

BOYS OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE

HERBERT STRANG



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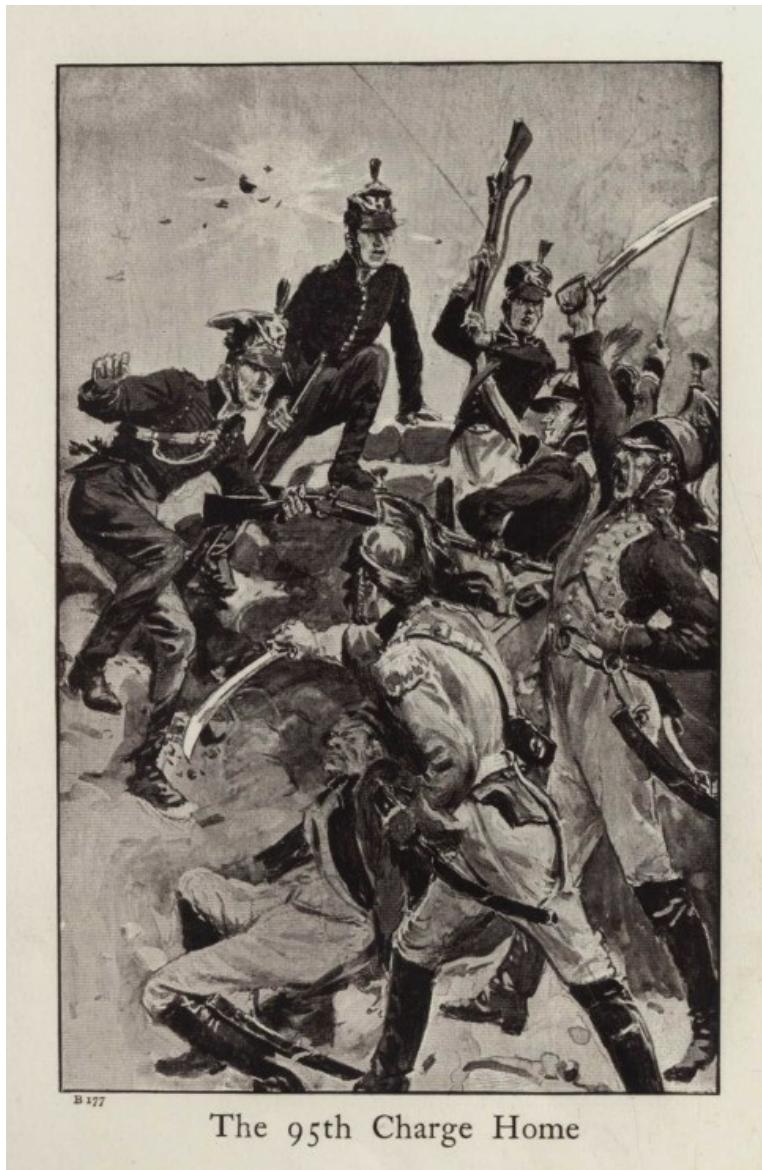
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The 95th Charge Home

Boys of the Light Brigade
A Story of
Spain and the Peninsular War

BY
HERBERT STRANG
AUTHOR OF "TOM BURNABY"

With a Preface by Colonel WILLOUGHBY VERNER
late Rifle Brigade

Illustrated by William Rainey, R.I.

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1905

To Spain they sent The Rifle Corps
To teach the French the Art of War!

—*Old Rifleman's Song.*

DEDICATED
BY PERMISSION
TO

FIELD-MARSHAL HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS
THE DUKE OF CONNAUGHT AND STRATHEARN
K.G., K.T., K.P., G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E, G.C.V.O.,
COLONEL-IN-CHIEF
AND TO THE OFFICERS OF
THE RIFLE BRIGADE
(Formerly 95th Rifles)

Preface

Mr. Herbert Strang has asked me to write a few words explanatory of the title he has chosen for this book.

"The Light Brigade" was the name given to the first British Brigade of Light Infantry, consisting of the 43rd Light Infantry, 52nd Light Infantry, and the 95th Rifles, which were trained together as a war-brigade at Shorncliffe Camp in the years 1803-1805, just a century ago, by General Sir John Moore, the Hero of Corunna.

These regiments subsequently saw much service together in various quarters of the globe; they were engaged in the Expedition to Denmark in 1807, the Campaign in Portugal in 1808 under Sir Arthur Wellesley, including the Battle of Vimeiro, and the famous Corunna Campaign under Sir John Moore.

In July, 1809, The Light Brigade, consisting of the same three corps, was re-formed under the gallant Brigadier-General Robert Craufurd (afterwards slain at their head at the storming of Ciudad Rodrigo in 1812), at Vallada, in Portugal, and it was in the same month that it made the forced march, famous in all history as "the March of the Light Division", of some fifty miles in twenty-four hours to the battle-field of Talavera. In June, 1810, when at Almeida, in Spain, "The Light Brigade" was expanded into "The Light Division" by the addition of Ross's "Chestnut Troop" of Horse Artillery,[#] the 14th Light Dragoons,[#] the 1st King's German Hussars, and two regiments of Portuguese Caçadores.

[#] The present "A" Battery, R.H.A., which bears its proud title of "The Chestnut Troop" in the army lists to this day.

[#] The present 14th (King's) Hussars. Charles Lever, the novelist, recounts some of their gallant deeds in *Charles O'Malley, the Irish Dragoon*.

It was as "*The Light Division*", throughout the long and bloody struggle in the Peninsula, and up to the Battle of Toulouse, fought in April, 1814, that the regiments of the old "Light Brigade" maintained their proud position, so well described by Sir John Kincaid (who was adjutant of the 1st Battalion at the Battle of Waterloo) in his delightful book, *Adventures in the Rifle Brigade*. He writes of the 95th Rifles in the Peninsula as follows:—

"We were the Light Regiment of the Light Division, and fired the first and last shot in almost every battle, siege, and skirmish in which the army was engaged during the war.

"In stating the foregoing, however, with regard to regiments, I beg to be understood as identifying our old and gallant associates, the Forty-third and Fifty-second, as a part of ourselves, for they bore their share in everything,

and I love them as I hope to do my better half (when I come to be divided); wherever we were, *they* were; and although the nature of our arm[#] generally gave us more employment in the way of skirmishing, yet, whenever it came to a pinch, independent of a suitable mixture of them among us, we had only to look behind to see a line, in which we might place a *degree of confidence almost equal to our hopes in heaven*; nor were we ever disappointed. There never was a corps of Riflemen in the hands of such supporters!"

[#] The Baker rifle, a short weapon with a flat-bladed sword-bayonet known as a "sword", very like the present so-called "bayonet", only longer. Hence the Rifleman's command, "Fix swords!" The three battalions of the 95th were (with the exception of the 5th battalion of the 60th Regiment) the only corps in the British army armed with rifles at the period of the Peninsular War, all others carrying long smooth-bore muskets, known as "Brown Bess", with long three-sided bayonets. The Baker rifle fired with precision up to 300 yards, whereas "Brown Bess" could not be depended upon to hit a mark at one-third that range.

Such was the "Light Brigade" which gives its title to this book.

The story deals with a period full of interest to Englishmen. Napoleon, having overrun Spain with some 250,000 men, swept away and defeated all the Spanish armies, and occupied Madrid, had set his hosts in motion to re-occupy Portugal and complete the subjugation of Andalusia. At this critical moment in the history of Spain, Sir John Moore, who had landed in the Peninsula with a small British army only about 30,000 strong, conceived the bold project of marching on Salamanca, and thus threatening Napoleon's "line of communications" with France— whence he drew all his supplies and ammunition. The effect was almost magical. Napoleon was compelled instantly to stay the march of his immense armies, whilst at the head of over 80,000 of his finest troops he hurled himself on the intrepid Moore. The latter, thus assailed by overwhelming numbers, was forced to order a retreat on his base at Corunna, a movement which he conducted successfully, despite the terrible privations of a rapid march in mid-winter through a desolate and mountainous country, with insufficient transport and inadequate staff arrangements. Thrice he turned to bay and thrice did he severely handle his pursuers. Finally, at Corunna, after embarking his sick and wounded, he fought the memorable battle of that name, and inflicted on the French such heavy losses that his army was enabled to re-embark and sail for England with but little further molestation. The gallant Moore himself was mortally wounded, and died the same night. The effects of the Corunna campaign were to paralyse all the Emperor's plans for nigh three months, during which time the Spaniards rallied and regained confidence, and the war took a wholly different turn, although it was only after five years' constant fighting that the French invaders were finally driven out of the country.

The Spaniards, on the other hand, animated by the presence of their English allies, once again took up arms in all directions and made a desperate resistance. No struggle was of more appalling or sustained a nature than was their second defence of Saragossa, which, in the words of the French soldiers engaged in the siege, was defended not by soldiers but by "an army of madmen".

The following story has thus a double interest. In its account of Moore's great Retreat it illustrates what we did for Spain in her dark days of 1808-1809; while in the pages dealing with the heroic Defence of Saragossa it illustrates what Spain did for herself.

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CHAPTER I

Corporal Wilkes wants to know

An International Question—Discipline—An Onlooker—Lumsden of the 95th—Dogged—A Six Days' Ride—Puzzlement

"What I want to know," said Corporal Wilkes, banging his fist on the table in front of him—"what I want to know is, what you Dons are doing for all the coin we've spent on you."

He was seated with a few other stalwarts of the 95th under the eastern colonnade of the Plaza Mayor, in Salamanca; a nondescript group of Spaniards, stolidly curious, blocked up the footway, and stood lounging against the balustrade. Getting no answer to his question, and probably expecting none, the corporal jerked his chin-strap under his nose, glared comprehensively around, and continued:

"I asked before, and I ask again, what has become of the ship-loads of honest British guineas you Dons have been pocketing for I don't know how long? Tell me that! What have you got to show for 'em, eh?—that's what I want to know. Here are we, without a stiver to our name, no pay for weeks, and no chance of seeing any. And look at this: here's a boot for you; that's what your Spanish mud makes o' good Bermondsey leather; and rain—well, of all the rain I ever see, blest if it ain't the wettest!"

He paused; the knot of Riflemen grunted approval. The Spaniards, who had by this time become aware that his remarks were aimed directly at them, turned enquiringly to one of their number, who shrugged, and gave them in Spanish the heads of the speaker's argument. Perceiving that he had made some impression, the corporal proceeded to follow up his advantage.

"What I want to know is, what 'ave we come here for? They did say as we were sent for to help you Dons fight the French. That's what they said. Well, the French are all right; but what are you doing? We showed you the way at Vimeiro; that's a long time ago now—what have you done since? Where are all the armies and the generals you talked so much about? What's become of them? Tell me that! Here we've been in Salamankya a matter of fourteen days, but we ain't seen none of them. There's plenty of you Dons about, sure enough, but you don't look to me like fighting-men. Where are you hiding 'em?—that's what I want to know."

There was no mistaking the glance of withering contempt with which the speaker pointed his questions; a movement of resentment was already visible among his mixed audience. The interpreter, whose dress proclaimed him a seaman from one of the Biscayan ports, was now volubly rendering the gist of the Englishman's taunts, to an accompaniment of strange oaths and ominous murmurs from the crowd. Warming with their sympathy, he became more and more excited, passed from explanation to denunciation, and then, turning suddenly from his compatriots, clenched his fist and poured out a torrent of abuse in a lurid mixture of Basque and Billingsgate. The corporal,

recognizing phrases that could only have been picked up at Deptford or Wapping, smiled appreciatively, and, with a wink at his companions, said:

"Ain't it like home? He ought to be a drill-sergeant—eh, boys?"

A shout of laughter greeted this sally. The Spaniard, his complexion changing from olive to purple, strode forward and shook his fist within an inch of the corporal's nose. Wilkes, greatly tolerant of foreign eccentricity, preserved an unwinking front; but his bland smile was too much for the Spaniard's fast-ebbing self-control. With a snarl of rage he plucked a knife from his sash and aimed a blow at the Rifleman, which, had it taken effect, would assuredly have put an end to his interrogative career. But the corporal's left-hand neighbour, who had been lolling against a post, flung out his arm and arrested the stroke; almost at the same instant Wilkes himself got home a deft right-hander beneath his assailant's chin that hurled him senseless across the table. In a moment a score of Spaniards with drawn knives were surging around the little group. Being without arms the Riflemen had slipped off their belts and closed up to meet the attack. The colonnade now rang with fierce shouts, and from all quarters of the large square there was a hurry-scurry of idlers attracted by the noise of the fray. Cheerfully confident, the half-dozen British soldiers, their backs against the wall, kept the throng at arm's-length with the practised swing of their long belts. But the odds against them were heavy. It could only be a few moments before the Spaniards must get in with their knives, and then the 95th would be six men short on parade. One or two of the Spaniards had been hard hit; but the rest were drawing together for a rush, when suddenly, above the din of the mêlée, rang out the clear authoritative word of command:

"Attention!"

The habit of discipline was so strong that the British soldiers on the instant dropped their belts and stood rigid as statues. On the Spaniards the effect of the interruption was equally remarkable. Surprised at the sudden change of attitude, they looked round with a startled air to seek the cause of the Englishmen's strange quiescence. A horseman had reined up opposite the scene of the scuffle—a tall youthful figure, wearing the headgear of the 95th and a heavy cavalry cloak.

"Stand easy!" he cried to the Riflemen, over the heads of the crowd, "and don't move an eyelash."

With a dozen Spanish knives flashing before their eyes, the command was a severe test of discipline; but in the British army a hundred years ago rigid training had made instant unquestioning obedience an instinct. While the Spaniards were still fingering their weapons, and hesitating whether to finish off their work, the officer began to address them in pure Castilian.

"Pardon me, Señores," he said, "for interrupting what I am sure was a pastime. I am an English officer, as you see, and I fear that my men, ignorant of your customs and traditions, might have taken seriously what was no doubt begun in sport. There is no need for me to say a word, Señores about your valour; is not that known to all the world? and I am sure you would be the last to do anything to endanger the friendly alliance between your country and mine. The French are your enemies, Señores; they are ours too. We are fighting shoulder to shoulder in a noble cause. Confusion to the invader, say I! Hurrah for the independence of Spain! Cry Viva la España with me!"

Then turning suddenly to the Riflemen, he cried:

"Now, men, give three rousing cheers."

Wilkes and his friends cheered half-heartedly and with an air of endurance; but the Spaniards were not discriminating, and responded with shrill vivas.

"Thank you, my friends!" said the officer, when the tumult had subsided. "And now, as I have a few words to say to my men before I ride off, I will bid you good-day."

In a few moments the pacified crowd dispersed in small knots, discussing with interested curiosity the young officer whose courteous firmness and fluent Spanish had produced so remarkable an effect. When, last of all, the

interpreter, having recovered from the blow, had made his way across the square, the horseman called up Corporal Wilkes, who advanced with a somewhat guilty air and saluted.

"Now, Corporal Wilkes, what do you mean by this? Have you forgotten the general's orders about brawling with the Spaniards?"

The corporal shifted his feet uneasily, and began to mumble an explanation in his slow ponderous way.

"That'll do," said the officer, cutting him short. "You're always in hot water. Get off to your quarters, and report yourself to me in the morning."

"Very good, sir."

With a look of injured innocence he saluted and slouched off with his companions, while the officer, touching his horse's flanks with the spur, cantered away. At the angle of the colonnade the crestfallen Riflemen were confronted by a tall stately figure in cocked hat and long military cloak, who had for some time been quietly watching the scene from an inconspicuous post of observation.

"Who's your officer, my man?"

The Riflemen halted in a line, struck their heels together, and brought their hands to the salute like automata.

"Mr. Lumsden, your honour," replied Wilkes, looking as though he would have liked to be elsewhere.

"Oh indeed! Thank you!"

The commander-in-chief acknowledged their salute and turned on his heel. The men stared after him for a few moments in silence; then Wilkes turned to his comrades, and said with a rueful look:

"By gum! How much of that 'ere rumpus did Johnny see?—that's what I'd like to know."

Meanwhile Lumsden of the 95th had trotted off, across the great square, past the church of San Martin, towards the University and the Tormes bridge. He was bound for a farmhouse some five miles south-east of the city, where it had been reported that a considerable quantity of flour could be purchased for the troops. Since the arrival of his regiment in Salamanca a fortnight before, he had been employed continuously on commissariat business, and was the object of envy to his fellow-subalterns, who would gladly have found some special work of the kind to vary the monotony of life.

It was the 28th November in the year 1808. Salamanca was full of British soldiers, who had marched in on the 13th amid a drenching rain-storm and the cheers of the inhabitants. They comprised six infantry brigades and one battery of artillery, among the former being the famous 95th Rifles under Colonel Beckwith, in which Jack Lumsden was a second lieutenant. The main artillery force, with its escort, was near the Escorial, a few miles from Madrid, under Sir John Hope, who was intending to march northwards to join his chief; while Sir David Baird lay at Astorga, with three batteries, four infantry brigades, and a force of cavalry under Lord Paget. The infantry had marched from Lisbon under Sir John Moore, who had succeeded to the chief command of the British forces in the Peninsula recently vacated by Sir Hew Dalrymple. At Salamanca Sir John expected to receive news of the approach of a Spanish force under the Marquis of La Romana, to co-operate with him in offensive movements against the French. The march had been particularly arduous and uncomfortable; rain had fallen in torrents for the greater part of the way, and owing to lack of supplies the men were in a sorry state as regards clothes and equipment. But they nourished high hopes of soon inflicting a heavy blow on the French invaders; and though the delay, due to want of definite information about the movements of the Spaniards and the position of the French, was telling somewhat on the spirits of the force, Sir John Moore was so popular with all ranks, and enjoyed their confidence so thoroughly, that discontent had only shown itself in half-humorous protests like that of Corporal Wilkes.

Jack Lumsden rode easily through the darkening streets, passed the sentry at the bridge head, and cantered along the sodden road leading to Alba de Tormes. Three miles out of Salamanca he struck off to the left, and, carefully picking his way among the ruts and depressions, reached his destination just as the black darkness of a

November evening fell. His errand with the farmer occupied some little time. He then accepted the refreshments pressed upon him with true Castilian hospitality; and at length, towards seven o'clock, set off on the return journey.

The moon was rising behind him, throwing a dim misty radiance over the bare fields to right and left. As he reached the cross-roads, and wheeled round into the highway towards Salamanca, he saw, some hundred yards ahead, several dark forms on both sides of the road, creeping along with stealthy movements in the same direction. Carrying his gaze beyond them, he descried a man leading a horse, who, he instantly concluded, was being followed by a gang of foot-pads, or of the brigands who notoriously infested every part of Spain. Almost involuntarily Jack pricked his horse forward; he saw that the furtive band were rapidly lessening the distance between them and the walking horseman, who every now and then half-turned to look at them, and then resumed his slow progress.

The road was so soft, and the men were so intent upon their expected prey, that they did not hear the sound of Jack's approach until he was within a few yards of them. Then a sudden splash in a large puddle caused them to stop and look round; Jack galloped up, and as he passed them, ostentatiously held his pistol so that a glint of moonlight fell on the barrel. At the same moment the dismounted rider heard the pad of his horse's hoofs; he paused, still holding the bridle, and turned towards Jack, who pulled his horse across the road and glanced back at the brigands. They had now formed a group, and stood in the middle of the road. Jack clicked the lock of his pistol. After an instant's hesitation the men turned in a body and vanished into the darkness.

"Many thanks!" said the pedestrian. "I was never more glad to see a British officer. Those bandits have been following me up for some minutes. My horse is lame, as you see, and though I've a couple of pistols handy I'm afraid I'd be no match for eight big fellows with their knives. And I've a particular reason for avoiding risks."

"They've had the discretion to sheer off," said Jack, turning again towards Salamanca. "It's unlucky your horse is lamed. Have you been riding far, sir?"

"About five hundred miles," was the reply.

Jack stared.

"No wonder your horse is lame—though you didn't ride the whole distance on the same beast, I suppose."

"No indeed; but I've scarcely been out of the saddle for six days—"

"Six days! Hard riding that, sir."

"True. The fact is, I've most important despatches for Sir John Moore, and haven't wasted a minute more than I could help."

Jack was off his horse in a moment.

"In that case, sir, pray take my horse and finish your ride with equal speed. If you bring news for the general, no one will be more delighted to see you. It's only about three miles, and the road's straight ahead; I'll follow with your horse."

"That's very good of you. I didn't like the idea of trudging in in this lame fashion. You're sure you don't mind? Those brigands, eh?"

"Not a bit. They won't show their noses again."

By this time the stranger had mounted Jack's horse, and was preparing to ride off.

"By the way," he said, "to what address shall I return the horse?—a pretty animal, begad!"

"I'm quartered at a worthy alderman's in the Calle de Moros—El Regidor Don Perez Gerrion; my name's Lumsden."

"Lumsden!" repeated the stranger with a start, letting the reins fall on the horse's neck.

"Yes," said Jack, looking up in surprise. "Why?"

"Oh! Excuse me now. I have my despatches to deliver, and then I will call on you at the regidor's. I have a communication, probably, to make to you. Au revoir!"

With a wave of the hand he galloped off, leaving Jack to tramp along behind him, in some wonderment as to what communication a despatch-rider could have to make to a subaltern of the 95th.

CHAPTER II

Some Introductions

The Grampus—A Turn with the Foils—An Interruption—Enter a Regidor—Flour and Water—A Soft Answer—Pepito—Biographical—Captain O'Hare—Mr. Vaughan is announced

It began to rain when Jack was still two miles out of Salamanca, and he was wet and chilled when, having put up the stranger's horse, he entered the regidor's house and sought the general room, where, as he knew from the sounds of laughter proceeding from it, his friends and comrades were assembled. There was a universal shout as Jack pushed open the door.

"Here's the commissary-general!" cried a tall, fair-headed subaltern of seventeen years. "Look here, Jack, if this corn-chandler business of yours gets you promotion before me, I'll—I'll punch your head."

"Thanks! Pommy, my dear, unless you're careful, respectful, you know, you'll find your next billet will be a stable or a pig-stye; you can take your choice. A pig-stye would be the easier got, perhaps—this country teems with porkers; but there are plenty of mules too, and one more won't matter."

"All the same, Lumsden," said Harry Smith, a lieutenant of twenty-one, "I don't wonder Pomeroy's jealous. We didn't all have the luck to be babies in Spain! But let me introduce a friend of mine—an old school-chum. Lumsden—Dugdale, Percy Dugdale, otherwise the Grampus."

Jack found his right hand engulfed in a huge fist, and shaken almost to a jelly. It belonged to a tall young man in civilian dress, stout, massive, broad-shouldered, with a rubicund, open, ingenuous face, and a smile that bespoke friendliness at once.

"Heard of you," said Dugdale cordially. "Heard of your little bet. Reminds me of my wager with Blinks of Merton when I was a freshman. Bet me a pound to a polony I wouldn't screw up a proctor; loser to eat the polony. I won—and bought a champion polony in St. Aldate's. Blinks stood us a supper to be let off. Ha! ha!"

The Honourable Percy Dugdale's chuckle had a quality of its own. While it seldom resulted from what others would have regarded as wit or humour, it never failed to breed sympathetic laughter, and the room rang with appreciative merriment.

"What's this bet of yours, Lumsden?" asked Bob Shirley, lieutenant in Jack's company.

"Oh, a little affair with Pomeroy! He's so desperately cocksure of everything, and what is worse, he will talk, you know. Said he'd hold me at boxing, at wrestling, at swimming, at every mortal thing, including fencing, so I bet him before we left Alcantara that I'd give him points at them all, and we're going to begin with the foils."

"What are the stakes?" asked Shirley. "Why didn't I hear of this?"

"It's a guinea to a Bath bun. Pomeroy's amazing fond of Bath buns; and as at present I haven't a guinea, at least to spare, and he hasn't a bun, we're going to settle up when we get back to London, and you fellows can come to Gunter's and see Pommy shell out twopence, if you like."

"No time like the present," said Smith. "We've half an hour before supper, and nothing to do. If you fellows are game we'll make a ring now."

"I'm ready," said Pomeroy, pulling off his jacket, "if the corn-dealer is."

"By all means," retorted Jack, laughing; "but I hope, for the sake of the company, your riposte is better than your repartee."

"No more cackle!" cried Smith. "Let's get to business. Where are the foils?"

At a word from Jack, a tall, strapping Rifleman, who had followed him into the room, disappeared for half a minute, and returned with a couple of foils in his hands. He handed one to his master, who had meanwhile peeled, and the other to Reginald Pomeroy. The two faced one another; they were of equal height, but otherwise presented a strong contrast. Both were tall, but Jack was slight and lissom, with dark hair, brown eyes, and clear-cut features, while Reginald Pomeroy was heavier in build, fresh-complexioned, with blue eyes and light curly hair. In brief, if Jack was Norman, Pomeroy was as clearly Saxon, and as they stood there, they were worthy representatives of the two fine strains of our present English race. They were always sparring, always girding at each other, but at bottom they were the best of friends, and had indeed been inseparable chums ever since they entered the Charterhouse together.

"Gad, reminds me of the mill between Jones of Jesus and De Crespigny of the House, in Merton meadow," said Dugdale with his capacious chuckle.

"His eyebrow dark, and eye of fire,
Shows spirit proud, and prompt to ire,"

quoted Shirley, amid a chorus of groans.

"Shut up, Shirley!" cried Jack; "if you begin spouting poetry you'll shatter my nerve."

"Yes, by George," said Smith, "we had enough of *Marmion* on the way out. Shirley's a long way too fond of poetry. Now, you two, are you ready? Buttons on the foils? That's right. Now then!"

"Charge, Chester, charge; on, Stanley, on!"

shouted Shirley, who was irrepressible, and who, indeed, was said to have got *Marmion* by heart a week after it was issued, in February of this year.

The duel began. The combatants were pretty evenly matched, and as the spectators watched thrust and parry, lunge and riposte, now cheering one, now the other, the air became charged with electric excitement. Right foot well forward, left arm well behind his head, Jack watched his opponent with the keenness of a hawk, and for a time seemed to content himself with standing on the defensive. He knew his man, and held himself in with the confident expectation that Pomeroy would by and by become reckless.

"Two to one on Pomeroy!" shouted Dugdale, who was growing excited.

"Done!" said Smith. "Name your stakes."

"Anything you like; I'm not particular. I want a new pair of breeches. Yours won't fit me, but mine'll fit you with a little trimming'. Gad, Lumsden was nearly pinked that time. Make it two pairs!"

"D'youth mind moving aside?" said Shirley, who, being head and shoulders shorter than Dugdale, found his view obstructed by six feet two and a back broad in proportion.

"Sorry; get on my back if you like," said Dugdale. "Won a bet by running a race with young Jukes of Pembroke on my back. I don't mind."

But Shirley contented himself with edging in to a place beside the big sportsman.

The foils clashed; Pomeroy made a rapid lunge at Jack, who instantly straightened himself, and before his opponent could recover his guard, Jack's foil was out, and slid along the other, and with a dexterous turn of the wrist

he sent the weapon flying out of Pomeroy's hand, over the ring of onlookers, to the other end of the room, where it clattered against the wall and fell with a clash to the floor.

"Oh, come now! I never lose my wagers. I make a point of it," said Dugdale with a rueful look.

"End of the first round; that's Lumsden's," said Smith quietly. "Five minutes' rest, then to it again. Give you six to one next round."

"No, thanks! I'll wait a bit. Can't afford to part with all my pants. What's that?"

Above the voices of the officers discussing the details of the match rose the clamour of a repeated battering on the door.

"Oh, I say!" cried Dugdale, "we can't have this interrupted. Is the door locked?"

"Fast," replied Shirley, adding:

"And neither bolt nor bar shall keep
My own true—love—from—"

The quotation remained unfinished, for Jack laid Shirley on his back and sat on him. The knock was repeated again and again, with increasing loudness; the door was rattled with ever-growing vehemence.

"Set your back against the door, Giles," said Jack. "It'll take some force to move your fourteen stone of muscle."

The big Rifleman set his straight back against the door, planted his feet firmly on the floor so that his body formed an obtuse angle, and crossed his arms on his breast. The knocking continued.

"Can't come in," shouted a shrill-voiced ensign. "We're busy."

From outside an angry voice bawled in reply.

"Be quiet, you fellows," cried Smith. "Let us hear who it is."

The noise inside the room was hushed, and through the door came muffled tones of angry and excited remonstrance.

"It's very bad language, but I can't understand it," said Smith, who now had his ear against the oak. "Here, Jack, you're the only fellow who knows the lingo; leave that drain-pipe and see if you can make anything of it."

Jack rose from his wriggling seat, and, going to the door, shouted "Who are you?" in Spanish. A moment later he turned to the company and said: "By George! it's the regidor himself. We'd better let him in."

"Not till I've licked you," said Pomeroy. "Let the old boy wait."

"That's Pommy all over," said Smith; "I'm Reginald Pomeroy, and hang civility! The regidor's our host, and we owe him a little consideration."

"Exactly," put in Jack. "Heave over, Giles, and let me open the door."

He turned the key, threw the door open, and gave admittance to the oddest figure imaginable.

"Pommy's Bath bun—underbaked!" said Shirley under his breath. The rest of the company were too much surprised for speech or laughter. The intruder was presumably a man, but he was so completely covered with an envelope of paste that form and feature were undiscoverable. Two unmistakable arms, however, were wildly gesticulating; an equally obvious fist was being shaken towards the group; and a human voice was certainly pouring out a stream of violent language, of which no one there, not even Jack, could make out a word.

"Come, Señor Regidor," said Jack in Spanish, "what is the matter? Really, you talk so fast that I cannot understand you."

He laid his hand on the regidor's arm, but drew it back hastily; it was covered with wet flour.

"Shut the door, Giles," he said, wiping his hand; "this needs an explanation. In fact" (he gave a quizzical glance from the floor to the company) "it needs clearing up!"

Taking the fuming regidor gingerly by the hand, he led him to the middle of the room, where, with Pomeroy's assistance, he set to work to scrape away the clinging paste that swathed the poor man from head to foot. The first shock of surprise being over, the rest of the officers were now fairly bubbling with merriment, for the regidor was too angry to keep still, and never ceased from objurgating some person unknown. Dugdale had stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth to stifle his laughter, and Smith was thumping Shirley vigorously on the back. After some minutes' scraping with the foils, the new-comer was revealed standing in a circle of clammy flour—a little, round, pompous individual, with a very red and wrathful face, made ludicrous by the stiff moustache, to which a coating of flour obstinately adhered.

"Now, Señor Regidor," said Jack soothingly, "tell us all about it. I hope the mischief has gone no deeper than your clothes."

And then the little alderman unfolded his pitiful story. It appeared that he had gone round his premises in the rain, to see that all was safely locked up for the night, when he found that his barn at the back of the house had been left open—not only the lower door, but also the upper door, through which sacks of flour entered the loft. It was very dark, and he had been unable in the rain and wind to obtain a light. Feeling his way into the barn, he had crept up the ladder leading to the loft, stumbling as he did so over an empty sack that covered the last two or three steps. Then, arrived at the top, he had lifted the trap-door, and raised head and shoulders above the opening, when without warning he was smothered by an avalanche of flour, which took him so entirely by surprise that he had fallen backward, and only saved himself from a headlong descent to the foot of the ladder by clutching at a rope that dangled a few inches in front of him. It was no accident, he declared, for he had heard the scurry of some living creature moving in the loft. On recovering from his shock he had mounted again and searched the place as thoroughly as he could in the darkness, but without success. He had then locked up the barn securely, and being convinced that he was the victim of a practical joke on the part of one of the subalterns billeted upon him, he had come to demand satisfaction for the insult, and compensation for the irreparable damage done to his clothes.

Such was his story, told at much greater length, and punctuated with many violent gestures and still more violent expletives. Jack listened to him patiently, while the rest of the company stood in a ring about them, striving with ill success to hide their merriment. When lack of breath at length brought the little man to a stop, Jack spoke to him consolingly, assuring him that he was mistaken, and that no British officer would so far have forgotten the courtesy due to their obliging host. The regidor was not appeased; he was on the point of recommencing his denunciation of the culprit, when Jack stopped him, and said that he would question his brother officers and convince the regidor that he was mistaken. He then briefly told his companions the outlines of the story he had heard. Just as he came to the point where the shower of flour had descended on the unfortunate regidor, he was annoyed at hearing a loud chuckle.

"Pomeroy, that's too bad," he exclaimed. "How can I persuade our host that we have had nothing to do with his plight if you disgrace yourself like that?"

"Look here, Lumsden," said Pomeroy, "I'm not going to be lectured. As a matter of fact, I didn't make a cheep."

"Sorry, Pommy," said Jack, with a glance at Dugdale. "Well now, I can assure the regidor, on your honour, that none of you had a hand in this?"

Every officer present gave his word. Then Jack put on his coat, and, slipping his arm within the regidor's, led him off with a promise to investigate the matter, and see whether any of the officers' servants had been in fault. The moment their backs were turned, the same loud chuckle was heard, followed by an unmistakable guffaw. Giles Ogbourne, Jack's big servant, while maintaining a rigid position against the wall, was putting his broad face through

the oddest contortions of amusement.

"What are you grinning at?" cried Pomeroy angrily. "Was it you who gave that oily chuckle just now?"

"Beg pardon, sir," said Ogbourne, endeavouring to look grave. "I really couldn't help it. 'Tis a trick of that young varmint Pepito; I be sure 'tis."

"That imp of a gipsy! I told Lumsden he'd be sorry he ever set eyes on the creature. Why do you think he is at the bottom of it?"

"Why, sir, I seed the boy bummelled out of the kitchen, and prowling around by the barn, and, sakes alive, 'tis he and no one else."

"Who's Pepito?" asked Dugdale.

"A young sprat of a gipsy Jack picked up outside Queluz soon after we left Lisbon. Here, Ogbourne, you know more about him than I do. Speak up."

"'Tis just as you say, sir. Mr. Lumsden found the critter on the roadside, a'most dead, and took'm up and fed him, sir. A thoroughbred gipsy, sir. His band had been cut up by the French after the fight by Vimeiro; every man of 'em was killed dead except this mortal boy, and a' got a cut in th' arm from a sabre. Mr. Lumsden gave him a good square meal, sir, and next day a' hitched hisself on to us, followed us all along, went a-fetching and a-carrying for Mr. Lumsden, for all the world like a little dog. Mr. Lumsden says to me: 'Giles,' says he, 'there's enough women and childer along of us without this young shaver; what'll we do with him?' I couldn't think of anything, so Mr. Lumsden he takes him to a Portuguese barber and hands him over some money for the boy's keep, and tells him to make a barber of him. Bless you, next day the varmint turns up again, and we can't shake him off nohow. If a' goes away for a day, back a' comes the next, as perky as a Jack-in-the-box."

"A sort of millstone round Lumsden's neck," said Shirley.

"Not but what he's useful," added Ogbourne. "He's first-rate at shining buttons and cleaning swords, and all sorts of little odd jobs. Only he's so full of monkey tricks, you can't believe. One night a' put two live toads in my bed, a' did; another night a' mixed some dubbin wi' my soup. I tanned him, I did, but though a' blubbered hard enough, next minute his wicked little black eyes were as mischievous as ever. Mr. Lumsden's got a handful, sir, and that's gospel truth."

"If that's his character, depend upon it he's responsible for the regidor's whitening," said Smith. "We'll have to abolish the boy; don't you think so?"

"Oh, I say!" struck in Dugdale, "never mind about a scrubby gipsy. I wish Lumsden would hurry up. I want to see Pomeroy lick him."

"You'll lose this time," said Smith.

Dugdale made a wry face. "Didn't know he was such a paragon. Speaks Spanish as well as the Don. Learnt it for a bet, I suppose."

"No," said Pomeroy, laughing. "He lived at Barcelona till he was eleven."

"Where on earth's Barcelona? Is it where the nuts grow?"

"Yes—in the big square!" said Smith with a smile.

Dugdale grunted. "But what was Lumsden doing there?" he asked.

"Eating, and growing, and learning the lingo, of course," said Pomeroy. "His father's a partner in some Spanish firm whose head-quarters are at Barcelona, and lived there, as I say, until Jack was eleven. Then, as the kid was more or less running wild, I suppose, Mr. Lumsden returned to London as head of the branch there, and sent Jack to the Charterhouse, and that's where I licked him first—"

"Now, Pommy, at it again!" said Jack's voice.

Dugdale chuckled, and Pomeroy looked aggressive; but immediately behind Jack, as he re-entered the room,

came a figure at the sight of which the whole group broke out in exclamations of welcome.

"Peter!" said Smith to Dugdale in a stage whisper.

The new-comer was a tall man of some thirty-six years, wearing a big greatcoat and a peaked cap drawn over his brow. His face was particularly ugly, but redeemed by a pair of bright good-tempered-looking eyes. He stood for a moment quizzing the company, while the water streamed from his coat and made a pool on the floor.

"Bedad," he said, observing the pasty mixture there, "sure if it's roast beef that it is, it's myself that's thankful; but the flure's a queer place to mix the Yorkshire."

"No such luck," said Pomeroy. "No chance of that this side of Portsmouth; it's only a toad-in-the-hole this time."

Captain Peter O'Hare laughed when they told him of the regidor's plight.

"And who was the blackguard that did it?" he asked, suddenly looking serious. "Such conduct is terribly unbecoming an officer and a gentleman."

"It was Pepito," exclaimed Jack; "that little scamp of a gipsy who's been shadowing me since we left Lisbon. I found him crouching in the regidor's stable, smothered in flour from head to foot. It appears he had made for the loft as the only dry place, and emptied a bag of flour on the regidor in sheer self-defence, being afraid of a walloping if he was caught. He jumped out of the upper door and slid down a gutter-pipe. I'm afraid that young man will prove a thorn in my side."

Captain O'Hare having by this time removed his dripping garments, Smith took the opportunity to introduce his friend Dugdale.

"He's just escaped from Oxford, O'Hare; heard the bugles sounding and couldn't sit still."

"What regiment, sir?" said the captain, shaking hands. "I knew a Dugdale in the 85th."

Dugdale chuckled.

"My brother Tom, no doubt. Laid him a poodle to a pork-pie that I'd be at the front first, and here I am."

"Ah! an amachure, I presume," said Captain O'Hare, glancing at his civilian costume. "Sure, an' I hope you'll like it, for 'tis not all beer and skittles. And that reminds me; 'tis time we cleared the decks for supper. You'll stay and take pot-luck, Mr. Dugdale?"

"Thank you, sir! but, you see—well, we had a little wager—in short, thank you, sir!"

O'Hare looked puzzled, and still more as he noticed a smile on the faces of the rest of the company.

"Never mind, Grampus," said Smith with a nudge, "they can fight it out another time, and meanwhile you've saved your breeches."

At this moment Rifleman Giles Ogbourne entered the room.

"Please, sir," he said to Jack, "there's a Mr. Vaughan at the door as would like to see you. I was to say 'twas he that borrowed your horse a while ago."

"Show him in," said Jack.

"Beg pardon, sir, but he says as he would like to see you alone."

"Oh, very well!" said Jack, rising, and he followed Giles from the room.

CHAPTER III

Palafox the Man, Palafox the Name

The visitor was awaiting Jack beneath a dim lamp in the vestibule.

"You won't mind coming into my bedroom?" said Jack, after an interchange of greetings. "It's the only place where we can be alone."

He led the way, struck a light, and noticed that the stranger was bespattered with mud from head to foot.

"I'm scarcely fit to come into a house at all," said the latter apologetically; "but as things are, no doubt you'll excuse me. I had better introduce myself. My name is Vaughan, and I am acting as private secretary to Mr. Stuart, our minister at Madrid. As I told you, I have ridden in with important despatches for Sir John Moore; I happened to be with Castaños' army, and as I came through Saragossa on my way to Madrid I was entrusted by General Palafox with a letter to you, which I promised to deliver to you in person if I should come across your regiment. Here is the letter."

He handed the paper to Jack, who looked at it in surprise.

"General Palafox!" he said. "I don't know him. He is the Spanish general who defended Saragossa recently, isn't he?"

"Yes. I assure you it was he who gave me the letter."

"Will you sit down while I look at it?"

Jack hastily broke the seal.

"I should add," said Vaughan, who had thrown himself wearily into a chair, "that if I failed to find you, I was to carry the letter to your father in London, whither I am proceeding at once."

Meanwhile, Jack had opened the letter, which was written in a crabbed and shaky handwriting. "My dear friend Jack," it began; and then Jack turned to the signature, and read "Fernan Alvarez". A light dawned upon him; his look of bewilderment vanished, and he turned back to the beginning with eager curiosity. The letter ran as follows:—

MY DEAR FRIEND JACK,

My brave friend Captain-General Palafox tells me that Mr. Carlos Vawn, who has of late arrived at this city, is on the point of leaving for Madrid, and will then, it is possible, return to England by way of Portugal, in which case he will, without doubt, visit the camp of the great general, Sir Moore. By his courtesy I trust that this letter may come to your hands all safe, and then I beg you will advise my agents in Madrid, Señores Caldos and Gonzalez, inasmuch as I may be quite altogether beyond the touch of your reply. The last letter I received from my dear friend your father tells me that you sail instantly with Sir Moore's army, and I already hear that your general landed soon after the blessed victory at Vimeiro.

You will have heard of our glorious defence against the usurper. We shall not grudge our sufferings if the example of Saragossa do give heart to the other great cities of my poor country so distracted. For she will need indeed all her strength, all her courage, all her heroism, in the storm which is now to burst upon her. Alas! I can no longer hope to be of any service; my strength fails fast; I am old; I die. For myself, I do not repine, but I am full of fear and trouble for the safety of my poor Juanita, the little playmate whom I am sure you will not have forgotten quite. I have done my all to provide for her, but who can see through the clouds of war? We know not what may come in a day. And the danger is not to be feared only from the outside. In a letter to your father I have told him of what I have done. One thing is needed to finish the things I tell him, and that is in the six words—mark you—Palafox the Man, Palafox the Name. I beg you commit these words to memory, and burn this letter the moment after you have read it.

I hope I may yet see you again before I die, but if it is not so be, I say God bless you, and write myself for the last time

Your old friend,
FERNAN ALVAREZ.

P.S.—Remember always: Palafox the Man, Palafox the Name.

"Palafox the man, Palafox the name!" said Jack half aloud. "What does he mean? Did General Palafox send a message with this, sir?"

"No. I understood that the writer was a friend of his and yours."

"He is a friend of mine. He is my father's partner. But I don't understand the letter. It appears to hint at something which he does not care to express clearly. And he speaks of a letter to my father. Have you that too?"

"No; I know nothing about that."

"Then it is probably with Don Fernan's agents in Madrid. But I am forgetting to thank you. Really, sir, it was very good of you to undertake this private errand when you must have been engrossed in public affairs. We were just going to have supper; will you honour us by joining our mess?"

"I am very tired, and not at all in company trim; in fact, I had just declined a similar invitation from Sir John; but—"

"You will, then? I am very glad. We will not keep you late."

"I must first go and give a coin to the boy who showed me the way here—a little gipsy fellow who said he knew you."

"Pepito! Let me deal with him, Mr. Vaughan; he has an extraordinary knack of turning up just when he can make himself useful. You'll find a towel there; I'll go and settle with Pepito, and you will follow me, won't you? Our fellows will be delighted to meet you."

And Jack left his visitor to his ablutions.

There was much curiosity among the subalterns as to the identity of Jack's visitor and the subject of their private interview; but Jack volunteered no information, merely telling them, as he passed through the room on his way to find Pepito, that Mr. Vaughan would join them at supper.

"So you boys will have to mind your p's and q's," said Captain O'Hare. "No antics now. Some of these politicks are very starchy."

Consequently it was a quiet group to whom, in a few minutes, Mr. Vaughan was introduced. They were all hungry, and Jack apologized for the plainness of the fare.

"You see, sir," he said, "Sataro, our Portuguese contractor, has failed, and we all have to get what food we can."

"You won't find me fastidious," replied Vaughan. "I could almost eat my boots, I think."

"Mr. Vaughan has just ridden five hundred miles on end," explained Jack.

"By George!" exclaimed Dugdale.

"Five hundred, bedad!" said Captain O'Hare. "If they were like the miles round Salamanca, sure you must have come through a power of mud!"

"How long did it take you, sir?" asked Shirley.

"Six days."

There was a cry of astonishment.

"Gad, that beats Bagster of Trinity!" said Dugdale. "Backed himself to ride sixty miles and eat sixty oysters in a hundred and sixty minutes; lost by six oysters, and always vowed he could ha' done that if the vinegar hadn't run short!"

There was a general laugh.

"I could have done with the oysters—even the six," said Vaughan, who was tickled by Dugdale's whole-hearted enjoyment of his recollection.

"And why did you pelt along so terrible hard, may I ask, Mr. Vaughan?" said the captain.

"It'll be common property to-morrow, so I may as well tell you. I have been for some time with the staff of General Palafox in Aragon. Six days ago General Castaños was totally defeated at Tudela."

"Good heavens!" cried Pomeroy; "another defeat! It was quite time we turned up to help the Dons."

"What a cowardly crew!" added Smith. "They run at the sound of their own guns. Bang! whizz! and Vamos, they cry, which Lumsden will tell you means: 'Let us skedaddle'."

"We mustn't be too hard on them," said Mr. Vaughan quietly. "They used to fight well, by all accounts. There were good men in Alva's time—not to go back any further. All they want is proper leading. Their generals happen to be no match for the French marshals, and unlucky to boot. A little British discipline would work wonders. Well, as I happened to be with the Spanish army, I rode off to Madrid at once with the news, and our minister there sent me off with despatches to Sir John."

"Lucky you were on the spot, sir," said Smith, "or we might have waited till doomsday. The villainous way we are served with intelligence is the common talk of the army."

"I judged as much. The fact is, the Spaniards think they can do the whole thing unaided; you gentlemen are mere interlopers. They'd like to have the French all to themselves."

"Well, they've had a lesson at Tudela," said Pomeroy. "Who had the presumption to beat them there? Was it Marshal Ney?"

"No, a Marshal Lannes. It's rather curious how he managed to take the command, seeing that as he rode across the mountains a fortnight ago his horse fell with him over a precipice, and every bone in his body appeared to be broken. But a clever surgeon named Larrey mended him in some ten days—how do you think? He stitched him up in the skin of a newly-flayed sheep!"

"A wolf," said Shirley, "a wolf in sheep's clothing; and the British dogs of war'll soon be at him."

"How does this defeat affect us, sir?" asked Jack.

"That depends on how the French follow it up. Bonaparte may—"

"Oh, I say, sir," cried Dugdale excitedly, "is old Boney himself in Spain?"

"Didn't you know? He crossed the border three weeks ago. He may swoop down on Madrid, for, except Heredia and San Juan, there seems to be nobody to bar his way."

"Bedad, sir, but there's a certain General Sir John Moore, to say nothing of the 95th," said Captain O'Hare with a laugh; "though, to be sure, 'twas Soult we were to tackle first."

"Won't this defeat bring the French on our flank?" asked Smith, already showing the strategical perception that distinguished the victor of Aliwal.

"It certainly seems likely. I found Sir John terribly distressed at his imperfect knowledge of the French position, and at the sluggishness of the Spaniards. The proud Dons seem to have no plans, and to be perfectly content to drift along. But that won't do against soldiers like Bonaparte and his marshals."

"Do you know how many the French number, all told?" asked Jack.

"I don't, and I'm sure no Spaniard does. I heard 80,000 given as one estimate, but I shall be much surprised if the total is not much larger than that."

"Whew!" exclaimed Dugdale. "And we've only a few thousand here at any rate. What's the odds! an Englishman was always worth ten Frenchmen, and I don't care if Boney comes with a million."

"I admire your confidence and spirit, Mr. Dugdale," said Vaughan dryly.

"Though I'm hanged if I know what we're fighting Boney in Spain for," added Dugdale. "Not that that matters."

"Indeed, but it matters a terrible deal," said Captain O'Hare earnestly. "We've crossed the mighty ocean—and mighty unpleasant it was, bedad!—to help a distressed and downtrodden people; and sure 'tis we Irishmen can feel for the like o' them."

Dugdale, feeling out of his depth, was silent for a time while the conversation took a more serious tone, and turned on the chain of events which had led to the presence of the British army in Spain.

It was fifteen years since a little Corsican officer of artillery, named Napoleon Bonaparte, had first drawn attention to himself by his clever work at the siege of Toulon. In that time he had made himself Emperor of the French and dictator of Europe, and become one of the greatest figures in universal history. His ambition was insatiable and hitherto his success had been stupendous. Within a few years he had subdued Austria, humbled Prussia, hoaxed Russia, and plundered Italy. Alone of the nations, England had checked his series of triumphs by her victories at the Nile and Trafalgar; but even in England his name was held by the more timorous in awe, and caricatures represented him as a voracious ogre who made his meals of little children. He longed to have England also at his feet—a longing only intensified by the success with which she had hitherto defied his efforts to cripple her trade.

Before he could subdue England, however, Bonaparte saw the necessity of adding Spain and Portugal to his tale of victims. Portugal was our ally, and he gave her the choice between breaking with us and fighting France. She held to her alliance, and was promptly overrun with French troops. Having crippled Portugal, he turned his attention to Spain. In that country the old King Charles had allowed the government to fall into the hands of his unscrupulous minister Godoy, who was universally detested. The greater part of the nation wished the king to abdicate in favour of his son Ferdinand, with whom he was constantly quarrelling. Taking advantage of these dissensions, Napoleon sent a French force to Madrid, with the intention, as the Spaniards believed, of supporting Ferdinand. But both Charles and Ferdinand were summoned to meet Napoleon at Bayonne; there they were in turn tricked into resigning the sovereignty, which the emperor at once bestowed on his brother Joseph. This was the signal for a great national rising, the first which Napoleon had yet encountered. The Spaniards were proud, high-spirited, and independent, and refused tamely to submit to this arbitrary interference with their affairs. In all parts of the country they proclaimed Ferdinand king, and when Napoleon poured his troops in an endless stream across the Pyrenees, their eyes turned to England as their only stand-by, and to England they sent for help. A British army under Sir Arthur Wellesley landed in Portugal, and defeated Marshal Junot at the battle of Vimeiro; but, ere the victory could be completed and followed up, the chief command was assumed in succession by Sir Harry Burrard and Sir Hew Dalrymple, who came out within a few days of one another. To Wellesley's disgust, they allowed the French, by the Convention of Cintra, to withdraw from Portugal with the honours of war. But their action aroused intense indignation at home; they were recalled, with Wellesley, to appear before a court of enquiry, and Sir John Moore was unexpectedly placed in command.

Meanwhile the French forces in the Peninsula had been continually increasing; the regular armies of Spain had been beaten on all sides; and instead of meeting, as he had expected, large forces, well equipped at English expense, ready to co-operate with him, Sir John found that he had to defend the Portuguese frontier and undertake offensive operations almost single-handed against a victorious enemy many times outnumbering his own army. Immense sums of money and stores of all kinds had been given to Spain by the British Government, but owing to the corruption of the Spanish officials, and the want of any real governing authority, the gift was virtually wasted. The Juntas, or

committees, which had undertaken the government of the various provinces, were all acting, or rather talking of acting, independently, and were strangely blind to their deadly peril. They appeared to regard England as an unfailing source of money and arms, and in some cases actually resented the arrival of British troops, in a sort of blind confidence that they were able unaided to withstand the invader.

Mr. Vaughan had seen something of this during his stay with General Castaños, and his account of what had come under his own eyes kept his hosts interested to a late hour. At length he rose.

"I am very tired," he said, "and as I expect to have to ride again to-morrow, I know you gentlemen will excuse me for leaving you. Many thanks for your hospitality, and may we meet again!"

"I will see you to your quarters," said Jack. "Where are you staying?"

"At an inn in the Plaza Santo Tomé. I shall be glad of your company, if the hour is not too late."

When Jack returned, half an hour afterwards, his man Giles handed him a note which had been left at the house by an orderly during his absence.

"The commander-in-chief", it ran, "presents his compliments to Mr. Lumsden, and will be glad to see him at his quarters at nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Another letter," said Jack to himself; "and almost as mysterious as the first. I wonder what it can mean!"

He read the note again, but finding himself unable to make any inference from the few simple words, he wisely resolved to allow the morning to bring its own solution. In the few moments that elapsed between his laying his head on the pillow and falling asleep, his mind see-sawed between the two letters. Now it was Sir John Moore's that was uppermost, now Don Fernan's; breaking the darkness of his room he seemed to see the phrases, one above the other, in letters of fire: "At nine o'clock to-morrow morning"—"Palafox the Man, Palafox the Name".

CHAPTER IV

A Delicate Mission

Sir John Moore—In the Dark—A Roving Commission—Maps and Plans—Camp Critics—An Hidalgo—Mystification—Exasperation—Pepito again—A Bargain—Force majeure

At nine o'clock next day Jack made his way through a crowd of officers congregated about the door of the archbishop's palace, where Sir John Moore was quartered. It seemed to be nobody's business to show him up, so he discovered for himself the room in which the commander-in-chief was, as he supposed, awaiting him. Entering at the door, and lifting a heavy velvet curtain that hung within, he found himself in a large chamber, at the other end of which stood a group of officers engaged in what was evidently a very animated discussion. He noticed the tall, handsome figure of General Sir Edward Paget, the commander of the reserve; near him was General Anstruther, a rugged, untiring Scot; in the centre of the group was Sydney Beckwith, Jack's own colonel, rough of tongue and unsparing in his demands on his men, but withal kind of heart and true as steel. He was at this moment eagerly pointing to a map which lay outspread on a table, over which bent several other officers, among them the commander-in-chief himself. Fine men as were all the soldiers gathered there, Sir John Moore was easily first among them. At this time forty-seven years of age, his tall graceful figure, crowned by a head nobly fashioned, with classic features, large lustrous eyes, and bright close-clustering hair, would have marked him out in any crowd as

one above the generality of men. He was listening intently to what Colonel Beckwith said. His lips were firmly compressed; every now and then the fingers of his right hand restlessly tattooed upon the table. Suddenly he straightened himself and moved backward a pace; the hubbub of conversation ceased, and in the silence Jack heard, in Moore's clear and measured tones, the following words:

"Excuse me, gentlemen, I take the whole responsibility of my decision; and I only expect my officers to prepare to carry it into effect."

There was sternness, even a touch of irritation, in his accent. "There's something wrong," thought Jack; "I've no business here; I'd better make myself scarce."

He withdrew into the corridor, and began to walk up and down, with that curious feeling of excitement which takes hold of a boy when waiting for an interview on some unknown matter with his head-master. In a few minutes the officers left the room in a body, still talking with animation, and passed down the corridor, away from Jack, towards the street. Judging that Sir John was now alone, Jack returned to the room. The general was pacing the floor with long steps, his hands clasped behind him, his head bent forward in anxious thought. Jack hesitated a moment; then stepped forward. Sir John looked up, and stood with legs apart, evidently not for the moment recognizing his visitor. Then his brow cleared; his features softened in the kindly smile for which he was celebrated.

"Ah! Mr. Lumsden, I think," he said; "I am glad to see you. I fear I have kept you waiting. Yes, I see it is twenty minutes past the hour. Let me waste no time, then. Sit down at the table there."

Sir John seated himself at the opposite side of the table, gave the lad one quick glance, and said:

"Without beating about the bush, are you willing, Mr. Lumsden, to undertake an important and possibly dangerous mission?"

"Certainly, sir."

The answer came without a moment's hesitation, and the general seemed pleased. Then, observing a look of surprise on Jack's face, he went on:

"You wonder at my selecting you? I happened to overhear yesterday an eloquent address in Spanish by an officer of the 95th, and when I came to enquire of Colonel Beckwith, he told me that Mr. Lumsden's knowledge of Spanish had already proved useful. That is how it happened, Mr. Lumsden."

He gave the young officer a friendly smile, and Jack's cheeks flushed with pleasure as the general continued:

"You are the man I've been looking for. What I want you to do is out of your regular duty, but then a knowledge of Spanish is out of the usual officer's acquirements, more's the pity. Do you know French also?"

"A little, sir; just well enough to understand what is said and to make a shift to reply."

"That's well. Now I suppose you have some sort of notion of what my intentions were in marching from Lisbon, eh?"

"We've talked it over at mess, sir," said Jack with a smile.

"Naturally. Well, if you're to be of use to me, and I think you will be, I must take you into my confidence. What I want, Mr. Lumsden, is information—information that I can rely on." At this point he rose from his chair and resumed his restless pacing to and fro. "I started to join forces with the Spaniards, but they haven't put themselves into communication with me. I don't know their plans; I don't know what their Government is aiming at. I am in entire ignorance of the numbers or the situation of the enemy. The Spaniards seem to be living in a fools' paradise; talk very big about their own armies, and very small about the enemy; keep us short of supplies, and shorter still of news. I do know that a fortnight ago General Blake's Spanish army in the north was beaten, and now a Mr. Vaughan has brought me news that General Castaños has been routed at Tudela; which means that his co-operation with me is out of the question. Do you see what I am driving at?"

"You mean, I think, sir, that as the Spaniards are beaten, the French are free to attack you."

"Precisely. Now follow the positions on the map here and you will see more clearly what I want of you. Here am I at Salamanca; Sir John Hope, with the cavalry and guns, is marching to join me by Talavera and the Escurial—a roundabout route, you see, and a long march that might have been avoided if I could have been sure the mountain roads were passable for wheeled transport. All the guns might have come by Guarda and saved a hundred miles; but the Portuguese engineers assured me the road was too difficult. Farther north there is another division under Sir David Baird, who landed recently at Corunna, and is now at Astorga. You see the positions?"

"Yes, sir; of course your idea was to join."

"Exactly. But now you see that I dare not attempt a junction with Sir David. As long as General Castaños' army remained, there was a hope, but now that all the Spanish armies are beaten, the French are free to march against us. Their numbers, I believe, very much exceed my own, so that if they get between me and Sir David we shall be in an awkward hole. And therefore I have determined to retreat."

Jack opened his eyes. A retreat had never entered into his imagination. He understood now what had been the subject of discussion at nine o'clock, and suspected from the general attitude of the officers, and from the few words he had heard, that the decision to withdraw without firing a shot did not meet with the approval of the staff.

"I have already sent orders to Sir John Hope," Moore went on, "to retire by way of Peñaranda and Ciudad Rodrigo, and Mr. Vaughan has been good enough to offer to carry a letter to Sir David Baird ordering him to re-embark at Corunna, and land his division at Lisbon. God knows I would have run great risks to help the Spanish cause, but the Spaniards have shown so little ability to do anything for themselves that I should only sacrifice my army, and do no good to Spain, if I attempted the impossible."

The look of anxiety and worry had returned to Sir John's face. It cleared, however, in a moment, and he continued brightly: "Now, Mr. Lumsden, you see the position. The questions are: Where is the enemy? and What is he going to do? The French were, a fortnight ago, at Valladolid; if they go north-west in force they will come across Sir David's division; if they come south, and are reinforced by the French from Tudela, they will threaten Sir John Hope's flank, and I must then do something to relieve the pressure. But any movement on my part would disclose my position and strength to the enemy, who, I hope and believe, at present know nothing about me. What I want then, Mr. Lumsden, is exact information of the enemy's whereabouts and numbers, and I think that you, with your mastery of Spanish, are the most likely officer to obtain it."

"I am ready to start at once, sir," said Jack.

"That's right. If you're the fellow I take you for, you won't want any further instructions from me. What means you use I must leave to your own discretion. I'll supply you with anything you require; money in moderation. I am terribly hard up; our Government showers gold on the Spaniards, but can't afford to pay my army. Now, before we settle the matter, it is only fair to warn you of the danger you run. If you are caught by the French within what they claim to be their lines, you'll be shot, as sure as eggs is eggs. Think of it then; you have free choice. Will you go?"

"I'll take the risk, sir," replied Jack instantly.

"It is confidential, of course," added the general. "You will report direct to me what information you obtain, or, in my absence, to one of my aides-de-camp or to General Paget."

"I am at liberty to employ messengers?"

"Certainly, but you will satisfy yourself that they are trustworthy."

"And may I have a map?"

"Of course. We haven't too many, and they are not particularly good, but send your man, and I will have one looked out within an hour. How long will it take you to make your preparations?"

"Not a minute longer than is necessary to get a Spanish dress and requisition a mule," answered Jack with a smile.

"You'll make a presentable Spaniard," said Moore, smiling back. "But wouldn't a horse serve you better than a mule? You were riding a good mount yesterday."

"A horse would attract too much attention, I think, sir. And I was used to riding mules when I was young."

Sir John laughed.

"You're not a very ancient Pistol even now, Mr. Lumsden," he said. "But that's the right spirit; regard yourself as a man and you'll do a man's work. Well, that is settled, then. I'll send you some money, and I hope you will do me valuable service and come back with a whole skin. Stay; you want a Spanish outfit. I know the very man who can be useful to you—a Spanish gentleman, one of the old school. I will write you a line of introduction. Let me see." Sir John hastily rummaged among a heap of papers. "I mustn't forget one of the names; that would be an unpardonable slight. Here it is."

He scribbled a note, copying the address with some care. Jack read: "El Señor Don Pedro Benito Aguilar Quadrato Garrapinillos de Sarrion de Gracioso," and caught a twinkle in Sir John's eye.

"I am sure he will do all he can for you," added the commander-in-chief. "He is a good patriot, not a painted one. Now good-bye, and good luck to you!"

He shook hands with Jack, who, feeling as though he trod on air, so much elated was he at the confidence placed in him, went back to his quarters. At the door he found a small group of his fellow-officers, evidently in a high state of excitement.

"Hi, Jack," cried Smith, as he came up to them, "what do you think of this? The army's going to retreat."

"You don't say so?" said Jack with well-feigned surprise.

"I do, though. Did you ever hear of such an order from a British commander-in-chief! We haven't even had a glimpse of the enemy, and by all we can hear their cavalry vedettes are at least four marches away. I can't for the life of me make out what Johnny Moore can be thinking of. How did he get his reputation, I wonder?"

"Depend upon it, he's good reason if he has ordered a retreat."

"He that fights and runs away," began Shirley; but Jack had already gone into the house, where he found his man Giles Ogbourne in the kitchen, polishing his boots and hissing like a kettle with the exertion.

"Giles," said Jack, "cut off and find me a strong, steady mule somewhere. Then go to Sir John Moore's quarters; say you have come from me; you'll get some money and a paper packet; take them, with the mule, out of the town as quickly as you can, and wait for me some two miles along the Valladolid road. Don't say a word to anyone about me, mind."

"Very good, sir!"

Giles dropped the boots and departed on his errand. Then Jack found his way to the palace of the much-baptized hidalgo. After the usual salutations, made on both sides with more than ordinary regard to punctilio, Jack presented his note. Don Pedro, an old and stately cavalier, with thin pointed features and wearing a crimson skull-cap, looked up after reading it, and said:

"General Sir Moore's wishes are to a good Spaniard commands. If you will acquaint me, Señor, with the manner in which I may serve you, I shall feel myself indeed honoured."

Jack, bowing his acknowledgments of the hidalgo's courtesy, went straight to the point.

"My general, Señor, has entrusted me with a somewhat delicate mission towards Olmedo. As you may imagine, it would not be politic for me to make such a journey as a British officer. Relying on a certain familiarity with your noble language"—here the courtly hidalgo waved his hand in graceful acknowledgment—"I propose to pass for the time as one of your countrymen. I shall need in the first place a dress, and secondly one or two willing helpers."

"Ah! as to the dress," said the hidalgo musingly. "Let me see. You will do best to wear a quiet costume, such as might become a well-to-do tradesman—say a snuff-coloured cloak, a pointed hat, velvet breeches, and high gaiters.

Well, give me half an hour, and I will have the costume ready for you. As to the helpers, that is a little more difficult. I have no intimate acquaintance in the neighbourhood of Olmedo. If you had asked me but a few short months ago, I should have said that any of my countrymen might have been trusted, but, alas! too many now have betrayed their country to the usurper. But now I bethink me, an old servant of mine keeps a small inn, the Posada de Oriente, at Medina del Campo, some twelve miles on this side of Olmedo. He is an excellent worthy fellow, and staunch, and if you so please, Señor, I will write a note to him, asking him to serve you as he would serve me."

Jack eagerly accepted the hidalgo's offer. Don Pedro opened a heavily-chased escritoire, selected a sheet of paper, then cut a new quill, and proceeded with as much formal deliberation as though he were penning a document of state. The letter finished, he carefully sprinkled it with sand from a silver pounce-box, delicately shook the paper clean when the ink was dry, and after folding it, impressed upon it a seal some two inches in diameter. The whole operation had occupied nearly half an hour, which Jack had utilized in thinking out his plans.

"I much regret to hear, Señor," said the hidalgo, as he handed him the note, "that my dear friend General Castaños has suffered a check, and that this may cause some change in General Sir Moore's plans. But I hope your excellent countrymen will not be discouraged by this temporary mischance. 'Tis but the fortune of war, or perhaps a warning, a summons to us to cast off our lethargy; and Spain will hear, and when she awakes, let her foes beware."

Jack took his leave, thanking the hidalgo in flowing Castilian, and requesting him to send the promised costume to his quarters. Half an hour afterwards the clothes arrived. Meanwhile Jack had procured a little saffron, by whose aid he had given his complexion a sallow tinge, and this, with the large-brimmed pointed hat, the cloak, and other details of the costume, effected a complete transformation in his appearance. Armed with the note to Don Pedro's old servant, he walked boldly out by the front door into the street. As luck would have it, the first person he met was Captain O'Hare himself.

"Vaya usted con Dios!" said Jack, with a slight bow, giving the usual Spanish salutation.

"Buenos dias, Señor!" returned the captain, with so vile a pronunciation that Jack could scarcely repress a smile. He passed on unrecognized, and chuckled at having so completely deceived the worthy captain.

Rather more than half an hour later he came to a spot on the road to Medina del Campo where Giles was patiently waiting with the mule. The big private was sitting on a heap of stones, holding the reins with one hand while with the other he flung pebbles across the road in idle preoccupation. Jack went up to him.

"You Ingles soldier?" he said, in a foreign accent.

"Yes, mister."

"Inglaterra a fine region," said Jack. "You go a viaje?"

"See then, what's a viaje?"

"A voyage, a march, on the mule back."

"No, I'm not goin' a march on the mule back."

"The mule is to you?"

"The mule bean't nowt to me."

"Where you go then?"

"What's that to you, mister?"

"What for you—?"

"Now look here, mister, doan't ye be too inquisitive. Axing me forty questions indeed. See then, I'll punch your head, iss a wull, if ye—"

Jack burst out laughing.

"Well, Giles," he said, "that's a compliment to my disguise at any rate. Have you got the packet for me?"

"Yes, sir," said Ogbourne, springing to his feet with a sheepish grin. "Beg pardon, sir, but I took you for a

Don."

"I know you did. Well now, get back to quarters, and don't say a word to anybody about where I have gone. If you are asked about me—and no doubt you will be—just say that I have been sent on an errand by the general."

"Very good, sir. Mumchanced as a scarecrow, sir."

"That's right. Good-day!"

He sprang on to the mule, took a switch and the packet containing the map from his man's hands, and rode off in the direction of Medina del Campo. It was fortunate that he had previous experience of such steeds when a young boy in Barcelona, for the animal began at once to play pranks. It got up first of all on its hind-legs, and then gave a lurch forward, a movement for which Jack was prepared, and which he defeated by a sudden violent strain upon the reins that brought the animal to reason. The mule requires wholly different treatment from a horse. Prick him with the spur, he stops dead; strike him with a whip, he lies down; draw rein, and he begins to gallop. Sometimes he will halt in the middle of the road, lift his head, stretch his neck, draw back his chops till he shows his gums and long teeth, and then give vent to sobs, sighs, gurgles, squeals like a pig's; and thrash him as you please, he will not budge a step until his vocal exercises are finished. Jack knew all this of old, and after trying a few experiments the mule appeared to recognize that he had no raw hand to deal with, and settled down into a steady trot, making the bells upon his neck tinkle merrily.

Jack had not ridden more than a quarter of a mile when, as he was passing by a small clump of trees, the mule stopped short, and not all his rider's coaxing sufficed to make him move. Springing off his back, Jack went to his head, to see if leading would prove more effectual than driving. As he stood there a pebble fell at his feet, then another, and another, coming, apparently, from the sky. He looked up, and there, ensconced in a fork of one of the trees, crouched a small human figure.

"Well I'm hanged!" exclaimed Jack. "Come down, Pepito."

The figure swung itself over the bough, clambered down the trunk with the nimbleness of a squirrel, dropped lightly from the lowest branch, and stood before Jack, looking up into his face with a broad smile. It was a curious figure indeed: a boy about four feet six in height, with tanned skin some shades darker than the Spaniard's olive hue, thick red lips now open and showing strong white teeth, narrow brow, arched nose, and long raven-black hair that hung in a tangled mass over his eyes. He was not pretty, but there was something strangely attractive in his smile, and his brilliant black eyes, with their indescribable touch of mystery, were dancing with fun as they met the surprised gaze of the young Englishman.

"And what does this mean, Pepito?" said Jack in Spanish.

"Go with Señor," replied the boy briefly. He shivered; it was a cold day, and the raw air cut through the tatters which left his flesh here and there exposed.

"No, that's impossible," said Jack decisively. "I couldn't be bothered with you."

"Want to go with Señor," persisted the boy. "Know the roads—Medina, Valladolid, Segovia, all the places; the Gitanos know everything."

"That's all very well, but I don't want you. You'd be in the way. Besides, I'm riding. You couldn't keep up with me."

"Can run fast. No mule can beat me."

"Nonsense! I shall be riding all day, and you'd be dead before night."

"I can get a mule, then."

"Where, may I ask?"

"From the Busne."

Jack knew that Busne was the gipsies' name for the Spaniards.

"That means that you would steal it, eh? Didn't I tell you that if you were caught stealing you'd be hanged, or at any rate soundly flogged?"

"Yes. Hanged!" He shrugged his shoulders. "Flogged!" He pulled aside his rags and showed the marks left by old thrashings on his skin.

"Incorrigible little imp!" muttered Jack in English. "Look here," he went on in Spanish, "you can't go with me; that's settled. You must go back to Salamanca. I'll give you a note to Ogbourne—"

"He'll flog me."

"No. I'll tell him to get you some clothes and see that you are fed, and to keep his eye on you till I get back. Now, will you promise me to keep out of mischief?"

"No."

"Impudent little beggar! I suppose you know no better. You know at any rate that my man will lay on pretty heavily if you plague him. Look, here's a silver peseta. I'll give you this if you promise to go back to Salamanca."

He held up the coin between finger and thumb.

"Give it me," said Pepito.

"Promise."

"I'll go with you, Señor," said the boy obstinately.

"Don't you understand? It's impossible. I can't be clogged with you. Come now, here's the money. Cut away, and when I see you next take care that you've decent clothes on your back."

Jack rapidly scribbled a note, and gave it with the coin into the brown lean little paw, eagerly outstretched to receive it. Pepito stowed them both into a pocket he discovered somewhere among his rags, then grinned, and said:

"Now I run with Señor's mule."

"Confound you!" cried Jack, losing patience at last. "I won't have you with me."

He raised the switch which he had laid across the saddle and made to strike at the gipsy. Pepito looked in his face with an inscrutable expression in his dark eyes, shrank back from the expected blow, then slowly turned on his heel and slunk away in the direction of Salamanca.

"The obstinate little mule!" said Jack to himself as he watched him go. "I don't wonder that Giles has given him many a tanning. I'd sooner be haunted by a ghost."

As soon as Pepito was out of sight Jack remounted, and set the mule at a canter to make up for lost time.

CHAPTER V

A Roadside Adventure

A Spanish By-Road—Negotiations—A Rupture—A Village Inn—Family History—Antonio the Brave—A Near Thing—The Other Cheek—Explanations—Recruits—Quits

For a few miles Jack followed the highroad, meeting no one but an old wizened woman staggering along under a basket-load of onions. Then, thinking it well, as he approached the district in which there was a possibility of encountering the enemy's vedettes, to avoid the main thoroughfare, he struck off to the right along what was little better than a cart track, discovering from his map that this would lead him to his destination by way of Pedroso, Cantalapiedra, and Carpio, villages which were scarcely likely to be selected as billeting-places by any considerable force. It was a dreary ride. The road was heavy with the recent rains. It passed through a country consisting partly of

bare heath, partly of grain-fields, now black and desolate. He had started from Salamanca shortly after eleven o'clock, and, owing to interruptions and the state of the roads, it was nearly three in the afternoon before he arrived at Cantalapiedra, little more than half-way to Medina. By that time he was hungry, and his steed was both hungry and tired. Dismounting before a posada at the entrance to the town, he sent the mule to be fed and rubbed down, and went into the house to seek refreshment himself.

There was no other guest in the place, and the landlord, slow and stolid like a genuine Spaniard, showed neither pleasure nor displeasure at the appearance of a traveller. In reply to Jack's request for food, he brought, after some delay, a basin of very greasy soup of a reddish tinge, due to the saffron with which it had been liberally sprinkled, and a dirty carafe of violet-coloured wine, which Jack found, when he poured it out, almost thick enough to cut with a knife. The bread, however, was eatable, if a trifle salt, and Jack munched away with an appetite that evoked a gleam of interest in the landlord's solemn eyes. He began to ask questions, and indeed to show himself inquisitive, remarking on the strange fact of a young man travelling alone through disturbed country at such a time. Jack good-humouredly parried enquiries that seemed too direct, merely explaining that he had been on a visit to Salamanca, and was riding across country because, having heard rumours that the French were in possession of Valladolid, he had no wish to fall into their hands. The landlord dryly told him that travelling anywhere in Spain was rather dangerous for a man with good clothes on his back and money in his pocket, for if he escaped the French he might fall in with bandits, and there was little to choose between them when plunder was in question. In answer to this Jack opened his coat and showed the man the butt of a big Spanish pistol.

"Even a peaceful merchant," he said with a laugh, "may prove an awkward customer to tackle."

The landlord shrugged.

"One against a troop of French cavalry, or a gang of bandits, would fare rather badly," he said. "I suppose you will want a bed to-night, Señor?"

"Not I. I'm going to push on to Medina."

"The saints help you to find your way in the dark, then!"

"Oh! I shall find it. The road is direct, you know, and my mule will not wander."

He set off after an hour's rest and rode on in increasing darkness. What the landlord had said about brigands gave him little concern. For one thing, the mule trod almost silently on the sodden road, and he had removed the bell from its neck; for another, he had avoided the highway, and did not suppose that much booty was ever to be obtained on the by-roads; and lastly, he trusted to his wits, his mule, and his pistol. As he rode on, the air grew colder and the sky darker; there was no moon, and a thickening haze lay over the fields to right and left of the road. It was impossible to proceed at more than a walking pace, except at risk of breaking the mule's knees in a rut or ditch. To divert his thoughts from the cold and the unpleasantness of his journey, he ran over in his mind the events of the last few days. He dwelt particularly on the strange message he had received from Don Fernan Alvarez.

"Palafox the man, Palafox the name!"—what could it mean? How did it concern his old playmate Juanita, whom he remembered, a little black-eyed child, clambering on his father's knee, and listening with her finger in her mouth to the stories told her by Mr. Lumsden, so merry and frank compared with her stiff, stately, solemn father. Palafox!—he was a young general, with a brilliant reputation; Jack had heard Colonel Beckwith give high praise to his strenuous defence of Saragossa against Verdier; but what likelihood was there that the chances of the campaign would give Jack an opportunity of meeting him! Suppose he did meet him, what—

"Buenas noches, caballero!" said a thick guttural voice at his mule's head, breaking into his meditation, and giving him a momentary shock.

"Buenas noches, hombre!" he replied.

The mule had stopped short. Jack saw dimly, right in front of him, a thick-set figure clad in a heavy cloak, his

head covered with a pointed large-brimmed hat, reminding the rider of pictures he had seen of Italian brigands.

"O Señor caballero," said the man, "will you have the charity to tell a poor wayfarer the time?"

Jack was on the point of pulling out his big hunting-watch, but it struck him suddenly that it was advisable to be on his guard until he was sure of his man.

"Somewhere about seven o'clock, I fancy," he said courteously. "You are right in my way, my friend."

"Sí, caballero, but it is my way as well as yours."

"It is wide enough for both of us," rejoined Jack with a smile; "and as I have some miles to ride, I shall be obliged to you if you'll stand away and let me get on."

The man did not budge, but brought his left hand from beneath his cloak and seized the off rein.

"Come, my friend, don't delay me. 'Tis a cold night, and the sooner I reach my journey's end the better I shall be pleased."

Jack spoke quietly and politely as before, but he was watching the fellow with the wariness of a hawk.

"'Tis cold for me also, caballero; a fire and warm drink await me yonder. I am going to fight the accursed French, and it strikes me a mule like yours will serve me well. I will trouble you, therefore, to dismount, caballero. I perceive you are a tradesman from the town, and you will admit the fighter is more useful to Spain than the shopkeeper. If you will do me the honour to descend, I will mount in your place."

"Not so fast, my man," said Jack. "I don't want to hurt you, but if you continue to stand there you may come to grief when I whip up my mule."

Realizing from Jack's firm tone that his object was not to be gained without a struggle, the man suddenly threw off the fold of the cloak enveloping his right arm, and with a guttural oath lifted a huge mallet he carried in his hand, springing slightly aside to give his arm free play. The movement was fatal to him. With a sharp dig in the groin Jack swung the mule round in the same direction, and launched him full at his assailant. Before the ponderous mallet had time to complete its swing, the mule had struck the man square in the chest, and as he reeled and fell under the blow Jack brought down his switch smartly across his brow.

"That's well saved, anyhow," said Jack grimly to himself as he cantered on, and smiled as he heard the man's curses pursuing him. The mule seemed to share in his rider's feelings, for as he trotted steadily on he lifted his head high in the air, curled up his lip, and showed his long yellow teeth, as though laughing at the man's ignominious overthrow. Jack let him have his way, and the animal kept up the same pace unfalteringly, with never a slip or stumble, until he reached the squalid streets of Medina del Campo. The curfew had just ceased ringing, and the great market-square was quite deserted; but Jack knocked at a house in which he saw a light, enquired the way to the Posada de Oriente, and in a few minutes was standing within the doorway of that hostelry. To judge by the various voices issuing from its interior, it was entertaining a numerous company.

He presented to the landlord the letter he had brought from the man's former master, Don Pedro, and was led with some hesitation into the inn, while his mule was handed over to an ostler. The inn consisted of one large apartment with a fireplace at each end, a timber roof blackened and varnished by smoke, stalls at each side for horses and mules, and for travellers a few small lateral chambers each containing a bed made of planks laid across trestles, and covered with sheets of coarse sacking. "Rough lying," thought Jack, as he looked in at the open door of one of these. The floor was of brick, strewn with rushes. A large fire burnt in one of the grates, strings of onions hung from nails on the walls, and the place was pervaded by an odour of scalded oil and grilled tomatoes. Jack gave a comprehensive greeting to the company as he entered. A deep silence had fallen upon the room, and he was conscious of the curious scrutiny of several pairs of eyes; but knowing that the Spaniard is always reserved with a stranger until assured that he is not, let us say, a pedlar, or a rope-dancer, or a dealer in hair-oil, he paid the company for the moment no further attention, but sat down on a back seat pointed out by the patron, and ordered food. The

landlord regretted that at short notice he could supply him with nothing but a simple gaspacho. Jack laughed inwardly at the thought of how his friend Pomeroy would turn up his fastidious nose at such fare, but assured his host that in his present state of hunger he could eat anything, and the gaspacho was accordingly prepared. Some water was poured into a soup-tureen, to this was added a little vinegar, a few pods of garlic, some onions cut into four, a slice or two of cucumber, a little spice, a pinch of salt, and a few slices of bread; with this the detestable mixture was complete. As Jack began his meagre meal the landlord opened the hidalgo's note, and Jack threw a glance round the company.

Nearest the fire sat a lean, cadaverous old gentleman closely wrapped in a chestnut-coloured cloak, and sipping at a glass of dry Malaga. Next him reclined the village priest, a rotund figure clad in a black cassock, with cloak of the same colour; he nursed on his knee an immense hat, at least three feet long, with a turned-in brim, which when upon his head must have formed a sort of horizontal roof. Then came a couple of arrieros, or carriers, in rough fustian, with big leather gaiters and broad sashes of red silk; and a loutish Maragato with shaven head, clad in a long tight jacket secured at the waist by a broad girdle, loose trousers terminating at the knees, and long boots and gaiters. A few young villagers completed the circle. By this time the landlord had spread out his old master's note, and was scrutinizing it with a puzzled expression, his head screwed aside and his lips pursed up. After a few moments he appeared to come to the conclusion that he would never decipher the crabbed handwriting unaided, and handed it to the priest, a broad grease mark showing where his thumb had pressed it.

"Here, Señor cura," he said, "be so good as to read it to me; Don Pedro's hand is growing paralysed, surely."

The priest took it, giving Jack a humorous smile.

"Don Pedro merely introduces the caballero as a friend of his," he said, "and asks you, for his sake and the sake of Spain, to serve him in every possible way."

"To be sure," returned the landlord; "I have done it without asking. I have given the caballero a gaspacho, and if he will wait till Antonio arrives he shall have a puchero in addition, and a grilled tomato."

"Thanks, landlord! I shall do very well," said Jack. "But I fear I am a kill-joy, Señores. Pray don't let me interrupt your conversation."

"The caballero, being a friend of Don Pedro, may be trusted," said the lean gentleman by the fire, taking a sip. "He is welcome, particularly if he joins us in giving God-speed to Antonio as he goes on his way to join the brave guerrilleros."

"I shall be happy," said Jack. "Antonio, I presume, is a soldier of this neighbourhood?"

"Nay, Señor, all our soldiers are already with General Castaños or the Marquis of La Romana or brave San Juan, doing deeds of valour against the accursed French, every man of them worth three of the enemy. Were I not old and worn, I myself would have led them, and drawn the sword of my ancestors in defence of my country. I am a hidalgo of noble line, Señor, tracing my descent back to a paladin who slew ten Englishmen with his own sword, when, in the days of Great Philip, we landed in England and held London to ransom." (Jack opened his eyes at this new light on English history!) "His blood still flows in my withered veins, and my neighbours here know well that only my great age keeps me from driving the French back across the mountains at the head of my troop."

Most of the company applauded this patriotic speech, but Jack observed a whimsical look on the priest's face.

"I rejoice to know," continued the hidalgo, "that the old valour is still alive in the breasts of my countrymen; they are flocking in their thousands to join the bands of guerrilleros who dog the French at every step, and our friend Antonio, whom we expect to-night, and who leaves to-morrow for Saragossa, is one in whom the Spanish valour most brightly shines."

"Antonio is a journeyman cooper, Señor," said the priest confidentially, "a dare-devil by report, a contrabandista too at times, and a great favourite in these parts. He is expected from Cantalapiedra to-night."

"And here he is," cried one of the younger men, who had gone to the door. "Late, but welcome. Viva Antonio!"

All the company but Jack rose to their feet to greet the hero. He came hastily into the room, flung the door to behind him, bolted it, and heaved a sigh. Jack saw at a glance that he was no other than the man who had sought to borrow his mule, and had found the apparently inoffensive rider tougher than he expected.

"Señores, Señores," cried the man, "only by a miracle and by my own courage have I escaped this night! Blessed be the saints that I have a stout heart and a strong arm, or I should have been but a dead man to-night!"

He spread himself with an air of bravado upon a low bench, and as he removed his hat, disclosed a deep-red wale across his brow. His friends gathered about him in consternation, and the old hidalgo rose painfully from his chair, and, tottering across the room, handed a bumper of Malaga to the panting new-comer, who quaffed it gratefully.

"Yes, Señores," he continued, "but for the merciful protection of Santiago and Santa Maria, and the fact that I know no fear, I should have been lost to Spain, a cold corpse even now. Four miles back, as I trudged wearily along the miry road, thinking of the kind friends and the warm food awaiting me here—"

"Manuel," cried the landlord to a strapping youth who stood with sleeves tucked up near the fireplace, "grill a tomato for our brave Antonio."

"As I trudged along," Antonio resumed, "all at once I heard a great splashing and clanking behind me, and before I could stand aside, three horsemen were upon me. They reined up when they saw me, and one of them called me dog, and asked the way to Valladolid. I knew by his tongue that he was one of the thrice-cursed French, and, commanding myself to Santiago in a breath, I raised my mallet and struck him upon the head, and he fell. His comrades drew their swords and made at me over their horses' necks. I defended myself as best I could with my good mallet, but it was an unequal fight, Señores, and I was at my wits' end, when I bethought me that all the French are craven curs, and I shouted aloud, as though summoning a hidden band to the rescue. The Frenchmen started back, looked fearfully around, and then, unmindful of their dead comrade on the ground, set spurs to their horses and galloped away, one of them, as he passed, striking me—with the flat of his sword, praised be Santiago!—across the brow, and—"

"What was he like, hombre?" asked Jack quietly, bending forward on his chair and looking the man full in the face.

Antonio's jaw dropped. He gave a scared look at the speaker, and spilt the remainder of his wine upon his boots.

"The brave fellow is overcome," said the hidalgo. "Fill his glass, Manuel."

Antonio gulped down a second glass, and looked with apprehension at Jack, who was now sitting back again in his chair, keeping his eyes fixed on the abashed Spaniard.

"A lucky escape, Antonio," said the cura with a twinkling eye. "In the morning, no doubt, some passing arriero will see the dead Frenchman on the road, and bring him here for dog's burial."

"No doubt, no doubt, Padre," said Antonio hurriedly. "But I am faint, Señores, and as my nose tells me the tomato is now well grilled, I would fain stay the pangs of hunger."

As he devoted himself to the succulent fruit, the hidalgo entered upon a long oration on the iniquities of the French and the heroism of the Spaniards, with particular reference to the guerrilla band in the Virgen mountains, whom Antonio was on his way to join. He concluded by calling upon the company to drink the health of the brave Antonio, and confusion to the French. When the ringing vivas had ceased, Jack rose from his chair. Approaching the hero, who looked far from comfortable, he held out his right hand, and, laying his left on Antonio's shoulder, said:

"I am glad that, as a chance traveller, I am here in time to add my good wishes to so staunch a patriot. With a spirit like yours, we shall soon succeed in driving the enemy headlong through the passes of the Pyrenees. I myself

hope to do something in my small way for Spain, but nothing I can do will match the valiant deeds of the brave guerrilleros, who face the rigours of winter cold on the barren mountains, and leave all the comforts of home in their noble enthusiasm. I call upon the sons of Spain here present to drink once more a health to Antonio the guerrillero, and confusion to the French! Viva Antonio! Viva la España!"

He grasped the hand of the astonished Antonio, and shook it heartily, amid the applause of the company. Antonio's look of amazement gave way gradually to one of smug content, and when, after another flowery speech from the hidalgo, the guests rose to take leave, the cooper had quite recovered his wonted air of assurance.

After the departure of his guests, the landlord was proceeding to bolt the door for the night, when Jack stopped him.

"Don't fasten up yet, landlord," he said. "I am going farther presently."

"To-night, Señor?"

"Yes; the moon is rising, and I shall ride as far as Olmedo."

"But, Señor, you may be set upon by French horsemen, like Antonio here."

"I don't think so," replied Jack with a smile. "Remember, Don Pedro sent me here to claim your assistance. He assured me you are a good patriot, and I don't suppose you love the French any better than the Señor hidalgo, or than Antonio, eh?"

"The French, Señor! I hate them. Every good Spaniard hates them. We are all caballeros, Señor, and we're not going to have any masters over us but our own hidalgos and the king—our own king."

"Have you seen anything of the French yourself?"

"The saints forbid! They spare neither man nor beast. If they came this way I'd have never a pig in my sty nor a copa of wine in my cellar. Antonio has seen some of them to-night, and my son Manuel told me that a squadron of dragoons passed through Olmedo and went south yesterday, and all last week parties of French horse were scouring the district north of Olmedo, playing the very devil with the people."

"They came from Valladolid, I suppose?"

"No doubt, Señor; Valladolid has been occupied by them for at least a fortnight past. We're hoping every day that the Marquis of La Romana or General Palafox will swoop down on them and slit their weasands. Or maybe the English general Sir Moore, now at Salamanca, will come and trounce them."

"You know the English are at Salamanca, then? Do the French know it?"

"Not from us, Señor. Not a man of us will give them any information."

"Well, landlord, I'm an Englishman—"

The man threw up his hands in amazement, and Antonio gasped. Jack watched the effect of his announcement; he had come rapidly to the conclusion that as Antonio was clearly regarded by his friends as a staunch patriot, there would be no danger in disclosing his own nationality.

"And I've come this way to find out all I can about the French. I want two active young fellows to help me, and I've been looking at these two fine lads—sons of yours, I take it?"

"Yes, Señor, they are my sons. Manuel is nineteen, and his brother Juan a year younger, and 'tis ten years yesterday since their poor mother went to heaven."

The two young men, with square-set faces and ragged shocks of black hair, stood listening with interest. Jack had watched them narrowly during the evening. They had something less than the usual stolidity of expression, looked fairly intelligent, and appeared likely to serve him well as special messengers.

"They would have to be prepared for hard work," he said, "at any hour of the day or night. They would be well paid, of course—"

"Señor," interrupted the landlord, "a good patriot doesn't require pay for working against the French."

Jack thought he had heard a different account about some of his host's countrymen, but he went on:

"Well then, you will not object to your sons entering my service as messengers between me and my general?"

"But, Señor, I shall then be single-handed. Who will there be then to attend to my guests—to mix the puchero, and stir the gazpacho, and rub down the mules? The lads could not leave their poor old father alone."

"Caramba!" struck in Antonio, who was now devoting himself to a fried onion, "what is that? Here am I leaving my wife and three children, to fight the French."

"You've left them before," said the landlord dryly.

"And there's Don Pedro's letter, you know," suggested Jack.

The landlord glanced at the letter, which lay on the table, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he said, "I would do much for Don Pedro. He was a good master to me; he gave me the money to buy this inn; and since he asks me to serve you and my country at the same time, I can't refuse, Señor—if the lads are willing to go."

They at once professed their readiness to serve the Señor in any way, and assured him that they were well acquainted with the country for miles around.

"That's settled, then," said Jack. "Now, Manuel, you won't mind being employed at once? Have you any mules on the premises?"

"Two, Señor."

"Just the number required. You will saddle up and ride off at once to Salamanca. I will give you a note to take to Sir John Moore, the English general there. If you can't find him, ask for General Paget. You can say Paget?"

After two or three attempts, Manuel succeeded in pronouncing a passable imitation of the sound.

"When you have delivered the note, you will return to Carpio, and wait there for further orders. Both in going and coming you will take care to attract as little attention as possible, and of course you will not say a word to anyone, not even to your dearest friend, about your business. You understand?"

"Yes, Señor. And I have a friend near Carpio, a farmer, who lives about a league out of the town, so that I can stay with him if need be."

"Very well. Go and get your mule saddled, and return here for the note."

Jack wrote a few lines to Sir John, giving him the news of the passing squadron of French horse he had just learnt from the landlord, and ten minutes later Manuel left the inn with the note and a little money to serve for his immediate needs.

"Now, Juan," said Jack, when the elder brother had gone, "go to bed and get what sleep you can till three o'clock. At that hour I shall want you to start with me for Olmedo. I'm pretty tired, so I shall turn in myself, landlord, for a brief rest, and I shall take care that your assistance is brought to the notice of my general and also of your own juntas. Good-night!"

At three o'clock, beneath a pale half-moon, Jack stood at the door of the inn, waiting as Juan brought up his mule. He was about to mount, when he was surprised to see Antonio issue from the door and approach him.

"I'm a rough common man, Señor," he said; "you're a caballero. My big tongue will not say what I have in my heart, but I know what I owe you for your kindness to-night. Yes, Señor, it was like a true caballero not to remember what had happened on the road; and I say, Señor, that if ever there comes a chance to do you a good turn, por Dios! Antonio will not forget."

"Thanks, Antonio!" replied Jack, holding out his hand. "We'll cry quits and part friends."

"Vaya usted con Dios!" returned the man; and then Jack, followed by Juan, cantered up the quiet street.

CHAPTER VI

Monsieur Taberne

Westphalian Light Horse—Mine Host—Two Menus—Feeding a Commissary—Practice in French—Another Bottle—A Sum in Arithmetic—Inferences—
A Cold Prospect

Daylight was just breaking as the riders came to the dreary outskirts of Olmedo, passing by one or two desolate-looking vineyards, untidy brick-fields, gloomy convents, and neglected kitchen-gardens, the walled town itself rising before them on an eminence in the midst of a wide sandy plain.

Jack had already learnt from Juan on the way that, nearly a mile from the town, a small clump of pine-trees grew, the only trees to be seen on all the barren heath. This, Jack thought, would be a convenient spot at which to leave the youth with the mules while he himself went into the town and reconnoitred. Accordingly, he sent Juan into the wood with the animals and sufficient food to last them the day, telling him to wrap his cloak well about him to keep off the cold, and on no account to allow himself to be seen from the road. Then he proceeded alone into the town, the narrow dirty streets of which he found in a great bustle. There appeared to be a horse at the door of every one of the six hundred houses of which the place consisted, and at the side of every horse there was a French trooper, who was either brushing his mount, or fastening its saddle-straps, or feeding it, or watching his comrades engaged in one or other of those operations. In short, three squadrons of French dragoons, which had been quartered on the town, were saddling up in preparation for marching, and the streets resounded with the clank of metal, the pawing of horses' hoofs, and the cries of the soldiers.

Jack made his way to the first inn, where he found the landlord endeavouring to reconcile his Castilian dignity with the obsequiousness demanded by the troopers he was serving. Ordering some chocolate, Jack sat down quietly on a bench, prepared to pick up any scraps of information he could gather from the half-dozen troopers who were loudly conversing over their drink. But a few moments later a sergeant entered, in a rage at finding the men away from their horses. They left in a body, and Jack seized the occasion to make a few discreet enquiries of the aggrieved and perspiring innkeeper. The troopers, he learnt, were the Westphalian light horse, belonging to General Maupetit's brigade, which formed the cavalry division of the fourth army corps under Marshal Lefebvre, Duke of Dantzig. They had arrived in the town on the previous afternoon, and the landlord, like all the inhabitants, was anxious to see the last of them; for the town had been visited by numerous smaller parties of horse during the previous week, and the French always took what they wanted, and were not very scrupulous about paying for it.

While Jack was condoling with the landlord, he heard the bugle ring out the "boot and saddle". A few minutes later the whole force moved out along the main road to the south, leading to Villacastin and Madrid. Jack stood just within the door, watching them defile past, and he could not but admire the excellent condition of the horses and the soldierly smartness of the men.

"I wonder where they are bound for?" he said to himself. He knew, from a careful examination he had already made of his map, that if the cavalry kept to the main road it would bring them, within about thirty miles, in contact with Hope's outposts, with the result that their general, Lefebvre, would not remain much longer in ignorance of the proximity of the British forces.

"I must see what they are after," thought Jack. Hastening to the plantation outside the town, where he had left Juan and the mules, he mounted and rode alone after the dragoons, being careful to maintain a discreet distance between himself and their rear. After riding for some three miles, he observed that they were leaving the main road and bearing to the left. Taking out his map, he found that they were evidently making for Segovia by the shortest

cut, and the obvious inference was that they were as yet quite unsuspicious of the proximity of the British army, and had no intention of marching towards the Portuguese frontier. Riding another mile, to make sure that this supposition was correct, Jack then returned to the plantation, scribbled a note to Moore giving this important news, and ordered Juan to set off with it, going round Medina to Carpio, where he would meet his brother, whom he was to instruct to carry the message to Salamanca.

Having thus despatched his second messenger, Jack made his way back to Olmedo, with the intention of obtaining a more substantial meal than he had yet had time for. He sought, this time, the principal inn of the place, and found that with the departure of the dragoons the inhabitants of the town, previously invisible, had now formed little knots at the street corners, and were condoling with one another on the indignities they had suffered at the hands of the enemy. The landlord was at first too much occupied with the gossips at the door of his posada to attend to a stranger, but Jack at last boldly took him by the arm and declared that he must have food of some sort.

"Food! All very well for a stranger to ask for food," he replied bitterly, "but these cursed Frenchmen have stripped us bare, and are verily capable of eating our children."

"Come, landlord," said Jack, "I heard an old cock crowing lustily as I came up the street. At least you have an egg or two. I don't love the French any more than you; and I'll pay, which is more than they do, by all accounts."

"Well, Señor, perhaps I can find you an egg, but you must wait till I can send for it and borrow a frying-pan, for a Frenchman knocked a hole in mine last night."

Jack sat down on a bench within the bar-room, and listened to the conversation, or rather the declamation, of the men at the door. While he sat there waiting with scant patience, for he was very hungry, the sound of horses' hoofs was heard approaching, mingled with the clank of steel. The knot at the door melted away as by magic, and a few moments later a small party of horsemen clattered into the courtyard, and loud voices were heard calling to the inn servants. In a minute or two a portly French officer clanked into the room, now empty save for Jack. He was clad in a uniform of some brilliance, with a heavy shako and an embroidered white cloak, and the stone floor resounded to the tread of his heavy spurred riding-boots. Giving a casual glance at Jack, who was staying his hunger with a crust of dry bread until the egg should appear, the officer strode up to the low counter, smote it heavily with his riding-whip, and bellowed for the landlord, in execrable Spanish, freely interlarded with French expletives.

"Ohé, landlord!" he shouted. "Palsambleu! Where has the hog hidden himself? Ohé! Come out of your pig-stye, canaille that you are, and bring me some food."

He continued shouting and belabouring the counter, setting the crockery rattling on the big dresser behind.

"Nice manners!" said Jack to himself, closely watching the new-comer. "I wonder who he is!"

At this moment the landlord entered with a fried egg, which he brought to Jack without giving more than one sullen glance to the boisterous officer. This neglect wounded the gentleman's dignity; he strode across the room and, lifting his whip, spluttered:

"Insolent dog! Don't you hear? I order you to bring me food, and, palsambleu! you had better hurry. What do you mean by keeping an officer of the emperor waiting while you serve a beggarly tradesman?"

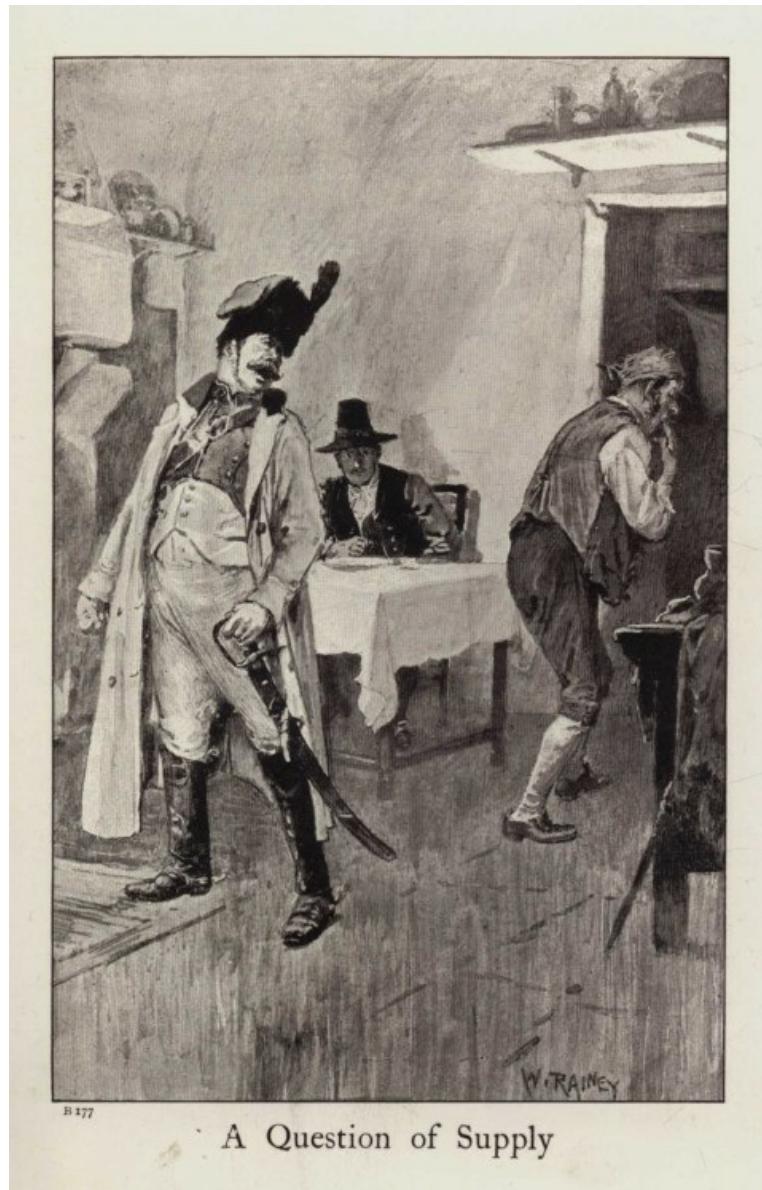
"In a moment, Señor," said the landlord, setting the dish before Jack.

"Would the noble marquis like my egg?" said Jack meekly in bad French.

"Egg!" The officer snorted his contempt for such frugal fare. "Look you, landlord, I want soup to begin with, and then a mayonnaise—sweet olive-oil, mind you—and a capon well basted to follow, and—"

"Señor, Señor," interrupted the landlord, "I've not any such things on the premises. Your dragoons have eaten me up already. I can give you an omelet—"

"An omelet! Morbleu, landlord! If you don't hurry with something more substantial than an omelet I'll slice your fat cheeks into collops."



A Question of Supply

He glared at the Spaniard and laid his hand on his sword; and the landlord, giving up all attempt to preserve his dignity further, scuttled through the door leading to his kitchen.

"Holà!" cried the officer, calling him back; "before you go give me a stoup of wine; none of your tarred vinegar of Toro, pardi, but good wine of Valdepenas, something with a tang. Ventrebleu! it's a poor thing if an officer of the emperor, who has to feed an army, can't get good food for himself."

("Ah!" thought Jack, "we have a commissary here. He ought to be worth something.")

The trembling landlord set a goat-skin and a cup before the blustering commissary, and hurried off to ransack his larder for something wherewith to appease his Gargantuan appetite.

After two or three draughts of wine the big man appeared to be somewhat mollified. He threw more than one

glance at Jack, as he strode up and down the room, objurgating the landlord's sluggishness. To Jack's amusement and surprise, the Spaniard returned in a very few minutes, bearing a steaming tureen of soup.

"Would the Señor like his meal served in a private room?" he asked. "There is only my own sitting-room, with no fire at present, but if his excellency pleases a fire shall be lit, and—"

"Tenez, tenez!" said the officer; "let me fill my stomach, in the public room here by the fire. I may want the private room by and by," he added pompously; "but meanwhile I have no objection to your guest being present."

He glanced at Jack, who at once said, in his politest tones:

"I shall be happy to retire if I am in the noble marquis's way. Personal convenience must, of course, give way to the public service, and anyone can see that the noble marquis is a very high functionary."

The deferential tone and the barefaced flattery conciliated the big man. Puffing himself out he said:

"Not marquis yet, young man, not yet, though it may come—yes, it may come in time. Lefebvre is Duke of Dantzig: he rose from the ranks, and there's no reason in the world why I, Gustave Taberne, shouldn't be a marquis before long. Personal business, you say? Well, my business is wholly personal at present, since it consists in lining my not inconsiderable person, hein! But I don't regard your company as an intrusion, monsieur; far from it; I welcome you heartily."

Jack bowed his acknowledgments. Meanwhile the officer had begun to gulp his soup with no little noise, gobbling like a turkey-cock, as Jack described him afterwards. As his meal progressed he unbent still further.

"You are almost the first of your cursed countrymen I've met who can speak tolerable French," he said. "Where did you learn it, young man?"

"I picked up a little in Barcelona, your excellency," replied Jack, "but not till now have I had the opportunity of improving myself by conversation with an officer used to high society."

"Ah! you know a galant homme when you see him. You have some sense, young man. Yes, I'm commissary-general to the Duke of Dantzig's forces, and, parbleu! in the emperor's service I spare no one, neither myself nor others. Ohé, landlord, bring the next course."

The landlord brought in a number of dishes.

"Señor likes the puchero?" he said.

"Puchero, you call it? Well, if this is puchero, I do like it. Now, par le sambleu, you wanted to put me off with an omelet! He! he!"

He lay back in his chair and roared. Jack himself was not a little amused, for he saw on the table a quarter of veal, a neck of mutton, a chicken, the end of a sausage called *chorizo*, slices of bacon and ham, a jug of sauce made of tomatos and saffron and strong spices, a dish of cabbage soaking in oil, and a platter filled with a vegetable rather like haricot beans, called *garbanzo*. All these the landlord mixed in one big vessel so as to make a mayonnaise, which Jack hoped did not taste as strong as it smelt. The commissary fell to with avidity, but he was evidently fond of hearing his own voice, and his tongue being loosened by the unexpected good cheer, and by Jack's respectful admiration, he condescended to converse between the mouthfuls.

"Pity your countrymen are not all as civil and sensible as yourself," he said. "If they'd only put a good face on it, and pay willing obedience to King Joseph—though, to tell the truth, he's only a proxy for the emperor,—they'd live a quieter life and make the duties of the commissary less of a torture. I tell you, young man—moi qui vous parle—there isn't a more harassed man in the army than the commissary-general. Hang me if he is not every way as important as the commander-in-chief!"

Jack looked at him sympathetically.

"A general gets all the credit of a victory, but, parbleu! 'tis the commissary that deserves it. Who won the battle of Austerlitz three years ago? Folks say it was the emperor, but between you and me, mon ami, it was I myself,

Gustave Taberne. Soult, Masséna, Lannes, the emperor himself—all very well, but could the men fight if they weren't well fed?—tell me that. And I feed the army. Skill, that is good; courage, that is better; devotion, that is excellent; but a good meal has won more victories than the cleverest tactics."

"The world knows nothing of its greatest men," said Jack.

The commissary gleamed approval, but at this point the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of a corporal.

"Well, Antoine," said the officer, "where is the alcalde?"

"He cannot be found, mon colonel," replied the man.

"Cannot be found! Cannot! Who dares use such words to the emperor's commissary-general? The alcalde must be found, or, parbleu! I'll burn every house and pig-stye in the place. Let him be here in half an hour—not a moment sooner, for I must finish my *dejeuner*; not a moment later, for he will fare ill if he keeps me waiting. Away with you, Antoine."

The corporal vanished.

"Ohé, landlord!" shouted the commissary. "Another bottle of wine. No, don't take out the stopper. Set it on the table there in front of me."

The commissary gloated at the rotund wine-skin, but made no sign of opening it. Catching an enquiring glance from Jack, he said loftily:

"I drink no more till my work is done, young man. If I drank more now, I should get drunk; and if I got drunk the emperor would call me a pig, and I should deserve it. Duty first, young man, always remember that."

"It astonishes me," said Jack, "—forgive my ignorance, Colonel,—how you officers can make the calculations necessary for feeding an immense army. In our little villages, for instance, if we keep the festival of a saint or a guild, when there are only some hundreds of mouths to feed, we either run short or have so much left that bushels of good stuff have to be thrown to the pigs."

Jack spoke from recollections of the autumn bean-feast in his little Surrey village at home. The commissary rose to the bait, and spoke, always with a thirsty eye fixed on the wine-skin.

"Oh! as to that," he said, "we do everything by system. Nothing is easier when you have a system. We allow a pound of biscuit a day to each man, and half a pound of meat, and as much wine as is good for him and can be got. For myself, as you see, I can drink a gallon without staggering, and hold a fresh bottle always at arm's-length without touching it."

"Matchless strength of will!" exclaimed Jack. "But even so, the responsibility of obtaining just the right quantity for so many thousands of men would make a weaker man quaver. The biscuit, for instance—what a huge quantity you must consume!"

"Huge indeed!" said the commissary. "Why, in Valladolid, where I have come from, we use nine tons a day." (Jack made a rapid mental calculation: one pound of biscuit to each man; nine tons a day. "So there are about twenty thousand men in Valladolid!" he concluded.) "And in the present temper of your confounded countrymen," continued the commissary, "such a man as I is not to be envied. I have had great difficulty in procuring supplies in some places. Like your landlord here, they offer an egg, and we have to curse them before they bring out the chicken. But we stand no nonsense, I can tell you. Your alcaldes have bad memories, but 'tis amazing how refreshing is a yard or two of hempen rope or the touch of a cold pistol-barrel. We had trouble in Valladolid, and 'tis rumoured we are to have trouble in Segovia; but let 'em beware, let 'em beware."

"Ah! I'm afraid our poor people have small chance against the hosts of your emperor—the finest soldier the world has seen since Alexander the Great."

"You say true, monsieur; you are a sensible fellow—for a Spaniard. The Little Corporal is indeed a new

Alexander, destined to conquer the whole world, and, parbleu! those upstart meddling shopkeepers of English into the bargain. Why, the emperor is at this moment marching south, and my bag here is stuffed with bulletins of his victories."

He pulled out a handful of papers, and spread them on the table. At this moment the corporal re-entered, followed by the trembling alcalde of the village, whose bemired dress showed that he had been hiding in no very sanitary spot.

"Ohé, Don Long-chops," said the commissary, "you thought to escape me, did you? Now you and I will have a reckoning."

As the alcalde was brought round the table until he faced the commissary, Jack rose.

"I will bid you good-day, monsieur," he said politely. "I have a long way to go, and be sure that in whatever village I pass through I shall warn them that so capable an officer is not to be trifled with."

"That is sound sense, pardi," said the commissary. "You will do well to prepare them for my coming, and, look you, if we meet again, you and I will drink as much Valdepenas as our skins will hold—provided my duty is done. Au revoir!"

Jack bowed and took his leave. The information he had obtained from the self-sufficient commissary was clearly of the highest importance. There were twenty thousand men in Valladolid: they were about to march for Segovia; and the emperor himself was coming southward at the head of an army. It was evident that the French were as yet in ignorance of the proximity of Moore's army. They were probably intending a blow at Madrid; and Jack saw in a flash that this might have a direct bearing on the movements contemplated by Sir John.

"Why shouldn't we march eastward and cut their communications?" he thought.

The question was, how was this information to be conveyed to head-quarters? At the earliest Juan could not be back before dark, even if he met his brother the instant he arrived at Carpio.

"There's nothing for it but to go myself," said Jack to himself, "and that's a pity. I should have liked to get a little more out of my budding marquis when he is in one of his expansive moods. Well, I've a cold ride before me."

CHAPTER VII

Pepito intervenes

Precautions—Gone to Earth—Foundered—In the Nick of Time—The Allied Army—At the Marchesa's Palace—Social Salamanca—Light Refreshments—Messengers—A Recognition

The stable-yard lay to the rear of the inn. Snow had been falling lightly during Jack's conversation with the commissary, and one of the servants was busily sweeping the slush into a corner. The stable doors were open, and several lads and men were attending to the horses of the commissary's escort, the universal hiss of men employed in that occupation being mingled with curses which it was lucky the Frenchmen could not hear or understand. Jack went up to one of the men and asked him to bring out his mule. The ostler turned from the horse he was grooming and looked at Jack with an air of incivility, if not downright insolence. He made no movement to carry out the order, and, glancing round, Jack became aware that all the other stable-helps had left their work and were gazing at him with the same distrustful, lowering scowl.

"What's the matter?" he thought.

The men had been all civility when he gave his mule into their hands on his arrival. What could be the cause of

this unpleasant change of attitude? Jack was puzzled. Meanwhile he wanted his mule unhaltered and saddled, and though he was tempted to do it himself, and not trouble the reluctant servants, he saw that such a course would not improve his position with them. He knew the Spanish character too well to bluster or dictate. After a pause of only a few moments he addressed the same man quietly and politely, but with a firmness that admitted no refusal; and the servant, dropping his eyes, turned sullenly to do his bidding.

A few minutes later, as he rode out of the courtyard, he met the alcalde, looking very angry and much perturbed. He was coming, evidently, from his interview with the commissary. He looked up at Jack as he passed, and half-stopped, as though hesitating whether to address him. Jack was surprised to note the same quick glance of suspicion in the alcalde's eyes as he had seen in those of the stablemen. The official seemed to be on the point of speaking, but he gave a hurried and anxious glance towards the window of the commissary's room, flushed hotly, and with a final dark look at Jack turned away. Jack rode on, feeling that the eyes of the whole inn were upon him, and possessed by an unaccountable sense of insecurity.

The meaning of it all flashed upon him quite suddenly. The alcalde had seen him in close and apparently friendly conversation with the commissary. Their interview had lasted for a considerable time, and must have been talked about among the people of the inn. Every Spaniard must feel that no true patriot would hold amicable intercourse with a Frenchman, an enemy of his country, except under compulsion, and it was now evident to Jack that he was regarded as a traitor, perhaps a spy, selling the interests of his compatriots to the invader. The thought made him smile.

"Shall I go back and tell them?" he said to himself. "They'd be surprised to find how the boot is on the other leg."

But a moment's reflection convinced him that to reveal his secret would not be politic, even if he were believed. There were too many Frenchmen about the inn to make it safe for him to enter into long explanations. Then another thought came which promised a spice of adventure.

"I shouldn't wonder if they follow me, and perhaps try to do for me. They will if they think I'm a French spy. I'll take the Valladolid road first, and cut off to the left when I'm well out of sight from the town."

Careful not to look behind, he rode slowly on until a bend in the road concealed him from the inn; then he jogged the sides of his mule and quickened its pace from a walk to a trot.

The snow had ceased to fall, and the afternoon sun promised to thaw the light glistening mantle that covered the bare country. There was enough snow yet on the ground to show clear tracks of his course to any pursuers. Being anxious to get a good start, he soon urged his mule to a gallop, hoping that, if he was indeed followed, the hoof-marks might have been thawed away from the high-road before he turned off to Medina del Campo.

After riding hard for some three miles he came to a river. On either side of the bridge the bank sloped down to the water's edge, and Jack, feeling that his mule needed a rest, saw here an excellent opportunity of learning, without risk to himself, whether a pursuit had been commenced. Dismounting, he led the animal carefully down the shelving miry bank, and found that underneath the first arch of the bridge there was ample room to conceal both himself and the mule from the eyes of any but careful searchers. The snow had by this time been converted to a washy sludge, and the ground having been trampled by many animals before his own, he had no fear of his tracks being sufficiently marked to attract special attention.

He had remained in his place of concealment but a few minutes when he heard in the distance, in the direction from which he had come, the dull thud of hoofs. As they approached, the sounds were mingled with the subdued hum of voices. Jack waited with no little curiosity, keeping a hand on his mule's reins to prevent the animal from emerging into view. The sounds grew louder. Several riders galloped their steeds up to the end of the bridge, and halted them for a moment as though in indecision. Then they resumed their progress and rode on to the bridge, the

clatter of hoofs awaking an echo from the arches below. When they had gained the other side Jack crept carefully up the bank until he could safely peep over the parapet, and saw four riders pelting rapidly towards Valladolid. He gave a chuckle as he recognized the men who had behaved so churlishly in the stable-yard.

"A lucky miss!" he thought. "They're after me."

They were riding horses, and it was clear that but for his little stratagem he must soon have been overtaken. What should be his course now? He could not reckon on their riding much farther along the main road, for they would naturally enquire of anyone they might meet if a tradesman had been seen riding a mule that way, and in the course of a few miles, allowing for their greater speed, they must suspect that their quarry had turned to one side or the other. Obviously he must lose no time. Retracing his steps, he led the mule from the muddy river-bed, remounted, and rode along the tow-path in the hope of soon discovering a road that would lead in the direction of Medina. In a few minutes he came to a rough and narrow cart-track between two fields on his left hand. It must lead somewhere, and, being anxious at any rate to put as much ground as possible between himself and his pursuers, Jack wheeled his mule to the left and rode along the rough track at a canter.

He found that it led into a somewhat wider road, crossing it at an obtuse angle. The ground was much cut up by cart-wheels, and the mule laboured heavily on the soft swampy ground. Jack eased the pace, hoping that the start he had obtained would enable him to keep well ahead of his pursuers, even if they soon discovered their mistake and had the luck to track him. By and by he came to a considerable ascent, up which he was fain to allow the animal to walk, and on reaching the summit he found the poor beast so breathless that he dismounted and walked slowly on, leading the mule. Turning after a while in the direction from which he had come, he caught a glimpse, in the far distance, of a group of riders coming towards him. It was impossible to distinguish their figures, much less their features. Delay was dangerous; so without hesitation Jack sprang again on the mule's back and set off once more towards Medina. For a time he was hidden from the riders by rows of stunted trees that lined the road. Then the road took a sharp curve to the right, and before him he saw a long hill, sloping gradually down for nearly a mile towards what appeared to be a plantation. He urged the mule now to its top speed, noting with some anxiety that the animal was breathing with difficulty, and showing other only too manifest signs of fatigue. Before he had reached the foot of the hill it was patently flagging, and when, having passed that point, another upward ascent began, the mule staggered once or twice, recovered itself, staggered again, and, finally, just as Jack came abreast of a low farmhouse that lay back some sixty yards from the road, it dropped on its knees, its rider barely escaping being thrown on his head upon the road.

"Whew! This is awkward," he said to himself. He looked up the hill he had just descended. "By George! there they are," he exclaimed under his breath. Four riders had just topped the crest, and were coming towards him, at no great speed, for their horses were evidently tired; but clearly they must overtake him in less than five minutes. Jack looked around for some means of escape. He might stand his ground and fight them, but the odds were against him, and a single crack in the head would prevent him from reaching Salamanca, and render useless the information he had obtained for his general. "I must run for it, but how and where?" he thought.

At this moment he heard a sound behind him. Turning hastily, he was amazed to see a little dark figure clad in a zamarra of sheepskin, a high-peaked, narrow-brimmed hat, a red plush waistcoat with many buttons and clasps, and a brilliant crimson-silk girdle about the waist. In one hand the dwarfish creature carried a large pair of shears, in the other the reins of a half-clipped mule, which walked meekly behind him.

"Pepito!" Jack gasped in amazement.

Pepito grinned.

"No time to waste, Señor," he said. "I saw you come down the hill, and the Busne behind you. Your mule has foundered. Here is a fresh mule I was clipping; mount him and ride on."

Clearly there was no time for explanations. In a moment Jack was on the mule's back.

"Thanks, Pepito!" he said. "But what will you do? Those fellows will kill you."

Pepito smiled.

"Never fear, Señor. The Gitano is more than a match for the Busne. Ride, Señor, ride. They have not seen you yet. Quick!"

He led the mule a few yards beyond the spot at which Jack had halted, and pointed to a road that went off the main-road to right and left.

"The left road leads to Medina," he said. Then he struck the mule sharply on the flank, and waved his hand gaily to Jack, who set off at full speed, rounded a curve, and was soon lost to sight. As he disappeared, he heard behind him the shrill notes of a song that was ever and anon on Pepito's lips:

"The Romany chal to his horse did cry,
As he placed the bit in his horse's jaw,
Kosko gry! Romany gry!
Muk man kistur tuté knaw."

He smiled as he heard the uncouth words, and rode on, wondering by what cunning device the little gipsy would throw the pursuers off the scent, as he evidently intended to do.

Jack had intended to make his way back to the Posada de Oriente at Medina, and there obtain a rest and a change of mules. But having got a fresh steed by Pepito's fortunate intervention, he changed his plan, and decided to make straight for Salamanca by Carpio and Cantalapiedra. He had still fifty miles to ride, and after his experience with the foundered mule he doubted whether one animal would carry him the whole way. But there was an off chance that another mount might be procurable in case of need, and his mission was urgent. He therefore pushed on, avoiding Medina, and taking a short cut for Carpio. It was four o'clock when he reached that town. He halted for half an hour to bait his mule and snatch a meal, then he resumed his journey, and an hour and a half after dark he entered the wretched streets of Pedroso. He had ridden but a few yards into the town when a figure on horseback moved silently out from the shadow of a church and stood full across his path. He pulled up, and then a guttural and husky voice addressed him roughly:

"Who go zere? Qui va la? Quien vive?"

Jack laughed quietly.

"Is the caballero himself the allied army?" he said in his best Castilian.

"Donnerwetter noch einmal!" growled the horseman, adding in bad Spanish: "Give the word, and quickly."

"You have the advantage of me, my good friend," responded Jack in English, "so you had better take me to your captain."

Jack had now recognized the man by his uniform as a trooper in the 3rd Light Dragoons of the King's German Legion. The dragoon grunted in surprise on hearing English, and, wheeling his horse beside Jack's mule, he laid one hand on his rein, and with the other held his carbine close to the new-comer's head, and so escorted him to the inn where the cavalry patrol was quartered.

The officer there seated at ease, a burly moustachioed Hessian, looked up as the trooper clanked into the room, holding Jack by the sleeve.

"A stranger, Herr Rittmeister," he said in German, "who cannot or will not give the countersign."

"Not such a terrible stranger, Captain Werder," said Jack in English, recognizing the German as the officer through whom he had obtained his horse in Salamanca. A few words sufficed to explain his presence in such guise,

and half an hour afterwards, mounted on a spare horse luckily at hand, he set off on the last eighteen miles that lay between him and his destination.

It was seven o'clock when he reached Salamanca, and, tired as he was, bespattered with mud from head to foot, he proceeded at once to the general's quarters. There he learnt that Sir John was attending a reception given by the Marchesa de Almaran, one of the grandes dames of the city. Leaving the horse at a neighbouring inn, Jack made his way to the Marchesa's palace, hoping that the commander-in-chief's explicit instructions would excuse any want of ceremony there might be in his action. He pulled the broad brim of his hat well over his eyes, and turned up the high collar of his coat, passed the English guard of honour outside the palace, and, entering at the open door, asked for the major-domo.

"General Sir Moore is within?" he said to that functionary when he appeared.

"He is."

"Will you tell him that a señor waits below with important news, and begs an instant audience?"

The major-domo looked somewhat suspiciously at the dirty, travel-stained Spaniard before him.

"The general is in the sala, and there is dancing. I do not know that I can interrupt him now."

"If you will kindly give my message, the general will see me," persisted Jack.

"What name shall I tell him?"

"I do not give my name. Merely say that it is a señor whom he knows."

The functionary shrugged, and led Jack within the vestibule—a vaulted apartment not unlike the porch of a church, illumined by a single small lamp. Two or three servants were gathered about a fire.

"Wait here," said the major-domo, and left the visitor. The servants eyed him for a moment, then resumed their conversation, of which Jack caught a few words here and there. A messenger from General Castaños—a long ride from Saragossa—brave fellow—yes, a true caballero, no other would have faced the perils of so long a ride through country infested by the French—yes, such courage was worthy of a true son of Spain, and far exceeded anything of which the English were capable. Such were some of the remarks Jack overheard, and he smiled as he remembered that Mr. Vaughan had ridden double the distance, and come through equal perils, arriving earlier after all.

Some minutes passed, and every now and then, as the sound of guitars floated down the broad staircase, Jack envied the good fortune of the officers who, he did not doubt, were footing it gaily above. Then the major-domo returned and silently beckoned the visitor to follow him. He led him upstairs, through a narrow corridor where, on benches of carved wood or plaited straw, lay a variety of cloaks, hats, and silken scarves. Pushing open a door, the major-domo preceded him into a wide dimly-lighted room. "Remain here; I will fetch the general," he said, and was gone.

Jack saw that the room was connected by folding-doors, which were now thrown open, with a large salon lighted by numerous candles. It was crowded with a brilliant assembly. Along the walls sat many ladies in elegant mantillas, each gracefully wielding the indispensable fan. Among them was a sprinkling of priests and sad-eyed students of the university. The centre of the room was occupied by the younger society of the city—Spanish officers and lawyers, with young ladies in festal array, engaged in dancing the javaneja to the music of a band of guitarists stationed at the farther end of the room. It was the first time that Jack had seen this characteristically Spanish dance since he had left Barcelona six years before, and his feet itched to join in it. He watched the couples as they made their graceful rhythmic movements, each holding a coloured kerchief in one hand, the other curved over the head. It formed an interesting spectacle against the bright background formed by the red coats of British officers of all ranks, who stood silent spectators, each no doubt privately wishing that the unfamiliar dance would come to an end, and that an opportunity might be given them of teaching the señoritas the quadrilles which were then all the rage in England, or country-dances, in which they were still more at home. Nearly all the men, except those who were

dancing, were smoking cigarettes. Every lady, young or old, had a flower in her hair.

The javaneja at length ceased, and the Spaniards gave place with evident reluctance to the British officers, who immediately set partners for a quadrille, and began their task of tuition, to the great hilarity of the ladies. Jack was becoming impatient. He had not caught sight of Sir John Moore, and wondered how long he was to be kept waiting in this dim ante-chamber. He looked around. There were two or three tables set with refreshments; but there was no tea, no ices, no punch; nothing but urns of chocolate, small glasses of sugared water, and a plate of azucarillos.

Jack wondered how the English section of the company, among whom he had now recognized his friends Pomeroy and Smith and several other of his acquaintance, would be satisfied with this plain and simple fare, so different from that provided at the luxurious entertainments at home. Two or three solemn servants moved quickly about between the rooms, carrying glasses of sugared water to the ladies. As they passed Jack they eyed him curiously, but with Spanish stolidity made no remarks. Keeping in the shadow, he looked on at the animated throng with ever-increasing impatience, wondering whether the major-domo had forgotten him altogether. By and by he saw Pomeroy lead his partner to a seat, and come towards the ante-room with the manifest intention of seeking refreshment for her himself. Jack stepped back as Pomeroy crossed from room to room, and the subaltern, throwing a curious glance at the strange cloaked figure that stood there in the shadow, looked for a moment as though he would like to question his right to be there. But the moment passed, and almost immediately afterwards Sir John Moore emerged from a curtained doorway behind the band, and crossed rapidly to where Jack stood awaiting him.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, Señor," he said in Spanish, with his unvarying courtesy, "but I have had to listen for half an hour to a countryman of yours who brought me news which, after all, happened to be a trifle stale. You have an important message for me, I understand?"

"I am Lumsden of the 95th," said Jack in English, in a low tone which none but the general's ear could catch. Sir John started, and glanced keenly at Jack; then a smile passed over his face.

"Capital! capital!" he said. "I shouldn't have known you from Adam. Come into the farther corner, away from these noisy dancers, and tell me your news. You'd rather be kicking your heels among them, eh?" he added with a twinkle.

"Not till you have done with me, sir," replied Jack as he accompanied the general out of earshot. There, in a dim corner of the room, he gave Sir John a succinct account of his movements, assuring him that the French were beyond doubt making for Madrid, ignorant of, and not even suspecting, the proximity of the British column at Salamanca.

"You have come very pat to the occasion," said Moore, who had listened to Jack's story without interrupting it. "You confirm what I already suspected from a previous messenger. No, not the messenger who came just now from General Castaños, and whom the good people here have already elevated into a hero; his news was three days behind time. But to-day the Spanish generals Bueno and Escalente reached me from the Junta at Madrid, and made a strong, and, I must say, insolent, protest against my intended retreat, assuring me that General San Juan, with 20,000 men, has fortified the pass of Somosierra and effectually blocked the way to Madrid, and urging me to march towards him. They would have talked a cow's hind-leg off, Mr. Lumsden, but I effectually shut the mouths of my informants by confronting them with Colonel Graham, who has just come in from Talavera, where San Juan is the prisoner of the villainous runagates from Castaños' beaten army. If the Spaniards depend on him to defend the Somosierra pass their hope is a poor one. However, what you tell me proves that the French are not coming towards me, and for the present at any rate I am perfectly safe here. Now, you have been so successful that I am going to tax you still further. You are very tired, no doubt?"

"A good supper and a night's rest will cure that, sir."

"Then you'll be prepared to set off again to-morrow?"

"Certainly. I am very glad to be of use."

"You have been of the greatest use; I shall act upon your information, and at once. And, by the bye, I must congratulate you on your messengers. Your two Spanish lads brought me your messages, and gave me great hopes that I had not misjudged you—hopes amply justified. I have despatches to write, so I will take leave of my hostess and accompany you to the door."

In a few minutes Sir John Moore, cloaked and hatted, was striding down the corridor with Jack by his side. They came to the outer door, where by the light of a huge torch a tall Spanish officer in brilliant uniform was taking leave of two ladies with what struck Jack as somewhat affected gallantry. He glanced up as the Englishmen passed, saluted Sir John Moore with much condescension, and then, as his eye fell on Jack, started with an air of bewilderment. He looked again with still keener scrutiny at the shorter of the two figures, whom he followed slowly. At the porch Sir John bade Jack a cordial good-bye. The latter turned to the left, towards Don Pedro's house, but had only walked a few yards when he felt a touch on his arm. Glancing over his shoulder without checking his pace, he saw that he had been followed by the tall Spaniard whom he had passed at the door. The next moment a voice that was oddly familiar addressed him in smooth suave tones that struck him with a curious sense of discomfort.

"Surely the Señor will spare a minute to an old friend."

CHAPTER VIII

Don Miguel Priego

Memories—A Self-confessed Patriot—Confidences—Plain Speaking—Reflections—A Public Departure

Jack stopped now, and faced round at the speaker, who still had a hand on his arm.

"I recognized you at once," the man continued, "though your disguise is good, very good. I have not seen you for a good many years, Jackino, but I never forget any face I have once seen, still less one that I have lived with in the days of childhood. Don't you remember your old friend—"

"Why, you're Miguel Priego," interrupted Jack, with no great cordiality of tone. "How you've grown! Who would have thought you would have topped me by a couple of inches! And what a swell, too!"

"Yes, I have changed more than you, amigo," said Don Miguel with a complacency that irritated Jack, already annoyed that his disguise had been penetrated. "Ah! and there have been other changes, great changes, since I last saw you, Jackino. You are an English officer, and I might perhaps not have recognized you so easily if you had been dressed in your uniform like your friends; but the hat and cloak—oh! Miguel Priego would have been a fool indeed if he had not known the dear companion of his boyhood."

"You're rather more affectionate than you were when we parted, Miguel," said Jack bluntly.

"Don't say that. We were always good friends, Jackino; is it not true? You and I and Juanita—ah! what fun we had in the old house at Barcelona. Do you remember the times when Don Fernan came from Saragossa and brought Juanita on a visit to your father and mine, and how we shared the presents he gave us?"

"Your share usually happened to be the biggest, if my memory doesn't play me false."

"Well, I was the eldest of the three; I am three years older than you, amigo mio, and four years older than Juanita."

"How is Juanita?" asked Jack.

"In fair health, but paler than I should like to see her. But her grief will wear away in time, and when she becomes my—"

"Her grief! What do you mean, Miguel?"

"You do not know, then? I am forgetting; of course you do not get news very well here. I myself rode in only to-day from Saragossa, at the risk of my neck, Jackino, with tidings of the unfortunate misadventure at Tudela, and —"

"Come, Miguel," said Jack, "we can't stand here. Where are you staying? While I'm in this rig-out it will be better for me to go with you than for you to come with me."

"That is true. Come, then; I am staying at the Fonda de Suizo in the Calle de Zamora. We can talk there at ease, and I shall be glad on my part to hear again of my old friends your father and mother, and to tell you of the sad changes that have taken place, and the bright changes also, dear friend."

Jack was very tired, and in no mood to make himself amiable to a man for whom he had an intense aversion. But he was so anxious to learn the meaning of Miguel's hints and half-statements that he put his feelings in his pocket and trudged along. Ever since he could remember, he had disliked Miguel, the only son of his father's second partner, Don Esteban Priego. They had grown up together in Barcelona, and almost his earliest recollections were connected with the petty meannesses and cruelties of Miguel. Three years older than Jack, Miguel had played the bully with the younger boy until he grew strong enough to defend himself; and then, not daring to molest him openly, he had shown great ingenuity in devising petty annoyances which were even harder to bear than his former brutalities. He was cruel to children and animals smaller than himself. Jack remembered how Miguel had once lamed a spaniel of his in wanton mischief, and how, whenever Juanita, the only daughter of Don Fernan the senior partner, had been brought to Barcelona on a visit, she had often run to Jack's house in tears to seek protection from the boy's bullying and domineering. The tone in which Miguel had referred to Don Fernan and Juanita gave Jack vague uneasiness, and he paid scant heed to Miguel's talk by the way, and scarcely answered him.

Don Miguel, however, was quite content to do all the talking. He was a patriot, he said, and high in favour with General Palafox. He had early volunteered in defence of his country, and had won rapid promotion, being now indeed, though but twenty years of age, a major in Palafox's Hussars. When the news of Castaños' defeat arrived in Saragossa, Palafox had sent him off with the news to General Moore, and he boasted largely of his readiness to undertake, with only one servant, so perilous a ride. Not, he thought, that his servant would have been of much use had they come across the French; he would have had to trust to his own skill and courage, for the poor man had unfortunately lost an eye; still, he was a faithful fellow and a good forager.

Jack caught himself wondering what service the man could have rendered the master. It was scarcely in Miguel's character to allow a mere question of sentiment to outweigh the loss of an eye. Jack recalled his passion for display; he could not imagine him willingly accepting a one-eyed follower. This thought passed like a flash through Jack's mind while Miguel was proceeding to dilate complacently on the scenes of butchery and torture he had witnessed as he came through the country of the guerrilleros, who had no mercy on the stray Frenchmen they succeeded in ambushing. Jack at last gave utterance to an exclamation of disgust.

"Ah!" sneered Miguel, "that is your English squeamishness. You English have no nerves. What is the good of your coming out here? We will show you how to deal with these accursed Frenchmen, and if your stomach turns against it, well, go home to your nurses in little England, and play with your tin soldiers and toy guns, for you are no good in Spain."

Their arrival at the inn checked the reply that rose to Jack's lips. Don Miguel, in the same oily, languid tone that was causing Jack more and more irritation, ordered the landlord to make himself scarce, as he had important business to discuss with his friend, and in a few moments the two were left alone in the room. The Spaniard flung

off his cloak, revealing the resplendent uniform of Palafox's Hussars, and as he removed his hat Jack noticed a long, livid scar running from his brow to his left eye, disfiguring what was otherwise a well-looking countenance so far as features were concerned.

"And how is your excellent father?" asked Miguel as he lolled in the only easy-chair in the room. "He is lucky, truly, for the stock in London is a good one, and he will do a good business, whereas with us these troubles have brought trade to a stand-still, and we are obliged to suspend all operations. But things will improve. Don Fernan, with his shrewd head for business, foresaw what would happen, and took steps to realize what he could on the stock before the outbreak of war, which was a very lucky thing for my father and myself and Juanita. And he could not have chosen a more convenient moment for dying, for—"

"For dying! Is Don Fernan dead?" cried Jack.

"Dead as a door-post, poor man! I thought you would be surprised to hear it. He had been ailing ever since his exertions in the siege of Saragossa last summer—there was something wrong with his heart, I think,—and when the news came that General Castaños had met with a mishap at Tudela, he held up his hands and cried: 'Oh my country! my poor country!' then fell forward and died. He was an old man, of course, and must have died soon, and I have only come a little sooner into the inheritance that was bound to come to me."

"Did Don Fernan appoint you his heir, then?" asked Jack with a keen look. "What about Juanita?"

"Does it not come to the same thing, my friend? Juanita, of course, is Don Fernan's heiress, but since in a little while, when the mourning is over, she will marry me—"

"Marry you!"

There was contempt as well as surprise in Jack's tone, and Miguel evidently felt this, for he replied with flashing eyes, though with no change in his bland manner:

"Yes, marry me—that was what I think I said. Of course if my good friend Jackino has any objection—"

"Good heavens! Juanita is a thousand times too good for you!" Jack blurted out.

"Quite so; she is a thousand times too good for any man. But since she does me the honour to become my wife, you will surely not have the impudence to question her choice, dear friend."

He hissed out the last sentence, and bent a little forward. Jack shrugged.

"She wasn't always so fond of you," he said bluntly.

"That is not the point, is it?" returned Miguel with an exasperating smile. "The match has long been talked of; Don Fernan and my father were agreed that it was an excellent arrangement for uniting the business interests of the two families. And now that Don Fernan is dead I shall marry Juanita as soon as possible, my father will retire, and I shall be the sole partner of your excellent father, for you, of course, have a soul much above business, and will no doubt ere long be a field-marshal. Perhaps, however, you have no ambition to earn fame in the open and heroic way? Your costume would suggest, my friend, that you are satisfied with a more modest and retiring part—but still, no doubt, profitable—"

"It seems to me, Miguel," said Jack, interrupting him very quietly, "that you have forgotten the last thrashing I gave you. Remember, I am always at your service. But I should not advise you to risk another scar like the one you have already. How," he added quickly, "did you come by that?"

Miguel's sullen face assumed a dusky hue, and the scar showed all the more livid. He flinched, as bullies will, before Jack's menacing attitude.

"Hot-tempered as ever," he said with an attempt to smile. "Why will you take offence so easily? What have I said? Here I find you, an Englishman, in Spanish dress, and I conclude, naturally enough, that you are fulfilling an office of very great importance and usefulness, and when I—"

"Now look here, Miguel, I don't want to quarrel with you, but you'd better understand at once that I'm not a

child, and that your oily tongue won't do you any good with me. I don't suppose we shall see much more of each other; when—if—you marry Juanita you will settle down, I suppose, in Saragossa, and our paths won't cross. I tell you frankly I'm astonished that Juanita will have you; but she's old enough to know her own mind—though our girls in England don't marry so early—and I hope with all my heart she'll be happy. And now I think I'd better say good-night!"

"And good-bye!" said Miguel sweetly. "I will carry your good wishes to Juanita, be sure of that."

"Where is she, by the way?" asked Jack.

"In Saragossa, with her aunt the Doña Teresa."

"And you are returning immediately?"

"Oh no! I go on to-morrow towards Leon, with despatches for the Marquis of La Romana. The Spanish generals will have to strike a blow without the assistance of your General Moore, it appears."

Jack ignored the sneer.

"Well, good-bye!" he said. "There's no need to suggest that you should take care the French don't catch you."

"True, true, Jackino. Give my respects, when you see him, to your excellent father, to whom I hope to have before long the honour of sending the documents relative to the changes in the business. Adios, amigo mio!"

He accompanied Jack to the door, and looked after him with a mocking smile. Jack, pulling his cloak more closely around him, and his sombrero lower over his eyes, walked rapidly to his quarters, where, proceeding directly to his room, he threw himself upon his bed with a sigh of weariness and contentment.

But it was long before the much-needed sleep came to him. He lay awake, unable to keep his thoughts from running round the circle of his adventures and dwelling on his unexpected meeting with Miguel. The more he thought of his conversation with that gentleman the more puzzled he felt. As a child, Juanita had shrunk from the boy and had never willingly gone into his presence. It was very odd that she should have overcome her dislike and now be ready to marry him. Perhaps she still disliked him, and had agreed to the match merely because it was desired by Don Fernan and Miguel's father, Don Esteban. But even then it was extraordinary, for Don Fernan himself had never shown any liking for Miguel, and had indeed on many occasions taken him severely to task and punished him for acts of deceit and dishonesty. Miguel did not appear to Jack to have changed: what had altered Don Fernan's opinion of him? Then, too, there was Don Fernan's letter, in which he had spoken of his anxiety on behalf of his daughter. Why, if he were satisfied with the proposed match, should he be anxious about her future? And what had General Palafox to do with all this? Miguel was the general's trusted messenger; could Palafox have influenced Don Fernan's judgment? Jack wished he could go to Saragossa, and enquire for himself into all the circumstances—see Juanita, and discover whether she were in truth a willing bride. And then he thought of the phrase Don Fernan had so carefully impressed upon his memory: "Palafox the man, Palafox the name," and with this repeating itself to the hundredth time in his weary brain he at length fell asleep, and slept on until he was awakened about ten o'clock next morning by loud cries in the street.

Springing from bed, he ran to the window. Men were waving their hats, women their fans and handkerchiefs. At every window there was a fluttering scarf. Loud vivas rose into the air as an officer in full uniform, followed by a gorgeously-dressed orderly, clattered by.

The officer smiled with gratification at the warmth of the cheers, and kissed his hand gallantly to the ladies who peeped at him out of their mantillas. Jack smiled satirically.

"Pooh! It's only Don Miguel Priego! Confound the sneak!"

He was about to withdraw, when the orderly turned his head to the left, as though seeking a share of the admiration so lavishly bestowed on his superior. Jack noticed that one eye-socket was closed; the man's remaining eye had a curiously malign glitter that gave the beholder a strange sense of uneasiness.

"Is this how people feel when they talk of the evil eye?" he said to himself with an unmirthful laugh. Then he donned his own clothes and went gloomily downstairs to find his brother officers.

CHAPTER IX

Some Surprises

At the Cross-Roads—A Mêlée—Bagged—Franceschi's Chasseurs—Under Guard—A Hard Case—Moore's Plans—Reconnoitring—Within the Gates—Caged—Blind Man's Buff—A Strategic Move—A Dash on Rueda—An Alarm—A Chase in the Dark—A Tragedy

About two o'clock on a frosty December afternoon, some ten days after Jack Lumsden's return to Salamanca, four riders were walking their horses up a slight incline about three miles out of Alaejos towards Valladolid. Three of them were troopers in the 18th Light Dragoons, the fourth, riding slightly in advance of the rest, was Jack himself, now wearing his own uniform, and mounted on a fine black charger borrowed from the regiment to which his companions belonged. A few yards from the crest of the hill, lying back from the road, was a mean-looking hovel at the door of which stood a little black-eyed girl, who watched the advancing riders with her finger in her mouth.

"Hullo, little girl," said Jack in Spanish, pulling up as he came abreast of her, "are we on the right road for Tordesillas?"

The child gave a scared look at the troopers and fled into the hut without replying.

"You've sent the timid little beggar into her burrow," said Jack with a smile. At the same moment a heavy-browed man appeared at the door, in the rough coat and thick gaiters of a muleteer.

"Ha, my friend," said Jack in a genial tone, "your little daughter needn't have been afraid of us! Are we going right for Tordesillas?"

"Straight on, Señor," replied the man, with stolid countenance. "Over the river; you can't miss your way."

"Thanks! Any sign of the French hereabout?"

"Never a man—the saints forbid!" said the man with a scowl. "They carried off my last pig six months ago. Gr-r-r! I hate them!"

"Well, they won't trouble you much longer if we can help it. Buenas tardes!"

"Vaya usted con Dios, Señor!" replied the muleteer, doffing his hat; and as the Englishman rode off, his little daughter came to his side and watched with him their retreating figures.

A mile farther on they had just crossed the stream of which the man had spoken, when Jack suddenly reined up his horse and in a low tone ordered his men to halt.

"Do you hear anything, Kelly?" he asked of one of the troopers.

The man turned his head aside, and his companions sat motionless, an expectant look upon their faces.

"Riders, sir!" said Kelly in a moment.

"I thought so," returned Jack. "To our right, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

There was a moment's silence. Behind them came a slight murmur from the full river, but more distinctly, from some distant point beyond a wall-enclosed orchard on their right, sounded the unmistakable clatter of horses' hoofs on the hard road.

"Wait here," said Jack, springing from his horse. "Don't make a sound. I'm going forward to reconnoitre. Hold my horse's rein, Kelly, and don't let him champ his bit."

He ran forward, round a slight bend in the road. In two minutes he was back.

"Men," he said in a low voice, "there's a road to the right, and half a dozen Frenchmen riding down towards us. I think they're French—by their helmets. We four are a match for the six, eh?"

The men grinned.

Jack rapidly took stock of the situation. The wind was almost due east; he and his men were riding north-east, and as they were the smaller party, and had been travelling only at walking pace, it was not likely that the enemy had heard them coming. The idea of dismounting his men and forming an ambuscade at first suggested itself. Jack glanced round for a convenient tree or post to which they might tether the horses; but though there were plenty of trees beyond the orchard wall, the only way in was a quarter of a mile to their rear. This meant that even if the ambuscade were successful two at least of the enemy would be almost certain to escape, for Jack and his men, with three carbines and a pistol, could at the best only account for four at the first volley, and the remaining two would have a start of half a mile before they could be pursued. On the other hand, if Jack told off a man to hold the horses, his striking force would be reduced to three, and there was always the risk that two of the horses—young Spanish chargers purchased at Salamanca and only half-trained—would break away at the sound of the firing. For these reasons Jack preferred to trust to cold steel.

Giving his commands almost in a whisper, he drew up his men in line under cover of the wall, about thirty yards from the cross-road, ordering them to be in readiness to charge at the word. Each man silently drew his sabre and Jack uncovered his sword, still fresh as when he received it from the makers in Pall Mall. It was not perhaps quite so suitable for the purpose in hand as the weapons carried by the troopers, but Jack knew that it was of the highest temper, and felt confident that it would not fail him.

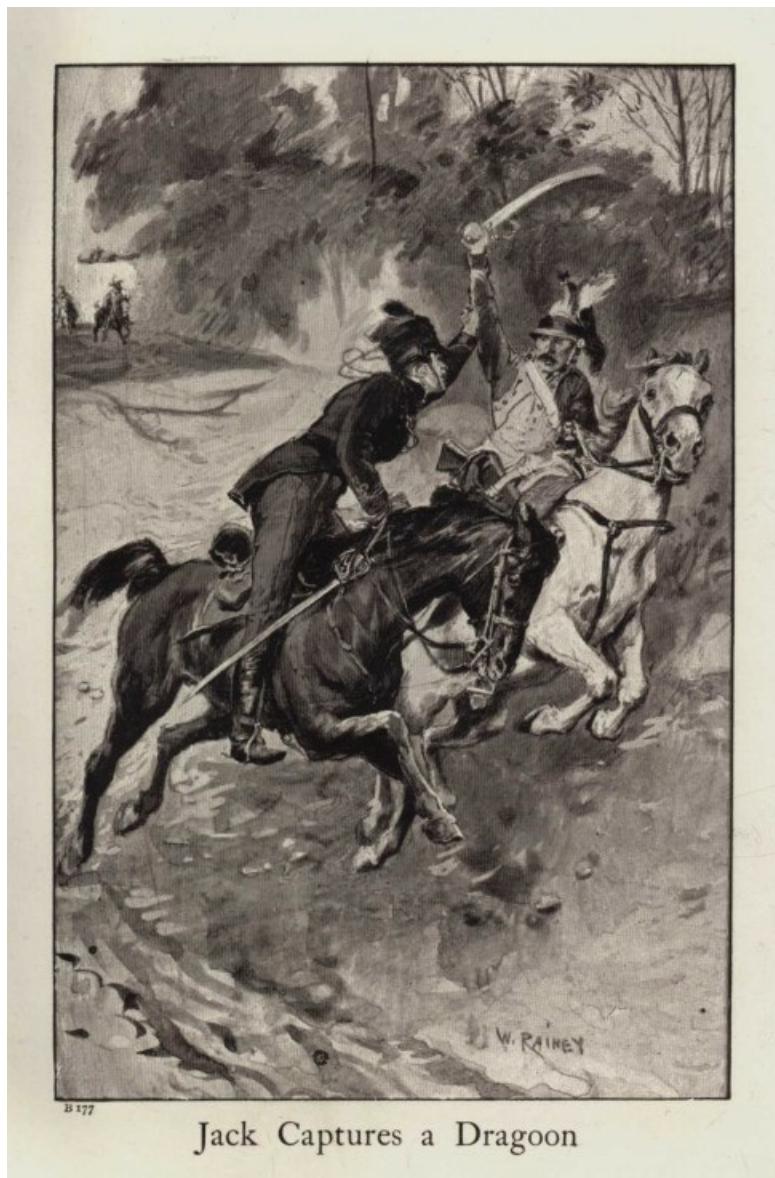
In little more than a minute the increasing clatter showed that the unsuspecting Frenchmen were approaching the cross-roads. There was no slackening of pace as they neared the junction, and Jack inferred from this that their route lay straight across the main road towards Castroduno or Toro. Every second seemed like a minute to him as he waited for the horsemen to arrive, but after what seemed an interminable delay two helmets at last appeared beyond the angle of the wall. Jack drove his spurs into his horse, giving the word "Charge!" and, with their leader a pace or two in advance, the three troopers dashed forward. In a few seconds the two bodies met with a terrific shock. The French dragoons, unable to check their progress, had just had time to draw their sabres; the leading files had half-wheeled their horses to meet the storm, but the two succeeding troopers were taken square on the flank, and all the advantage of momentum being on the side of the attacking force, the whole four went down like a ship struck by a squall. Almost before Jack could realize what had happened he was reining in his horse on the far side of the cross-road; three of the Frenchmen were lying motionless on the road, a fourth, dismounted, was defending himself with spirit against one of Jack's troopers, and three horses were scampering wildly towards Toro. He was wheeling his horse round, when, almost at the same moment, two bullets whizzed past his head. The two remaining Frenchmen had halted before reaching the cross-road, rapidly fired their carbines, and, turning round in the direction from which they had come, were now galloping wildly away.

"After them, Kelly!" shouted Jack to the corporal, who was just beside him; and, leaving the other two troopers to secure the dismounted Frenchmen, the two dashed off at a mad gallop. They were a hundred yards behind at the start; the Frenchmen were down upon their horses' necks, shouting to the beasts in a fever of haste. But as luck would have it, they were heavy men; Jack was a light-weight, and before the chase had proceeded for two hundred yards he began to gain, and the interval between himself and Kelly was increasing. Foot by foot he made up on his quarry; in little more than a mile he was at the heels of the rearmost Frenchman. The man, feeling that he was at a disadvantage, suddenly swerved towards the near side of the road, bending low as he did so to avoid Jack's blow, and then, as Jack darted past, pulled his horse on his haunches and wheeled round to meet Kelly. Thinking he could

safely leave this man to the heavy trooper, Jack rode on after the Frenchman in front, and within a couple of minutes had him at his mercy. The dragoon had no time to turn and meet his pursuer; with a horse of superior speed, Jack, coming up behind him, had a terrible advantage over the fugitive, who was painfully twisting himself round in the saddle to meet the expected blow. Choosing his opportunity, Jack, dropping his own sword, wrested the Frenchman's sabre from his grasp, and next moment drove him into the hedge.

"Je me rends! je me rends!" cried the Frenchman, panting.

"Comme de juste!" gasped Jack, who then turned to see how Kelly was faring. He had ridden down and over the luckless dragoon, who, rising painfully to his feet, called for quarter. Being a strapping fellow, the trooper had been unable to do more than maintain his distance from the second Frenchman, who, however, seeing Jack now standing full in his path, recognized that the game was up, checked his horse, and quietly surrendered his sword just as Kelly came bustling to his side.



Jack Captures a Dragoon

"Jolly good chase, sir!" said Kelly, as Jack and his prisoner came up. "The froggies showed the cleanest pair of heels I ever did see."

"You stuck to it like a Briton," said Jack. "Now we'll get back to the others and see what damage is done."

With the two Frenchmen disarmed between them, they retraced their steps, the Frenchmen sitting limp and careless, with a resigned expression of countenance that tickled Kelly's sense of humour.

"Where do you come from, mon brave?" asked Jack of the man next to him.

"From Rueda, monsieur le capitaine," answered the trooper with a smile. Jack chuckled inwardly at his sudden promotion, and went on:

"And what is your regiment?"

"Mais, monsieur, the 22nd Chasseurs of General Franceschi's cavalry. And little did we think, monsieur, that we should meet Englishmen to-day. Eh bien! it is all the fortune of war, and monsieur le capitaine rides a good horse."

"No better than your own, mon brave," said Jack, not to be outdone in politeness. "Well now, how many of your regiment may happen to be in Rueda, if I may ask?"

The trooper looked at him with twinkling eyes.

"Non, non, monsieur le capitaine," he said. "You have captured our patrol: c'est égal! but you want to know too much. I tell you how many? Non, non; but we are enough to capture all Sir Moore's army before it ends its retreat to Lisbon. Monsieur wants to spoil the joke."

"Very well," said Jack with a laugh. "I won't press you; but there are more ways than one of killing a cat, as we say in English."

He kept up an amicable conversation with the Frenchman until they arrived at the cross-roads. There he found his two troopers mounting guard over the four wounded chasseurs, and Jack was sufficiently new to warfare to feel relieved and glad that no life had been lost. The dragoons had made clumsy attempts to bind up their prisoners' wounds, and had allowed the least injured of them to fetch water in his helmet from the stream.

"That's right," said Jack as he came up. "We've had an unexpected piece of luck, my men, and our capture may be important. But we have no time to lose. We made noise enough along the road to bring up the whole French army if it's hereabouts. Lucky the regiment isn't far behind us. Now help these fellows on to their horses; we'll take them back to the hut we left a while ago, and I'll leave them in your charge while I go on alone and pick up a little information."

"May I come, sir?" asked Kelly. "'Tisn't safe to go alone."

"Safer for one than two. But come along; there's no time to waste, and it's getting dark."

In a few minutes the cavalcade had reached the hut on the hillside. The muleteer glowered viciously at the prisoners as they were led up to his door, and handled his knife as though he would have liked there and then to take vengeance upon them for the loss of his favourite pig. But Jack allowed no mistake about his intentions; he told the man that the prisoners would remain with him, in charge of the dragoons, until the British advance-guard under General Stewart arrived.

"I'm going on to Rueda," he added. "How far is it from here?"

"A league and a half, Señor," said the man.

"That's about seven miles as your Spanish league goes. Kelly, if General Stewart arrives before I get back, tell him that there are some of General Franceschi's chasseurs at Rueda on our right flank, and I've gone to find out how

many. If all goes well I'll be back within two hours."

"Very good, sir!" said Kelly, and then looked as though he would have said more.

"Well, what is it?" asked Jack.

"Beg pardon, sir, but you'll be nabbed as sure as a gun. Your uniform—"

"Don't worry, Kelly. I'm going to borrow an outfit from one of our French friends here. Come, mon ami," he said, turning to the sergeant whom he had captured, "I must trouble you to take off some of your things—your helmet, say, and your cloak, your breeches, and your boots; I think they'll be enough."

"Pardon, monsieur le capitaine, but I'm a soldier of the emperor, and the emperor would shoot me as a traitor if I parted with my uniform to an Englishman."

"That would be unfortunate. But we can't stand on ceremony now; make haste, if you please."

"But, monsieur," said the man, "the breeches won't fit you."

"They will be a trifle baggy, but no one will be critical in the dark. Come now, hurry up!"

"But, monsieur, I shall be cold, I shall freeze. If monsieur will lend me his things in exchange, perhaps—"

"No, thanks! If you're cold you'd better ask the muleteer to lend you some things, or, better still, go to bed. Kelly, come and help the sergeant off with his things."

But as Kelly approached him with a grin, the Frenchman unclasped his cloak and proceeded to divest himself of the garments Jack required. Soon Jack was cantering off on his reconnoitring expedition to Rueda.

By this time it was almost dark, and Jack rode gently, partly in order to avoid mishap, and partly to spare his horse in case hard work were required of him later. His blood tingled with the excitement of his recent adventure and with anticipation of the unknown adventures before him. Like his brother officers, and indeed every member of the army, from the chief of staff to the smallest drummer-boy, he rejoiced in the sudden change of plan which Sir John Moore had announced about a week before. The news he himself had brought to the general, reinforced by further news obtained through Manuel and Juan, and by information that the Spanish armies were concentrating, had determined Sir John, on December 5th, to countermand his order to retreat. The French, he had learnt, were not marching in his direction, but towards Madrid, which, he was assured, was defended by large forces at the difficult Somosierra Pass, and would resist to the utmost. He put little faith in the Spaniards' power of resistance, but he saw a possibility of creating a diversion in their favour, and of cutting in between Soult and Napoleon and striking a blow at the former. If Madrid had not yet fallen, his movement might draw off Napoleon and save the capital, or at any rate he might make matters so unpleasant, by seizing Valladolid and Burgos, that time would be gained for the re-equipment of the Spanish armies. If, on the other hand, Madrid fell, he could still make a run for it. He therefore ordered Baird on his left and Hope on his right to move forward towards Valladolid, while he himself prepared to advance on the same town by way of Alaejos and Tordesillas, acquainting the Marquis of La Romana, who was at Leon, some 120 miles due north of Salamanca, with his intentions.

A few days after Moore had arrived at this decision he received the news that Madrid had capitulated to Napoleon. It was a severe blow. He had hoped against hope that the Spanish promises would at last be fulfilled, that their boasts would at last justify themselves. Once more the Spaniards had shown their instability. But Moore was not disposed to alter his plans; there seemed every probability of his striking a successful blow at the French communications. On December 11th, then, the infantry moved out from Salamanca, General Paget marching with the reserve for Toro, where his brother, Lord Paget, had already arrived with Baird's cavalry, while Hope left Alba de Tormes next day to join the main body on the Valladolid road. The advance along this road was led by General Charles Stewart's cavalry brigade, consisting of Hussars and Light Dragoons. It happened that during the previous week Jack had more than once been sent backwards and forwards between Salamanca and Alba de Tormes with despatches and reports, and he had come under the notice of General Stewart. When the advance was ordered,

Stewart, thinking that Jack would be useful in gathering news from the Spaniards, and acting as interpreter in matters connected with commissariat and billeting, asked that he might be temporarily attached to him as extra aide-de-camp, and it was while riding ahead to enquire about billets in Tordesillas that Jack met with the adventure just related.

As he rode along towards Rueda he could not help feeling a glow of satisfaction at his continued good luck. But he did not indulge in idle dreams. It was now too dark to see, but his ears were keenly alert to catch any sound that betokened danger, and he told Pomeroy afterwards that he felt as sensitive as a cat's whiskers. His enterprise was obviously full of peril, for he had no knowledge of the number of troops in Rueda, or of that town itself, and it behoved him to go warily. If the French force was large, there would certainly be outposts at some distance from the town, and every now and then he pulled up his horse and waited, straining eyes and ears for a sound or a light.

At length, when he had been riding for about three-quarters of an hour, he saw, at the bottom of a slight hollow more than half a mile in his front, a twinkle of light which he inferred came from a house by the roadside. Dismounting at once he led his horse off the road to the left, and found that he was in a vineyard where many of the poles used for supporting the vines were still standing in the soil. He led his horse well out of sight from the road, tied him to one of these poles, patted his neck, and then set off to walk through the field, keeping a distance of about fifty yards from the highway. The light shone more clearly now, and as he approached it he went ever more and more cautiously, stopping at one point to remove the spurs that, in spite of his careful tread, made a slight clanking on the frozen ground. At thirty yards distance from the light he saw that it proceeded from the window of a small cabin not unlike the muleteer's behind him. Now every step he took was as stealthy as a cat's. His pulse beat a little faster as he came within a few feet of the cabin, though he was barely conscious of this, so intent was he on the task in hand.

He crept at first behind the hut and waited for a moment. Voices reached him from within. Pressing his ear against the wooden wall, he distinguished a few exclamations in French, and then a burst of laughter.

"They're having a high old time!" he said to himself with a chuckle. "Evidently well occupied. I'll chance it."

Stealing round the hut he fell down on hands and knees and crawled till he came beneath the window; he then removed his helmet, took a breath, and raised himself inch by inch until he could just peer over the lower sill. For a moment his eyes were dazzled by the light. As they became more accustomed to it he saw four French troopers, in the same uniform as the one he now wore, seated at a round table playing cards. An empty bottle stood in the centre, and some glasses were half-full of red wine. Jack inferred at once that the cabin was a sort of impromptu guard-room, from which sentries were posted at the entrance to the village.

"Pretty sentries!" he said to himself. "I wouldn't give much for their skins if Boney caught them! They're making enough row to drown the sound of an army. So much for that."

Lowering himself with equal care, he crept away, rose to his feet, and set off at a sharp walk towards Rueda. Before long he descried a number of scattered lights ahead. Then he found himself in a lane that appeared to lead towards the town. "Here goes," he thought, and without hesitation struck up the lane in the direction of the lights.

It led straight into the principal street. Jack walked boldly on, thinking that boldness would attract less attention than stealth. He noticed that nearly all the houses at this end of the place were lit up. Sounds of merriment floated upon the air—a laugh, a cheer, an exclamation of anger, the clink of glasses, the rattle of dice. There was a small inn; twenty yards away Jack smelt fried onions, and longed for his supper. The street was empty, and as he went forward he observed that the houses were almost all dark, and guessed that the French were billeted at the end he had passed. By and by he came to the Plaza, a narrow open space in the centre of the town, and saw what was evidently the town-house looming before him, a large building in the middle of the square. He halted in the shadow of a church porch.

"There'll be a sentry posted here," he thought. "I wonder which side of the building he is on!" He hesitated for a moment whether to proceed or to return at once, seeing no prospect of obtaining definite information of the number of the French. "In for a penny in for a pound," he said to himself; "I'll try another few yards."

He chose the street passing by the left-hand face of the town-house, and stole along on tiptoe. A narrow beam of light fell obliquely across the street from an upper window on his left, throwing a luminous circle on the townhouse wall just above the level of his head. He skirted the wall, and had reached the mid-point of that face of the square, when a voice suddenly arrested his steps.

"Señor, charity for a poor prisoner. A copper, Señor, for the love of God!"

The voice appeared to come from just above his head. There was something in the tone that seemed familiar, and with a quickening pulse he resolved to test the surmise which had flashed upon him. Retracing his steps for a couple of yards, he looked up, and there, full in the shaft of light from the house opposite, he saw the barred grating of a dungeon, and, pressed against the bars—yes, it was the small elfin face of the gipsy boy Pepito. "Here's luck again!" he thought. Being below the level of the beam of light, Jack himself was out of sight, and he knew that Pepito could only have caught the sound of his footsteps, and must have addressed him without knowing who he was. Putting his hand into the pocket of his breeches—forgetting they were not his own—he took out a few copper coins, and stretched his arm up towards the grating.

"Here you are, poor prisoner!" he said softly in Spanish.

A low exclamation answered him. The coins were taken, and a small lean hand pressed his gently.

"Muchas gracias," said Pepito; then turning to speak to someone behind him in the cell: "A Christian gives alms to the poor, and four noble Spaniards and a gipsy boy will not go supperless to bed."

"Four noble Spaniards!" echoed Jack. "Let me speak with one of them."

Pepito disappeared instantly, and his place was taken by a large, heavy-jawed Spaniard, whom Jack recognized at once as the stableman who had led the pursuit of him from Olmedo. The man looked suspiciously at the French uniform.

"Hist! I may help you," began Jack, but at this moment he heard the clamp-clamp of ammunition boots approaching from round the corner behind him. "The sentry!" he thought. "Silence! I will come back," he whispered.

He crept along the wall on tiptoe, in the direction away from the approaching footsteps. At the same time he heard from within the cell Pepito's shrill voice in song:

"Kosko gry! Romany gry!
Muk man kistur tuté knew!"

"Clever little imp!" he thought. "He didn't give me away to his companions there, and now he's trying to smother the sound of my footsteps."

He turned the corner and waited. The sentry was still approaching with measured tread, and when he arrived beneath the grating he cried angrily:

"Tais-toi, maraud! Il faut te taire, ou je vais te brûler la cervelle."

The singing ceased, and the sentry with a grunt resumed his march.

"He's going to make the round of the building," thought Jack. "So will I; but I hope to goodness no one will be passing on the other side."

He tiptoed along and turned the other corner. Not a soul was to be seen. He waited. On this face of the building was the door, over which a feeble light flickered, and Jack wondered whether it was open, and if he would be seen

from within. But there was no time for hesitation. The tramping sentry was coming behind him. Taking his courage in both hands, Jack slipped along, passed the door safely, turned the farther corner, and in another half-minute was back under the grating, breathless with excitement.

For a moment he stood listening. The sentry had halted in front of the building.

"Hist! Are you there?" he whispered towards the grating.

"Sí, Señor," said the man.

"Now, answer quickly. How many French are in the town?"

"About a hundred, Señor."

"Foot or horse?"

"Half one, half the other."

"And they come from—"

"From Segovia, Señor."

"That'll do. Where's that gipsy boy?"

"But, Señor—"

"Hush! Where's the gipsy?"

"Here, Señor," said Pepito, pulling the Spaniard away.

"Here's a few pesetas. Buy them all a supper from the jailer. All being well, I'll have you out to-night."

Then he thought for an instant. He must make sure his escape from the town. What if the sentry were again moving round the square? Stepping softly into the road, he picked up a large loose cobble and flung it with all his force towards the corner farthest away from the road he meant to take. The stone struck the road several yards beyond the building, and made a clatter as it ricochetted along. He heard an exclamation from the sentry, who set off at a quick step in the direction of the sound. Without more delay Jack hastened in the opposite direction, hearing behind him, more and more faintly, the quaint refrain of the gipsy's wild song:

"Kosko gry! Romany gry!

Muk man kistur tuté knew!"

He arrived safely at the end of the street. The mirth of the French was even more uproarious, their fancied security clearly still more confident. Out of the town, into the lane, Jack hurried at full speed; past the guard-house, along over the field, among the bare vine-poles until he reached his horse again. A whinny greeted him. He sprang on to the animal's back, and cantered back rapidly in the direction of the Valladolid road.

"We'll make a clean swoop of them or I'm a Dutchman," he said to himself gleefully. "Was there ever such luck—and such bad management! Won't Charley Stewart be delighted!"

On he rode, keeping his ears open for the slightest sound. He had come, as he judged, within a mile of the scene of his afternoon's adventure when he heard the sound of horses trotting. Turning off the road, he walked his horse for some distance across the field and waited. The riders were approaching him. He tried to determine from the sound of the hoofs how many they were. Then he heard voices—they carried far in the silence of the frosty night,—and as they came opposite him he heard an English voice say with a growl:

"Pon my soul, the madcap deserves to be nabbed!"

"Charley himself!" chuckled Jack. "Who goes there?" he called.

The horses stopped, and a voice called sharply:

"Who are you?"

"Lumsden of the 95th."

"Gad, it's the fellow himself. Come and show yourself, you daredevil! Where in the world have you been?"

"Into Rueda and back, sir," said Jack, saluting.

"And what the blazes have you been doing there?"

"Taking stock, sir. There are a hundred French in the town, cavalry and infantry mixed, and they're all hard at it with drink and cards."

"The deuce they are! No sentries, eh?"

"A few in a cabin this side of the town, sir, but they're busy at the same game."

"Are they, begad? Seymour, we'll collar this little lot. We were coming to rescue your dead body, young man, and you've disappointed us. Ride back, there, and tell the squadron to hurry. We'll draw first blood to-night."

Ten minutes later the whole squadron of 250 men of the 18th Light Dragoons, General Stewart himself in command, were on their way to Rueda. Jack rode ahead by the general's side—no longer in French uniform, for when the squadron arrived on the scene Kelly came forward and said:

"Brought these, sir; thought you might want 'em."

He handed Jack his head-dress and cloak, receiving the Frenchman's cloak and helmet in exchange.

"I didn't bring the breeches, sir," added Kelly, "thinking it might be a cold change to-night."

"Right, Kelly! and that reminds me that I've borrowed some of the Frenchman's money; all fair in war, eh?"

General Stewart enquired of Jack as they rode how he had contrived to pick up his information.

"Famous, famous!" he exclaimed when the tale had been briefly told. "We mustn't let a man escape if we can help it. If Franceschi doesn't hear of this we may scoop up his whole division. How are we going to escape the sentries? They can't fail to hear us on this hard road, and we can't muffle the horses' hoofs."

"If you like, sir," suggested Jack, "I'll go ahead with a few men across the fields and collar them first."

"You want to do it all, eh? Very well; we'll halt when you tell us. If anything goes wrong, give us a hail and we'll be on your tracks like the wind."

When he judged that the squadron had arrived at a safe distance Jack gave the word, the general halted, and Jack went forward across the fields with four men to make a detour and come upon the sentries' cabin from the direction of Rueda, thereby to deceive the Frenchmen into the belief that the approaching riders were a party coming out to relieve guard. Jack's men had ridden two hundred yards beyond the cabin, and were just turning to the left to regain the road, when one of the men declared that he heard the sound of trotting horses from the town.

"That's a relief patrol," said Jack. "Ride back to the general, Kelly; tell him we can hardly hope to surprise the town now, and ask him to pick up the men in the cabin as he passes. Now, dragoons, forward with me into Rueda."

They set spurs to their horses, and made for the road. Secrecy was no longer possible; the approaching chasseurs heard them, stopped short, hesitated a moment, then turned tail and made at full speed back towards the town, with Jack and his men close at their heels.

"Who's in first, my boys!" cried Jack, rising in his stirrups and urging his flying steed. On they went, heedless of the road, sparks flying from the hoofs, the horses snorting with the joy of the chase. Into the town with a clash and a clatter!

"Sauve qui peut! Les Anglais! Les Anglais!" shouted the sergeant of the flying patrol. Instantly the little town was filled with noise, the inns belched forth their scared revellers, from every house streamed soldiers, drunk and sober, some in full uniform, some half-dressed, some without swords, some without muskets, the chasseurs clamouring for their horses, the officers of Lefebvre's infantry shouting to their men to form up and stand firm in the square. Jack dashed on. A pistol flashed at him; he heeded nothing, keeping his eye on the form of the sergeant who headed the patrol, and who had now distanced his companions, and was clearly making in a panic for safety. By this

time about sixty of the infantry had formed up in some sort of order in the square. Giving rein to his horse, the sergeant of chasseurs, yelling incoherent exclamations, dashed into their midst, cleft a way through them, and pelted on towards the other end of the town. At his heels flew Jack, whom in the confusion and the semi-darkness the Frenchmen appeared to take for one of themselves. Behind him he heard the clatter of hoofs and the shouts of Stewart's dragoons as they dashed into the town, the crack of pistols, the dull thud of infantry muskets, then the clash of sabres and the yells of wounded men. Still he rode on. "Not a man must escape," the general had said, and not a man should, if Jack could help it.

He was now out of the town, and the Frenchman was apparently losing ground. Jack spurred his panting horse, and knew by the louder clicks of the hoofs before him that he was gaining on the enemy. But it was only for a moment. The chasseur shouted to his horse, flung a mocking cry behind, and tore on at increased speed. On went Jack, his mouth set, determined to run his quarry down if only his horse would hold out. Mile after mile the chase continued; each horseman could hear the pants of the other's steed, each rode headlong, careless of ruts or stones, Jack hoping now against hope that something would happen to check the Frenchman's career. His own horse was almost done; he remembered that it had had scarcely any rest for half a day, while the chasseur's was probably fresh; and it occurred to him at length that the Frenchman could easily have outstripped him if he pleased, and must be holding him now for his own malicious amusement, or perhaps to lure him on till he reached a larger body of Franceschi's men. Just as he was wondering whether it might not be the more discreet part to relinquish the chase, he caught sight of lights ahead. The Frenchman was quickening his pace; evidently then he did not expect to find friends in the village or town to which they were coming. Jack endeavoured to get still more out of his own breathless steed. On went the chasseur at full gallop into the town. At the door of an inn a group of men was gathered, some of their number holding flaring torches above their heads. The crowd parted to make way for the flying horseman, and he dashed pell-mell through their midst.

"The game's up!" thought Jack with a sigh of disappointment. "Poor old horse! You're done up." He rode into the crowd. "After him!" he cried in Spanish, pointing after the Frenchman. "After him, hombres! The English are at Rueda. Don't let him escape. My horse is foundered; somebody mount and catch the dog!"

But not a man moved in response to his cry. Jack dismounted, trembling in every limb, and furious with the Spaniards for their apathy. As he led his quivering horse towards the inn, and the throng gathered around him, he stopped suddenly, for there, in front of the inn door, stretched on his back, lay a soldier, his eyes closed, his cheeks pale in the ghastly torchlight, a dark stain marking the frosty road.

"What is it? Who is he?" asked Jack. He looked round, and saw at the inn door a man with a reeking knife in his hand. As Jack passed, the man came forward.

"I did it! One of the accursed French. I killed him!"

He went on to explain that he was the posting-master of the place. The French horseman had ridden up half an hour before and demanded refreshment; he had behaved with such insolence and brutality that human nature could not endure it.

"He was an enemy of my country, and I killed him!" the man concluded.

Jack shuddered involuntarily, and stepped round the corpse to enter the inn.

CHAPTER X

The Emperor's Despatch

Spoils of War—Hard Cash—A Good Bargain—"To Command the World"—A Wigging—"Missing"—Through the Night—Dead Beat—Grumbling—A Late Breakfast—Mixed Metaphors—A Change of Route

Jack threw himself wearily into a chair. He was tired, famished, disappointed—above all, disappointed,—for he had set his heart on capturing the Frenchman as a crowning achievement for this crowded day. For a few moments he sat staring with downcast eyes at the floor; then he pulled himself together.

"It can't be helped," he thought. "I did my best.—Landlord, give me some food."

The landlord put down on the table, between two smoking candles, the knife which he had retained up to this moment.

"Some food for the caballero," he said to one of his men. "And you, Perez, go outside and bury that carrion Frenchman."

Some minutes passed. Jack found that he had no appetite for the crude dishes set before him, and heard dully, with inattentive ears, the slow monotone of the landlord, who seemed to be anxious to justify to himself the act of murder he had committed. Presently two of the inn servants entered.

"We have buried him, master," said the first. "And his clothes are rich; we thought maybe you would wish to have them."

His companion came forward, and laid before the inn-keeper a heap of garments.

"He was a handsome man," added the first.

"Fine feathers, fine feathers!" muttered the landlord. He took the garments up one by one, turning them over and commenting on them. There was a black cloth pelisse, a white dolman with gold braid and fur, and a shako of scarlet cloth, surmounted by an aigrette of white heron's plumes. The uniform was ornate with gold braid, cord, and buttons; and a rich sash of black and gold silk, a small cartridge-pouch, a sabretache, and a long Damascene sabre completed the brilliant appointments. As Jack watched the landlord fingering the articles, he recognized vaguely that they could only have belonged to a soldier of high rank or position, and for the first time he wondered what had brought the Frenchman to this out-of-the-way village of Valdestillos. The landlord stroked the fur of the dolman caressingly.

"Worth some dollars, this," he said, shaking it out to see its full extent. As he did so, a folded paper fell to the floor. Jack was up in an instant.

"I want that," he said, fatigue, hunger, disappointment forgotten at once. He stepped forward, but the landlord put his foot on the paper.

"No, no, Señor," he said quickly. "He was my prisoner; I killed him; all his things are mine."

"But don't you see," said Jack, now hardly able to control his excitement; "don't you see, the man was a despatch-rider! That explains his rich uniform. Perhaps he was one of Napoleon's own aides-de-camp, and the fate of all Spain may lie in that simple paper. You must give it to me, landlord; I must take it to my general."

Jack was too much agitated at the moment to perceive that his urgent manner was likely to defeat his ends. The probability that the paper had value had aroused the cupidity of the landlord, who stooped cautiously, picked up the despatch, and thrust it into his pocket.

"It is mine—mine," he said gloatingly. The man's attitude served to quiet Jack's nerves.

"Very well," he said. "Keep it. I wouldn't be in your shoes for something. Your servants have seen the despatch. Look, there's a crowd of peasants gaping at the door there. You can't keep it quiet, even if anything happens to me; and when General Stewart finds out what a patriot you are, he'll send you to the Marquis of La Romana, and then—"

Jack shrugged expressively. The servants cast uneasy glances at their master, who at first frowned at them, then himself looked uncomfortable.

"What does the Señor offer for it?" he said at length with a covetous leer.

"You sell your patriotism, eh? Well, I'll give you five dollars."

The landlord shook his head.

"I have lost many dollars of late through the war. It is worth more than five dollars."

"Well, I won't stick at a few dollars. Say ten."

"No, no. The Marquis of La Romana would give more than ten."

"I won't haggle with you," cried Jack. "I make you a last offer. If you accept it, you are so much to the good; if you refuse it, you not only won't get a maravedi, but you'll come pretty badly off when the authorities hear of it. I'll give you twenty dollars, and not a peseta more."

The landlord looked at him enquiringly, as though questioning whether he might not squeeze a few more dollars from the young officer. Jack eyed him firmly.

"That's final," he said. "Twenty dollars, or nothing, plus your country's curse."

"A paltry sum!" said the innkeeper. "In cash?" he asked cunningly.

"In cash. I have the money here."

"Let me see it."

Chafing at the man's suspicion, Jack unbuckled his belt, and counted out from the pockets on the inside twenty small golden dollars of the old coinage of Spain. The landlord's eye gleamed. He took out the despatch from his pocket, and held it doubtfully in his hand.

"Give me ten dollars first," he said.

Angrier than ever, but outwardly calm, Jack handed over ten of the coins. The man bit each one between his teeth, and dropped them into his pouch.

"Take it, Señor," he said.

It was the most exciting moment Jack remembered in his life when he took the folded paper in his hand, and paid the balance of the price. He turned it over; there was no writing on it; the flap was fastened with a great red seal; what if it was no despatch after all? Instantly he broke the seal, and, unfolding the stiff paper, read at the top:

"To the Marshal Duke of Dalmatia, commanding the Second Army Corps at Saldana, the Vice-Constable Major-General".

His eyes swam, and he felt a rush of blood to his cheeks. The landlord was droning on to his servants, and Jack remembered afterwards, with infinite amusement, that, at this tense moment, he had heard as in a dream the landlord directing his servant to put out one of the candles; one was enough: "'Tis a waste of good pork fat, and we have no pigs left in Spain—bar the French."

He read on by the light of one guttering dip, running his eye rapidly down the closely-written page. Moment by moment his joy increased. The despatch was written from Chamartin by Marshal Berthier, Prince of Neufchâtel, and Jack saw that it contained Napoleon's plan of campaign, and gave information of the position of his armies which would be beyond price to Moore. Having read it hastily, he went through it again with more care, fixing the details in his mind in case by any mishap he should lose it before reaching head-quarters. What he read was as follows:—

"I read to the Emperor your letter of the 4th of December, which was brought by one of your officers. His Majesty approves of all you have done. The brigades of Generals Debelle and Franceschi are under your orders, and you can manoeuvre them as you think proper. The Emperor is of opinion that with the division of Merle and the division of

Mouton, together with the four regiments of cavalry, nothing can resist you.

"What are you to do? Take possession of Leon, drive back the enemy into Galicia, make yourself master of Benavente and Zamora. You can have no English in your front, for some of their regiments came to the Escorial and Salamanca, and everything shows that they are in full retreat. Our advance-guard is this day at Talavera de la Reyna, upon the road to Badajos, which it will reach soon. It will be clear to you that this movement must compel the English to hasten immediately to Lisbon, if they have not gone there already. The moment you are sure that the English have retreated (of which there is every presumption), move forward with rapidity. There are no Spaniards who can resist your two divisions. Order shoes and greatcoats to be made at Leon, Santander, and Palencia. His Majesty grants every demand for improving your equipment. You may also require mules for your artillery, and horses to remount your cavalry; but let it all be done according to the regular forms of administration.

"It is possible that as soon as the dragoons of General Millet arrive in Spain, the Emperor will send them on to you. But his cannot happen for a fortnight. At the distance at which you are you must be guided by what you think best, and look upon all I write as only general instructions. His Majesty conceives that you will take measures to reduce the country between the Douro, Galicia, and the Asturias, always most carefully guarding Santander. The 5th Corps, commanded by the Marshal Duke of Treviso, has been ordered to advance on Saragossa; the 8th Corps, under the Duke of Abrantes, whose 1st Division arrived at Vittoria on the 12th, will probably receive orders to concentrate at Burgos. Gunboats and armoured vessels of any kind have orders to sail for Santander. Load them with confiscated English merchandise, cotton, wool, artillery, and send all to France.

"Five divisions of Castaños' best troops have been routed with even less difficulty than you found in beating the Estremaduran army at Burgos. The wreck of Castaños' army is being pursued by Marshal Bessières, who has cut them off the road to Estremadura, and is pursuing them towards Valencia, several marches beyond the Tagus. The Emperor's headquarters are at Chamartin, a little country seat a league and a half from Madrid. His Majesty enjoys an excellent state of health.

"The city of Madrid is quite tranquil. The shops are all open, the public amusements are resumed, and there is not the least appearance of our first proposals having been emphasized by 4000 cannon balls.

"THE PRINCE OF NEUFCHATEL,

"Major-General.

"I will send you to-morrow a proclamation and some decrees of the Emperor, in which you will recognize the style of him who was born to command the world."

Every word was impressed on Jack's memory as though burnt in with fire. He had been disappointed of catching a Frenchman! He almost laughed aloud, for here, surely, was a find worth a king's ransom.

"Landlord, I ride back to Rueda." His voice had the ring of authority. "My own horse is tired. I will ride the Frenchman's horse. You will keep mine here until it is sent for, and a fair price shall be paid you for the other if mine is returned to me safe and sound. At once, if you please!"

It was not the Spaniard's way to move with alacrity, and it took fifteen minutes to saddle the horse and bring it round from the stables. Then Jack mounted, his whole body tingling with joy; and, the despatch carefully buttoned up inside his tunic, he set off on the fine Arab gray for Rueda.

The horse was not too fresh, and went all too slowly for Jack's eager haste. It was near midnight when he cantered into the open street of Rueda, and dismounted at the door of the posada. There was a light in this as in

many other houses, and he guessed that here he would be most likely to find General Stewart. The sound of his horse's hoofs had drawn an orderly to the door.

"Ah, Benson, catch hold of this nag, there's a good fellow! Is the general up?"

"Yes, you'll find him in the first room, sir."

Jack waited to hear no more. He almost ran into the room, and found himself in the presence of General Stewart and a few other officers.

"Oh, it's you!" said Stewart, turning on his chair to face the intruder. "Now, look here, Lumsden, this is all very well, but things may go too far, you know. 'Twas a mere fool's trick to bolt off after a runaway vedette when, for all you knew, a whole army-corps was within a mile of us."

"Sorry, sir," said Jack, "but I understood that you wished to secure the whole party, and I went after the only one that had escaped.... There are no Frenchmen on the road; in fact, to the best of my belief there's only one Frenchman between here and Valladolid, and he's dead."

"You got him after all, then?" said Stewart with a gleam of interest.

"Unluckily no, sir; he got off. It was another fellow, and he carried this despatch."

The general took the paper without a word. He opened it, and began to read.

"Gad, what a find!" he exclaimed. "Look here, Seymour. 'Born to command the world', begad!"

The other officers got up and looked over his shoulder. Jack watched their faces, and noticed how their expression changed from an ordinary interest and amusement to an excitement rivalling his own.

"By George, Lumsden," cried the general as he finished the document, "you've found a treasure here!"

"It cost me twenty dollars, sir."

"Dirt cheap at twenty thousand! How did it happen?"

Jack briefly told the story.

"Boney was always too careless about his aides-de-camp," said Seymour. "The idea of sending the poor chap off without an escort!"

"Spare your pity!" laughed Stewart. "This must go off to the commander-in-chief at once." He looked at Jack, and added dryly: "I suppose you are too tired to take it yourself?"

"If you'll give me a fresh horse I'll start at once, sir."

"Very well, though you look dog-tired. Have you got a flask you can give him, Seymour? That's right. There's a fellow half an hour ahead of you, with a despatch reporting our capture here—and I've put you down as missing, my boy. You're sure you can do it? It's a ride of nearly twenty miles."

"I'll go, sir," said Jack simply. "May I mention two things? I left my horse at the posting inn at Valdestillos, and promised to send for it and buy the Frenchman's gray. Will you look at it, sir, and offer a price? And there was a little gipsy boy with a few Spaniards in the watch-house here. The boy has been rather useful to me; will you order him and the rest to be released and looked after a bit?"

"Done to both. I'll buy the horse myself if he's fit; and as for the boy and those Spanish louts, they were released long ago, and the gipsy has kept the men in fits with his monkey antics. Now wait just a moment while I scribble a note to Sir John, and then be off, and think yourself a lucky young dog."

When Jack, fortified with Captain Seymour's flask, went to the door to mount his horse, he became for the first time thoroughly aware how tired he was. He had been in the saddle almost without intermission for more than twelve hours, and as he lifted his foot to the stirrup, he felt as though his thigh was weighted with lead, and on the point of snapping. But he would never have confessed his fatigue, much less have abnegated his right to carry the important despatch to the commander-in-chief; so, aching but cheerful, he cantered off into the night.

He had a ride of eighteen or twenty miles before him, and it was now past midnight. "Thank heaven!" he said to

himself, "in three hours or so I shall be between the sheets." Soon after he started, snow began to fall in scattered flakes, giving cold and gentle dabs to his face. The horse answered to his spur, and trotted rapidly along the solitary road, which grew whiter and whiter as he proceeded, past the cabin where the French outpost had been surprised, past the cross-road where the little tussle of the afternoon had taken place, over the bridge, up the hill, and thus on and on until he was within a couple of miles of the town of Alaejos.

At this point he overtook suddenly another horseman, whom the snow, driving now thick and fast, had hidden from his sight, while the carpeted road had deadened the sound of his own horse's hoofs. Guessing at once that this must be the courier bearing General's Stewart's earlier despatch, the recollection that he had been reported missing made him chuckle. Throwing a word of salutation to the rider as he passed him, he urged his horse to a gallop, soon came to the advanced pickets of the British force, and in a few minutes arrived at the door of the house in which Sir John Moore had fixed his quarters. The general had not long arrived, and was still up, engaged in arranging with a few of his staff the details of the next day's march. Jack was ushered to his room at once. Staggering in, white from head to heel, he drew Stewart's letter and the intercepted despatch from his breast pocket, and, holding them out towards the general, he said:

"A despatch, sir, from General Stewart."

"Ah, indeed!" said Sir John, rising in his chair. "I hardly expected—why, Colborne, the boy's done up! See to him."

Jack's face had turned the colour of his snow-laden cloak, and he would have fallen had not Major Colborne, Moore's secretary, hastily caught him and placed him on a seat, asking one of the aides-de-camp present to give him some cordial. Meanwhile Sir John had hurriedly run his eye over Stewart's covering note, and was now eagerly perusing Berthier's despatch.

"Gad, we have him at last!" he exclaimed, as he came to the end. The assembled officers looked expectant of an explanation, but at this moment the courier whom Jack had passed on the road entered, bearing the despatch announcing the capture of the French garrison at Rueda.

"Another despatch!" exclaimed the general; "Stewart appears to have been busy."

Tearing it open, he said, with a jubilant note in his voice:

"First blood, gentlemen! The campaign has opened at last. General Stewart has captured fifty of Franceschi's chasseurs and seventy of Lefebvre's infantry at Rueda, and—why, what's this? Lieutenant Lumsden missing!"

He looked across the room at Jack, who had now recovered, and was sitting, half-asleep, with his back to the wall.

"You're Mr. Lumsden, surely?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"I thought I could not be mistaken. How is it you are reported missing in the second despatch?"

"I was missing when the courier left, sir. I overtook him on the road."

"I see. You're dead beat, I'm afraid, but I should be glad to hear how you came by this despatch of yours, if you can manage to keep awake for a few minutes."

Jack briefly gave an account of the circumstances.

"You did very well, uncommonly well, Mr. Lumsden," said Sir John when he had concluded. "Colborne, be good enough to send someone to see Mr. Lumsden safely to the quarters of the 95th. Mr. Lumsden, you will hear from me to-morrow."

Jack rose stiffly and saluted; then, accompanied by one of the aides-de-camp, he walked off to the quarters of his battalion. The officers had all gone to bed. Learning from Jack the name of his servant, the aide-de-camp roused the servants' quarters, and, just as the church clock was striking three, Jack was put to bed in a cosy little room on

the ground floor of the house by his man Giles Ogbourne.

"What I want to know is, when are we agoing to have a slap at the French? Here we've been tramping and camping for two months or more, and nothing to show for it—not a shot fired. And you call that sojering!"

The words and the grunt that followed came on Jack's ears as it were out of a mist, along with the pungent fumes of strong tobacco. He had just awoke from a heavy sleep; the window of his room was open, and he could see the deep-blue sky of a fine December day.

"My friend Corporal Wilkes holding forth!" he said to himself with a smile, and, turning on his back, he listened for more.

"What are we here for?" went on the grumbler. "What's the good of cleaning your rifle day after day when it's had no chance of getting fouled? It's nothing but walking, walking, walking; 'ang me if we ain't out on a bloomin' walking-match."

"There's been a bit of a scrum somewhere for'ard, so I heard," put in another voice. "P'raps things is waking up, corp'ril."

"Shut up, Bates! What's the good o' that to us? It was those long-legged dragoons, by all accounts. Why should they have it all? Where does the 95th come in?—that's what I want to know. What's the good o' pickin' out the Rifles from the whole army and then giving them cavalry chaps the only job that's going? Besides, nothing'll come of it. We shall only have a longer walk than ever, you see. A flick in the ear to the French, so to say, and then we skedaddles!"

"That ain't fair, corp'ril. Who says we're a-going to sheer off?"

"Nobody says we're going to sheer off, but anyone with half an eye could see those blessed grub-carts over there cutting up the roads this morning, and anyone with an ounce of gumption would know what that means. That ain't the road to Valladolid! What I want to know is, do the general mean to fight, or don't he? If he do, let's step off on shanks his mare and get to business; if he don't—why, he's only spoiling good sojers, that's all I've got to say."

"Not so much noise, corp'ril," said Giles Ogbourne; "you'll wake Mr. Lumsden."

"Spoil his beauty sleep, eh? Where's he been, getting so dead tired that he ain't up to take his rations? I don't hold with such late hours. Not but what he's a good plucked 'un mostly, and I don't grudge him the—"

At this point Jack got out of bed, wincing as his aching muscles reminded him of the previous day's hard work.

"You there, Giles?" he said, putting his head out of the window. "Get me some hot water, and then see about my breakfast while I dress."

A guffaw broke from the soldiers below, and was instantly suppressed.

"Yes, sir," said Giles, adding: "Beg pardon, sir, but it's not breakfast, it's dinner."

Jack laughed.

"What! Have I been asleep so long? What's the time?"

"Gone four, sir, and mess is at a quarter past."

"Hurry up, then! There's just time."

"Mr. Pomeroy's been twice to see if you was up, sir, but he wouldn't let me disturb you. And he said I was on no account to say a word about—"

He caught himself up, with a blush that gave his honest round face a very boyish air.

"About what?"

"I wasn't to say, sir."

"Oh well, cut off and fetch the water! Been fighting any Spaniards lately, Wilkes?"

"No such luck, sir. Spaniards or French, it's all one to me, and what I want to know is—"

Jack smiled and shut the window.

When he entered the mess-room he found the officers of his regiment already seated, Colonel Beckwith being at the head of the table.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Smith, who was opposite the door. His exclamation drew all eyes towards Jack, and as he passed down the table to take the place made for him beside Pomeroy, the subalterns rapped knives and glasses on the unstained deal, and gave a rousing welcome to the wanderer.

"Of all the lucky beggars!" said Pomeroy in Jack's ear, when the general greetings had subsided. "And I can't even punch your head!"

"You're welcome to try," retorted Jack, "but allow me to get some dinner first. I've had nothing but pucheros and gaspachos for days past, and there are heavy arrears to make up."

"Well, I don't want to take advantage of you, though you have played me rather a mean trick."

"What do you mean?"

"Wine with you, Mr. Lumsden," interjected Colonel Beckwith from the far end of the table; "a good ride, begad!"

"Thank you, sir! most happy," said Jack, with a look of mingled pleasure and surprise. After the interchange of compliments, Jack, turning again to Pomeroy, said quietly: "What's Sidney driving at? I've never been honoured in this way since I first joined."

"Oh, he's anxious!" returned Pomeroy carelessly.

"Anxious! About what?"

"About his job."

"How? What?"

"'Fraid he'll be superseded, you know."

Jack was so much puzzled by the apparent inconsequence of the reply that he failed to remark the wide grin of amusement which all the subalterns within hearing were vainly endeavouring to dissemble.

"He's trying to carry it off," added Pomeroy.

"I say, Smith, what does this lunatic mean?"

"What! Haven't you heard the rumour?" answered Smith.

"'What great ones do the less will prattle of,'" quoted Shirley *sotto voce*.

"What rumour?" asked Jack, more mystified than ever.

"Well, there may be nothing in it, but for my own part I think it's a shame to promote a raw sub like you over the heads of men like Colonel Beckwith and Captain O'Hare, to say nothing of Pomeroy."

Jack, looking somewhat startled, appealed to Captain O'Hare, who was bubbling with amusement.

"Are they all mad, sir?"

"S mad's hatters!" replied O'Hare with a chuckle. "'Tis a shame to keep ye in suspense. The fact is, my boy, as you'd have learnt if you'd only kept decent hours, you've been growing in your sleep. You're like the mushroom that blooms in the dark. You went to bed a second lieutenant and woke up a full-blown one. 'Tis most unusual, this promotion, and bedad, 'tis Peter O'Hare himself that's glad, so he is, and so's all the rest of us."

"Except me," said Pomeroy in a tone of regret; "for as my superior officer I can't punch his head."

There was a laugh, under which Jack was glad to hide his pleasure and embarrassment.

"And the worst is," added Pomeroy, "that it's another bet won for the Grampus."

"By the way," asked Jack, "what's become of the Grampus?"

"Oh!" said Smith, "he went off a week ago. Said he came out to be at the front; bet me Baird would open the

ball with Soult, and went to lend a hand."

"He'll be lucky if he isn't made mincemeat of by the French, or else by Spanish bandits," said O'Hare. "These amachures would be safer at home."

At this moment an orderly entered and handed a note to Colonel Beckwith, who, having read it, crumpled it up and rapped on the table.

"Gentlemen, I may as well inform you, although of course it must go no further to-night, that a change has been made in our route. We march for Toro to-morrow."

There was a dead silence, broken only by a half-audible growl from Captain O'Hare. The shadow of a smile flickered across the colonel's face as he noticed the glum looks of his officers.

"This change, I may add, is due to some news lately received." Here he glanced quizzingly at Jack. "It's not so bad as it looks, and you may take my word for it that before the week's out we shall be in the thick of it."

"Thanks be!" said Captain O'Hare.

CHAPTER XI

Napoleon in Pursuit

To the Douro—Pepito Turns Up—Four Noble Spaniards—At Sahagun—In Suspense—News from La Romana—On the Trail—War with the Elements—Word from O'Hare—A Cavalry Skirmish—A Break-down

Sir John Moore had instantly recognized the immense importance of the despatch so opportunely discovered by Jack at Valdestillos. It informed him of the exact positions of the various components of the Imperial army; it assured him also that up to the present Napoleon's ignorance of his enemy's whereabouts was profound. But Moore knew that after Stewart's brilliant little affair at Rueda it was only a matter of days before this ignorance would be dispelled, and then Napoleon would without doubt launch every Frenchman within striking distance upon his track. If, therefore, he pursued his original intention of moving on Valladolid he would come into the direct line of the emperor's advance, whereas, with his new information about Soult's position, it was just possible that he would have time to strike a blow at that marshal before the huge masses converging on Madrid could be wheeled round and hurried over the passes of the Guadarrama in direct pursuit, or pushed forward from Burgos upon his flank. That Napoleon would interrupt all other operations to crush him he had no doubt, and if he was to strike at all it must be at once.

His own force numbered some 25,000 men, and he was assured from several sources that he might hope for the co-operation of La Romana, who was said to be at the head of a continually increasing army of Spaniards at Leon. Thus reinforced, he would be more than a match for Soult, if Soult, with some 16,000 men, were ill-advised enough to risk an action. On the other hand, if Soult, probably the ablest of Napoleon's marshals, resisted the temptation to close with Moore before the other French armies came up, the British general would have, as he himself said, "to run for it", with one army on his flank and three others at his heels. The risks were great; the boldest general might well shrink from the ordeal with which Sir John was now confronted. But Moore's courage and promptitude increased with the magnitude of the peril; he fully counted the cost, and, feeling bound in honour to take this one chance of saving Spain, he quickly formed his resolution and set to work with energy to carry it out.

Within a few hours of receiving the intercepted despatch, Moore countermanded the advance to Valladolid, and ordered his infantry to cross the Douro at Zamora and Toro, throwing out cavalry as a screen for both columns.

When the news spread through the ranks that a rapid move was to be made against Soult, their enthusiasm knew no bounds. The dissatisfaction which all had felt, the murmurs which had not been confined to the men, gave place to jubilation, and it was with laughter and singing that the advance-guard marched out of Alaejos northward to the Douro.

Jack's regiment was brigaded with others to form the Reserve, and the men had to curb their impatience for some hours before their turn to march arrived. It was a bitterly cold day, that 15th of December, and, having performed all their immediate duties, Jack and his fellow subalterns were stamping up and down before their quarters, wrapped in long cloaks, and doing their best to warm their blood. They had been so busy since Jack's arrival that there had been no time to get from him a full account of his recent adventures, but now, in their enforced idleness, they kept up a fire of questions as to where he had been and what he had seen, and how it was that he had had, as they put it, all the luck. Jack found that the simplest means to escape the bombardment was to give a consecutive account of the events at Rueda and Valdestillos, to which his chums listened with interest, scarcely remarking the modesty with which the narrator minimized his own share in the bustling incidents.

"That boy Pepito, you see," he said at one point in his narrative, "is not quite the thorn in the flesh we all supposed he was going to be. In fact, he has the strangest knack of turning up at odd moments when he can be of use —"

"A regular god in the machine!" said Shirley.

"A familiar spirit, I'd call him," said Pomeroy. "I never had much faith in witchcraft, but upon my word I shall soon begin to believe that you're in league with the powers of darkness, and no wonder you have such confounded luck!"

"Talk of the—" cried Smith suddenly. "Look at that!"

The subalterns, looking in the direction pointed out by Smith's stretched forefinger, saw, at the other end of the street, a strange cavalcade approaching. Between two stalwart troopers of the 18th Light Dragoons rode a picturesque little figure on a gaily-caparisoned mule, the rider cocking his head aloft with a consequential air that was irresistibly comic. Behind tramped a crowd of foot-soldiers, and the rear was brought up by a troop of dragoons.

"By George!" cried Pomeroy, "it's Pepito himself, riding in like a conqueror.

"And the French prisoners of Rueda behind him," added Jack. "I'm glad to see the boy. Giles, go and see where they halt, and bring the little beggar to me."

In a few minutes Giles returned, bringing not only Pepito but a group of four rather dilapidated-looking Spaniards.

"My friends of the Olmedo inn," thought Jack, recognizing them with a chuckle. "Well, Pepito, so you've turned up again, eh?"

"Sí, Señor," answered the gipsy with his captivating smile. "And with me the four noble Spaniards, Señor."

"So I see. You seem in high feather. You'd better tell me what has happened since I saw you last on the way to Medina."

Pepito stood in the centre of the group of officers, while the four stablemen hung on the outskirts, Giles keeping a watchful eye on them. The boy, speaking in rapid Spanish, with an occasional Romany word when he found his emotions too much for him, told how, after being provided with clothes by Giles Ogbourne, he had started to track the Señor, in spite of orders to the contrary. Being hungry, and having no money, he had, on arriving at the farmhouse where Jack had met him, offered to clip the farmer's mules, such clipping being the traditional occupation of the gypsies in Spain. There he had seen Jack's plight, caught sight of the pursuers, and instantly determined the course of action he adopted. When overtaken by the panting stablemen, he had sent them off on the wrong track; but they carried him along with them and threatened him with a lingering death if he proved to have played them false.

He was cudgelling his wits for a plan of escape when, as luck would have it, they fell suddenly in with a troop of French chasseurs, who captured the whole party, chose to assume that they were spies, and bundled them into the watch-house at Rueda to await punishment.

"Ay, ay, that cell!" said Pepito. "It was dark and damp and foul, and Señor knows how the Romany love the fresh air and the open sky. But still, there were the Busne, the four noble Busne, Señor, and when I felt sad I would laugh at them, and tell them what fools they were, who the Señor really was, and how it was all their own fault if they were shot. Oh, it was good, Señor!" The gipsy's black eyes twinkled at the recollection.

"I'm afraid you're a mischievous young scamp," said Jack. "You'd better come along with me—that is, if you'll behave yourself."

"Ta ra, ta ra! Viva!" cried Pepito, flinging his knife in the air and catching it as it fell. "The Romany chal to his horse did cry"—and singing his merry song he skipped up to Giles, and dug the stolid Devonian in the ribs.

Meanwhile, Jack beckoned to the Spaniards, and they slouched towards him with shamefaced sullenness. Addressing the biggest of them, he said with a smile:

"Well, hombre, you will be wiser next time. It might have been awkward for you. You'd better go home by way of Salamanca, or you might happen to meet some more Frenchmen. Here, you may find this useful."

He gave the man a few pesetas, and the four dejected fellows, muttering their thanks, shambled away.

Half an hour later the order came for the regiment to march, and soon the men were swinging along on the way to Toro. It was a fine frosty day, and the cold, though keen, was exhilarating. The road, which in wet weather would have been a mere slough of mud, was now frozen hard, and walking was easy and pleasant. Many women walked with the regiment; others, with their children, were perched on the baggage- and ammunition-wagons. There was joking and laughter; the prospect of soon meeting the enemy whom they had been so long hoping to fight gave brightness to the men's eyes and elasticity to their gait. Colonel Beckwith rode up and down the column, throwing a word to this man and that, encouraging the laggards and chaffing the boasters. A little snow fell at times, causing the women to snuggle under their cloaks and the men to growl about wet boots; but during this day's march, and the four succeeding days', the high spirits of the regiment were well maintained, and it was with surprisingly little loss by sick or stragglers that the infantry arrived, on December 20th, at Mayorga, where a junction was effected with the column under Sir David Baird. They moved forward again the following morning, and their enthusiasm was raised to the highest pitch by the news that Lord Paget, with the 10th and 15th Hussars, had surprised a large body of French cavalry in Sahagun, killing or capturing over 200 officers and men.

When they arrived at this place in the evening, the main army found that it had outstripped its supplies. Wagons were short, and neither food nor clothing was to be had. It was therefore imperative that a breathing-space should be allowed, that time should be given for recruiting their strength and repairing their equipment. Eager as they were to fight, they were not sorry when they learnt that at least a day's rest was to be given them.

But when the whole of December 22nd passed without the expected order to advance, the men again began to chafe at the delay. Corporal Wilkes and some of his cronies were sitting round their camp-fire on the evening of that day discussing the situation.

"What I want to know," said Wilkes in a tone suggesting that he would rather have resented the information—"what I want to know is, why we don't up and at them Frenchmen at once. What are we waiting for? True, we ain't had much grub, and our toggery ain't exactly what the general would specially admire on parade, but over yonder, where that Marshal Salt, or whatever they call him, is, there's plenty of tommy and fine clothes too, and if we could only make a move we'd very soon be able to fill our insides and polish up our outsides. Here we are, three days off Christmas, and where's the roast-beef and plum-pudding to come from? We'll have to sing for it, by what I can see."

"Sing for it!" interposed Bates with a grunt. "No, thank'ee; we've had enough of the waits. Ha! ha!"

There was a general guffaw at Bates's little witticism.

"I don't see nothing to laugh at," growled Wilkes, resenting the interruption. The others looked reproachfully at Bates, who relapsed into abashed silence.

It was not until the morning of the 23rd that the general of the Reserve, Sir Edward Paget, a younger brother of Lord Paget, received marching orders. On the evening of that day he was to move his division forward from Grajal del Campo along the road to Carrion, join the main body, and halt until head-quarters should arrive from Sahagun. At this news the younger and less experienced men found it almost impossible to keep still.

"Lie down and rest, you silly fellows," said Jack to a group of men whom he saw fidgeting about in sheer nervousness and anxiety. "Look at Wilkes yonder; he knows what war is, and he's snoring away, getting a good sleep before the march to-night. Here, Pepito, just come and show these fellows some of your tricks, and keep them amused, or they'll be dead-beat before they start."

Pepito, who had followed Jack like a shadow ever since he had left Alaejos, obediently went among the men, and soon had them laughing merrily at his absurd antics and extraordinary gibberish. The bleak winter day passed, and at four o'clock, under a gray and leaden sky, the Reserve at last set out towards what they hoped was to be a brilliant victory. The whole country was covered deep with snow. The men had been ordered to refrain from talking or singing while on the march; and thus, in cold and silence, the column trudged along in the gathering night.

After some hours' tramping a halt was called, and the men stood and shivered and wondered.

"What are we waiting for now?" growled Corporal Wilkes, shaking the snow from his shako.

"To let the guns come up, shouldn't wonder," returned his friend Bates. "This blessed snow makes it slow work to bring 'em along."

"I expect it's old Romana not up to the scratch," suggested Tom Plunket, the best shot in the regiment. "Very likely he's lost his way, or forgotten the date, or frizzing his moustache, or something, and that's keeping our general waiting."

"Humph!" growled Wilkes, "another case of to-morrer, to-morrer. Tell you what, boys, these Dons will say 'manaña' once too often. When the last roll-call comes they'll say 'manaña' as sure as fate, and then where'll they be? —that's what I want to know."

"Hush! what's that?" said Sergeant Jones, a little man known familiarly as "The Weasel".

A bugle-call was sounding. Every man started to his feet. Surely the two hours' halt was over and the battle was at hand. But no; there was no sound of movement among the troops, no cheer from the men near the general's quarters. While the men stood in a tense attitude of expectancy, Jack came up out of the darkness.

"Men," he said quietly, "we are ordered back to Grajal. Fall in!"

Not a word broke from them. Back to Grajal? But the French were not there. Was the battle postponed again? No one appeared to know the meaning of this new order. They collected their kits, strapped on their heavy knapsacks, and trudged despondently back over the frozen roads.

At six o'clock that evening a note had been brought to Sir John Moore from the Marquis of La Romana. It read:

LEON, Dec. 22.

SIR,

The confidential person whom I had placed on the River Douro has written to me on the 18th inst. that he is assured that the enemy's troops posted at the Escurial are moving in this direction.

He adds that if the person who gave him this intelligence should not arrive the same day he would go himself to

Villacastin, twelve leagues from Madrid, to watch the two roads, the one of which leads to Zamora, and the other to Segovia.

I hasten to give this information to your Excellency that you may judge what measures are requisite to be taken.

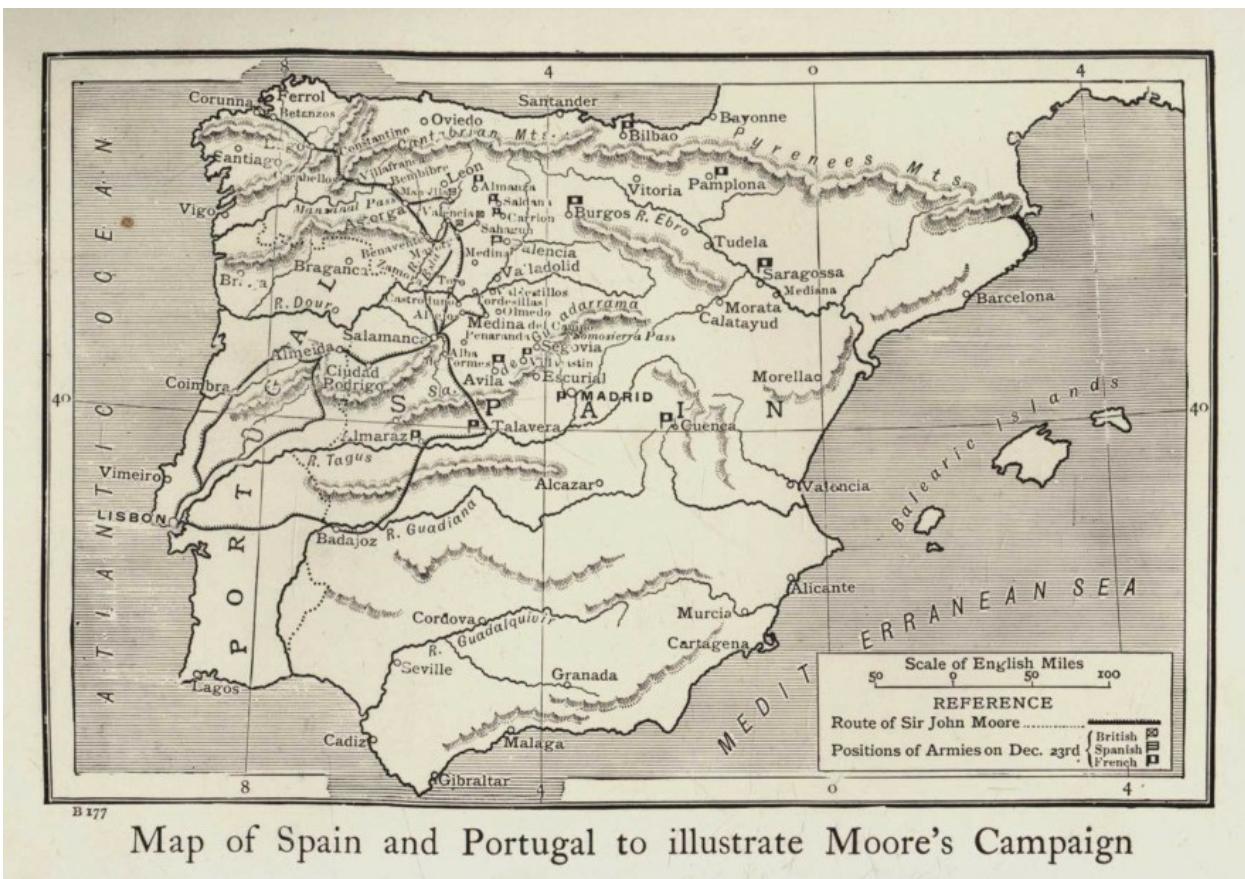
LA ROMANA.

What Moore had expected and hoped for had come to pass. It was clear that Napoleon had learnt the British position at last, and was hastening from Madrid northward across the mountains with his whole army to crush the little force.

"We must cut and run for it," said Moore to his staff with a hard smile. "And by Jove we'll give them a race!"

When Moore suddenly, ten days before, altered his line of march from the Valladolid to the Toro road, Napoleon had not had time to learn of the affair at Rueda. He had made up his mind that the British were retreating on Lisbon, and had already despatched Lefebvre and Lasalle in pursuit by way of Badajos, preparing himself to back them up with an overwhelming army of 40,000 men and 150 guns. The news of Stewart's exploit at Rueda reached him on the 19th. It had the effect of an electric shock. Where before had been activity, there was now feverish energy. Couriers were sent on the instant to all parts of Spain, ordering all the scattered units of his immense force to converge on Valladolid, which he persisted in believing to be Moore's objective. Mere skeleton corps were left to hold in check the shattered Spanish armies. The rest followed Napoleon over the Guadarrama mountains, or pushed along the Burgos road to join hands with Soult.

On the 21st, the same day on which Moore marched for Sahagun, an immense French army, comprising the flower of Napoleon's troops, left Madrid. Marshal Ney, "le plus brave des braves", led the van, and he was lucky in bringing his troops across the Guadarrama in comparatively fine weather. But no sooner had he crossed than a terrific snow-storm burst over the mountains. When Napoleon himself arrived from Madrid he found the passes blocked with snow, guns, wagons, all kinds of impedimenta; and the advance, on which so much depended, to all appearance indefinitely delayed.



Map of Spain and Portugal to illustrate Moore's Campaign

But opposition, even on the part of the elements, only roused the emperor's indomitable energy. The gale was raging its fiercest, men and horses were being hurled over precipices by the force of the wind. The leading battalions had actually turned back and were making confusion worse confounded, when Napoleon appeared. Addressing the soldiers, he announced that he meant to overtake the British at all costs. He set thousands of men to clear the drifts, others to beat down the snow into a hard road, over which the artillery, harnessed with double teams, crawled painfully northward. He ordered the members of each infantry section to link arms and thus help each other along the perilous mountain way. He dismounted the cavalry, and used their horses to haul the guns. Then, gathering his staff about him, he bade them lock their arms, and himself led the way, walking arm in arm with Lannes and Duroc. Thus, in the teeth of wind, snow, and ice they pushed up the wild mountain steeps. Half-way up, the marshals and generals, who wore jack-boots, were too much exhausted to move another step. Nothing daunted, Napoleon had himself hoisted on a gun, and sat there astride. He called to his marshals to do the same; and thus, after four hours battling with the elements, the grotesque cavalcade reached the convent on the summit, where, with food and wine, the rigours of the march were forgotten.

It was in this spirit of fierce determination that the great emperor, sparing himself as little as his troops, strained every nerve to accomplish the end he had in view—the destruction of Moore's gallant little army. If La Romana's confidential agents had been napping, Moore might indeed have beaten Soult, but only to find himself enveloped by a force triple his own in numbers, commanded by the most brilliant soldier of the age. Fortunately, information had

reached La Romana, and through him Moore, in time. At the moment when Napoleon arrived at Villacastin, only some three marches distant, Moore was countering the advance on Sahagun.

That moment marked the ebb of Napoleon's fortunes. Hitherto he had pursued his wonderful career with scarcely a check; but the decision of Moore on that December evening was the signal for the break-up of Napoleon's power; it was the step that saved Europe. It diverted the emperor from his immediate purpose of conquest, and engaged his huge armies in a fruitless and exhausting chase; it gave Spain time to bethink herself and rise as a nation. Her rising set an example to Europe, by which Austria and Prussia slowly profited, and which led Russia, three years later, to that spirited defiance which burnt Moscow and brought destruction upon the finest army in the world.

The British retreated in two columns, one, under General Baird, by the northern road to Valencia, the other, under General Hope, by Mayorga towards Benavente. General Paget's reserve division, including the two light brigades under Generals Anstruther and Disney, and five cavalry regiments, remained for twenty-four hours behind the main body. It was on Christmas-day that Jack's regiment received orders to march. The men were formed up in readiness for starting. Every face was gloomy, every heart bitter with rage. It was only vaguely known in the ranks why the advance had been so suddenly countermanded, and the general opinion was that it was due to the cowardice and incompetence of the Spaniards. The officers remarked this spirit of sullen discontent, and Captain O'Hare determined to make a personal appeal. Calling his company to attention, he stood in pouring rain and addressed them.

"Now, my boys," he said cheerily, "we must put a good face on it. The froggies are too many for us now, and the general don't want every mother's son of you to be clapped into a French prison. We're off to Astorga, and bedad, if Marshal Soult comes within reach of our heels, we'll give him a good parting kick before Boney arrives. But remember, we form part of the rear-guard; 'tis the post of honour because 'tis the place of danger. If there is to be any fighting, 'twill fall to us, and every man Jack of you must keep himself as fit as a fiddle, or he won't be able to do what's wanted. I trust to you, my boys; and sure we'll show that every Englishman, whether Scotch or Irish, is worth ten Frenchmen yet. Shoulder arms! Left turn! Quick march!"

"All very well," grumbled Charley Bates, as he swung along beside Corporal Wilkes; "there's to be fighting at Astorga, he says. The general means to march us to death first, and expects us to fight after!"

"You shut up, Bates," said the corporal sullenly. He was just as much irritated as his friends, but, being disputatious by nature, he was ready to contradict anyone. "I've fought under Johnny Moore before, and he ain't one to run for nothing. And you and me, Charley Bates, has got to show a good example to them young orficers—Mr. Lumsden an' the rest,—didn't you hear Peter say so? So step out, my boy, and don't argue."

"Hear that, Pommy?" said Jack, who was nearer the corporal than that worthy believed.

"I heard it," growled Pomeroy, "and I hope you'll profit by Wilkes's example."

They needed all their strength of will to preserve their cheerfulness. A thaw had set in, and the road, running between fields of soft rich loam, was knee-deep in slushy clay. All that day they tramped heavily through the rain. They halted at Mayorga for the night, and pushed on next day to Valderas, their clothes like sponges, their limbs racked with pain. At the halting-places they saw the first signs of failing discipline. Some of the men in the regiments which had preceded them had broken out and vented their rage on the houses of the Spaniards. Food was scarce; means of carriage were lacking; and the men were so incensed against the inhabitants of the villages through which they passed that they seized food for themselves, and, the country being for the most part treeless, tore down doors and sheds to provide wood for their camp-fires. But this marauding spirit had been as yet confined to a few regiments; the men of the light brigades were held well in hand by their officers, and refrained from the ill conduct of their less-disciplined comrades.

As they marched on the 26th and 27th it became known that Lord Paget's cavalry were having a warm time behind them. Soult had sent Lorge's dragoons in pursuit of Baird's column, and the advance-guard of the emperor's army at this time began to appear, until the five British cavalry regiments were closely pressed by no fewer than thirteen French. But Paget was a consummate cavalry leader; spreading his 2400 men as a screen to the whole army, he showed ceaseless activity in fending off the assaults of the French dragoons, beating them time after time, and capturing many prisoners. Every effort of the French to break through and attack the infantry was baffled and checked. So admirably, indeed, did he handle his men, that Napoleon imagined they were twice as numerous as they actually were.

On the afternoon of the 27th, Jack was marching with his regiment, the first battalion of the 95th, along the road from Valderas to Castro Gonzalo, where the river Esla was to be crossed. Behind came the second battalion, with other regiments, and the rear was brought up by Lord Paget's cavalry. The pace had been forced for some hours, for the French were continually pressing closer, and Sir John Moore was anxious to get his whole army across the river without delay. He had given orders that when the passage had been completed the bridge was to be destroyed, and Jack and his fellow-subalterns were disappointed that this task, and the chance of a brush with the enemy, would fall to the second battalion and not the first.

About half a mile before they reached the village of Castro Gonzalo there was a momentary stoppage of the column, caused, as was learnt in a few minutes, by the breaking down of the last of the baggage-wagons. Jack's company happened to be the nearest to the scene of the accident, and as they halted, Captain O'Hare came up and said:

"Lumsden, I'll leave you with a squad of men to repair this confounded cart. It's got our whole wardrobe in it, and we can't afford to lose that. Choose your men, and don't be longer about it than you can help. You'll probably have the job done before the second battalion come up, but if not, there'll be the hussars behind to see you safe in."

CHAPTER XII

Corporal Wilkes on Guard

Amateur Wheel-wrights—Wilkes Disappears—Dodging Dragoons—Night with a Picket—A Roman Bridge—Benevente—Wilkes enters a Protest—One MacWhirter

Jack was glad to have the chance of doing something that was not merely trudging through slush. He selected four men to assist him with the wagon—Wilkes, Bates, Tom Plunket, and his own man, Giles Ogbourne, who had some experience of smith's work. An inspection of the vehicle showed that the tyre of one of the wheels had broken, and with it one of the spokes. It was evident that, unless the tyre were repaired, the felloe would soon fall to pieces if the wagon were hauled farther over the heavy road. The first thing to be done was to take off the wheel. Luckily the Portuguese driver had a spanner in the cart, and with this the axle-cap was screwed off and the pin knocked out.

"Now, Wilkes," said Jack, "you and Bates will look after the cart while the others come with me to find a smithy. The second battalion will be up in a minute or two. If anyone asks, you can explain what has happened."

Jack started off with the other two men, who carried the heavy wheel between them. Reaching the village of Castro Gonzalo, they went along the streets in search of a smithy. Every house was deserted; the inhabitants had fled in terror at the news that the French were advancing. Nowhere was a smith's shop to be seen, nowhere a person of whom to make enquiry.

"There must be a smithy somewhere," said Jack, "even if the smith has taken to his heels."

"Maybe 'tis along the road to the left, sir," said Giles. "The smithy sometimes lies a bit out of the village at home."

"Perhaps. Let us try it."

The three proceeded down the road towards Villapando, in the teeth of a blinding storm of sleet. At a distance of nearly half a mile from the village they came to a small stone house at the left of the road.

"Here we are!" said Jack, noticing a horse-shoe nailed on the wall, and some broken bits of iron by the doorway. "The door's open; the smith seems to have bolted."

He led the way in, and found himself in a dark smithy. The forge was black and cold; evidently no fire had been lighted there for some time.

"Now, Giles, kindle a fire. You'll find some wood and charcoal about, no doubt. We must be quick about this, for we don't want to be left in the lurch."

It took some time to get a good fire alight. The wood was damp, and Giles's tinder-box had not altogether escaped a wetting. But the fire was ablaze at last, and then Jack set to work with the creaking bellows to blow it to a heat sufficient to weld the broken ends of the tyre. The third man, Plunket, held the iron in the glowing charcoal with the smith's huge tongs, while Giles stood ready with the hammer to beat it on the anvil.

"I'm afraid it won't be big enough to go round the felly without a bit more iron," said Giles; "and there don't seem to be a bit of the right kind here."

"Try it first. The whole tyre may expand enough with the heat."

But when Giles had welded the broken ends, and tried to fit the tyre on the wheel, he found that it was too short, as he had feared.

"We can't give it up," said Jack. "Look round the place and see if you can find a scrap of thin iron that will serve the purpose."

After searching in the smithy and the surrounding yard for several minutes, a strip of iron was discovered which Giles thought might weld with the rest. The tyre had to be heated again and cut at the cleavage. The small piece had to be beaten until it was of the same thickness as the tyre, and only after a good deal of patient manipulation did Giles succeed in forming a tyre of the required circumference. It was finished, however, at last. It fitted on the scorching felloe, and after cold water had been thrown on it from the blacksmith's tank, filling the air with vapour and the characteristic smell of the smithy, Giles declared that the wheel was good enough for another campaign.

"That's right, then," said Jack. "Now we must get back to the cart. By George! it has taken us a long time. It's past five o'clock, and getting dark. Raining as hard as ever too!"

They trudged up the road and through the village, expecting to meet the rear-guard of the British infantry, or at any rate the cavalry. But there was nobody to be seen. They hurried along out of the village towards the spot where, in the gathering darkness, they saw the wagon still standing in the middle of the road.

"But where are the bullocks?" cried Jack, noticing that the shafts and rope traces were empty.

Hastening in advance of the men, burdened as they were with the heavy wheel, he came to the cart.

"Wilkes, where are you?"

There was no answer; nor was there any sign of the men he had left on guard.

"This is awkward, my men," he said, as the two came up. "The wheel's right, but those two fellows and the driver have gone off, and the bullocks with them. We can't move the thing without animals."

"The corp'ril wouldn't budge without he were sent, sir," said Plunket.

"Maybe the French have come up in the dark and captured 'em, sir," added Giles.

"Nonsense! the French were not so close as all that. I don't fancy our cavalry have gone by yet. You two fellows fix the wheel on. I am going back to the village to find a team. I sha'n't be long."

Jack went back to the village in the darkness, going in and out among the houses and the gardens, expecting every moment to come upon some traces of the men and animals. The night was silent, save for the steady downpour of rain and the dull roar of the flooded river, he knew not how far beyond. Presently he heard splashing footsteps, then two men rushed towards him breathless—first Giles, then Plunket.

"The French dragoons!" panted Giles.

"Not our own men?" said Jack quickly.

"No, sir. We heard hoofs, and ran up to the first house and waited; and then two vedettes came up and stopped at the wagon, and we heard the French lingo, sir."

"Then we must make ourselves scarce. Have we time to reach the bridge?"

But even as he spoke, the sound of galloping horses and rumbling wagons came from the other end of the village.

"We must cut, my men. Follow me!" cried Jack.

Running at full speed along the Villapando road, he did not draw breath until he reached the smithy where the tyre had been repaired.

"We must wait here till we know what is happening," he said.

As they stood by the dark forge, they heard the clash of steel and the shouts of officers from the village.

"Soult's men for a certainty," said Jack. "I wonder if our fellows are across the bridge."

Soon after came a clatter and rumble as of wagons driven furiously, and then the thunder of horses' hoofs. Crack! That was a musket-shot. Another, another, then a rapid succession of reports, muffled by distance, struck their ears.

"They're trying to drive our pickets in," said Jack. "Come, men, we must try to find our own lines, or we shall stand a poor chance of escaping with whole skins in the morning. All we can do is to cut across the country over there; no one will hear us through this noise. Come along!"

Leaving the shelter of the smithy, he ran across the road into the field opposite. Great clods of earth clave to his boots, and it was heavy running; but, followed closely by the two men, he pounded on, listening for shots on his right, and moving obliquely to the left to avoid the skirmishers who, he guessed, had been thrown out by the French. As he ran he found the ground rising in a gradual ascent. The firing still continued in a desultory way, and Jack rejoiced that the night was so murky that he and his men would not, as they ascended the slope, present a mark to the enemy. They had run for nearly twenty minutes, and were panting for breath, when they were suddenly brought to a stop by hearing the click of a firelock directly in front of them, and, as they ducked their heads, a shot rang out, followed by the cry:

"Who goes there?"

"A friend—an officer of the 95th!" shouted Jack in answer.

There was a murmur of astonishment. In the darkness several forms were heard rather than seen to advance, and in a few moments Jack and his men were hauled over a rough, semicircular embankment, where they found themselves among a picket of the 43rd.

"Where the deuce do you come from?" asked the sergeant in charge, letting go his hold of Jack's collar.

"Look here, my man, I'm Lieutenant Lumsden of the 95th, and—

"Beg pardon, sir," said the sergeant hastily. "No offence. 'Twould need cat's eyes to tell a dook from a dustman in a night like this."

"What's going on, sergeant? I want to get to the bridge with my men. Can you put us in the road?"

"Heavens above, sir, you'd be shot in a winking. The bridge is half a mile up-stream, and we're holding these heights while t'other half of the brigade knocks a hole in it. We're the last picket this way, and as, judging by the sound of it, the Frenchmen are dismounted and a-trying to pass us, and we expect 'em here direckly minute, I'm afeard you'll have to stay here till morning light, sir."

"Oh, all right! I'll take a hand if there's any fighting. What has been going on this afternoon, then?"

"Troops all crossed, sir, except our half-brigade."

"Are the cavalry over?"

"Yes, sir. They came up rather late; and directly they and the guns was got over, the general had a hole knocked in one of the arches—cut completely through, sir—so that the rest of us will have to swim across, I expect, if we get through the night. And we'll all be drownded, sure as fate. Hark to the water a-rushing and raving behind us!"

His voice, indeed, was almost smothered by the roar of the swollen river. Getting what shelter was possible, Jack and his men passed a miserable night with the picket of the 43rd, and were glad when the darkness cleared, and they saw once more the grim dawn of another wintry day.

It brought little comfort. The wind had risen to a furious gale, beating sheets of snow and sleet in their faces. Jack and his men were shivering with cold and ravenous with hunger, though the men of the 43rd shared with them the scanty rations they had. During the whole of that day, and far into the night, they had to hold their position, ever on the alert to repel a flanking attack of the French cavalry, who several times galloped close up to the bridge, always retiring more quickly than they came before the volleys of the British infantry who lined the heights. More than once Jack thought of making his way along the embankment and rejoining his regiment, but the picket of the 43rd was always outnumbered; it had lost several men, and he decided, every time the opportunity of leaving occurred, that he would stay, thinking that, after all, he could probably do more good in the fighting line than in security on the other side of the bridge.

At the bridge General Craufurd kept his men unremittingly at the task of mining the arches. There had been no time to send an engineer forward to make the necessary preparations; the men lacked the proper tools; and the material of the bridge was so strong, and the construction of the Roman engineers centuries before so solid, that the task of penetrating the massive masonry was of unusual difficulty.

Towards night the spasmodic attacks of the French ceased altogether, and they withdrew out of range. After several more hours of cheerless waiting, word was passed quietly along the entrenchments that the work at the bridge was finished and that the troops were now to retire. The wet and weary men needed no urging; in dead silence they crept along and down the heights towards the end of the bridge, where General Craufurd, commanding the rear-guard, was in person superintending the crossing. The middle arch had been cut completely through, but the men had not to swim for it, as the sergeant of the 43rd had anticipated, for planks had been laid across the gap. Jack was among the last to cross, and as he passed over the narrow, shaking strip of boarding, the impetuous and roaring torrent dashed over it, threatening at every moment to carry away planks and men together. But the last man safely reached the other side, and Jack, as General Craufurd passed him, heard that fine soldier mutter with a grim chuckle:

"There! We've dished the fools!"

A few minutes afterwards there was a terrific roar, that for the moment drowned the fury of the torrent; then a blinding glare that flashed along the gray masonry and shot through the falling rain; and then, with a great crash, two arches and their supporting buttresses fell to the bottom of the river, where they lie to this day. The mine so laboriously excavated had exploded with complete success, and between the French and the English raged the boiling torrent, which effectually forbade present pursuit. Mocking cheers broke from the throats of the tired, drenched soldiers; then they turned their backs on the river and marched on, half-asleep, towards Benavente. Jack looked at his watch; it was just midnight.

When he awoke, at daylight next morning, some minutes passed before he realized where he was. He had no recollection of going to bed; in fact, on arriving in the town he had been so fatigued that he could have slept in his wet clothes on the road. But his man had been anxiously on the look-out, and it was to him that Jack owed his bed in the convent where his fellow-officers had found lodgment.

His dazed senses were fully recalled to him by the sound of Pepito's voice humming one of his gipsy songs outside the door.

"Pepito!" he called.

The boy bounded lightly into the room with an eagerness that bespoke, as clearly as words could have done, the affection he now bore towards the young Englishman.

"Find Giles for me, my boy," said Jack, "and tell him to get me something to eat—something substantial—for I'm ravenous."

When the boy returned, Jack had dressed.

"Find him? That's right. So you got here safely yesterday! You've not been up to any mischief, I hope?"

"No, Señor," replied Pepito gravely. "But I can, now that you are here."

Jack smiled, and then sprang up as Giles entered with a dish that filled the room with a very savoury odour.

"What's this?" said Jack, sniffing. "Roast hare, by all that's glorious! Giles, you're a wonder."

"'Twas Pepito, sir," said Giles. "The young varmint went out before 'twas light this morning and snared the beast for your breakfast, sir. I allow he makes himself useful sometimes."

Pepito was grinning with pleasure, and Jack without ado devoted himself to his meal.

"By the way," he said presently, "have you seen anything of those two fellows I left with the wagon?"

A broad smile broke over Giles's ruddy face.

"They was brought in yesterday, sir, under guard, and locked up in the guard-room. They was mad, sir, both on 'em, but Corporal Wilkes the worst. He made a few remarks, sir—" and here Giles gave vent to his loud guffaw, and instantly straightened his face to its usual stolid impassivity.

"Are they still locked up?" asked Jack.

"No, sir. Captain Stovin ordered 'em to be released when they'd had about two hours of it."

"Go and fetch them."

In ten minutes Corporal Wilkes entered, followed by Bates, each man wearing a look of sullen discontent.

"Now, Wilkes, what have you got to say for yourself?" said Jack sternly.

"Say, sir? I ain't got nothing to say, nor I didn't get a chance o' saying nothing. It ain't common fairness, let alone justice, that it ain't, begging your pardon, sir. It ain't for the likes o' me to question what an orficer says, sir, to say nothing of an orficer like Bobby—beg pardon, like General Craufurd. But," continued the corporal, his eloquence increasing with his indignation, "but, Mr. Lumsden, sir, what I want to know is, what call the general 'ad to miscall me a straggler, to say nothing o' Bates, and send us in under guard of a bloomin' corp'r'il of the second battalion—why, we're the laughing-stock o' the regiment."

"There now," said Jack with due gravity, suspecting what must have occurred, "I suppose there was some little mistake. Tell me all about it."

Wilkes proceeded to explain that a few minutes after Jack left with the broken wheel a heavy shower of sleet had come on, and he and Bates had taken shelter beneath the wagon. From this point of vantage they had seen the passage of the greater part of the second battalion, which was whipping in all stragglers from the various other regiments that had gone by earlier in the day. In the rear of the battalion rode General Craufurd with Colonel Wade and other officers, and Craufurd's eagle eye had at once remarked the abandoned wagon. Riding up to it, he desrcied the two figures crouching underneath, and sternly demanded what they were doing there.

"I was beginning to explain, sir," said Wilkes, "but before I could crawl out into the open, 'Enough of that', says he. 'Come out of that, you skulkers!' Me a skulker! And without sayin' another word he marches us off to the bridge, where he hands us over to Corp'r'l MacWhirter, a feller I've the greatest dislike of. 'Here,' says the general, 'see these two stragglers safe into Benawenty, and hand 'em over to Colonel Beckwith with my compliments'. MacWhirter he sniffed, and it was hard work to keep my hands off him, sir, for blest if he didn't pass foolish and opperobious remarks all the way to Benawenty, just a grunt here and there, like as if we was pigs, and his two Riflemen like to bust 'emselves with laughing. Now, sir, what I—"

At this point Captain O'Hare came into the room. Jack, who had had some difficulty in keeping his countenance, said hurriedly:

"Well, well, it was very unfortunate, but I'll see that it is put right."

As Wilkes turned away, Jack heard him mutter under his breath:

"Yes, and I'll put it right with MacWhirter."

CHAPTER XIII

Don Miguel's Man

Fine Feathers—A Fight by the River—Lax Discipline—Scenes at Astorga—A Cry for Help—The One-eyed Man—At Bay—A Warm Corner—Wilkes to the Rescue—Miguel Explains—Righteous Indignation—Wilkes's Supper

Captain O'Hare's eyes were twinkling as he watched the aggrieved exit of the two soldiers, and when they had gone he joined in Jack's shout of laughter.

"Ah! 'tis all very well for you to laugh at Corporal Wilkes; but faith, my boy, we'll have to court-martial you for deserting his Majesty's stores, to say nothing of my best pair of galligaskins. Begorra, let's hope they won't fit the spalpeen of a Frenchman who gets them. The whole mess is rejuced to one suit."

Then, changing his tone, the captain proceeded to inform Jack of what had happened since his arrival at Benavente. The inhabitants of the town had received the British army with an attitude of sullen dislike and even animosity. Relying for their rations on what could be obtained during the march, the troops had come into the place tired and hungry, to find the doors barred and food withheld. The shops were all closed, the magistrates had taken flight, and although the British were prepared to pay for supplies, neither bread nor wine was to be had. The men were already embittered by the hardships of their long march, and disappointed of their hopes of meeting the French in fair fight, and it was small wonder that coldness where they might well have looked for warmth, and aversion where they might have claimed active friendship, provoked resentment and reprisal. They were received as enemies; they could scarcely be expected to act as friends.

"Indade, the whole army's going to the dogs," said Captain O'Hare dejectedly; "all except the Gyards and the Reserve. Things are as bad as they can be, and there's worse to come. The main body's looting, and behaving worse than Pagans and Turks. They should be at Astorga by now, and we're to follow them in an hour or so. The company's falling in, and you'd better hurry up, or you run a risk of finding an escort like our friend Wilkes. And bedad," he added, as the dull sound of firing was heard in the direction of the river, "there's the music again."

Jack had by this time finished his breakfast, and, hurrying out with the captain, he found the 95th preparing to move off.

"Hullo!" cried Smith, "you've turned up, then! What have you done with the wagon?"

"Where are my boots?" asked Pomeroy.

"And my best frilled shirt, the one with the ruffles?" continued Smith.

"And my new highlows, the ones with the silver buckles?" added Pomeroy.

"They are coming after us," returned Jack. "If you care to wait they'll probably be here in half an hour—and Colbert's dragoons inside them."

As the regiment moved off, the firing behind them became more and more distinct and continuous. Bodies of mounted troops could be seen on the horizon; a smart cavalry action was apparently being fought, and the men of the 95th were again jealous of what they considered the better luck of the cavalry. But Jack's company, marching away at the quick step, was soon beyond sight of the combatants, though for an hour afterwards the boom of guns could be plainly heard.

Lord Paget was fighting one of those brilliant little rear-guard actions that stamped him in an age of great soldiers as one of the finest cavalry leaders of his time. At Benavente he had to deal, not with the ruck of Napoleon's cavalry, who, be it said to their credit, were never wanting in dash, but with the flower of the emperor's troops, the famous Cavalry of the Guard, led in person by Lefebvre-Desnouettes, his favourite general, who had been until now the spoiled child of fortune. When Lefebvre-Desnouettes discovered that the bridge across the Esla was broken beyond possibility of immediate repair, he rode fuming up and down the river, vainly seeking a practicable ford for the large body of infantry that had now gathered on the banks. On the farther side was a thin chain of British vedettes; beyond these, as far as the eye could reach across the great plain, there was no sign of Sir John Moore's army except a few belated camp-followers hurrying into Benavente. The French general, chafing with impatience, at last flung prudence to the winds and decided to follow up the pursuit with his cavalry alone, leaving the infantry to follow as soon as the bridge could be patched up. Fording the swollen river with 600 chasseurs of the Guard at a spot some distance above the ruined arches, he drove back the vedettes in his front and pushed rapidly across the plain in the direction of Benavente. Meanwhile the news of the crossing had brought the British vedettes at full gallop from their posts opposite the fords below and above the bridge; and when a few score had collected they made a plucky charge at the head of the French column, and in spite of their small numbers threw it into disorder. The discomfited chasseurs, supported by the succeeding squadrons, rallied and pursued the audacious little band; but they were again broken by a second charge, led in person by General Stewart, who had come up with a few reinforcements. The British troopers broke clean through the first line, and although they narrowly escaped being cut off by the main body, they hewed their way out again and retired in good order towards Benavente. They were only two hundred, the French were three times their number, and Lefebvre-Desnouettes, irritated by these checks, incautiously pressed them into the outskirts of the town. There Lord Paget, with the 10th Hussars, lay grimly in waiting. Forming up his men under cover of some buildings, he held them, straining at the leash, until the chasseurs were well within striking distance, then he let them loose, and the hussars, instantly joined by Stewart's pickets, rode at the enemy at a headlong, irresistible gallop. The leading squadrons of chasseurs went down like ninepins; the rest wheeled about, galloped back to the Esla, and did not draw rein until they were safe on the French side of the stream. Lefebvre-Desnouettes himself rode his horse at the river, but the animal had received a wound and refused to face the water. While still floundering at the brink, it was seized by an enterprising British trooper; the general was captured with seventy of his men, and Napoleon was left chafing at the first decisive check he had personally met with in Spain.

Meanwhile there was growing dissatisfaction in the ranks of the British infantry, and even among the officers. It had been stated, with some show of authority, that Moore intended to make a stand at Astorga, but no one believed it; a similar statement had been made so many times before, always to be falsified. Some of the more clear-headed among the rank and file endeavoured to prove to their discontented comrades that the retreat was inevitable;

Moore was no coward, and only the knowledge that he was overwhelmingly outmatched would have induced him to retire without giving battle. He had nothing personally to gain by running away; his military reputation was at stake, and he had further the duty of showing that Britain honourably stood by her pledges to Spain. It was a bitter disappointment to him, and nothing but a strong sense of responsibility had actuated his decision to march to the sea.

Unhappily a retreating army is always prone to get out of hand. Already marauding had taken place at various stages of the march, and the sullen incivility of the Spaniards provoked ill-tempered words and deeds on the part of the British. The road was encumbered with stragglers, as well as with numbers of women and children, who suffered from the inevitable hardships of a march through wild country in mid-winter. The confusion and disorder were only increased when the troops reached Astorga. There they met the ragged Spanish regiments of the Marquis of La Romana, who, in spite of Moore's repeated requests that he would retreat northwards into the Asturias, had marched westward into Galicia, giving as his reason that the only available pass into the former province was blocked with snow. In retreating before Soult his rear-guard had been cut to pieces by Franceschi's dragoons at the bridge of Mansilla, where there had been every opportunity of making a stubborn resistance. They arrived at Astorga in a state of panic, more like a crowd of peasants driven from their homes than a regular army. They were half-naked, and half-starved; many were suffering from a malignant fever, and they were maddened by cold, disease, and want. Learning that large supplies of food lay at Astorga, as well as stores of shoes, blankets, and muskets, they prowled through the town, seizing whatever they could lay hands on, setting an example which too many of the British soldiers showed themselves ready to follow.

When, on the evening of December 30th, Jack's company marched into Astorga, they found disorder reigning everywhere within its ancient turreted walls. Several houses were on fire, men were plundering on every side, all kinds of objects were littering the streets. Three divisions of Moore's army had already left the town on the way to Villafranca, and the only British troops now quartered there were the Reserve under General Paget and the two light brigades. These had kept better discipline than most of the regiments which had preceded them, and the signs of havoc provoked a great burst of indignation from the rear companies of the 95th as they swung round into the great square. Corporal Wilkes was especially voluble in denunciation of the bad discipline among the Spaniards. He was expressing himself warmly to Bates as they kept step together, when the sight of a tall Spanish soldier in somewhat better trim than the tatterdemalion rank and file of La Romana's forces added fuel to his wrath. The men were standing near the lighted door of the Town Hall, where Jack's company was to be quartered, and the Spaniard looked with a cynical smile at the Riflemen defiling past. He had a villainous countenance, its forbidding aspect enhanced by the fact that he had only one eye, which was gazing at the men with a fixed, stony, unwinking stare.

"What's that one-eyed villain of a Don doing there?" growled Wilkes, staring into the solitary eye as he passed.
"Why ain't he keeping his men in order, instead of loafing about like a London whitewasher out o' work?"

Jack heard the remark, and turned to look at the one-eyed man; but a scuffle between a man of the 28th and a squalid Spaniard drew off his attention for a moment, and when the quarrel was ended by the Englishman's fist, the man had disappeared.

After the men had been safely got to quarters Jack was sitting in the room he was to share with Pomeroy and Shirley when he was summoned to the Casa Morena. He there found Colonel Beckwith vigorously haranguing a Spanish officer, and was called on to act as interpreter. Beckwith was insisting in no measured terms that the officer should make some attempt to check the disorder among his men, and Jack did his best to soften the colonel's language without depriving it of its authority. At the close of the interview, about eight o'clock at night, he was returning to his quarters when he fancied he heard a cry proceeding from a large house that stood alone, and by its size seemed to belong to a person of some importance. He stopped and listened; the cry was not repeated; he was passing on, when out of the darkness a little boy ran up, seized his hand, and began to pull him towards the house.

"Señor! Señor!" he cried in a terrified wail, "my father—he is being murdered. He is an old man; he cannot fight. Come, Señor, and save him!"

Jack had broken from the boy's clutch and was already making with long strides to the front door. It was firmly barred and unyielding to his pressure.

"Not that way, not that way, Señor!" cried the boy, and seizing Jack's hand again, he led him to the back, through a narrow enclosure, to a flight of stone steps, at the head of which was a French window with one of its halves open inwards, and a dim light shining through. Running with the boy up the steps, Jack found himself in what was evidently the sala of the house. It was in darkness, but a door at the far end giving on to a corridor was open, and a dim light filtered into the room from a lamp, consisting of a shallow bowl in which a wick was floating on oil. Treading very warily, the two crossed the room to the corridor beyond; at the end of the passage a brighter light was streaming from a half-open door, and Jack, alert to catch the slightest sound, heard a rasping voice say in Spanish:

"Now, you old dotard, I will give you one minute by yonder clock. After that the knife, and I will search for myself."

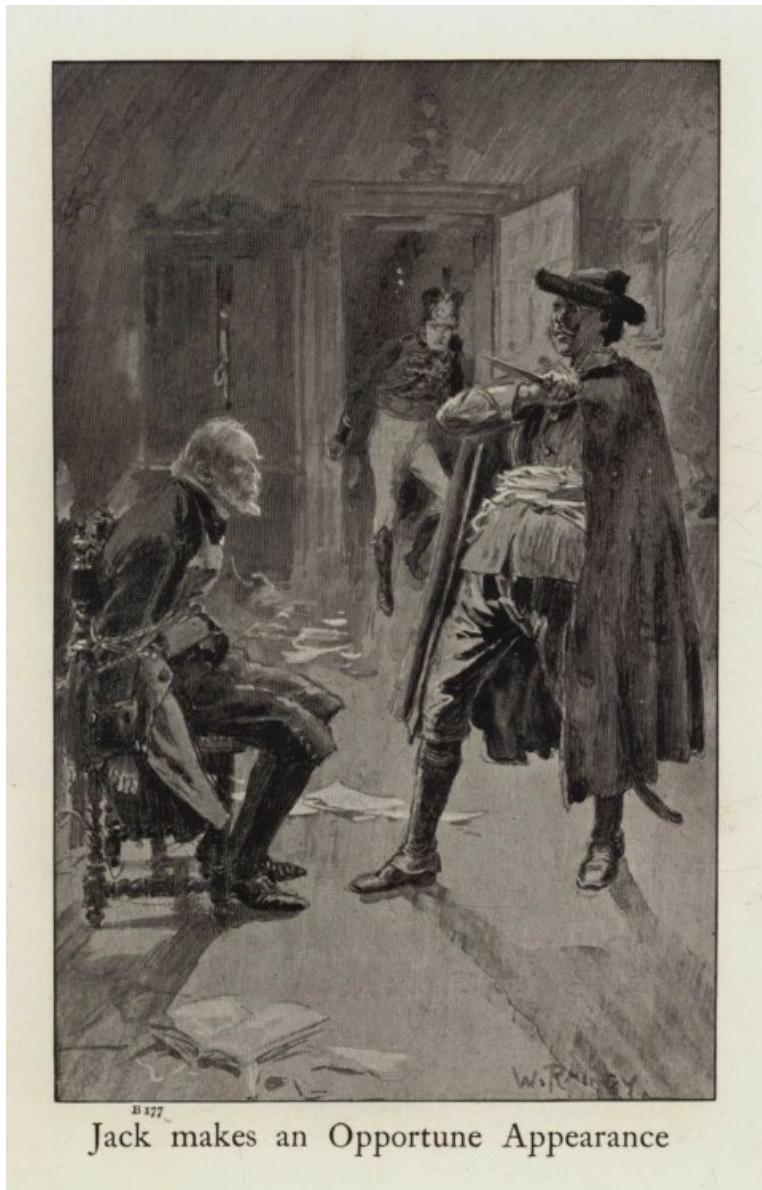
Pushing the boy behind him, and signing to him to be quiet, Jack crept cautiously to the door and peeped into the room. Tied to a chair, with a rope cut from the bell-pull, was an old gentleman, very frail and thin, with sparse gray hair and beard. On the table before him a long knife, driven into the wood, rocked to and fro with diminishing oscillation; an angular man in Spanish uniform, his back half-turned to the door, occupied a chair within a couple of feet of the victim, and, leaning forward, elbows upon his knees, gazed with a vengeful smile into the old man's face. At the side of the room a large escritoire lay open, its contents thrown pell-mell upon the floor.

The old Spaniard, bound and helpless as he was, looked steadily with unflinching gaze into the face of his enemy.

"Do you think for a moment, wretch that you are," he said with quiet scorn, his tone strangely contrasting with the fury of the other, "do you think for a moment that you will cajole me with empty promises, or scare me with insolent threats? I expect no mercy from you—you were always a villain,—but I can at least baulk your greed. I am an old man, do your worst; your knife has no terrors for me."

The man, springing to his feet, snatched the knife from the table, and lifted his hand to strike; but Jack had already sprung into the room. The sound of Jack's step arrested the villain's movement; he half-turned to meet the intruder, disclosing as he did so the distorted features of a man with one eye. Even at that tense moment Jack connected him vaguely in thought with some previous experience, but there was no pause in his action. Before the man had time to wheel completely round, Jack struck him a blow on the chin that felled him to the floor, where he lay stunned and motionless. The boy threw himself on the fallen man with a cry of triumph, snatched up the knife that had dropped from his grasp, and with two quick strokes severed the cords that bound the old man. Then in a paroxysm of fury he turned to drive the weapon into the would-be assassin's heart. Jack stayed his hand, and at the same moment heard the sound of trampling feet, and a familiar voice exclaiming:

"This way, my men; we shall find the English bandit here."



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Jack makes an Opportune Appearance

Jack makes an Opportune Appearance

"Miguel!" said Jack under his breath, remembering in a flash the one-eyed servant he had seen following him in Salamanca. Turning quickly to the old gentleman, who now stood in seeming uncertainty what the new interruption might portend, he pointed to the prostrate man and said:

"It is this man's master."

Then, as there was obviously no time to parley, he rushed to the door and slammed it, intending to turn the key. The key was not in the lock. Pressing his knee against the door, Jack looked round and saw the missing key on the table. He called to the boy to bring it, but he was too late. The door was pressed inwards in spite of Jack's exertions; there was greater force on the other side. Feeling it opening inch by inch Jack turned on his shoulder, set his back against the oak, and drew his sword, preparing to give way suddenly and attack the enemy before they could recover

from their sudden inrush. But the boy, with a quick wit that did him credit, had rushed into the corner of the room, where there was a space of some two feet between the jamb and the wall, and there, crouching on the floor, he jabbed with the knife through the slowly widening aperture at the legs of the nearest figure. There was a yell of pain; the pressure on the door instantly relaxed; and Jack, putting forth all his strength, had almost succeeded in closing it when a musket was thrust into the gap. Jack's muscles were strained to the utmost. From the clamour in the corridor he knew that the enemy were preparing for a concerted rush. He called to the old Spaniard to push the table against the door, but before that could be done he felt overpowering pressure on the other side. Hastily forming his resolution, he sprang back suddenly; the door flew open, and three of La Romana's ragged ruffians fell sprawling upon the floor. Others came behind, and one of them, with his heavy flintlock, struck out of Jack's hand the sword he had drawn, dropping his weapon immediately with a yell as he felt the boy's knife in his leg. Jack saw that the old Spaniard had taken down one of two rapiers that hung on the wall beneath the portrait of an ancient caballero. Exerting all his strength, he dragged the table round so that it stood obliquely across the room, cutting off a triangular corner. Then he seized the second rapier, and stood side by side with the Spaniard, behind the table, facing their foes just as several of them were preparing to leap across it.

Among them Jack now recognized Miguel Priego, his face lit up with savage excitement, flourishing his sword and goading on his desperadoes. The boy had crawled beneath the table, prepared to use his terrible knife on all who came within reach. The one-eyed man had recovered from the blow dealt him by Jack, and had snatched a musket from one of his fellows. Fortunately none of the firearms were loaded, and the Spaniards, mad with rage, grudged the delay necessary to charge their cumbersome weapons.

"I think, Miguel, you had better call off your followers," said Jack, in a momentary lull that preceded the rush.

There was no reply; in point of fact Jack scarcely expected one. Miguel was at the moment out of sight behind a burly mountaineer, and Jack felt rather by instinct than by any reasoned process of thought that the Spaniard would scarcely let slip this opportunity of taking him at a disadvantage. Behind the table Jack measured the forces opposed to him. Six men were gathering themselves for the onslaught—lean, half-starved wretches for the most part, but ugly customers in the bulk. A raw-boned mountaineer, armed with a long musket and a rusty bayonet, was the most formidable among the gang, and Jack marked him out for special attention when the critical moment came. It was not long in coming. At the cry from Miguel: "Down with the English dog!" the six made a simultaneous rush, and if they had not impeded one another's movements they must have made short work of the little garrison. The lanky Asturian lunged viciously at Jack, who dodged the point by a hair's-breadth, narrowly escaping, as he did so, the clubbed musket of another Spaniard on the right. Before the mountaineer could recover, Jack's long rapier, stretching far across the table, had ploughed a gash in his arm from wrist to elbow, and at the same moment the second assailant, howling with pain, had dropped his musket and fallen to the ground a victim to the terrible knife of the little Spaniard, who had been forgotten by the enemy in the excitement of the fight.

The old man, however, had been less successful; one of his opponents had felt the point of his rapier, but, attacked simultaneously by another, his weapon had been dashed from his grasp, and he now stood defenceless against the foe, who were beginning to push the table into the corner of the room. Miguel, having left the brunt of the action to his allies, now advanced resolutely to the attack; and Jack's rapier had crossed with the long sword carried by his opponent, when through the open door sounded the heavy tramp of feet; and a loud voice was heard shouting: "What I want to know—" The sentence was never completed, for Corporal Wilkes sprang into the room, cleaving a way through the maddened Spaniards with his fist. Before they realized the meaning of this unlooked-for interruption, the corporal flung himself on Miguel, caught him by the collar, and hurled him upon two of his men, who fell under him with a resounding thud. Immediately behind Wilkes, Bates and two other men of the 95th had dashed in, and the rear of the unexpected reinforcement was brought up by Pepito, who at once engaged in a tussle

with the Spanish boy, now upon his feet, for the possession of the knife.

Wilkes stood with clenched fists over Miguel, while his companions of the 95th threw themselves on the other Spaniards and speedily disarmed them.

"You hound of a Don!" cried Wilkes, preparing to knock Miguel down if he should attempt to rise; "what I want to—"

"Wilkes, let him get up," said Jack quietly, coming round the table, the rapier still in his hand.

Miguel rose stiffly, his face expressing the purest amazement.

"Verdaderamente!" he exclaimed. "If it is not my dear friend Jack! There is some strange mistake. And I did not recognize you in your uniform, Jackino! Last time I saw you, you remember, you were dressed as one of ourselves. Truly, dress makes a world of difference, amigo mio."

His tone had all the oily suavity that Jack knew so well, and so cordially detested. Wilkes was looking from one to the other with concentrated interrogation in his eye, ready at a word from Jack to lay the Spaniard low again.

"Shut the door, Bates," said Jack, as he saw the one-eyed man slinking in that direction. "That's your man, I think?" he added, addressing Miguel.

"My servant, who accompanied me from Saragossa," replied Miguel. "And I am at a loss to understand—"

"So am I," interrupted Jack. "I am at a loss to understand why a man in your position should countenance violence, robbery, almost actual murder."

"Robbery! Murder! Really, my dear friend, these are strange words to me. I was in the street, and one of these men—soldiers in the army of the Marquis of La Romana—told me that an English ruffian—it was a mistake, yes, but he said an English ruffian—had forced himself into this house: for what purpose? It could only be, as you say, to rob or murder. You know what sad excesses your troops, usually so excellently disciplined, have been guilty of; and having but a short time ago heard that your colonel—Beckwith, is that his name?—had sternly ordered his men to refrain from acts of pillage, why, my dear friend, was it not natural for me to come in and do what little I could to prevent such admirable orders from being disobeyed? That explains—"

"Oh!" said Jack. "And your man—was that his errand too?"

"Perez? Oh no! He obtained my permission to visit his old master, the faithful fellow. It was inconvenient, for we should now be on the road; but could I—would you?—hesitate in such a case? I was touched by the poor fellow's devotion."

Perez' solitary eye gleamed with a baleful light singularly out of keeping with the sentimental character thrust upon him by his master. He wriggled venomously in Bates's grasp. The burly Rifleman checked his contortions by impressing his knuckles into the nape of his neck.

Jack turned to the old man, who had watched the scene in dignified silence.

"I think, Señor, you can throw some light on this man's devotion."

The Spaniard, in a few quiet words, told Jack that the man had, in fact, been his servant, but had been dismissed two years before for attempted robbery. He had suddenly made his appearance that evening, taken his old master unawares, and when he had bound him had broken open the bureau containing, as he supposed, the valuables he coveted, and, failing to find them, had demanded the secret of their hiding-place under threat of assassination.

"I owe my life," he concluded, "the little that remains of it, to my son here, who providentially overheard from his bedroom above the threats of this wretch, and to you, Señor, whose chivalrous intervention came at a moment when I regarded my case as hopeless. I thank you!"

"This, Señor," said Miguel, turning to the old man, "is to me a most extraordinary, a most painful, discovery. The man was recommended to me by Señor Alvarez, my father's partner"—Miguel's fluency in his present predicament recalled to Jack's memory many of his youthful essays in mendacity. "It only shows, Señor, how sadly

one may be deceived by a specious exterior."

As he spoke he regarded his one-eyed follower with a look of mournful disappointment.

If Perez' exterior at this moment was any index to his quality, he was scarcely a man in whom the most credulous would have placed confidence. In Bates's iron grip his body was quiescent; but the malignant glitter of his single eye told of raging fires within.

"It will be my duty," continued Miguel with increasing sternness, "to bring this wretch to justice. Men, seize him, and see that he does not escape. He shall be dealt with by the marquis himself."

The Spanish soldiers advanced to carry out Miguel's order, but Bates merely tightened his grip and looked enquiringly at Jack for instructions. Jack could not but admire Miguel's astuteness. He was perfectly well aware that the man would be released as soon as he was out of reach; but while loth to let him escape scot-free, he saw how powerless he was in the face of Miguel's declaration. It was a matter for the Spanish authorities, in which, except as a witness, he himself had no concern; and it was nothing to the point that the Spanish authorities were hiding in cellars, lofts, and even, as he had heard, in pig-styes. He turned to the old man, and said:

"I fear, Señor, that, as things are, we have no choice but to return this man to the care of his present—master. Bates," he added in English, "let him go."

In apparent abstraction, Bates gave a farewell twist to the Spaniard's neck-band, shot him among the knot of tattered soldiery in the doorway, drew himself up, and saluted. With a ceremonious bow Miguel followed his men from the room, several of them carrying with them painful mementoos of the affray. Wilkes shadowed them to the end of the corridor. Meanwhile the venerable Spaniard had taken a decanter and several glasses from a press in the corner of the room.

"You will permit me, Señor," he said to Jack, "my servant having deserted me, to offer you and your worthy soldiers a little refreshment. It is a poor expression of my gratitude to you and them, but it comes, believe me, from a full heart."

The men willingly tossed off their bumpers, and soon afterwards escorted Jack to his quarters. He there learnt from them that while at supper they had been summoned by Pepito, who announced in broken English, eked out by gestures, that el Señor Lumsden was in urgent need of help. He had apparently been shadowing Jack as usual, had seen him enter the house, and a moment after heard Miguel hounding on his willing dupes to kill the English bandit.

"The little rascal is always putting me in his debt," said Jack to himself as the squad saluted and marched off. "He is quite a guardian angel."

No one but Jack had cause to regard Pepito in this gracious light.

"What I want to know," asked Corporal Wilkes wrathfully, when he returned to his billet"—what I want to know is, what's become of my supper?"

Only Pepito knew.

CHAPTER XIV

An Incident at Cacabellos

There was no rest for Jack or his friends that night. On returning to his quarters he found that Colonel Beckwith had called the officers of the regiment together, and was already addressing them with more than usual seriousness. He told them that their hope of making a stand at Astorga was fated to be disappointed. Sir John Moore had decided to continue the retreat with all speed, either towards Vigo or towards Corunna.

"It is useless to pretend I am pleased," said the colonel. "None of us are that. Some of the youngsters among us may think that things would be ordered differently if they were in command. That's not our business. The general is satisfied that his reasons are good, and all we have to do is to obey orders. And that brings me to the point. A retreating army is always apt to get out of hand, and a British army perhaps more than any other. Take any man in the regiment and he'll ask you why he should retreat, and what the dickens is the good of running away from a Frenchman. We've seen already what disorder and ruffianliness have disgraced some of the regiments. And I tell you, gentlemen, I won't have that in the 95th. We shall from this time form a part of the actual rear-guard. The second battalion leaves, with other regiments, direct for Vigo to cover our left flank. The safety of the whole army will therefore depend much on us. The French won't let us off lightly. We shall often be in touch with them, and if there's any want of steadiness they'll get through us, and then it's all up. I ask you then, gentlemen, every one of you, to keep a tight hand on the men. There must be no slackness, no relaxation of discipline. The honour of the regiment is in your keeping, and, by heaven! I'll never lift my head again if the 95th fails me."

The colonel's vehement words sent a thrill through the group, and Jack Lumsden was not the only officer among them who vowed inwardly not to disappoint "old Sidney". Beckwith went on to prescribe their immediate duties. He alluded to the confusion and disorder in which they had found the town, in great part due to the unexpected presence of La Romana's ragged regiments. The place had been crammed with stores, consisting of shoes, blankets, tools, muskets, ammunition, from which many of the preceding regiments had been partially re-equipped. But in the haste and muddle the distribution had been mismanaged. Many of the stores had been left behind, and the town was full of British and Spanish stragglers eager to plunder where they could. The colonel instructed his officers to see that pillaging was checked as much as possible. What stores could not be removed were to be destroyed.

During the night, therefore, Jack and his chums were busy in carrying out the colonel's orders. It was found next day that there were not sufficient draught animals to serve for the transport of all the remaining stores, and the 95th were employed for many hours in burning and blowing up valuable stuff to prevent it from falling into the hands of the French.

The regiments of the Reserve were to march in the evening for Cambarros, a village some nine miles in the direction of Villafranca. Before they started, Captain O'Hare paraded his company and repeated to them the substance of what Colonel Beckwith had said to the officers.

"I've heard a deal of grumbling at times," he said. "You don't want to retreat. No more do I, but our chance'll come, please the pigs; and then I know who'll be at the front—not the grumbler and skulkers, but the men who know how to obey. Now, my boys, I trust ye. I don't want the general to send for me by and by and say: 'O'Hare, ye've the most blackguardly company in the whole army.' We'll do better than the best, and sure I'll be proud of ye. And if there should be a man among ye with a deal o' power over the company—a good soldier let us say, but with a long tongue and a way of speaking that—well, a way of speaking"—the captain studiously kept his eyes from Corporal Wilkes: "if there's such a man, to him I'd say, with all my solemn seriousness: Ye've a deal of persuasion; then use it for the glory o' the regiment; and bedad, I believe he'd know what I meant."

Corporal Wilkes, looking straight in front of him, had turned a brick-red, and was unusually silent as the company marched off. To Sergeant Jones, the little Welshman, toddling along by his side, he remarked presently:

"I hope you'll mind what Peter said, Sergeant. As for me, 'tis a good thing for the glory o' the regiment that the

second battalion's off another way, for all my good resolutions would be turned into sour milk by the long fiddle-face of Corp'r'l MacWhirter."

After their sleepless night, and hard work during the day, both officers and men were glad to fling themselves down on rough beds of hay and straw when they reached Cambarros at dusk. But they had hardly settled to rest when some dragoons came riding in with news that the enemy were advancing in force. The order was immediately given to get under arms, and the march was continued through the night.

The Reserve reached Bembibre, a dirty village of mud and slate, at daybreak on January 1st, expecting now at least to enjoy the rest so much desired. But again they were disappointed. On entering the village they were at once ordered to pile arms and clear the place. It presented the appearance of a town that had recently been stormed and put to the sack. It happened to be a dépôt for the wine produced in the neighbouring vineyards, and large quantities were stored in the vaults and cellars of the houses. The inhabitants had shown themselves unfriendly to the regiments of the main body of Moore's army, and had provided food and drink for them only with the greatest reluctance. The result was that the men of the least-disciplined regiments broke all bounds, and set furiously to work to get for themselves what the Spaniards had denied them. Doors were wrenched off, windows smashed, property of all kinds destroyed; and the unfortunate discovery of so large a stock of wine had the worst consequences. Those were the days when hard drinking was the rule in all classes of society. It was little to be expected, then, that rough soldiers, suffering the hardships of exhausting marches on short rations, and feeling bitter shame and humiliation at having to retreat continually before a despised enemy, should prove able to withstand the temptation to excess. Ready to fight like bull-dogs if the call came, they lost all sense of responsibility at the sight of means to enjoyment, and set their officers at defiance.

The Reserve spent that day and part of the next in chasing the stragglers from the houses and driving them along the streets towards the mountains; but the task had been only partly accomplished when cavalry pickets came in and reported that French dragoons were pushing rapidly down the Manzanal pass in their rear.

"We must leave the ruffians to their fate," cried General Paget furiously, ordering the Reserve to march out towards Cacabellos. Not until late in the day did the 95th learn from the last of the hussar pickets what had happened when they left Bembibre. Lahoussaye's dragoons had come galloping into the village, riding through the groups of stragglers who flocked staggering along the road when they heard the noise of the pursuing horse, and slashing at them as a schoolboy does at thistles. The French made no distinction of age or sex. They hewed their way indiscriminately through drunken redcoats, women, and children. Even mothers who held up their babies, pleading for mercy on them, were struck down as ruthlessly as soldiers with arms in their hands. Few escaped. Those who did bore terrible signs, in sabre-cuts on head and shoulders, of the revenge the French horse had wreaked for their defeat at Benavente.

The road from Bembibre led over the crests of the Galician hills, with ravines and gorges and precipitous crags on both sides. Then it made a rapid and crooked descent, ending in a valley through which dashed a thundering river, white with foam, bearing huge stones and logs along with it in its tempestuous rush from the Asturian mountains to the ocean. Here the hill-slopes were covered with gaunt trees, which, though now bare of foliage, threw a mysterious gloom over the narrow road. Marching rapidly down this road against a beating storm of sleet, and whipping up innumerable stragglers on the way, the 95th at length arrived at Cacabellos.

Here, just as they halted, Sir John Moore met them, having ridden back with his staff the five or six miles from Villafranca, where the main body had bivouacked. The regiments of the Reserve were at once formed up in columns in the fields by the roadside. Sir John, his fine face lined with care and sorrow, took up a position in their midst, and then, in his clear penetrating voice, amid a silence broken only by the distant thunder of the torrent, he spoke in stern biting phrases of the disorder and want of discipline he had lately witnessed. With a pungent irony that made many

ears tingle, the commander-in-chief concluded his address thus:

"And if the enemy are now in possession of Bembibre, as I believe they are, they have got a rare prize! They have taken or cut to pieces many hundreds of drunken British cowards—for none but unprincipled cowards would get drunk in presence, nay in the very sight, of the enemies of their country; and sooner than survive the disgrace of such infamous misconduct, I hope that the first cannon-ball fired by the enemy may take me in the head."

After a few words, addressed specially to the 28th, which had done glorious service with him in Egypt, Sir John turned rein and rode back to Villafranca. His words made a deep impression on both officers and men. Previous appeals had not been in vain. The reserve regiments had kept much better discipline and committed fewer excesses than the main body, and the general's stern speech deepened the resolve of all good soldiers to abstain from disorder, and merit Sir John's approbation.

Alas! all were not animated by the same spirit. General Paget bade the men encamp some distance away from the town, and gave orders that no one was to enter the streets unless accompanied by a non-commissioned officer, who was to be held responsible for the orderly return of those committed to his charge. But no sooner had darkness fallen over the camp than many of the soldiers, forgetting the reproof of Sir John Moore, forgetting the subsequent appeals of the company officers, escaped from their lines, and, entering the town, resumed the old work of plundering. During the night many were arrested by the patrols, and two men were seized in the act of committing a serious crime, of which few had yet been guilty. They were maltreating and robbing a poor old Spaniard, who, paralysed with fright, was piteously beseeching them to take all that he had, but to do him no harm.

"This means a drumhead court-martial!" said Captain O'Hare when the matter was reported. "Keep the men in irons; Lumsden, take a note to the general from me."

Jack had delivered his note, and was returning to his quarters, when, as he passed along a broad road shadowed by trees on one side and a high wall on the other, he felt that someone was dogging him. He had heard no pursuing footsteps; he was at a loss to account for his strange uneasiness; but, obeying an impulse of which he was only half-conscious, he turned suddenly round, moving as he did so a little towards the wall on his right. At the same moment there was a report and a flash. A bullet whizzed past him; he could feel the rush of air on his cheek, there was a dull thud as the missile flattened itself on the stone wall. Springing forward in the direction of the report, he could just discern in the murk a tall figure scuttling for cover among the trees.

The man had a dozen yards' start, but Jack, always a good sprinter, had reduced the gap by half when his quarry disappeared into the trees. It was a narrow belt of chestnuts about three or four deep, and, following the sound of the footsteps in front, Jack dashed through, heedless of obstacles. A moment's scramble among roots and brambles brought him to the far side; his assailant had turned sharp to the right and was scampering towards a high wall running parallel with the belt on the opposite side of the road. With a fine spurt Jack reduced the gap to an arm's-length; his outstretched hand was within a few inches of the man's collar, when, to his utter amazement, the pursued disappeared into the wall. Jack shot past an open door, and before he could check his progress there was a violent bang and the sound of falling bolts. Jack pushed against the door, then threw himself upon it with all his force; it did not even creak. The wall was too high to clamber over; it was too long to go round; he had no force to relinquish the thought of further pursuit.

"Some poor demented Spaniard who has lost his all, perhaps," he thought, and was about to resume his walk when he noticed a small triangle of cloth projecting between the door and the jamb. The would-be assassin's cloak had caught, and, but that the door was rather clumsily fitted, would have prevented its being closed. Without any definite motive, Jack drew his sword and cut off the strip, which he put into his pocket, where it lay for many days forgotten. He said nothing about the adventure to his fellow-officers, and it did not keep him awake for an instant when, at a late hour that night, he threw himself, worn out, upon his uncomfortable bed.

CHAPTER XV

The Great Retreat

Reprise—A Fight in prospect—Trapped—Napoleon leaves Spain—Salvage—The Tragedy of War—In Motley—A Breathing Space—The Slough of Despond—Motherless—Thalatta!—A Batman's Battle

The growing spirit of indiscipline and lawlessness among the Reserve determined General Paget to make a signal example of the culprits. Early on the following morning he marched all the five regiments under his command towards the crown of a low hill overhanging Cacabellos, in the direction of Bembibre. After sending pickets to the summit, to keep the enemy under observation, he ordered the whole division to form a hollow square, the men facing inwards. Some distance to the rear of each regiment, the officers sat in drumhead court-martial. The men caught in the act of plundering were brought before them, tried, and sentenced, and then taken into the square, where, lashed to the triangles, they received the punishment awarded.

During this scene the general sat stern and impassive on his horse. At one moment a cavalry vedette galloped up with news that the French were in sight. "Very well," replied the general, and the punishment went on. Soon another trooper appeared, to report that the enemy were rapidly advancing. "Very well," said the general, without movement or further word.

So many were the offenders that the work of flogging continued for several hours. At length came the turn of the two soldiers taken in the act of assaulting and robbing the Spaniard. They were summarily tried, and condemned to be hanged. At one corner of the square stood a tree with accessible branches. The unhappy men were conveyed thither, with halters round their necks. They were hoisted on the shoulders of two strong Riflemen, and the ropes were fastened to the lower boughs.

It was just twelve o'clock. One movement of the supporting men would leave the criminals dangling in the air. The whole division awaited in breathless stillness the dread signal for execution. General Paget looked grimly down from his horse upon the wretched men, and in his set face they saw no hope of mercy. At this tense moment a captain of dragoons galloped through a gap opened for him in one side of the square. Halting before the general, he excitedly reported that the pickets on the hill were being driven in.

"I am sorry for it, sir," said the general coldly; "and I should rather have expected the information from a trooper than from you. Go back to your fighting pickets, sir," he added sternly, "and animate your men to a full discharge of their duties."

The officer retired. General Paget was again silent. His lips twitched, his eyes flamed. Then suddenly he burst out: "My God! is it not lamentable to think, that when I might be preparing my troops to receive the enemies of their country, I am preparing to hang two robbers! But if at this moment the French horse should penetrate that angle of the square, I will still execute these villains at this angle."

Again he was silent, and now shots were heard from the direction of the hill. The awed soldiers looked with consternation at their general's face. How long was this suspense to continue? A brief pause; then, swinging round in the saddle, Paget cried:

"If I spare the lives of these two men, will you promise to reform?"

A quiver passed along the ranks; the men held their breath; there came not a murmur from their parted lips.

"If I spare the lives of these men," again said the general, "will you give me your word of honour as soldiers

that you will reform?"

Still the same awful silence reigned—and the ominous sound of firing came nearer and nearer.

"Say 'yes' for God's sake!" whispered an officer to the man next him.

"Yes," murmured the man. His neighbours repeated the word in firmer tones, and then, as though a match had been laid to a train of powder, shouts of "Yes! yes!" rang along the faces of the square.

"Cut the ropes!" cried the general. The prisoners were instantly released, the triangles removed. The men cheered, and as the square was reduced, and formed into columns, the British pickets came slowly over the brow of the hill, steadily retreating before the advance-guard of the enemy. Paget's orders were rapidly given. The men started at the double towards the River Cua behind them. Three battalions crossed the bridge and took up their position behind a line of vineyards and stone walls parallel to the stream. A battery of horse-artillery, escorted by the 28th, was placed so as to command the road in its ascent towards Cacabellos from the bridge, and a squadron of the 15th Hussars, together with half the 95th Rifles, was left on the Bembibre side of the river to keep observation on the French.

"At last, my boys!" said Captain O'Hare. The men of his company were flushed with excitement. At last! The weary waiting of two months was at an end; the enemy were upon them; and now every man tingled with the joy of the fight to come, and greedily watched for the foe. The officers, looking along their ranks, could not but be struck with the wonderful change. Gone the blank despair, gone the sullen discontent, gone the hang-dog look; every man's face was lit up, every man's eyes flashed, every man stood erect with an air of high-hearted staunchness that had not been seen for many a day.

"There they are!" cried Pomeroy, whose keen eyes had descried Colbert's hussars advancing cautiously over the hill-top.

At this moment the bugle sounded for the last companies of the 95th to retire across the bridge and occupy the defensive positions allotted to them. The men marched with alacrity; it was certain there must be a fight now. Jack's was the rearmost company but one. It had only reached the middle of the bridge when the 15th Hussars came riding behind in hot haste, and the infantry were in imminent danger of being trampled down. The French were pressing on in such force that the hussars, wholly outnumbered, had been hurriedly withdrawn. Unsupported, the 95th were too weak to withstand a charge of cavalry; they must retire, and there was no time to lose.

"Hurry your stumps!" shouted a trooper as he passed Wilkes.

"No hurry!" said the corporal coolly, looking over his shoulder.

But behind them Colbert's hussars and chasseurs had swept down on to the bridge and ridden into the rear-most company. Some of the latter were cut down, half were captured, the rest succeeded in gaining the farther bank, and joined their comrades behind the vineyard walls.

"A close shave, mates!" said Wilkes. "But let 'em come on; we're ready."

General Colbert, a young and gallant officer, and reputed the handsomest man in the French army, had reached the bridge, and saw that the slopes on the other side were held by artillery and what appeared to be a small infantry escort. All the regiments but the 28th were by this time concealed from view. Burning to distinguish himself, and anxious to emulate the successful charge of Franceschi's dragoons at Mansilla a few days before, Colbert did not wait to reconnoitre the position and discover the actual strength of his enemy, but ranged his leading regiment four abreast, and led them straight for the bridge. Paget's guns played briskly on the French horse until, with the dip in the road, they sank below the line of fire; then the hidden infantry followed up with steady volleys from the walls and hedges. But the French were barely within range. The majority of the troopers escaped injury, cleared the bridge, and dashed up the hill, to carry, as they thought, all before them. Then the men of Paget's Reserve showed their mettle. The 28th were drawn across the road; the 52nd and the 95th were out of sight behind the vineyard

walls; and the French horsemen fell into the fatal trap. They suddenly found themselves in the midst of a hail of bullets from left, and right, and front. For a brief moment they struggled on; then Tom Plunket, leaping the wall and flinging himself flat on the slope, fired two marvellous shots which killed Colbert and his aide-de-camp in succession, whereupon the whole brigade wheeled about and fled madly back to the bridge, leaving the road strewed with their killed and wounded.

Cheer after cheer broke from the ranks of the exultant British infantry. Many of the men wished to leap the walls and pursue the baffled enemy, and had to be pulled back like hounds straining at the leash. Not a man had been lost since they left the bridge, and Paget's "Well done, Riflemen!" was like wine to their hearts.

But the fray was not yet over. Lahoussaye's dragoons swept down to the river, avoided the fatal bridge, forded the stream at several points, and tried to make their way over the rocky ground and through the vineyards. Finding this impossible, they dismounted and advanced on foot in skirmishing order, meeting with a spirited response from the 52nd and 95th, whom they first encountered. Then, as the afternoon wore on, Merle's light regiments of the line came into sight, and in column formation marched forward with loud cries to cross the bridge. For a few moments the 52nd were in danger of being swept upon and overwhelmed, but the six guns from the battery above opened a raking fire on the massed columns of French, and drove them back pell-mell to the other side. For an hour longer the French sharpshooters kept up a skirmish with the 95th and 52nd; then, as darkness fell, they recognized the hopelessness of their attack, gave up the contest, and hastened down the slopes to the eastern bank of the Cua.

"By George, this is a change of scene!" said Smith, standing with his fellow-subalterns around a hastily lit fire.
"Won't the Grampus be green when he hears what he has missed? I wonder what the fellow is doing?"

"Offering Napoleon long odds on something or other," said Jack with a laugh.

He had hardly spoken when the command came to form up in marching order. Sir John Moore had ridden back from Villafranca on hearing Paget's cannon, and was delighted to hear of his old friend's success. The French having suffered so decisive a check, he saw that the Reserve could be safely withdrawn under cover of night. The troops set out in better spirits than they had known for many a day, tramping cheerily over the snow-covered road with the comfortable assurance that at last they had won the general's approbation and proved themselves men. Their gaiety was doubled when they learnt from a wounded prisoner on the way that Napoleon was no longer behind them. He had withdrawn part of his army, leaving Soult and Ney to continue the pursuit. The thought that they had baffled the great emperor was delightful to the British troops: they never doubted that Napoleon had seen he was beaten by Johnny Moore, and had run away in sheer petulance and chagrin.

Four miles after leaving the scene of their brilliant rear-guard action, the Reserve arrived at the outskirts of Villafranca. Long before, they had noticed a red glow in the sky, which as they approached threw a rosy light upon the banks of dazzling driven snow. As they drew still nearer, the whole town seemed to be on fire. In every street great heaps of stores and provisions were burning, and so thoroughly was the work of destruction being carried out that guards had been placed even round the doomed boxes of biscuit and salt meat. But the temptation was irresistible to hungry soldiers; many men, as they passed, stuck their bayonets or pikes into junks of salt pork that were actually on fire, and bore them off in great glee. The men had been marching so steadily that the officers for the most part winked at this rescue from the flames, Jack remarking to Pomeroy that they'd all be precious glad to get a slice or two of the meat by the time the march was ended.

After leaving Villafranca they passed through the defile of Piedrafita into still wilder country. Climbing Monte Cebrero and emerging on to the barren plain of Lugo, the troops reached Herrerias shortly before daybreak. They were suffering intensely from fatigue and cold, but their halt for food and rest was of the shortest; as soon as day dawned they had to set off again. Now that daylight illumined the scene, they saw terrible signs of the misery and disorder into which the constant forced marching had thrown the main body. The road was strewn with wreckage of

all kinds—horses were lying dead, wagons lay shattered and abandoned; here was a rusty musket, there a broken sword; worn-out boots, horse-shoes, pots, articles of apparel, dotted the white and rugged causeway for miles. Worse than that, human bodies were mingled with these evidences of woe. At one spot Jack saw a group of redcoats stretched on the snow. Thinking they were stragglers asleep, he went to rouse them. They made no response to voice or touch; in their sleep they had been frozen to death.

As the day wore on, other incidents added to the general misery. The horses of Lord Paget's cavalry were constantly foundering through losing their shoes on the stony road. When this happened, the dragoons dismounted, and led their chargers till the poor beasts could go no farther. Then, by Lord Paget's orders, they were shot, so that they might not fall into the hands of the French. Many a rough trooper shed tears as he raised his pistol to the head of the faithful animal whose friend he was, and as the cracking of the pistols reverberated from the rocks, the sounds sent a painful shudder through the ranks of the trudging infantry.

Hundreds of stragglers from the leading divisions loitered along the road, causing an exasperating delay to the march of the disciplined Reserve. Among the laggards were not merely the marauders and ne'er-do-wells who had cast off all obedience, but veterans who were overcome by the rigours of the winter cold and the heavy marching on diminished rations. Every mile brought new horrors. Many sick and wounded were being conveyed in baggage-wagons, which, as the beasts failed, were abandoned, leaving their human occupants to perish in the snow. Women and children panted along beside their husbands and fathers, or rode in the few wagons that were left; but many dropped on the road and died of cold and fatigue. Looking back from a spur of the mountain chain, Jack saw the white road behind covered with dead and dying, a black spot here, a red spot there, showing where a woman or a soldier lay sleeping the last sleep. The groans of women, the wails of little children, were torture to the ears of the more sympathetic. Sometimes a soldier whose wife had given up the struggle, would fling himself down beside her, and, cursing the general whose object he so grievously misunderstood, remain to die.

Long after dark the Reserve reached Nogales, where they remained for the rest of the night. Before dawn, however, news came that the enemy were pursuing close upon them, and as they marched out, the rear companies became hotly engaged with French cavalry. The force hurried on, across a many-spanned bridge, up a zigzag road, skirmishing all the way, and halting at favourable points to tempt the enemy to attack. At one spot the mountain rose up a sheer wall on the right of the road, and on the left a deep precipice fell steeply to a valley. Here General Paget ordered the men to face round. The position could not be gained by a frontal assault, and the enemy, waiting for their heavy columns to come up, sent voltigeurs and some squadrons of cavalry into the valley to attempt a flank attack. But deep drifts of snow having hidden the inequalities in the ground, men and horses tumbled head over heels as they advanced, and, amid grim cheers from the British troops above, the French withdrew discomfited.

Fighting almost every yard of ground, the Reserve continued their rigorous march towards Lugo. Near Constantino they were amazed to meet a train of fifty bullock-carts crammed with stores and clothing for La Romana's army. Someone had blundered. The Spaniards were dispersed far and wide, and, but for its being intercepted by the British, the convoy must inevitably have fallen into the hands of the French. Astounded at this piece of Spanish folly, but rejoiced at the luck which had brought clothes at such an opportune moment, the soldiers soon stripped the wagons, many a man carrying off several pairs of trousers, and enough shoes to last a lifetime. Thus, when they were halted for action at the bridge of Constantino, they presented a remarkable appearance. Some wore gray trousers, some blue, some white; they were new shod, but with no regard for pairs. Corporal Wilkes, in his haste to replace his own worn-out boots, had put a black shoe on his right foot and a white one on his left. But there was no time to attend to niceties of costume, for the enemy kept up an incessant fire all the afternoon, and it was only at nightfall that the tired regiments could withdraw from the eastern end of the bridge and resume their march.

At dawn on January 6th they reached the main body, drawn up in battle order three miles in front of Lugo. The brigade of Guards were in their shirts and trousers, cooking their breakfast, having hung their tunics and belts to the branches of trees. As Captain O'Hare's company passed through them, one of the officers asked him if he had seen anything of the French.

"Bedad, now," exclaimed O'Hare, "you'd better take down your pipe-clayed belts from those trees, my dear, and put them on, and eat your murphies, if you've got any, as quick as you can, or by the powers those same French will finish 'em before they're cold."

The Guards laughed mockingly; they themselves had not fired a shot during the whole retreat. But as the 95th marched on they heard Paget's guns open on the advancing enemy behind, and, turning, they gave the incredulous Guards a derisive cheer.

No sooner had the Reserve reached Lugo than General Paget ordered the men to clean their weapons and polish their accoutrements as thoroughly as if they were going on parade in the barrack-ground at Colchester. Corporal Wilkes had scarcely uttered a murmur for three days, but this command was too much for him.

"Discipline be hanged!" he growled. "We ain't out for a picnic, nor goin' for a walk in the park, and what's polishin' paste to do with lickin' the French?—that's what I want to know."

But when he had recovered from the first feeling of hardship he recognized that the general's motive was to maintain the excellent discipline which had hitherto prevailed in his division; and Wilkes was too good a soldier not to do his best, even with the polishing leather.

For three days the army lay at Lugo—three days of incessant rain, which turned to slush the snow on the hills, and proved more trying to the spirits and tempers of the men than the frost had been. There were large stores at Lugo, and Sir John Moore judged it wise, after the exhausting forced marches of the past weeks, to allow the men a good spell of rest and plentiful supplies of fresh food. His position was very strong, and he hoped to tempt Soult to a fight, being assured that the troops would pull themselves together and give a good account of the enemy. But Soult was too wary to attack until he had overwhelming numbers at his disposal. His own force had suffered almost as severely as Moore's, and some of his divisions were still toiling on far in his rear. After a few attempts to feel the British position he made no further movement, and Moore waited and fretted in vain. He would not risk an offensive movement himself. He had no hospitals, few wagons, no reserve of food or ammunition; delay would weaken him and strengthen Soult. There was no alternative but to continue the retreat. The route to Vigo was definitively abandoned; orders were issued for the whole army to slip out of its lines on the night of the 8th, leaving the camp-fires burning so as to deceive the enemy, and to make for the direct road to Corunna, to which harbour the transports had already been commanded to sail round the coast. As soon as darkness fell all the foundered horses were shot, and such provisions, stores, and ammunition as were not required were destroyed. At half-past nine the first companies moved off, and by midnight the whole position was evacuated.

This was the beginning of the last stage of the army's demoralization. The frost of the previous week had quite broken up; a pelting storm of sleet and rain assailed the troops as they marched. In the inky darkness many of the guides missed their way amid the labyrinth of vineyards, orchards, and intersecting paths. Regiment after regiment went hopelessly astray, and when General Paget's reserve division reached the appointed spot on the Corunna road, it proved to be not in the rear but actually in advance of the main body. In these circumstances Paget moved his troops slowly, knowing that if the enemy overtook the less trustworthy regiments behind him the whole force would run the risk of being annihilated.

Through the black and rainy night, then, the men marched, halting at intervals. No man was allowed to leave the ranks; all were filled with apprehension of what might befall. On the morning of next day the belated divisions of the main body began to appear, and the Reserve thankfully resumed its proper position of rear-guard.

A terrible lack of discipline prevailed in all but a few of the regiments of the main body. Drenched by the incessant rain, the men sought shelter in cottages and outlying hovels whenever they were halted, with the result that when the order for marching was given vast numbers could not be found and had to be left behind. All day and all night the Reserve was harassed by the necessity of beating up these loiterers, until officers and men alike were almost overwhelmed with despair.

The experiences of that fearful 9th of January haunted the memories of Jack and his friends for years afterwards. From cheerless dawn to cheerless eve their eyes were shocked, their hearts were riven, by misery almost passing belief. For mile after mile of that bleak desolate country, a land of bluff and spur, torrent and ravine, men fell down upon the road, groaning, weeping, dying of weariness and disease aggravated by the bitterness of shame and despair. Mules and oxen lay as they fell, and in the wagons they had drawn, husbandless women and fatherless children wailed and moaned, a prey to hunger and exhaustion. Many a time Jack stuffed his fingers into his ears to keep out the intolerable sounds, until the very frequency of them made him almost callous, and he tramped along with haggard face and the same sense of dreary hopelessness. Smith was bent almost double with illness, Pomeroy and Shirley were so utterly weary and dispirited that they dragged their feet like old peasants racked with the ague of the fields. Even Pepito's vivacity had vanished; for the greater part of every day he rode on a gun-carriage, a silent image of depression.

As the 95th halted for a brief spell at a hamlet, Corporal Wilkes, his tanned, weather-beaten cheeks drawn and pinched, came up to his captain and said:

"Sir, Sergeant Jones's wife is dead."

"God help the poor fellow!" said Captain O'Hare; "what'll he do now with those two little children? How are they?"

"Well, sir, and cosy; that good woman gave her life for them. The sergeant's crazy, sir, and the wagon's come to grief that they were riding in. I thought, sir—"

"Well?"

"I wouldn't like to leave 'em behind, sir, and the sergeant's as weak as a rat and can hardly trail his pike. Couldn't I carry one, sir?"

"Sure an' you can. Take turns with another man. And the other one—the poor little colleen—"

"Pomeroy and I will look after her," said Jack. "It'll give us something to think about. We'll either carry her by turns or get some of our best men to do it."

And so it happened that for the rest of the retreat two little children, a boy and a girl, rode along in the rain on the shoulders of tender-hearted Riflemen, who talked to them and cheered them, so that the small things, all unconscious of their irreparable loss, prattled and laughed and felt exceedingly proud of their unusual altitude.

It is the morning of January 10th; the regiments are climbing the face of a range of hills, the last, they have been told, that intervene between them and the harbour of Corunna. The rain has ceased, the sky clears, and as the drenched and footsore warriors top the crest the sun bursts through a lingering cloud and throws its low beams from behind them.

"The sea! the sea!"

A great shout reverberates over the rugged hills. Below lies the little town of Betanzos, and beyond it the blue white-crested waters of the Atlantic. Corunna is only a few miles distant; the end of the long agony is in sight; and the sudden coming of weather springlike in its mildness after the severity of winter, fills all hearts with unutterable gladness. Colonel Beckwith roars at his men with a gruffness which nobody mistakes, and the fierce tension of General Paget's face is relaxed for the first time for many days.

"The finest retreat that was ever retreated," cries Captain O'Hare, who, though he looks only the shadow of his

former self, has suddenly recovered his usual cheerfulness. "But what's afoot down yonder, begorra?"

All eyes follow his gaze downhill. They light on a curious spectacle. In the distance the road is dark with French cavalry, their helmets and accoutrements flashing in the unwonted sunlight. Between them and the heights there marches a nondescript horde of stragglers, in all uniforms, from all regiments. But they are no longer straggling. Formed in a solid mass across the road, they are retiring by alternate companies, one company remaining to face the French, another marching along the road until they reach a position whence they can cover the first's subsequent retreat. Time after time Franceschi's horsemen charge; but every charge is beaten back by the rolling fire of the British, who fight and retire, retire and fight, with equal steadiness.

"Bedad, now, that's fine!" cries Captain O'Hare enthusiastically. "That's the greatness of the British Army! Three cheers for the fighting stragglers, my boys!"

Cheer upon cheer roll down towards the baulked and angry French. Stage by stage the army of stragglers retire up the slope until they are safe within the protecting lines of the Reserve. There the curious incident is explained. Dr. Dacres of the 28th had entrusted his instruments and baggage to the care of a batman, who had loaded his mule's panniers so heavily that the animal had fallen far behind the regiment. During the night the man slept in a cottage by the roadside, and, rising before dawn, was astounded to find that the French were almost within arm's-length. Shouting to the numerous stragglers in the vicinity, the batman, relishing a little brief authority, got them into some sort of order and began to fight a rear-guard action on his own account. A sergeant of the 43rd, seeing what was in the wind, hurried up and assumed command of the growing companies. It was by the skilful handling of this man, William Newman by name, that the impromptu rear-guard had held their own against the enemy's cavalry and been brought safely out of danger.

The army remained for a whole day at Betanzos. On the 11th they marched out towards Corunna, the Reserve being hotly engaged with the enemy's cavalry, and disputing the last ten miles yard by yard, under the approving eye of Sir John Moore himself. Two bridges were blown up. On the 13th Franceschi's dragoons discovered a ford, and Sir John, seeing that his main body was now secure, ordered the Reserve to fall back on Corunna. The regiments had hardly left their bivouac when shots from the French artillery came with a crash on to the roofs of the houses they had occupied near the bridge.

It was with this thundering adieu reverberating in their ears that the gallant 95th, along with their equally gallant comrades in arms, marched into their new quarters at Eiris, above Corunna, and attained, after much travail, their long-desired haven.

CHAPTER XVI

The Battle of Corunna

The Eve of Battle—Moore's Position—Wilkes is Himself Again—The First Shot—Advance 95th!—Hand to Hand—Wilkes in Action—A Message to Moore—The Commander-in-Chief—A Hero's Death—"Alone with his Glory"

The great retreat was ended. Sir John Moore's army, after its terrible forced marches over 250 miles of wild country in the worst of weather, had reached the sea. Five thousand men were left behind in sick, dead, wounded, stragglers, and prisoners—a small proportion considering the awful experiences they had come through. The honours of the retreat belonged to Sir Edward Paget and his regiments of the Reserve, who had fought dogged and successful rear-guard actions wherever opportunity offered, and had come through the whole campaign with little loss.

But the crowning achievement of the retreat was yet to be accomplished. Sir John's purpose had been to embark his army at Corunna on the transports he expected to find awaiting him there, and to sail at once for home. If this had been effected the history of the British army would have lacked one of its most glorious pages. When Moore arrived at Corunna, the expected vessels were still beating about under stress of weather in the Atlantic. The embarkation was perforce delayed. Meanwhile the French were straining every nerve to catch their enemy; it was more than likely that Soult would arrive in sufficient force to compel Moore to fight, and the long-wished-for opportunity of a great battle with the French would come at last.

Corunna was packed with military stores. In readiness for anything that might befall, Moore gave his men new muskets and rifles to replace the rusty weapons they had brought with them across the hills. He blew up a large amount of superfluous ammunition, and then sat down in security to await the arrival of the belated transports.

When, on the evening of the 13th, the Reserve fell back upon the main army at Corunna, there was still no sign of the ships. The British army was in position on a range of heights a short distance to the south of the city, and Paget's hard-wrought troops were ordered to occupy the little village of Oza, in the rear of the British line. There they formed, for the first time since the retreat began, the real Reserve of the army.

During the next two days Jack had more than one opportunity of visiting Corunna, where the Spaniards were making vigorous preparations for defence. For he was selected as usual by the general to arrange with the native contractors for the supply of provisions to the division. In his journeys to and fro he supplemented the company mess with small luxuries to which it had long been a stranger.

"I could almost forgive you your good luck, Jack," said Pomeroy at breakfast on the 15th. "But you should have been in the commissariat; you are wasted as a fighting-man. Eggs, butter, cream, and coffee—why, the 52nd across the way are as green as our coats with envy."

"If we stay here much longer we shall be back again on the old rations," replied Jack. "We shall soon eat up the native produce; only our own regulation hard-tack will be left."

"How are they getting on down at the harbour?" enquired Shirley.

"Slowly, as far as I could see. They don't seem to have done much since the transports arrived yesterday. It is ticklish work embarking the guns. But they expect to be ready to-morrow; and I hear that the Reserve are to be the first to embark."

"I don't like that," remarked Smith indignantly; "after we have borne the brunt of the retreat, they might at least have let us see it through to the end."

"Oh! as for that, we may take it as a compliment," said Jack with a smile. "It's a reward of good conduct. Our baggage is to be sent down to-night, we are to follow to-morrow at mid-day, and by the time the other divisions are ready we shall be snug and comfortable."

"It seems to me," said Pomeroy, pointing out of the window of the cura's house in which they were quartered, "that by this time to-morrow some of us will be a little too snug."

Jack and the rest, after a hasty glance at the heights to which Pomeroy was pointing, could not help feeling that the prospect of an unmolested embarkation was indeed becoming remote. They were now black with the masses of Soult's infantry.

Soult's progress during the previous two days had been very slow. He found the British strongly posted; and his experiences during the pursuit were calculated to inspire him with a wholesome caution when tackling, not as during the past fortnight an isolated rear-guard, but the whole of Moore's army in battle array. There were three ranges of hills, on any of which an army defending Corunna might be assured of a strong position. But two of these ranges were of too great an extent to be held by Moore's little force of 15,000 men, and the British general had been obliged to content himself with occupying the innermost of the three, extending over about a mile and a half of country to

the south of the city. It would have been an entirely admirable position had it not been commanded at the right extremity by a hill of considerably greater height, and within easy cannon-shot, while beyond this exposed flank was a stretch of open country extending to the gates of Corunna, and offering the enemy a good opportunity of turning the whole position. But Moore had no choice; he knew the risk he ran, and relied on the valour and steadiness of his men, who, now that their troubles were over, had become cheerful, confident, and well-behaved British soldiers. And with the instinct of a great general he ultimately turned his very weakness into a source of strength.

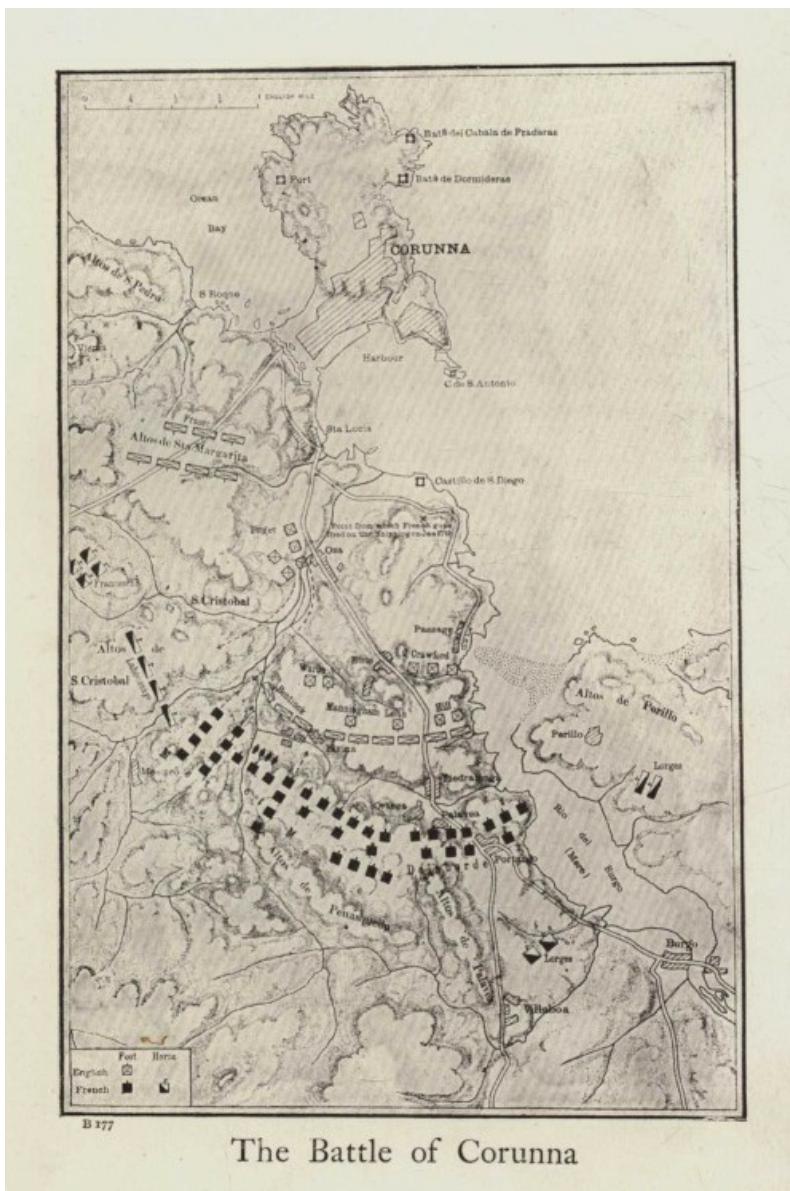
Throughout the day French troops continued to stream westward along the hills, and when night fell Soult had driven in the British outposts and was in full occupation of the whole line of heights. There were sounds of incessant activity during the night, and at dawn on the following morning the British found that the enemy had dragged guns up the steep rocky eminence dominating their right wing.

For several hours after daybreak, on that 16th of January, the two armies stood fronting one another. Moore had sent all his cavalry, and most of his guns, on board the transports, retaining only the infantry to fight Soult if he attempted to interfere with the embarkation. Hope's division, consisting of Hill's and Leith's brigades, occupied the extreme left of the British line, its flank resting on the river. Next came Baird's division, comprising Manningham's and Bentinck's brigades, the latter facing the little village of Elvina that lay at the bottom of the slope held by the British, but almost under the frowning heights occupied by the French batteries. On the Corunna side of the British position, and protected by the crest of the hills, Catlin Crawford's brigade lay in support of Hope's division, while Warde's two fine battalions of Guards were posted a little farther to the right, ready to reinforce Baird.

Almost out of sight of the French, in front of the village of Oza, lay Paget's Reserve, ready to be hurled upon any force attempting a turning movement against Baird. It was so well concealed by the formation of the ground that the French were not likely to discover its presence until their movement was well developed. Some distance in Paget's rear General Fraser's division occupied a low eminence outside Corunna, ready either to support Paget or to hold in check the large body of French horse that was found to be threatening the right rear of the British position.

Dinner-time came, and there was still no forward movement among the enemy. Moore concluded that Soult had made up his mind not to risk an attack, and consequently made preparations for completing his embarkation. The reserve division, with orders to embark as soon as the mid-day meal was over, grumbled while they ate their plentiful rations, even those from whom no murmur of complaint had been heard during the lean days of the retreat. Corporal Wilkes, whose courage and cheerfulness during the black fortnight had more than once earned him a word of praise from his officers, now made no attempt to disguise his feelings.

"I call it a shame," he remarked, gazing moodily up the valley to the dark masses on the heights, "that we should scuttle away without even the chance of a slap at 'em. Of course they'll come on as soon as they see our backs, and of course there'll be another fight. Of course there will. But where shall we be?—shut up with rats and cockroaches and shellbacks, and wishing we was at the bottom o' the sea. We've been doin' the worst of the work—there ain't no arguin' as to that—why couldn't they let us see it out?—that's what I want to know."



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At this moment the order is given to march; the men shoulder their rifles and sullenly tramp down the valley in the direction of the harbour. For weeks they have been straining all their energies to reach the coast; now, when a few minutes' march will place them beyond the reach of their enemies, and ensure complete immunity from the insufferable horrors that have dogged their footsteps during the retreat, their bearing is that of savage resentment.

Suddenly the dull boom of artillery is heard far up the valley; the division, as if at the word of command, comes to an instant halt, and the men's faces clear as if by magic. Surely this must mean a fight after all; they are to have their long-wished-for chance of coming to grips with the enemy. While they are thus waiting, anxious expectancy on every face, an aide-de-camp from the commander-in-chief dashes up at full speed.

"There is a general movement, sir," he says, addressing General Paget, "all along the enemy's line. An

engagement appears to be imminent. The commander-in-chief desires that you will return to the position you have just left."

Never a general's voice rang out more thrillingly than when Paget gave the order to countermarch. Never was an order received with more joy by officers and men. In a few minutes the Reserve had regained its old position around the little village of Oza. There the eager troops awaited, with what patience they might, the lurid moment that was to compensate them for all their past sufferings and humiliations. This moment was some time in coming, but it came at last.

The brunt of the attack fell, as Moore had expected, upon Baird's division. The guns from the opposite heights, completely outranging the British artillery, played upon Baird's front, and from the vantage-ground of the rocky eminence on his flank raked it from right to left. Under cover of this artillery fire a great French column, preceded by a swarm of skirmishers, swept down the hill, drove in the British pickets, cleared the village of Elvina of a company of the 50th, and advanced up the slope held by Bentinck's brigade. A portion of the column at the same time detached itself from the main body and moved round the right of the British position with the object of taking it in flank. Moore instantly seized the opportunity. Hurling the 42nd and 50th regiments of Bentinck's brigade at the French front attack, and driving home the charge with the help of Warde's two battalions of Guards, he swung round the 4th Regiment on Bentinck's right to meet the flanking column, and ordered up Paget from behind the hill to take this force in its turn in flank.

The hour has struck at last! With a cheer the 95th, who are in the van of the Reserve, dash forward in extended order across the valley, where they come into immediate contact with Lahoussaye's dragoons, who have been pushed forward on the French left to assist the turning movement.

The country, however, was far better suited for infantry than cavalry tactics; low walls and ditches broke up the formation of the horsemen and prevented them from charging with effect, while giving excellent cover to the Riflemen. The Frenchmen made a good fight, and there were several fierce combats between knots of Riflemen and small isolated bodies of horse; but the 95th pressed steadily forward, sweeping the enemy before them until the dragoons were driven back upon the slopes of San Cristobal, a low hill on the extreme left of Soult's position. There Lahoussaye dismounted his men and made a desperate effort to hold the Riflemen at bay, while the infantry that had hoped to turn Bentinck's flank were fighting a losing battle with the other regiments of the Reserve. It was here that many who had come unscathed through the perils of the retreat fell under the withering fire of the troopers. A dismantled farmhouse, with some ruined out-buildings, stood facing Corunna some distance up the slope. Encircling it was a low stone wall; other stone walls, taking the place of the hedges in an English landscape, radiated from it, dividing the surrounding fields, and the ground on all sides was cut up by ditches and ravines. It was an ideal position for defensive tactics, and Lahoussaye's men, sheltered behind the walls, made an obstinate stand against the advancing Rifles.

The task of clearing the farm fell to O'Hare's company. A rough cart-track led to a gap in the wall that had once been the gateway, now blocked up by the French with heavy wooden beams.

"Now, Riflemen," cried Captain O'Hare, "you have your chance at last. Remember Bembibre!" and with a cheer he led the company straight at the gap. When the Rifles were within twenty yards of the walls they were met with a murderous volley from the defenders, and there were many gaps in the line before the wall was reached. Then began a fierce hand-to-hand fight, in which every advantage was on the side of the defenders. Again and again the Riflemen mounted the wall and swarmed up the barricade, only to be thrust back by the sabres and clubbed carbines of the troopers. Sergeant Jones, whom the loss of his wife had made a dangerous foe for a Frenchman to meet, succeeded in forcing his way across, accounting for two of the troopers in his passage, but the man behind fell to the pistol of a French officer, and before the sergeant could be supported he was surrounded by the enemy and sank

under a dozen wounds. Captain O'Hare, at the first assault, was stunned for a few moments by a blow from a clubbed carbine, Pomeroy received a cut over the brow from a sabre, and others lay either dead or badly wounded within a few yards of the gateway.

Jack, on the right extremity of the line, had attacked the wall some fifty yards from the gateway, but the ground falling away steeply at this point, the obstruction was even more difficult to scale than in the centre. Three times he and Wilkes, although gallantly supported by their men, were thrust back after laboriously climbing the steep bank that carried the wall. He was about to make a fourth attempt when he observed that a few yards to the right, near an angle in the wall, the stones showed signs of approaching collapse. The bank had given way at this point, several huge stones had already fallen out of the wall, others were loose, and the mortar was crumbling.

"Corporal Wilkes, order six men to load and fire at any head that appears above the wall. The rest go at them again. Bates, and you, Plunket, follow me."

Jack led the way to the weak spot in the wall, and directing the men to work as quietly as possible, began to remove the loose stones. As he did so the surrounding blocks came away without difficulty, and in the course of a couple of minutes a hole some two yards wide and about a yard and a half high, extending half-way through the wall, was made just above the bank. In the meanwhile Wilkes had led another assault up the bank, and sounds of fierce fighting still farther to the left proved that a renewed effort was being made to carry the barricade. A glance to his left showed Jack that the other companies were busily engaged with a large body of Lahoussaye's horse, who had taken advantage of some open ground to remount and threaten the regiment's flank.

Seizing a rifle dropped by one of his men, Jack ordered Bates and Plunket to make a simultaneous attack with him on the spot where they had broken half through the wall. Running up the bank, they put their shoulders to the tottering masonry. The wall shook, then cracked, and falling, fortunately for Jack and his men, inwards, left a gap a couple of yards wide. There was a cloud of dust, through which Jack, followed by Bates and Plunket, dashed with a rousing cheer. The three men were at once surrounded by twice their number of dragoons; but with their rifles they kept the Frenchmen at bay, while Wilkes and the others, profiting by the temporary diversion, scaled the wall.

"Come on, my boys!" shouted Wilkes. "What I"—crack on a Frenchman's head—"want to know"—a second crack, and the big fellow burst through the French troopers, followed by several men of Jack's company. Thus reinforced, Jack led a vigorous charge; nothing could withstand it. The French troopers broke, and made a dash for their horses, tethered in the rear of the ruined farm, but in their flight they impeded one another's movements, and only a few got away.

Meanwhile Smith, who in O'Hare's temporary absence was in command of the company, formed up his men on the far side of the farm, and continued the forward movement that had been for the moment arrested. Within a few yards of the farm they were overtaken by General Paget, who galloped up and said:

"Well done, Number One Company!" Then, after a careful examination of the ground in front, and of the retreating enemy, he turned to Captain O'Hare, who had recovered from his blow and came up eagerly. "I think, sir, we hold them safe in this quarter. I shall be glad if you can spare me one of your officers. I have a message for the commander-in-chief."

O'Hare, who, chafing at being knocked over, had remarked Jack's share in carrying the farm wall, beckoned him forward.

"Take one of the Frenchmen's horses yonder," continued General Paget, when Jack came up and saluted, "and tell the commander-in-chief that the enemy on this side are in full retreat. We shall continue to push them through the valley, and ought shortly to threaten their great battery."

He pointed, as he spoke, to the rugged slopes, now covered with a thick pall of smoke, on which Soult had massed his heaviest guns. A continuous dull roar came from the battery, from which the French gunners were

pouring shot after shot at the British infantry.

With a parting hint to Jack that the commander-in-chief would probably be found with Baird's division, General Paget wheeled his horse round and returned down the slope. In a few seconds Jack was in the saddle, jumping walls and ditches, and floundering through ravines towards the village of Elvina. The retreating French infantry, broken but not yet dispersed, barred his direct progress. He ploughed across the valley, finding terrible evidence of the bitterness of the struggle in the scores of dead and wounded dotting the fields from which the tide of battle had now ebbed, and spurred his horse to a hand-gallop up the gentle acclivity beyond. When he reached the crest, the whole battle was spread like a panorama before him.

Far to the left General Hope's division was slowly pushing the French back through the village of Palavea, from which they had driven the British outposts at the beginning of the battle. In the centre a severe struggle was being waged for the possession of Elvina, where Bentinck's brigade, after hurling back the frontal attack and driving the enemy up the opposite slopes, was now with difficulty holding its own doggedly against superior numbers. On the right the French flanking columns were being driven steadily through the valley by Paget's division, and Franceschi's dragoons were already retiring behind the great battery, where eleven guns at almost point-blank range were now tearing huge gaps in Bentinck's slender columns.

Jack had halted for a moment to get his bearings; he was beginning to make his way down the slope towards Elvina when he caught sight of three officers on his left, galloping towards him on the crest of the hill. In the leading horseman, mounted on a cream-coloured charger with black tail and mane, he instantly recognized Sir John Moore; the others were officers of the staff. Jack had eyes only for the general as the well-known figure swept up at headlong speed to within a few yards of the spot where he had halted, then suddenly drew rein, throwing the gallant charger upon its haunches, with quivering nostrils and heaving flanks. Jack never forgot the picture of horse and rider at this moment: the charger snorting with excitement, its eyes dilated, its ears cocked forward, its hoofs ploughing deep furrows in the soft earth; the rider, with eyes fixed searchingly upon the enemy, seeming to keep his seat without conscious effort, his whole being concentrated in the lightning glance with which he took in every detail of the fight.

He was about to move away when Jack trotted up, saluted, and delivered his message. Sir John seemed too much preoccupied to notice who his informant was. After an instant's reflection he said: "Follow me, sir; I shall probably have a message for General Paget in the course of a few minutes." Then, setting spurs to his horse, he galloped down the hill towards Elvina.

As they approached the village the 50th Regiment, commanded by Major Charles Napier, was making a desperate effort to retake the place. They drove the enemy at the point of the bayonet through the village street and beyond some stone walls on the outskirts; but there the French rallied, and, being reinforced from the slopes above, again advanced, capturing Major Napier, who was desperately wounded, and pressing hard upon the 50th regiment and the Black Watch, both of which were running short of ammunition. The 42nd, mistaking an order, began to retire. Then the commander-in-chief rode up, and addressing them said: "Men of the 42nd, you have still your bayonets. Remember Egypt! Remember Scotland! Come on, my gallant countrymen!"

With a cheer the Black Watch returned to the attack. Moore followed the brilliant charge with kindling eyes. "Splendid fellows!" he exclaimed. He was just turning to give Jack the promised message when a cannon-shot from the battery above struck him to the ground. For one brief moment it might almost have been thought that the hurt was a trivial one, for the general, raising himself upon his right arm, continued to gaze eagerly and with a look of noble pride upon the struggle beneath. It was not until the success of his troops was assured that he sank back and allowed himself to be removed from the field. Four soldiers carried him tenderly in a blanket to the rear. No doctor was needed to tell the grief-stricken bearers that the wound was mortal. The injured man knew that there was no

hope. They would have removed his sword; its hilt was pressing against the wound. "It is as well as it is," he said. "I had rather it should go out of the field with me." As they carried him towards Corunna he more than once bade them turn to learn how the fight was going. They bore him to a house in the town; as he lay dying his mind was filled with his country and the commanders who had served him and England so well during the bitter days of the retreat. "I hope the people of England will be satisfied. I hope my country will do me justice." He spoke of Paget, asking to be remembered to him. "General Paget, I mean; he is a fine fellow." He left messages for all his friends, and in the midst of his agony mentioned for promotion several officers whose gallantry in the field he had noticed. He bore his dreadful sufferings without a murmur. Only when he dictated a last message to his aged mother did he show signs of breaking down. And thus, nobly as he had lived, when night had stilled the sounds of war and the stars blinked over the awful field, the great soldier passed away.

Jack had accompanied the bearers to the little room whither the general was carried, and remained for some time doing such small services as Moore's aides-de-camp required of him. When it was seen beyond all doubt that death was very near, he was sent back to the battle-field with the sad news. During his absence the fight had been raging with undiminished fury. The enemy were retiring; the British were pressing forward on all sides; and but for the lamentable event that had just occurred it is possible that Soult's army would have been utterly destroyed, for his ammunition was failing, and behind him his retreat was barred by an impetuous torrent, spanned by only one narrow bridge. It was not to be. Sir David Baird, who would naturally have succeeded to Moore's command, had himself been wounded. Sir John Hope, to whom the command now fell, ordered the advance to be checked as the shades of evening were falling. His decision was doubtless wise. He was not in a position to follow up a successful action, for the cavalry and guns were all on board ship. The advantage already gained secured the immediate object for which the battle had been fought—the safe embarkation of the army.

When Jack, sad at heart, regained his regiment, below the great French battery, he brought no message from the commander-in-chief. What the message would have been he could only guess. But he felt that had Moore lived, the 95th would have had stern work to do upon the rugged hills above. Sadly the army retired into its lines at Corunna; and as the last shot from the French guns boomed across the valley, and the watch-fires of the British pickets broke into flame on the heights, the body of the noble Moore was laid to rest in the citadel, simply, peacefully, without pomp, amid a reverent silence.

CHAPTER XVII

In the Guadalquivir

In the Dumps—Messages—A Fellow Passenger—A Match—Marcamiento—The Despatch Disappears—A Quick Recovery—Pepito Expostulates—Perez Plunges—Returned with Thanks—Mr. Frere—An Opportunity—A Volunteer—Pepito's Present—Before the Gale

The sadness which overshadowed the whole army was partly alleviated by the bustle of embarkation. The battle had been won; the object of the great retreat had been achieved. There was nothing to be gained by postponing the return of the victorious but battered army to England. Delay would have enabled reinforcements to reach Soult, which might place him in a position to renew his attack with better hope of success; while the state of the British army was such that it was impossible to follow up their success by a pursuit of the French. Sir John Hope, therefore, upon whom the command had fallen through Moore's death, gave orders that the embarkation of the troops should be hastened, and within twenty-four hours the men were aboard the transports, ready to set sail for home.

Jack was resting in the afternoon with the officers of his company. Illness and fatigue had worn them all to shadows. Pomeroy was wounded, Smith was so haggard as to be hardly recognizable, while Shirley's spirits had forsaken him, and his chums were too much depressed even to object to the melancholy dirges which he quoted, on the homoeopathic principle, for his own solace. Jack alone retained something of his old cheerfulness, and he was doing his best to hearten his companions, before their turn came to embark, when a messenger entered, saying that Sir John Hope desired to see Mr. Lumsden at once. He hurried off, and returned half an hour later with even greater cheerfulness in his eyes and gait.

"What do you think, you fellows?" he cried. "I am not going to sail with you after all!"

"Thank heaven!" said Pomeroy, with his head bandaged.

Jack smiled at his old chum's petulance.

"I'm not so thankful, Pommy," he said. "But for one thing I'd much rather go home with you. As it is—"

"Well, what's your one thing?" said Smith, as he paused.

"I'll tell you some day. I don't want to leave Spain just now, that's all."

"What are you going to do, then?" asked Pomeroy.

"Hope is sending me with a despatch to Seville, to Mr. Frere, our minister there. I'm to put myself at his orders. The general thinks that people at home will be so mad at this retreat that they'll howl for leaving Spain to its fate; so it's very probable that I shall not be long behind you. And you'll be as fit as fiddles when I see you again."

"My own mother wouldn't know me now," said Smith. "You always have had all the luck. Ten chances to one you'll be promoted again, while we, what with our wretched condition and that awful Bay of Biscay, shall either be thrown to the fishes on the way home or drop into our graves as soon as we get there."

"Call for the robin redbreast and the wren," quoted Shirley dolefully.

"Now, Shirley, cheer up!" said Jack. "Don't give all the fellows the blues."

"Faith, no," said the voice of Captain O'Hare, who had heard the last words as he entered. "I'm so weak myself I could hardly kill a fly, but I'm captain o' this company, and I won't have my men driven into the dumps. There's that Wilkes, now. I left him outside, smoking some unmentionable stuff with his mates, singing 'Down among the dead men', in a voice that would scare an undertaker. 'Faith,' says I, 'it's delighted ye ought to be, seeing ye're a sergeant before your time.' 'Sir,' says he, 'I'm only promoted cos poor Sergeant Jones is down among the dead men, and what I want to know is, whether it ain't my dooty to have the nat'r'l feelings of a man and a brother.' But what's this I hear, Lumsden?—we leave you behind, eh?"

"Yes, though I hope you'll soon be out again. Surely our government won't throw up the sponge!"

"Bedad, not if they ask my advice. No Englishman, let alone an Irishman, ever turned his back for good on a Frenchman yet; and as the war secretary's an Irishman, why, I prophesy we'll be wid ye in six months, my boy."

"Oh! but I'll be home long before then. There's one thing I'd like to stay in Spain for, but I see little chance of doing anything in it till the war's over, and then it'll be too late, so no doubt Mr. Frere will send me home at once."

"Ah! And your one thing?"

"A precious secret," interposed Pomeroy. "Lumsden's a mystery-man ever since he picked up that brat Pepito, who's the owner of the evil eye if ever gipsy was. Some cock-and-bull story of a hidden treasure, or a beautiful heiress, or something of that kind, if the truth was known; but Jack's as mum as a mile-stone."

A bugle sounded outside the house.

"That's our call, my boys," said the captain. "Come now, out and get the men into order, and march 'em off with as much decency as their rags admit. God bless ye, my boy! please the powers we'll have you back in the mess yet."

"Fare thee well, but not for ever!" said Shirley, giving Jack a hearty grip.

"Good luck, old chap!" added Smith. "Give my love to the heiress Pepito finds for you, and if you should

happen to come across the Grampus, take my advice—don't gamble."

Pomeroy shook hands silently.

"You'll give my love to the old people, Pommy?" said Jack. "I haven't had time to write to them since we left Salamanca. You can give them all the news."

Then they went among the men. Sergeant Wilkes looked astonished as he filed past and saw that Jack was not among his company, and Jack felt sure that he "wanted to know" more emphatically than ever, especially when, on turning suddenly, he found that Pepito was making farewell grimaces at all his friends in the regiment.

"Now, Pepito," said Jack sternly, "if you're to come with me, you must learn to behave yourself. Cut away and get my things ready; our ship leaves at nine to-night."

Jack's departure, however, had to be deferred until the following morning, the wind being unfavourable. Early on the 18th of January, then, he went on board a bergantin of some 300 tons, carrying his despatch for Mr. Frere in a waterproof bag, and followed by Pepito bearing the few articles he had been able to save out of his well-stocked kit of a few months before. Sir John Hope, when taking leave of him, had asked him to put in, if possible, at Vigo, and report to General Craufurd, if he were still there, the recent happenings at Corunna.

His errand fortunately fitted in with the instructions of the master of the brig. Jack had to spend the night at Vigo, where he learned that Craufurd had embarked his brigade some days before, and had already sailed for home. Next morning he was standing on deck, watching the last bales of a miscellaneous cargo as they were lowered into the hold, when, looking along the quay, he saw hurrying towards him two figures which he recognized with no little astonishment. The one was a tall Spaniard in military uniform; the other, still taller, was covered with a ragged brown cloak, and staggered along under the weight of a large valise. Perceiving Jack's eyes fixed on him, the foremost figure waved his hand with easy condescension, and smiled, and when he was still several yards away, began to speak:

"Ah, amigo mio, you look surprised! As for me, I am both surprised and delighted. I had not hoped for the pleasure of an old comrade's company on this voyage. We will talk over old times, Jackino, and help each other to face the perils of the sea."

"You anticipate a storm, then?" said Jack, with a meaning look.

"Not anticipate, my friend; but one must be prepared. And there is one peril that, storm or no storm, every traveller has to endure."

"That is?"

"Mareamiento, amigo mio! The motion of a ship produces an unpleasant perturbation of the internal organs, resulting in—"

Jack laughed.

"That's your peril! Well, it's one that everyone has to face for himself. If I were you, when you feel the perturbation beginning, I should lie on my back."

"But then I should have to turn over," said Miguel seriously. "However, you do not ask why I am prepared to endure this disagreeable accident of travel; you show no curiosity, my dear friend."

"About other people's business—no. But I see that your man appears none the worse for the punishment which, no doubt, the Marquis of La Romana awarded him for his outrage at Astorga—you remember?—the occasion when you were so much shocked at the man's heartless treachery."

"I remember well, dear friend. Perez was the victim of a sudden temptation, poor fellow. You see, he has only one eye. He is not all there. Oh, he was punished! He was made to take off his uniform—it had gold lace, you remember?—and to dress as a servant, and that, to a man of Perez' illustrious connections and personal pride, was a great, an overpowering humiliation. He felt the disgrace so keenly that he assured me he could not live unless I took

him back into my service. What could I do? I could not be responsible for the miserable wretch's self-destruction. I did what every man of heart would have done, and— But we are moving, my friend; the ship is oscillating like a child's cradle; the wind catches the sails. Yes, the voyage has begun. I think I will—ah!—descend."

As Miguel, leaning on the arm of his follower, disappeared down the companion-way, Jack noticed a large rent in the man's cloak, into which another material, by no means a good match, had been clumsily darned. He started, and drew out of his pocket a jagged remnant of cloth, the sole memento of his narrow escape at Cacabellos. In general appearance it closely resembled the material worn by the Spaniard; but as both were brown, and Spanish cloaks were usually of this colour, it would not be easy, without close examination, to establish their identity.

"It may be merely a coincidence," thought Jack, "but it's queer, anyway. I have no doubt he owes me a grudge; I hit him rather hard. And Miguel, who doesn't love me either, would not be above reminding him of it."

With a careless resolve to be on his guard, Jack dismissed the matter for the moment. For two days he saw nothing more of Miguel. The wind was fresh, and while Jack revelled in the rapid progress, and felt himself braced by the keen salt air, Miguel, his man, and Pepito all passed through various stages of misery and despair. Pepito was the first to recover, and from him Jack learnt that Miguel had intended to attempt the journey southwards overland, but that, having accidentally caught sight of Jack in Vigo, he had made enquiries, and determined to risk the sea-passage in his company. This information Pepito had picked up from one of the seamen, who had been accosted and questioned by Perez before they left the harbour.

"Two villains, Señor!" said Pepito, as he concluded his story. "They do not love the Señor," he added, significantly fingering the small knife that protruded from his sash. The action, like the weapon itself, was two-edged. It was a warning to Jack and a menace to the two Spaniards, who had just crawled for the first time from below, and, unwashed and unshorn, presented anything but a formidable appearance. Nevertheless, whenever he moved, Jack felt that Perez was watching him. He never succeeded in catching him in the act; he felt rather than saw the glare of the man's forlorn eye.

Miguel volunteered the information that he was carrying despatches from La Romana to the Supreme Junta at Seville, and asked Jack what errand had brought him southwards. Jack, however, evaded the question, enquiring into the present circumstances of La Romana's rabble, and its prospects of escaping destruction. The Spaniard was evidently annoyed at Jack's want of communicativeness. He gave the shortest answers to his questions, and then, with a malicious gleam in his eyes, turned the conversation into another channel.

"And when my errand at Seville is accomplished," he said in his blandest tones, "I shall make my best speed to Saragossa, where I shall find my pearl, my rose, querida mia, the lovely Juanita. Pity, Jackino, I cannot invite you to my wedding. It would give you so much pleasure to see the two friends of your childhood united in the holy bonds of wedlock; and when—"

But Jack had moved away; he walked forward and watched the prow cutting its white furrow, thinking of the old days when Juanita and he had both detested Miguel Priego, and wondering how the girl could have been persuaded to plight her troth to such a man.

The skipper told him that he hoped to make the mouth of the Guadalquivir on the evening of the fourth day after leaving Vigo. He proposed to anchor there for the night, and sail up to Seville next day. Jack was so eager to reach his destination and deliver his despatch that he half-resolved to have himself put ashore at San Lucar, and finish the journey overland. With this intention, when one evening the lights of San Lucar were sighted, he went to his cabin for his despatch-bag, telling Pepito to carry his few belongings on deck. Lifting the bag, he was struck by the appearance of fine scratches on the hasp of the lock. He held it close to the flame of his lamp to examine it more thoroughly, and found in a moment that the lock had been forced and the despatch abstracted.

"Pepito," he said quickly to the boy, "do you know anything about this?"

"Nothing, Señor."

"The truth?"

"Fear makes lies, Señor; I know no fear."

"We shall not go ashore to-night. Have you seen anyone in my cabin?"

"No, Señor."

"Very well. Say nothing about this."

Jack sat down to reflect. Neither captain nor crew could have any interest in stealing a despatch. The bag had contained nothing else. Miguel and his man were the only other passengers beside himself and Pepito. What would it profit either of them to tamper with the bag? The possession of the despatch would be of real advantage to neither of them; its loss would be merely an annoyance to himself. Anyhow, the despatch was gone; it remained to be discovered whether it had been taken by Miguel or Perez.

Pepito had been watching Jack's face. He seemed to divine what his master was thinking, for he came up to him and said quickly:

"Señor, I know the Busne. The paper is gone, and I will find out where."

Jack looked back at him for a moment without speaking, then he nodded, and Pepito hastened away with the light footstep of a cat.

Two hours afterwards he returned, with a grin of glee upon his elfin face, and a paper in his right hand.

"Señor's paper," he said. Then, bringing his left hand from behind his back, he produced a second paper, saying:

"The Busno's paper too. Both were together in the Busno's bag, beneath the Busno's pillow."

Jack frowned. He looked at the address on the second paper; it ran: "The Marquis of La Romana to their excellencies the Supreme Junta at Seville."

"You must take this back, Pepito," he said.

"No, no," said the boy, his eyes gleaming. "The Busno and the one-eyed man are asleep; I should wake them if I took the paper back. The Busno took Señor's paper. Very well, I, Pepito, take the Busno's; and I will tear it in pieces, and throw it into the sea."

"No," replied Jack. "You are a clever boy, but you must learn to do things in my way, not your own. I will give back the paper myself."

Pepito shrugged, as though expressing his inability to understand an Englishman's mad way of doing things. An idea had come to Jack; he would not restore the despatch at present, but would wait until the morning. Placing them both inside his tunic, and buttoning it up, he lay down and settled himself to sleep.

Soon after daylight Jack heard angry, excited voices in Miguel's cabin. It was evident that the master had discovered his loss, and that the man was bearing the first brunt of his vexation. Gradually the voices dropped to a whisper, then there was silence, and Jack detected a soft footfall in the passage. The catch of the little cabin-door was slowly raised; Jack coughed gently, the catch dropped noiselessly, and the visitor disappeared without a sound.

At breakfast Miguel, evidently preoccupied and ill at ease, made no reference to the subject. As Jack had anticipated, he was not sure enough of his ground to report his loss to the captain. But his look became more and more anxious, even agitated, as the vessel worked its way in long reaches up the river. Perez, lounging against the bulwarks, was keenly watching Pepito, in whose somewhat provocative bearing he seemed to find cause for suspicion. The gipsy was even more monkey-like than usual, swarming up and down the yards, flitting around and above his scowling enemy with a disconcerting assumption that Perez was non-existent.

Suddenly, while Jack was watching the play of sunlight on the mountain ranges in the east, he heard a cry, followed instantly by a splash on the port side. He sprang across the deck, noticing as he did so the half-recumbent

form of Perez lolling unconcernedly at the spot he had occupied for the past hour. There was nothing to be seen in the sluggish river below, and for a moment Jack was inclined to think that his ears had deceived him; but even as the thought passed through his mind he caught sight of a small dark object rising above the surface some yards in the wake of the vessel. With a loud cry "Man overboard!" he threw off his cloak, sprang on the bulwark, and dived into the river. The water was icy cold, but fortunately in these lower reaches the current ran slowly, and when he came to the surface, with the rapidity of a practised swimmer, he saw the small black head much nearer than he had expected. In another second the reason was clear; the owner of the head was swimming towards him with slow leisurely strokes, and Jack began to regret his precipitancy.

"The Señor will get wet," cried Pepito as he approached. His tone was that of aggrieved expostulation. "He will spoil his fine clothes. Ay de mí! Why will the Señor be so rash? And he has only one uniform. Now he will have to travel as a Busno. Ay de mí!"

Jack had now turned, and was swimming hard against the current. He heard Pepito remonstrating in his wake, but although he treasured the remembrance afterwards, he was in no mood at the time to be amused with his follower's untimely zeal. His heavy boots and water-logged clothes, to say nothing of the numbing cold of the water, made swimming anything but an agreeable exercise, and he was heartily glad when he clambered into a boat that had been promptly lowered from the ship. Pepito followed him a few seconds later, looking not unlike a water rat as he emerged dripping from the river, in which he seemed perfectly at home. In the boat the boy showed him, with an expressive grin, a piece of rope about five feet long. He had dragged it with him out of the river. "What are you doing with that?" enquired Jack sharply.

"It belongs to the ship," was the reply. "Pepito is not a thief; he must give it back."

"How came you to fall in?"

"I was swinging on the rope."

"And it got untied?"

"No; it was cut."

Jack started and looked closely at the end of the rope, which Pepito handed to him with a chuckle of enjoyment. It had evidently been severed with a knife.

"Perez?" enquired Jack.

"Yes, Señor," said Pepito.

They had by this time come under the ship's quarter, and a rope-ladder was let down for their benefit.

"Stay where you are for a moment," said Jack to the bos'un; "I am sending another passenger."

As he clambered over the bulwarks Miguel met him with assumed solicitude.

"You English are such sea-dogs, there is no keeping you out of the water. I trust, my friend, you will not suffer a chill. At this time of the year—"

He was warming to his theme when Jack stepped quietly through the little knot of seamen gathered on the deck, and went straight towards Perez, who was still lolling against the bulwarks, with a gleam of malicious enjoyment in his solitary eye. Before the man was aware of what was coming, Jack had seized him by the waistband, and, using the bulwark as a fulcrum, had tilted him over into the river.

Then Jack went below and changed his dripping garments for the Spanish dress which he carried with him in case of emergency. He noticed as he did so that in his absence his effects had been thoroughly ransacked.

When he came on deck he found that Perez, by no means a favourite with the sailors, had been hauled out with extreme deliberation, after swallowing some quarts of the turbid waters of the Guadalquivir. He glared at Jack with concentrated malignity, but was physically incapable of reprisal, even if his morale had not been impaired by the knowledge that he had only got his deserts.

The captain listened gravely to Jack's explanation, and examined the severed rope with a judicial air. Jack did not consider it necessary to make any reference to the incident of the despatches.

"I suppose," said the captain, "that the Señor will wish to lodge an information? A friend of mine is well acquainted with a man of law in the Calle del Amor de Dios, a very able man—he has one case of assault that has lasted thirteen years."

"Thank you!" said Jack with a smile; "but as I only propose to stay in Seville for a few days, I fear I shall have to forgo your friend's friend's assistance."

The captain looked disappointed.

At length the vessel passed the Torre del Oro, a crenelated octagonal tower near the landing-stage. The brig was moored, Miguel and his man, who had been below since the incident, came on deck at the last moment, and ostentatiously ignoring Jack's presence, stepped across the gangway on to the quay. As Miguel passed him, however, Jack quietly touched him on the shoulder.

"Allow me, Don Miguel," he said, "to hand you this packet. It was found—you can perhaps guess where—with some property of mine. I have no occasion for the one; you will perhaps permit me to retain the other?"

A dull flush mounted to Miguel's cheeks. He took the despatch without a word, gave Jack a glance in which humiliation, chagrin, and undisguised hatred were strangely mingled, and prepared to move off.

"A word," continued Jack, "before we part. Your Polypheus is doubtless a very devoted servant, but if we meet again, and I find him still at your elbow, you will pardon me if I betray a little suspicion."

Jack turned abruptly away, leaving Miguel for once at a loss for an adequate answer. By the time he had recovered himself, Jack, followed by Pepito, was half-way across the quay.

Jack had never been in Seville before. He was struck by the forest of masts from ships lining the river bank, by the whitewashed houses built in Moorish fashion, with barricaded windows, and the narrow, busy, cobbled streets. It was a fine clear day, and for almost the first time since he landed, four months before, at Mondego Bay, he felt the dry warmth of a southern climate. He found his way with Pepito along the river bank, past the bull ring, to a comfortable inn in the Plaza Nueva, and having there made himself as presentable as his worn and faded garments allowed, he set off for the Alcazar, where he had learnt that the British minister was then in conference with the Junta.

He had some curiosity to meet Mr. Hookham Frere. It had been common talk in the army that Sir John Moore had received a number of almost insolent epistles from the minister, who had gone quite beyond his province in dictating the course of action which he thought the commander-in-chief should follow. Mr. Frere, indeed, was not cut out for the delicate work of an ambassador, and he was perhaps as little surprised as anybody when, two months later, he was recalled by the dissatisfied Government at home. He was no doubt worried by the mingled vacillation, braggadocio, and incompetence of the Spanish authorities with whom he had to deal, and in truth their behaviour was such as would have tried the temper of a more patient and self-assured man than Mr. Frere.

He received Jack in a private room, and read the despatch in silence, save when the news of Sir John Moore's death provoked an exclamation. He folded the paper and laid it down on the table before him.

"Poor fellow!" he said. "He always said he hoped to die after a great victory. You knew him, sir?"

"Yes, sir," said Jack. "I had the honour to serve under him through the campaign, and he was very kind to me."

"Ah! I am afraid our relations were a little clouded of late. I acted for the best. I did some things I now regret; they were due partly to my lack of trustworthy information. And now, though we have won a victory, we have had to leave the country. The army might perhaps have sailed to Lisbon instead of returning home."

"I beg pardon, sir, but if you saw the horrible state of our men you would be the last to say that. They're worn out with illness and hard work, eaten with vermin, and have nothing but rags to cover themselves with. I came off better than most, and you see what a condition my uniform is in."

"Terrible!—I had hoped so much from this expedition. The Spaniards have indeed been given a breathing-space, but they will make little of it. And they are so untrustworthy, so untrustworthy, Mr. Lumsden. At this time, of course, it is of the utmost importance that the real state of things should be known to all the Spanish generals in all parts of the country; but I cannot depend on the Junta here telling the truth. There is General Palafox, for instance, in Saragossa, a young man for whose talents I have the highest admiration; he is, as you may perhaps know, besieged by the French, and the Junta has encouraged him with the news that great battles are being won for Spain, and that armies will shortly march to his relief. All humbug, humbug! Buoyed up by false hopes, he will resist to the bitter end, and the poor people of Saragossa may endure all the nameless horrors of a protracted siege only to find themselves disappointed and deceived. And then they will blame us, accuse us of deserting them in their extremity. It would be difficult now for any messenger to reach him; but in any case I cannot depend on the Junta's telling him the truth. I am weary of it all."

Jack had listened to this speech with growing eagerness. It suggested a means by which he might fulfil what had been his dearest wish ever since he met Miguel in Salamanca—to see Juanita Alvarez, and learn for himself that she had really of her own free-will consented to trust her life and happiness to Miguel Priego. Until now it had seemed idle to hope for such an opportunity, but why should he not offer his services to Mr. Frere and volunteer to convey to Palafox a true account of the progress of events elsewhere? And Palafox!—he had a private reason for seeing him. "Palafox the man, Palafox the name!"—the phrase in Don Fernan's letter had never left his memory. At odd moments, when free from his duties, he had found himself conning the words over and over again; and lately he had begun to wonder whether the mysterious message were not connected in some way with Juanita—whether there were not some strange link binding Palafox and Juanita and himself together. His regiment had gone home; he was now under the orders of the British minister; he had been in dangerous places and circumstances of peril before; why not combine the public service with his private ends, and start for Saragossa? His mind was made up.

"Let me convey a message to General Palafox," he said.

"You! It is preposterous. You would go to your death. How could you, an Englishman, and an English officer, hope to penetrate the French lines? You would be caught and shot."

And then Jack gave the minister a brief account of himself, his early years in Spain, his recent work for Sir John Moore done in the guise of a Spaniard.

"And so you see, sir," he concluded, "you could hardly find anyone, not actually a Spaniard, with better chances of success than I have. I have been in Saragossa before, and I have some command of Spanish—and I am not afraid, sir."

Mr. Frere was evidently taken with the suggestion. He had listened with growing interest to Jack's modest story, and smiled at his account of his conversation with the boastful commissary and his subsequent adventure with the Spanish stablemen.

"And this gipsy boy of yours—would you propose to take him with you?"

"Yes, sir; my chums regard him as my familiar spirit, and I myself have begun to cherish a sort of belief that I sha'n't come to much harm if he is near at hand."

"Well, Mr. Lumsden, I am much interested in your story; I think, if I may say so, that you have shown great capacity and resourcefulness, and fully justified poor Sir John's confidence, and I confess, after seeing and hearing you, that I have every hope of your succeeding in this, perhaps the most difficult, certainly the most hazardous, of all your enterprises. And now, as that is settled, we must lose no time. When will you be ready to start?"

"When the first ship sails, sir."

"You will go by ship, then?"

"It will perhaps be quicker, and safer on the whole."

"What about French frigates?"

"I must take my chance of them. Luckily I kept the Spanish dress given me by Don Pedro de Gracioso; Pepito has it in my bundle. I shall, of course, go as a Spaniard."

"I wish I had your youthful confidence!" Mr. Frere sighed. "Very well; find out when the boat sails northward, and I will have my despatch for General Palafox ready at any time."

"You will answer for me to the military authorities, sir?"

"Certainly. You may assume that you have six months' leave; and for my part, I do not suppose that your regiment will require your services any more in Spain."

At the conclusion of the interview Jack stepped into the street with a light-heartedness he had not known for many a day. The winter, with all its fatigues and disappointments, was passing away; he felt a strange assurance that with the coming spring the tide of his affairs would turn towards achievement and happiness; and he returned to his inn with a buoyancy and eagerness in his gait that caused many a head to turn and many a face to smile.

With Pepito he hastened at once to the quay by the Torre del Oro, only to learn that no vessel would sail for the northern ports for some days. "We can't wait for that," he said to himself, and immediately sought out the owner of a large fishing-smack he saw in the offing. After some bargaining he arranged to hire the craft with its crew, to sail, wind and weather being favourable, next morning.

On the way back to their inn he set a seal to the hold he had unwittingly obtained on the gipsy's affections. Coming to a clockmaker's, he stopped, looked in at the window, then entered, and soon returned carrying a huge silver watch, which he handed with its chain to Pepito.

"There, youngster," he said, "that's a little reward for the services you have done me. Take care you don't lose it."

The boy beamed his delight, and pranced along the street in unfeigned ecstasy.

The sun shone brightly next morning, and the wind blew fresh. Accompanied by Pepito, Jack, in his Spanish dress, went down to the quay, where, however, he found that the master of the smack was not disposed to sail. He foretold a strong gale from the south-west, and wished to postpone his departure till the next day; but Jack was so eager to arrive at Saragossa that he would brook no delay. After an hour's arguing and coaxing, and the promise of double pay, he induced the mariner to attempt the voyage, and at nine o'clock the smack cast off and sailed slowly down the river. The wind increased in force as she approached the mouth. On reaching the open sea she encountered the full force of the blast, and, swinging round, scudded before the wind at a speed that promised a fast passage.

CHAPTER XVIII

A Squire of Dames

In the Casa Ximenez—Cut Off—Ways and Means—A Race with Time—The Bridge Perilous—Into the Abyss—A Deserted House—Through the Streets—Adios—Señor

Near the convent of San Agustin, at the south-eastern end of Saragossa, there stood, in the year 1809, an old, large, gloomy house known as the Casa Ximenez. It was not in the best part of the city, but it had an air of high

respectability, and in truth had been for many years the town residence of a prosperous burgher family, whose name stood for all that was solid and dignified in civic and commercial life.

On February 1st in the aforesaid year the spacious rooms of the mansion were empty—all but one. In the gilded sala on the first floor, a chamber large enough to contain fifty or sixty persons as well as its massive antique furniture, sat two ladies, one old, the other in the heyday of youth. Though it was early morning, the room would have been in pitch darkness but for two candles which, set in the cups of a silver candelabra on the table, threw a glimmering illumination upon the panelled walls. The sulphurous fumes of gunpowder hung heavily in the air. The deep, square windows were shuttered on the outside; there was no crack or aperture through which the light of day could enter save a hole in one of the shutters, and that at this moment was blocked by a long Spanish musket, behind which stood a middle-aged man in the sober costume of an upper servant.

Within the house all was silent, but from without, penetrating the thick walls and the iron-clamped shutters, came dull, heavy, thunderous sounds that shook the air, set the candle flames quivering, and caused the elder of the two ladies to start and shudder and moan as if in pain. At intervals the man at the window withdrew the musket, letting in for a few moments a streak of daylight that lay white across the yellow glimmer from the candles. With silent deliberation he charged his weapon, passed it through the aperture with a downward slant, and pulled the trigger, going through the same series of movements time after time with clock-work regularity.

The old lady watched him as if fascinated. She was small and thin; the hair beneath her elaborate cap was white. With the long bony fingers of one hand she clasped her mantilla closely about her shrunken frame; the other was held in the strong, warm hands of the younger lady, who sat on the floor by the elder's chair and spoke to her alternately in soothing and in urgent tones.

"You really must come, Auntie," she was saying. "It is not safe here. Hark! there is another gun! They will break in before long, and then—oh! come, come now; you can walk if you only try."

The old lady, still with her eyes fixed on the servant, shook her head and clutched her mantilla convulsively.

"Does he kill—every time?" she said in a thin quavering voice.

"How can we tell? And if he does kill, it only makes our position worse, for they will find out where the shots come from, and they will burst in, and you—we—oh! Auntie, it is our only chance. See, I will support you; if you lean on my arm you will walk quite well, and I will never leave you. Come!"

"I will not go," said her companion. "I will not, will not. The French may kill me, I have not long to live; but you, Juanita, you can escape. Francisco will shoot and kill until the very end; he and I will remain in the old house, in the old house—"

"They are coming nearer, Señorita," said Francisco, his respectful tone as quiet and unperturbed as though he were announcing a visitor.

"You hear that? You must come, Auntie. I will not leave you here!"

Springing suddenly to her feet, she stooped, threw her arms around her aunt's body, and lifted her from her chair.

"Francisco," she said, turning to the servant, "go on firing. If I do not return, come after me in ten minutes."

Then, straightening her back, she went to the open door, bearing easily the wasted form of her aunt, who did not resist, but moaned and muttered in helpless impotence. Out into the corridor, down the broad staircase, the strong girl carried the feeble woman. She reached the patio; then, instead of turning towards the great iron-studded gate at the front of the house, she made her way to the smaller but still strong gate at the back. In the open patio the sounds of musket shots were tenfold louder than they had been in the house above; they were mingled with the shouts of men afar off, the sudden shocks of explosions, and the crackle of flames. A pungent smell of smoke filled the air. The girl hastened her steps towards the rear of the house, where the noises came less distinctly to the ear.

Arriving at the gate, she set her burden down gently upon a bench, quickly drew the bolts, and, promising to return in a few moments, slipped out, closing the gate behind her.

She found herself in a narrow irregular street. On the other side was a row of smaller houses, the upper stories of which projected over the roadway. At each end the street opened to wider thoroughfares, and the Casa Ximenez was nearer the northern extremity. Juanita gave a quick glance each way. The house at the end of the street on her left was in flames. Nobody was to be seen, but she heard fierce shouts, apparently in all directions, growing ever louder. She paused but for an instant, then ran across the street to a door opposite and hammered with her fists upon the wood. She waited; there was no answer, no sound of movement within. She knocked again with greater force, bruising her knuckles until they bled. Still no response. She stepped back a pace and looked up at the windows; all were shuttered. She struck the door with repeated blows, and cried to any who might be within to open it. A shout to her left caused her to start and look round with apprehension in her eyes. A French soldier, armed with a pike, had just turned the corner, and behind him were others, some armed with muskets. At sight of them the girl turned to run back to the gate of the Casa Ximenez. Glancing in the other direction, she saw a figure hastening from the nearer end of the street—a figure in the long cloak and low hat of a Spaniard. He caught sight of the French and stopped short.

"Señor," she cried, "help us for the love of God! My poor aunt!"

"What is it, Señorita?" he said, running towards her. "What can I do for you?"

She pushed open the gate and sprang through the narrow entrance. The stranger followed her, slammed the gate behind him, and shot the two stout bolts into their sockets.

"My aunt," said the girl, "is an invalid; I was trying to save her. The French are at the front; what are we to do?"

She spoke with decision, in rapid tones that conveyed no impression of fear, but rather of courage and determination. The young Señor looked at the huddled, helpless figure of the old lady on the bench.

"Señora," he said quickly to her, "we leave you for a little. Take me into the house, Señorita."

As she led the way the youth threw quick glances to right and left, taking his bearings.

"Is anyone in the house?" he asked.

"Francisco; all the other servants have fled."

"Where is he?"

"In the sala."

"Take me to him."

Afterwards he remembered the peremptoriness of his speech; at the moment neither noticed it.

Entering the room, he saw the servant loading and firing as imperturbably as before his mistress departed.

"That's right; go on firing," said the stranger. "Now upstairs, Señorita."

She led him to the top of the house. The windows at the back overlooked the tiled roofs of the lower houses opposite, slightly above the level of the parapet. The street below was filling with French soldiers, who were battering and firing at the doors, without for the moment doing much damage. From the barricaded and loopholed windows on the other side shots flashed at intervals; the houses were evidently defended in some force, and the throng below were taken aback by the deadly cross-fires from above. The stranger measured with his eye the distance across the street from house to house.

"Have you any boards, tables, anything, about fifteen feet long?" he asked.

"I do not know. Francisco will know."

They ran downstairs.

"Can you bring the Señora up?" asked the youth.

"Yes, I carried her down."

"Please do."

Juanita hastened to the patio below; Jack went into the sala.

"Stop firing now, hombre," he said to the servant. "There is one chance of escape, from window to roof. Are there any planks?"

Francisco put down his musket, and glanced keenly at the speaker, with a touch of surprise at his urgent manner.

"None, Señor, but the boards of the floor."

"No time to tear those up."

He glanced round the room. He saw that the heavy curtains were enclosed at the top within an ornamental wooden framework, square-cut, massive, and ugly.

"Steps? A ladder?" he said.

"In the press at the head of the stairs, Señor."

"Quick! bring them here; and a hammer."

In a few moments Jack was standing on a short ladder, hammering the planks of the framework apart.

Extending over both windows and the wall between, they were about sixteen feet in length. A few hard blows wrenched the fastenings, and two planks an inch thick lay on the floor. Side by side they measured three feet across.

"Now, ropes, cords!" cried Jack.

A long, stout bell-pull hanging from the ceiling caught his eye. Tearing it down, by the time Francisco returned with a length of rope Jack had lashed the planks together at one end. Soon the other ends were bound as firmly together.

"Help me upstairs with it."

They reached the topmost room, whither the girl had already carried her feeble, whimpering aunt. The extemporized bridge was long enough to rest on the ledge of the opposite parapet, with a foot each way to spare. But it could not be thrown across without a support at the other end; its weight would more than counterbalance any pressure that could be exerted on the end in the room.

"Another rope!" cried Jack.

He had noticed a strong staple in the attic roof above the window. Francisco came back in two minutes with a long rope. Jack lashed it round the end of the planks, sprang on the window-sill, and pulled the rope through the staple.

"Now let it out steadily as I push the bridge across."

Juanita stood with shining eyes, watching the young stranger as he pushed the planks across the street, while Francisco stolidly paid out the rope. The bridge rested on the parapet.

"Hold this end firmly against the sill," said Jack to Francisco.

Juanita held her breath as the young fellow mounted a chair, stepped out of the window, and walked cautiously to the middle of the bending bridge. In a moment he was back again in the room.

"It will bear," he cried. "I go first with the Señora."

He lifted the old lady carefully; she was too much dazed to have any consciousness of what was before her, and lay inert in Jack's arms, moaning "Ay de mí! Ay de mí!" incessantly.

"Wait till I return," he said to Juanita, who stood, her cheeks flushed with excitement and hope, within the room.

Step by step he slowly bore the old lady across the creaking, swaying planks, till he reached the other side; then he laid her gently down behind the parapet at the foot of the gable. Then he sped back.

"Now it is your turn, Señorita," he said, preparing to lift the girl.

"I can go alone," she said without hesitation. "I can," she repeated resolutely as Jack sought to detain her.

Springing lightly on to the planks, she paused for an instant, caught her skirt in one hand, bit her lips, and then ran across as lightly as a hare, Jack watching her with a tense feeling of anxiety mingled with admiration. He gave a gasp of relief.

"Now, hombre," he said, turning to the old servant, who had held the planks steady without uttering a word.

"Not so, Señor," he said; "I go last."

"Nonsense! I am responsible for this. Get on at once."

There were loud shouts from below.

"I am old, Señor. The Frenchmen in the street have seen us now; they will shoot; it matters little if I die."

"No more. You must go. The ladies require you."

From the parapet opposite Juanita was looking at them. Her cheeks were very pale.

"Come, Francisco," she said in a tone of authority that brooked no denial.

The man hesitated no longer. He mounted the bridge, and walked with slow, firm step towards his mistress. An upward shower of shots pelted all around him. One struck him in the leg; he stumbled, nearly wrenching the planks from Jack's grasp, and Juanita uttered a cry as the poor man fell headlong into the street.



Francisco Falls from the Plank

Francisco Falls from the Plank

Jack saw that there was no time to be lost. A few dexterous shots from below might destroy the bridge. He must run the gauntlet. He mounted at his end. At the same moment Juanita, with great presence of mind, seized the other end, and held it firmly against the parapet. Three bounds, amid flying shots, and Jack reached the parapet in safety. Then, catching up the planks, he hurled them down upon the crowd.

"You are not hurt, Señorita?" he said.

"Poor Francisco!" was her reply. There was a tremor in her voice, not from fear, as her next words showed. "I am ready, Señor; tell me what we are to do now."

There was a trap-door a yard away, opening inwards. Jack tried this with his foot; it was bolted, but the bolt rattled, and could evidently be forced with little exertion. Without hesitating he sprang heavily on to the wood; it

gave and fell in with a crash. Jack's body had almost disappeared into the opening, when as he fell he caught the ledge with both hands, and though the sudden stoppage gave his muscles a severe wrench, he managed to maintain his grip, and hung on with legs dangling.

"Señorita," he said, "come and look down and tell me what the drop is. I cannot see, myself."

Juanita went down on hands and knees, and peered into the darkness. For a moment her eyes could discern nothing; then, as they became accustomed to the obscurity, she said that the trap-door opened into an attic room, and that the floor was not far below. Jack instantly let go, and dropped. The distance was but ten feet. Regaining an erect posture, he found, after a little groping, a short ladder in a corner of the attic. He placed this in the opening, and went up into the light again. It was the work of only a few minutes to carry the old lady down the ladder. Juanita followed, and instantly busied herself with her half-fainting aunt.

"Wait here, Señorita," said Jack, "while I go down into the house and see if the way is open for escape."

The attic door was not locked. Jack went out, down the stairs, through the house from top to bottom, and found every room empty, every window barricaded, and the outer doors locked. Unlike the occupants of the other houses on this side of the street, the inhabitants of this had clearly not stayed to defend it. The front door was bolted on the inside; at the door of a yard at the back the bolts were drawn, showing that escape had been made that way. Jack pulled at the door; the lock held firmly; it was impossible to force it; the only means of exit was over the wall. Hastening upstairs again, he explained the position to Juanita, who looked at him with the same quiet self-possession.

"Do you know any house in the centre of the city, Señorita," asked Jack, "where you can take refuge? Your own house is now, without doubt, in the hands of the French."

"Yes, Señor, we have friends in the Calle del Coso with whom we can stay."

"Then, if you will allow me I will escort you thither. I do not know the town very well, but I know the Calle del Coso."

"Yes, we will go. But how can we take my aunt, Señor?" asked the girl. "Helpless as she was half an hour ago, she is prostrate now. You could not carry her all the way."

"I think I know of a plan. The first thing is to take her downstairs, and I am strong enough for that."

In a few minutes all three were at the yard door. Jack returned to the attic for the ladder, and having placed that against the wall, he carefully carried the old lady to the top, where he sat with her until Juanita had also mounted, drawn up the ladder, and let it down on the other side. They were now in a narrow lane, in which nobody was to be seen, though they knew by the shouts and the gunshots that fighting was going on at no great distance. Leaving the old lady in Juanita's charge, Jack went back into the house, and soon returned with a large chair and two short props he had found in the patio. Placing the old lady in the chair, he passed the props through the legs on each side.

"If you will hold them at the back, Señorita," he said, "I will take them in front, and then we shall be able to carry the Señora between us."

Thus burdened, they walked slowly down the lane, turned to the right, and found themselves in a street filled with soldiers and citizens, among whom were many women and priests. Almost all, even the priests, were armed, and many were hastening in the direction of the Augustine convent, where the French, after a desperate struggle, had just succeeded in forcing an entrance to the town. Barricades had been erected at various parts of the street. No one showed any surprise at the sight of an old lady carried on a chair. Strange incidents of the siege were happening every day. Every hour some new family was obliged to quit its dwelling and seek safety in flight. Unnoticed and unmolested, Jack and his companions in a few minutes reached the house in the Calle del Coso to which Juanita had referred. They were admitted immediately to the patio. There Juanita found her friends eating a meal the frugality of which spoke only too plainly of the straits to which the city was now reduced. The exhausted condition of the old

lady demanded instant attention, and while the group of friends gathered about her solicitously, Jack took a hurried farewell of her niece.

"Now that you are in safety, Señorita, I can leave you and go to fulfil an errand I have. I trust the Señora will soon recover from her weakness and terror, and that you will not suffer from the strain of this frightful morning."

"Señor, you have the heart-felt thanks of my aunt and myself. But for your timely help—I dare not think of it. And poor Francisco! To think of him dead, killed by those horrible French! ... We can never thank you enough."

Jack was conscious of some constraint in the young lady's manner, which he ascribed to the reaction from her excitement and the peril recently gone through.

"I am only too glad that I happened to be passing at that moment, Señorita," he said. "And now, farewell!"

He bowed. The young lady looked at him with a curiously scrutinizing expression in her eyes; then, returning his bow with somewhat more formality, Jack thought, than the occasion required, she said:

"Adios—Señor!"

CHAPTER XIX

Palafox the Man

Night on the Ebro—Across the Boom—Heroines of the Siege—The Captain-General—An Interview—A Missing Letter—War to the Knife—An Interruption—Santiago Sass—First Impressions

So exciting an incident immediately on his entrance into Saragossa had engrossed Jack's attention so thoroughly as to drive from his mind the matter which, until he turned the corner of the Casa Ximenez, had been giving him much concern. Where was Pepito? That mischievous but useful elf had been the life and soul of the sailors during their rapid voyage from Seville to the mouth of the Ebro. When they disembarked at Tortosa he had managed with great cleverness the hiring of horses on which to continue the journey overland, and had ridden with Jack across country until they reached the village of Mediana, some fifteen miles from Saragossa. There Jack learnt that Saragossa was closely invested on all sides by the French, and in particular that the Monte Torrero, an eminence on the south-west of the city, was in the hands of the enemy, who had made it the base of most vigorous and sustained operations.

It was clearly impossible to penetrate the French lines and enter the city on foot or horseback; the only other means was the river. Jack made anxious enquiry as to the chances of finding the waterway open. He learnt that in the early days of the siege several boats had eluded the vigilance of the French and come down the river, and that, only a fortnight before, Francisco Palafox, the brother of the captain-general in command, had escaped under cover of night and was now at large, endeavouring to raise a relief force. But the peasants of Mediana knew of no case of a boat going up-stream and passing the French batteries since Colonel Doyle had sent a number of new muskets into the city the day before the strict investment began. Further, in addition to a bridge of boats near the confluence of the tributary Huerba with the main stream, a boom had been thrown across the river a few hundred yards below this point, and it seemed most unlikely that now, in the seventh week of the siege, the French sentries would have so far relaxed their watchfulness as to allow the boom to be crossed or broken.

This was bad news, and Jack, for the moment, felt baffled. He discovered, however, that at this time of year Saragossa and the neighbouring district were covered at early morning with a thick mist from the river and the low-lying banks, and he felt that if he could take advantage of this fact he might slip into the city despite all the enemy's vigilance. At any rate he determined to make the attempt. A bargain was soon struck at a riverside village for the

loan of a boat. The oars were carefully muffled, and after dark, on the night of January 31st, Jack started with high hope on the last stage of his long journey.

All went well. It was a pitch-dark night, and the strain of rowing a heavy craft against the stream necessitated frequent pulls-in to the bank for rest. But steady progress was made mile by mile, until, about five o'clock in the morning, sounds ahead indicated that the boat was drawing very near to the French encampments.

Every stroke of the oars was now made with infinite precaution, and the boat crawled along at a snail's pace. Pepito, in the bow, leant over to watch for the boom which blocked the waterway, and many times dipped his hands into the icy-cold water so that touch might not fail where sight was impossible. The air was raw and chilly, and Jack was delighted to learn, from his sensations in throat and eyes, that the mist of which his informant had spoken was an actuality.

It was drawing towards dawn. The darkness was yielding to a faint luminance that was not yet light, when suddenly, a few moments after Pepito had withdrawn his numbed hand from the water, the boat was pulled up with a jolt, and a harsh prolonged creak testified that its nose had come at last into contact with the boom—a heavy chain drawn across the river from bank to bank. Instantly there was a cry from the bank on their right: "Qui va la?" At that same moment, without the least hesitation, Pepito slipped noiselessly over the side of the boat into the water, caught the chain with one hand, and endeavoured to pull it down, whispering to his master to row over. But his puny strength was, of course, unavailing, and he crept back shivering into the bows. Jack, however, had at once divined the only possible solution of the problem. So heavy a chain must undoubtedly sag towards the middle of the stream. Was the middle to his right hand or his left? He pulled the boat sideways against the obstruction, and told Pepito to slip overboard and walk along the chain while he himself gently paddled. At a guess he moved to the right, and was soon gratified by Pepito's whispered announcement that the chain seemed to be sinking. When the water reached the boy's middle, Jack gently brought the boat's head to the stream, and with two vigorous strokes drove the unwieldy vessel across the boom. The boat's bottom scraped the massive links as it crossed; Pepito clambered in rather too hastily and slipped; the sounds caught the ears of the sentry on the bank, and another cry of "Qui va la?" penetrated the mist, followed by a shot. More voices were heard; more shots; and then from a point behind came the sound of a boat being run down the bank. Jack now plied his oars with might and main; cries, followed by shots, rang out from the other bank, and then, ahead and approaching him, he heard the straining of oars against rowlocks. There was no time for hesitation. Pulling hard on the left oar he headed for the bank, taking his chance, and in a few seconds grounded with a shock. In an instant he was out of the boat, and, followed closely by Pepito, started at a quick walk through the clinging fog in what he guessed must be the direction of the city.

They had not walked fifty yards when a terrific explosion rent the air, deafening their ears and almost knocking them backward. Immediately afterwards the thunder of heavy artillery broke out to their right, and the mist beyond them was fitfully illuminated by lurid flashes. Brought to a momentary stop, Jack again went forward, with eyes and ears painfully strained, every fantastic eddy of the mist presenting itself as a possible enemy. Suddenly he looked round to see that Pepito was with him. The boy was gone! Retracing his steps, he peered through the gloom, calling the gipsy's name softly. There was no answer, no sign of him. Five minutes were spent in fruitless search; then, within a few yards of him, Jack heard the tramp of men marching rapidly in file. With a mixed feeling of annoyance and anxiety he turned and made off in the opposite direction, crossed the district known as the Tanneries, and after wandering about for nearly an hour, dodging footsteps, and seeing with concern the mist clearing, arrived at the turning of the Casa Ximenez just in time to assist the young lady then so urgently needing assistance.

Still anxious about the safety of the gipsy boy, Jack felt, after leaving the house in the Coso, that he could do nothing at the moment, and his first duty was to present his despatch to General Palafox. The sounds of combat hurtled in the air; behind him clouds of smoke and flame bore witness to the success of the French bombardment.

The street was full of men, women, citizens, soldiers, priests, hastening from point to point, all armed, all with fury and grim determination printed on their worn features. Stopping a boy who was hauling along a barrow filled with powder, Jack asked him where General Palafox could be found.

"In the Palace of the Inquisition, by the Portillo Gate," replied the boy in surprise, scarcely stopping to answer the question, and hurrying on again with his fatal load. Before he had gone fifty yards a bomb fell into the barrow, and, unknown to Jack, this little defender of Saragossa was blown into eternity.

Jack hastened along the street, climbing the barricades, shuddering as he saw the unburied corpses of the slain lying before every church door, wincing in spite of himself as the thunders of the cannonade resounded in his rear, and admiring the courage of the black-robed noble ladies, who went about the streets swiftly but quietly, some carrying aid to the wounded, others almost staggering beneath the weight of great bags of powder and ammunition tied to their waists. He hurried along the Coso, crossed the Calle del Hospital, pursued his way to the Portillo Gate, and at length, passing through a long covered approach, reached the Palace of the Inquisition—the Castle of Aljafferia, at the extreme north of the city, outside the walls. At the gate of the castle many people were going in and coming out. Jack joined the ingoing stream, and found himself within the stately halls of the old palace of the kings of Aragon, crowded with soldiers and people of all classes. Learning with some difficulty that the captain-general was in one of the smaller salons, he at length reached the room, and stood in presence of the man whom for months past he had been more than eager to see.

José Palafox was barely thirty years of age, a tall man with dark complexion, heavy brown moustache and whiskers, and kindling eyes—kindling now, alas! with the flame of disease as well as of patriotic ardour. He was seated at a table on which papers were outspread. Every now and then his frame was racked with coughing. At his right hand stood a grim-visaged priest, Don Basilio Bogiero, his chaplain, whose fiery zeal in the defence of the city was equal to his own. Around were others of the notable men of the place, whom Jack came to know before many days had passed—the parish priest Santiago Sass, the burly peasants known to the whole populace as Uncle George and Uncle Marin, who had already proved their valour at the first siege of Saragossa, six months before. Making his way through the throng, he came to the table, and, bowing to the general, presented him with the despatch he had run such risks to deliver.

"From the British minister, Señor?" said Palafox in surprise, looking keenly at Jack.

He broke the seal, and showed the handwriting to Don Basilio, who nodded in answer to his mute enquiry. The general then rapidly cast his eyes over the despatch; Jack, watching him, saw his features twitch as he read. Collecting himself, he folded it up and placed it in his pocket.

"My brothers," he said aloud, "this is good news."

A shout interrupted him.

"Good news! good news!" rang from lip to lip. Santiago Sass crossed himself and cried: "Praise to our Lady of the Pillar!" Don Basilio watched everything with his fierce eyes.

"Yes, my brothers, good news!" continued Palafox. "The great English general, Sir Moore, has smitten the hosts of the accursed French; an army three times his own he has smitten and scattered to the winds of heaven. The traitor, the regicide, Bonaparte, has fled to France, and our brethren in all parts of Spain are massing to march to our assistance. Praise to the noble English! Praise to our noble allies! Praise to the great and noble Moore!"

"Praise to Our Lady of the Pillar!" shouted Santiago Sass.

The room rang with exultant cries, some in praise of Moore and the English, others in adoring gratitude towards the patron saint of the city. The fervour of religious enthusiasm was all the intenser because of the general belief that the extraordinary failure of the first siege, six months before, had been due to the miraculous interposition of Our Lady.

While the exultation was at its height, Palafox whispered a few words in the ear of Don Basilio, rose from his chair, and beckoned Jack to follow him into a small inner room. There, having shut the door, he asked:

"Do you know the contents of the British minister's despatch, Señor?"

"Not in precise terms, Señor Capitan, but I know the facts. I was myself with Sir John Moore's army. I—"

"Pardon me, Señor. You see what I am compelled to do? The patriotic ardour of the Saragossans is so furious that I dare not as yet let them know all the truth. And, indeed, I do not yet give up hope. Though Mr. Frere tells me that I can no longer expect assistance from without, I do not know—I do not know. My brother is raising levies to the south; others are gathering forces. In any case, our brave countrymen will form guerrilla bands, and we shall give the accursed French no respite until they are all driven back across the mountains. And—but tell me; I do not understand why I have received so long and full a despatch from Mr. Frere and none from our own Junta. I should have expected that the Marquis del Vilel would have given you a despatch that would have been of equal importance with the British minister's."

"That is easily explained, Señor Capitan. I carry Mr. Frere's despatch because I am myself an Englishman. My name is Lumsden—Lieutenant Lumsden of the Rifles." Jack watched the general's face for a sign of recognition of the name.

"Indeed! you amaze me. You speak our tongue so—Lumsden! I remember; I had almost forgotten it; a friend of my old friend Don Fernan Alvarez—is it not so? Alas! Don Fernan could not survive the humiliation of his unhappy country. Are you the Señor Lumsden who was Don Fernan's friend?"

"My father was his partner, Señor," replied Jack.

"Yes, and I had a letter for you, addressed to you by Don Fernan, and left in my charge ere he died. As I understood, it was a duplicate of a letter sent to Mr. Lumsden in London—your father, no doubt, Señor—and Don Fernan asked me to retain it until I heard either from your father or yourself, and if I heard from neither within six months, I was to send it to an address in London that he gave me."

Palafox was here overtaken by a fit of coughing, which shook his fever-worn frame. When the coughing ceased, and the general lay back panting, Jack said quietly:

"And the letter, Señor?"

"That is what troubles me, Señor. I regret to tell you—"

He was seized again with coughing; Jack waited anxiously for the paroxysm to cease.

"I regret to tell you the letter is gone."

"Gone!" echoed Jack blankly.

"Gone, Señor."

"But how—why—can it have been lost, mislaid?"

"It was locked in my cabinet. A fortnight ago my cabinet was rifled, and a box of papers was taken away, among them the letter addressed to your father."

"But still I do not understand, Señor. Why should anyone wish to steal a letter addressed to an unknown Englishman?"

"No one wished that, I suspect," said Palafox with a faint smile. "The box in which the letter was placed was exactly similar to another box containing papers of public importance, including plans for the defence of the city. That, as I surmise, was the box which the thief wished to secure. Luckily for Spain, unluckily for you, he stole the wrong box, and apart from your letter obtained nothing of any great importance."

"I am glad of that," said Jack instantly. "Of course I am disappointed and vexed about the letter, but a private loss like that does not matter half so much as the loss of your plans would have done; it's no good crying over spilt milk, as we say, and I must put up with it."

"It is good of you to take the matter with such noble resignation," said the courtly Spaniard. "Believe me, I regret the circumstance exceedingly. I can only hope that the French spy who stole the box—he must have been a French spy; we have no afrancesados in Saragossa—I can only hope that there was nothing in the letter that will seriously affect your fortunes, and after all, it was a duplicate, and the original is probably safe with your father in London. And now tell me, Señor, how you succeeded in the daring and marvellous feat of entering our sorely invested city."

Jack gave a brief account of his adventures, to which Palafox listened with an air of the keenest interest.

"It will be more difficult to get out than in," he said at the conclusion of the story. "And yet to remain in the city will be to court death or disease. It cuts me to the heart to think of the thousands who are dying here week by week, not for want of food—we have provisions of a sort in plenty—but for want of air and space. We had too large a population, Señor, when the siege began. I should have sent away the townsfolk; I see it now. And yet no, for the townsfolk are our most ardent and staunch defenders; even when the courage of the soldiers flags, the brave citizens cry "Guerra al cuchillo",[#] and "Hasta la ultima tapia",[#] and when fell disease overtakes them in the fetid cellars where they now mostly live, still with pious resignation they cry: "Lo que ha de ser no puede faltar".[#] Such is their spirit, Señor, and hoping against hope I maintain my defences, and, if God wills, shall yet win the day."

[#] "War to the knife."

[#] "To the last wall."

[#] "That which is to be cannot fail."

During this speech Palafox had worked himself up into a frenzy that brought on another fit of coughing; and Jack, observing his unnaturally bright eyes, could not but wonder whether the labours and responsibilities of the defence were not affecting his mind. In a moment Jack said quietly:

"My position need not give you concern at present, Señor Capitan. I must stay in Saragossa for at any rate a day, for I have to make enquiries after my old friend Don Fernan's family. His daughter, Señor—is she well?"

"I believe so; I hope so. It is long since I saw her. I wished her to leave the city before the siege, but, like a true maiden of Spain, she preferred to remain and do what she could to help the noble Countess of Bureta and the thrice noble Maria Agustin, our heroic maid of Saragossa, in serving the soldiers and tending the sick and wounded. The Señorita is under the guardianship of her aunt, the Doña Teresa, and if you will seek the Padre Consolacion, he will give you all particulars of their welfare; he undertook to watch over their interests at my special request. If you stay with us for a time, then, Señor, you will want a residence. There is little choice; we are at the mercy of the French guns; no house is safe, but—"

"I have been thinking, Señor," interposed Jack, as the general paused: "Will you accept me as a volunteer? I have some months' leave. I not only have personal interests in your city, but I feel that the struggle in which you are engaged is one that I can throw myself into with a whole heart. The cause of Spain is the cause of England, and if I can do anything—"

"Señor, I thank you; I welcome you with eagerness. You are an officer; your experience with Sir Moore's army will be of value to me. Many of my best officers are dead; many more have no experience. If you please, I will assign you a definite command on our defences; will you come to me to-morrow at this hour?"

Jack was on the point of replying when loud vociferations came through the door from the large room.

"Palafox! Where is Palafox? The captain-general! Come! Help! Tio Jorge! Palafox!" The cries grew louder and louder; heavy fists, muskets, pikes battered on the door; Don Basilio's powerful voice was heard endeavouring to quell the tumult. Gathering himself together, and bravely repressing the signs of weakness he had previously shown,

Palafox walked to the door, opened it, and stood in the doorway.

"What is it, my children?" he said.

The noise was hushed; the crowd turned as one man and seemed to be looking for someone. Then a passage opened up among them, and a huge brawny figure, with capless, dishevelled head, torn clothes, and face and hands black with the smoke of battle, elbowed his way through till he came to the general.

"Viva Arcos! Viva el valiente Arcos!" cried several in the throng.

"Silencio!" in the stern, authoritative tone of Don Basilio.

"Señor Capitan," said the big man, "the French are making towards the Coso! The Casa Ximenez block is in their hands. They are burning, butchering; they are beating down our men at the barricades! I come for the reserve, Señor; for Tio Jorge and Tio Marin, and all their men! At once, Señor; send them at once; for if time is lost, the accursed foe will swarm into the centre of the town, and all is lost."

Before Palafox could say a word, the priest Santiago Sass seized a musket, and, raising his piercing voice, cried:

"Follow me! follow me! In the name of God and Our Lady of the Pillar! To the convent of San Agustin! Tio Jorge, Tio Marin, Jorge Arcos, follow me!"

He rushed out into the corridor, and the mob, in a frenzy of enthusiasm, poured pell-mell after him, carrying their heroes with them. The room was left almost empty. Don Basilio turned to Palafox and said quietly:

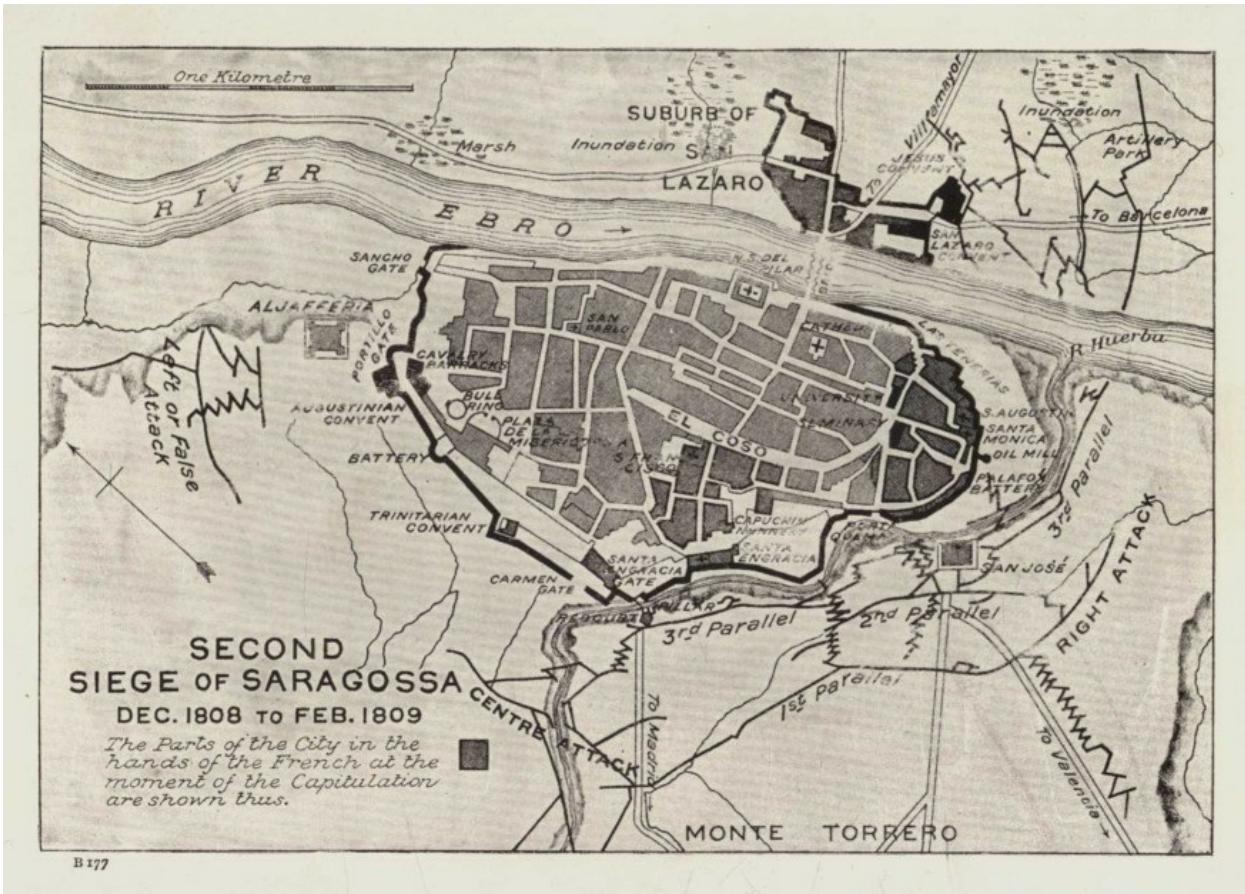
"They will recover any ground that is lost. Spare yourself, my son José."

"But the madness of Santiago leading them to the convent! The walls were breached by the explosion this morning, and the French must now be in full possession of it."

"If the Augustine convent is where the explosion took place," cried Jack eagerly, "that is near where I came in this morning. I found out by accident something of the position there, Señor. I think I could help. Have I your leave?"

Palafox looked kindly into the boy's shining eyes.

"Yes," he said, "go, and bring me word of what befalls."



Second Siege of Saragossa

Jack sprang instantly towards the door. As he passed out, Don Basilio turned with an enquiring look towards Palafox.

"An English youth, Padre," said the general, in answer to his mute question.

"A leader of men," said the priest, and sat down to write a proclamation.

CHAPTER XX

A Day with Tio Jorge

A Barricade—Battering-Rams—A Lull—A Way In—On the Stairs—The Day's Work—A Triumph—Pepito's Watch

At the end of the covered way leading to the Portillo Gate Jack found Tio Jorge giving instructions to a group of armed citizens, who went off one by one on various errands. Seizing a favourable opportunity, Jack went up to the big Spaniard, and in a few rapid words acquainted him with his own position and intentions. Jorge scanned him for a moment with quick, penetrating glance, then said:

"Señor will want a musket. There is a stand of arms at the corner yonder."

In two minutes Jack, armed with a musket of British make—one of those opportunely thrown into the town by Colonel Doyle the day before the siege opened,—was hastening along by the side of Tio Jorge into the city. On entering the streets, the Spaniard summoned to join him small bodies of citizens who were gathered at certain points to act as reinforcements and reserves. Soon he was at the head of a considerable troop, all of the artisan class, for in these days of stress every able-bodied man in the city was transformed into a fighter.

As they ran, their ears were deafened by a loud explosion on the right. The air was darkened with dust; broken slates and stones came hurtling down upon their heads; but the eager citizens pressed on with an indifference that showed how much accustomed they were to such incidents.

"A block of houses blown up between here and the Santa Engracia convent," said Tio Jorge in answer to a question of Jack's. "But that is not our business. The French will hold the ruins, but they'll get no farther. Our men will beat them back. 'Tis more dangerous towards San Agustin. The French have gained more there in this one day than in weeks on the Santa Engracia side. Hombres," he cried to the men with him, "hasten, hasten! The French are over the barricades, and we must drive them out at all costs."

They ran on. Even in the rush and excitement Jack was struck by the scenes of horror in the streets. At one point two corpses swung slowly on gibbets erected by the door of a church. Tio Jorge pointed to one of them, a look of grim exultation on his face.

"He was my school-fellow," he said, "and my friend; but I hanged him. So perish all who falter and counsel surrender!"

Wounded men were being carried to the hospitals by women; some were limping or crawling with shattered limbs and ghastly faces. Women and children ran hither and thither, some carrying goods from houses threatened by the enemy, others food and ammunition for the fighters. Though many of them bore only too manifest signs of sickness and privation, they all seemed animated by the same spirit of fierce determination, and a gleam lit up their worn features whenever Tio Jorge, as he passed, threw them a word of encouragement.

All the way along the Coso the sounds of firing in the eastern quarter of the city came more and more distinctly on the ear. Dense clouds of smoke rolled towards them, and Jack heard the crackle of flames, still invisible. A messenger with blackened face came towards Tio Jorge, and announced that the French had captured three blocks of buildings beyond the Casa Ximenez, and were slowly but surely gaining ground. The Spaniard, bellowing out fierce maledictions on the enemy, hastened his stride, and in a few minutes reached a street leading to the university. Here the Spaniards had entrenched themselves behind a barricade, where they endeavoured to find cover from the musket-shots fired from houses on both sides of the streets. The French, borrowing the tactics of the besieged, had occupied these houses, and were shooting from windows and loopholes bored in the walls.

The lean figure of the frenzied Santiago Sass was conspicuous among the defenders of the barricade. Disdaining all artifice, he stood erect, a mark for every bullet, yet unhurt, uttering derisive shouts, and mingling his battle-cry with quotations from the Psalms. Seeing Tio Jorge approach at the head of his men, the priest hailed him with loud acclaim.

"Twice," he cried, "twice, Tio Jorge, have we already beaten back the men of Belial. The hand of the Lord is heavy upon them!"

"And shall be heavier!" cried Tio Jorge. "We must over the barricade, hombres."

Instantly Santiago Sass mounted the entrenchment, and was first on the other side, his long cassock flying loose as he led the charge, musket in hand. Tio Jorge and Jack were but a yard behind him, and with a great shout the Spaniards swarmed over and dashed furiously at the French advancing to the attack. Nothing could withstand their rush. The French gave way, but instead of retreating down the street they disappeared into the houses on either side,

bolted the doors behind them, and went to swell the numbers of those who already occupied posts of vantage within. In vain the frenzied Spaniards beat on the doors with their clubbed muskets; the massive panels were unyielding, and a rain of bullets fell from above, thinning the Spanish ranks moment by moment.

"Poles, bring poles!" shouted Tio Jorge.

Instantly men ran off, some of them only to drop on the way. The survivors returned by and by with poles and beams, with which as battering-rams they drove at the fast-closed doors. They were shot down almost to a man; but the places of those that fell were at once taken. A door here and there was burst in, and the heroic Spaniards sprang into the gardens and patios, only to be killed or wounded before ever they came to close quarters with the French.

From the first Tio Jorge had selected as the special object of his attack a large house on the right of the barricade. It was evidently held by a considerable force of the enemy. But all assaults upon its thick door had proved ineffectual. Even when a heavy beam was brought up as a battering-ram it could not be used with effect, for the door was at such an angle to the barricade that it could only be struck obliquely unless the bearers of the beam advanced for several yards into the open, where so many of their comrades had already been struck down. Tio Jorge ordered his men to make an attempt to drive in the door from the angle of the barricade. Before the beam could be thrown across, one of the men carrying it was shot. The rest persevered, hauled it over, and made for the door. A sheet of flame burst from the windows above; six of the men were hit. The weight of the beam being now unequally distributed, the other men were dragged down, or tripped over the bodies of the slain.

Jack had accompanied them. Feeling a sharp pain in his left arm, and seeing that nothing could be done at the moment, he ran back to the barricade, narrowly escaping being hit by flying bullets. Behind the barricade he found Tio Jorge with a few others, the only survivors of the band which had come up with such ardour and enthusiasm. The leader was furious, railing at fate and at the failure of the men to back up their comrades, and shouting for more men to come to his assistance. Meanwhile, as Jack stood by endeavouring to bind up what proved to be a slight flesh wound, a lady came from the corner of the street, bearing food and wine. Seeing what Jack was about, she placed her baskets on the ground, calling upon the men to help themselves, and then with quick deft hands completed the bandaging which Jack had clumsily begun.

"You look tired," she said. "Take some food, Señor."

Jack was only too glad to eat and drink. It was the first food that had passed his lips since he left the boat. Tio Jorge, too, ate like a famished man.

"Gracias, Contessa," he said in a softer voice than was usual with him.

When all had eaten and drunk, the lady picked up her baskets and moved away without hurry towards another part of the city.

"Who is she, hombre?" asked Jack.

"The noble Contessa de Bureta, Señor; a delicate, frail lady, as you see, but as fearless as—as I myself."

There was a breathing-space, during which the men rested, awaiting reinforcements, and rejoiced that the French were contenting themselves with their work from the houses, and made no further attempt at present to storm the barricade. Jack took stock of the situation. The house on the right could not be taken by assault; it was occupied in too great force by skilled marksmen. To ram the door by a direct blow was impossible, as experience had proved; the fire from the houses was so deadly that no bearers could live through it. While Jack was pondering, the little band had been reinforced by other citizens, and Tio Jorge was on the point of ordering another attack. But he had uttered only a few words of vehement encouragement when Jack interposed.

"Give me ten men, and I think in a few minutes we could drive the French from yonder house without great loss."

Tio Jorge looked doubtfully at Jack's eager face. They were crouching behind the barricade, and there was a

temporary lull in the firing.

"How will you do that?" asked the Spaniard.

"Attack them from above."

"Impossible! impossible! If you got to the roofs you could not get into the houses, for the trap-doors are all towards the street. You would be seen from the houses on the opposite side, and shot down at once."

"Still, I think it is possible. I have a plan."

"Well, then, go, Señor, in the name of Our Lady of the Pillar, and I will remain here and fire on the French to cover your movements."

Accompanied by ten men hastily selected by Tio Jorge, Jack made his way to the rear, and came to a house which had not yet fallen into the hands of the French. Gaining admittance, he led his men upstairs to the attic floor, clambered out by the trap-door, and, before the enemy had caught sight of him, succeeded in crawling over the sloping roof to the opposite side. Two or three men had followed him safely. Then the move was seen, and bullets began to patter on the roof, so that the other men had to follow Jack at great risk. All but one managed to crawl over and join him without hurt, and the nine stood with him on the farther side of the roof, sheltered by the low parapet from any shots that might come from that direction.

Then he led them quickly on to the roof of the adjoining house, which was occupied by the French.

Immediately over an attic window he cautiously started to loosen the tiles, the Spaniards eagerly following his example as they perceived his intentions. After the first two or three tiles had been gently prised out, the rest came away easily. Half the men were employed in lifting the tiles, while the others took them from their hands, and laid them quietly in heaps at the foot of the parapet. Under the tiles were the joists, and as these were not connected by matchboard, it was an easier matter than Jack had expected to break an opening into the room below. It was empty. Such little noise as had been made on the roof had evidently been drowned by the continuous firing in the houses and streets. Jack handed his musket to the man next him, and, catching hold of one of the joists, swung lightly down into the room. The man handed him his musket, then followed him, to be followed in turn by all his comrades. In little more than ten minutes after their arrival on the roof the ten stood together in the attic.

"Now, hombres," said Jack, "we have to clear them out room by room."

Followed by the Spaniards, he dashed from the attic down the stairs into the first room on the floor below. At the window were three men, so intent on firing at the barricade that they were not aware of their danger until the invaders were upon them. When they turned and saw their enemies they had no thought of surrender. In this bitter war surrender to a Spaniard was only another name for death. But before they could bring their muskets to the shoulder the Spaniards were at their throats. They fell. Instantly the victors rushed to another room. In a few minutes all the occupants of that floor were disposed off.

By this time the rest of the garrison had taken the alarm. Many of the French had left their posts, and were crowding downstairs in a panic, believing that a large force of Spaniards had gained a lodgment in the house. Tio Jorge below inferred from the slackening of the enemy's fire that the bold attempt had been successful. Without losing an instant he ordered some of his men to make another onslaught with the beam on the door, and sent others round to the back of the house, where a narrow lane was at present clear of the French, to intercept any who should endeavour to escape there. Panic had now seized the French in the house. Fearing to be taken in front and rear, most rushed downstairs towards the back entrance, a few obstinately refusing to stir, and calling on their comrades to stand firm. But Jack and his men poured in pursuit, shouting, to keep up the illusion of their being a numerous body. Below, the door at last fell in with a crash before the strokes of the ram. Tio Jorge burst in, and found only a small knot of French between himself and Jack's men. The execution was swift and sure. Of all the French who had used that house as their fortress only those escaped who, fleeing out by the back door, cut their way through the Spaniards

sent by Tio Jorge to intercept them.

This brilliant success, won by citizens without the help of the soldiery, wrought the spirits of the people to a high pitch of exultation. Santiago Sass, who had escaped in all his wild peregrinations without a scratch, rejoined Tio Jorge's band, and rolled out sonorous sentences in jubilant frenzy. But the Spaniards were not satisfied with the first triumph of the day. There were other blocks of houses in possession of the French. After a brief respite, during which reinforcements of soldiers and citizens came up in considerable numbers, the defenders set to work systematically to dislodge the French from the positions so hardly won. The housetop device was put in practice wherever access could be obtained. For hours the struggle continued, and Jack, who worked as hard as any man, was struck with admiration of the untiring enthusiasm of the Spaniards. Fighting from barricade to barricade, and from house to house, they retook position after position, until, as early dusk fell, the French had been cleared out of all the houses and forced back to their impregnable position in the Santa Monica and San Agustin convents.

The din of combat died down. Jack had arrived at the Casa Ximenez, the scene of his adventure in the morning. Entering the house, he found many signs of its temporary occupation by the French, but the fighting had been so intense and so persistent that they had had no time to perpetrate the wanton mischief and destruction which usually marked their progress. Jack went through the house to make sure that none of the French were left, and, entering one of the rooms, he guessed by the character of its furniture and appointments that it belonged to the young lady whom he had assisted earlier in the day. The French had been so much occupied in the lower rooms that they had left this room untouched. There were a few trinkets on the dressing-table. Jack put these into his pocket, knowing that the Señorita would be glad to receive anything of value that could be rescued. Then, descending into the patio, he found that Tio Jorge had already told off a company of his men to occupy the house during the night, in preparation for the renewed attack which was undoubtedly to be expected in the morning.

"Come, Señor," shouted the big fellow, "we will now go to the captain-general and tell him what we have done for Saragossa this day. And your part, por Dios! is one that no Saragossan will forget. Come!"

They left the house. The sounds of bombardment and musketry had ceased; parties of the citizens were moving about collecting the dead and wounded; women and children were emerging for a breath of air from the close cellars in which they had sheltered during the day. As Tio Jorge and Jack passed into the street, they became aware, from the attitude of a group of soldiers and citizens all looking in one direction, that something unusual was attracting their attention. Looking up the street, towards the same end at which he had entered it nearly twelve hours before, Jack saw, by the light of the torches carried by search-parties, a small figure advancing—the figure of a boy, with a Frenchman's képi many sizes too large for him almost obliterating his head, a Frenchman's sword dangling from his belt, its point trailing a yard behind him along the cobbles, and a Frenchman's musket weighing down his shoulder. The boy was staggering along under his burdens, yet contrived to maintain an air of jauntiness and assurance that held the Spaniards spell-bound with surprise and curiosity.

"The imp again!" ejaculated Jack with a smile.

The boy caught sight of him, and, endeavouring to hasten his step, tripped over his sword and fell headlong, rising a moment after without musket or képi, and revealing the swarthy face and unkempt hair of Pepito.

"Here I am, Señor," he said with his enigmatical smile. "Not lost, Señor."

"So I see. And what have you been doing? What do you mean by giving me the slip like that, and making me think the French had got you?"

Pepito looked aggrieved. He took out of his vest the silver watch Jack had given him at Seville, and held it dangling by its chain.

"Señor's gift; should it get wet? Never. I got into the water; not the watch. No, I put it on one of the thwarts. We got out of the boat. Señor went so fast that I forgot the watch. It was Señor's fault. I went back for it, Señor; I got it;

then when I came away—ha! I hear the march of men. I stop; I hide; all day long from my deep hole I see the French shoot with their big guns across the river. I wait; I think, what if Señor is dead? I wish I had come with him, and let the watch get wet. Then, wonder of wonders! the Busne drive the French back. They go by my hole; one falls; then all is quiet, and I steal out and get these things from the dead man, and I come in and have Señor as well as the watch."

Jack could hardly find fault with the boy for wishing to preserve his own gift. Explaining to Tio Jorge that Pepito was a servant of his, he turned to resume his interrupted journey northward, and bade Pepito follow him closely.

CHAPTER XXI

Night on the Ramparts

The Café Arcos—The Story of the Siege—Perfervour—An Oath—The Casa Alvarez—The Missing Sentry—Through the Lines—Miguel Enters Saragossa—Don Casimir is Astonished—Moonshine

On arriving with Tio Jorge at the Aljafferia Castle, Jack found that Palafox had already received from Santiago Sass news of the excellent work done in the south-eastern quarter of the city. But Tio Jorge insisted on telling the story again, and dwelt with enthusiasm on the part the English Señor had played—his idea to scale the roofs, and his intrepidity in fighting by the barricades. The big Spaniard loved a hard fighter, and Jack could have found no surer way to his confidence and respect.

"Excellent! excellent!" cried Palafox; "you came to us most opportunely, Señor. And let me tell you, the good opinion of our brave Tio Jorge is itself the highest praise. Would to God that our success had been as certain at other points! Unhappily, the French have exploded mines in the neighbourhood of Santa Engracia, and the most heroic efforts of our men have failed to dislodge them from the ground they have gained. Unhappily, also, Don Hernando de Solas, my valiant lieutenant there, was shot as he led his men for the tenth time to the assault, and I have no one whom I can conveniently send to take his place."

"Send the English Señor," cried Tio Jorge instantly. "He has shown what he can do; he is an officer who has served with the great Sir Moore; he is the very man for the post."

Palafox looked for a moment doubtfully at Jack's youthful face.

"You are young yourself, Don José," added Tio Jorge, divining his general's reluctance. "Por Dios! was there ever before a captain-general so young!"

"It is an arduous post," said Palafox. "Just now it has to bear the brunt of the French attack, I fear. But you have shown valour and resource, Señor Lumsden; will you undertake the command of Don Hernando's district?"

"I will do my best, Señor, if you entrust it to me."

He spoke quietly, but his pulse leapt at the thought of the work opening before him. Accepting the general's offer with alacrity, he set off in a few minutes with Tio Jorge, who had offered to introduce him to his men, and procure for him a Spanish uniform to replace his soiled garments. As they were hastening along the Coso, crowded with people now that the day's fighting had ceased, Tio Jorge stopped at the door of a big café.

"You must be famished, Señor," he said. "You have had nothing but a bite and a sup all day. Here is the café of my friend Jorge Arcos; let us enter. When we have eaten and drunk it will be time to seek the ramparts."

Jack was nothing loth. In a few minutes he was seated amid a crowd of ardent Saragossans, whose blackened

features and soiled garments bespoke the part they had played in the defence of their city. Jorge Arcos himself, a robust and lusty Spaniard, attended to Jack's wants when he had learnt from Tio Jorge that the young Señor was an English officer who had done good work that day, and been entrusted by Palafox with the Santa Engracia command. The big host, as well as the miscellaneous company in the room, looked somewhat askance at the weird figure of Pepito, who had closely followed his master. His garb showed him to be one of the despised and outcast gitanos; but on Jack's explaining that the boy had been of service to him, Arcos shrugged, and brought him some food and diluted wine, which the hungry little fellow despatched with gusto.

As he ate, Jack fell into conversation with his host, and showed a curiosity to learn something of the earlier history of the siege. The mere suggestion was enough to set the man's tongue wagging. He evidently loved the sound of his own voice, and he owed indeed much of his popularity with the citizens to his rough-and-ready eloquence.

"A remarkable siege, you say, Señor?" he said. "It is, in truth; never was such a siege since the world began! And 'tis not the first time the French pack of wolves has come to eat us. Last year, by the favour of Our Lady of the Pillar, we escaped their greedy jaws; and now also again they shall rue the day they came a-hunting. For six weeks we have withstood them; 'tis six weeks since they began to throw their bombs and balls into our midst. Aha! and on the second day after, they sent a man to summon us to surrender. Surrender! Little they knew Don José Palafox, little they knew the hearts of our people—of Tio Jorge here, and Tio Marin, of the padres Don Basilio and Santiago Sass and Consolacion; aye, and of our noble ladies and of our poor folks such as I myself. Surrender! Why, our people well-nigh tore the French messenger in pieces! We knew they were coming to invest us; did they think we should open our gates or that our walls would fall flat as the walls of Jericho? Por Dios!"

He uttered a scornful guffaw, and shouts of approval broke from the crowd.

"No, no. We had warning; the people from the countryside came flocking in—workers in olive groves and vineyards, potters from the villages, swineherds and muleteers—and Don José gave them each his task, and with our own people they toiled night and day to make our city strong. Men and women and children, sixty thousand of us, we wrought upon the ramparts. Some carried earth in baskets, others plied the spade, others went into the outskirts with picks and axes, and levelled houses and orchards until, for half a mile round, the country was as bare as my table here, a level waste on which no enemy could find a wall or tree to shelter him. Thus we strengthened our defences, building bastions and raising mounds, till the whole city was encircled with strong ramparts from the Ebro to the Huerba.

"And all this time our people were gathering food—great stores of corn and maize, oil and fish; and some were making powder and bullets, and others were building barriers across the streets with timber and sand-bags, so that if the accursed French did break through our walls we could still fight from street to street, as you have seen to-day, Señor."

"Yes, but they are gaining ground; how can we hold out longer, Jorge Arcos?" said a voice in the crowd.

Arcos glared around and smote upon the table.

"Where is that coward?" he cried passionately. "Where is he? For whom does the gibbet stand in the Coso? Is it not there for cowards, and weaklings, and traitors, and all who talk of surrender? Hold out longer! We have only begun. The French have got in here and there—well, what of that? Every house captured costs them a day; and every day brings our triumph nearer. Have we not ample food? Is there a wretch in Saragossa who complains of hunger? Set him before me; let me see his face; he shall prove his words here in my presence, or—" He made a significant gesture, and continued: "No, we are not hungry; we can hold out for months; and meanwhile friends are hastening to our succour. North and south, east and west, armies are collecting. The French shall be hemmed round like pigs for the butcher; the February rains shall descend and flood their trenches; and by the grace of Our Lady of the Pillar we shall be able once again to foil the plans of the Corsican dog, and the men of Aragon will set such an

example to the men of Andalusia and Castile, of Leon and Estremadura, of Catalonia and Navarre, that no Frenchman shall be left alive between the mountains and the sea."

Loud vivas rang through the room as Arcos brought his oration to a close. It was no surprise to Jack to hear such a speech from the lips of an ordinary café-keeper—every Spaniard is an orator,—but he by no means shared the speaker's assurance. The influx of so many people from the country must have swelled the population far beyond its normal limit. Overcrowding involved disease; the encroachments of the French must constantly narrow the habitable region; in the exposed parts only the vaults and cellars would be safe from bombardment; and while the operations of war claimed their full tale of victims, Jack feared that pestilence would carry off still more. But he said not a word of his apprehensions, and soon afterwards, bidding his host and the company a cordial adieu, he left with Tio Jorge and Pepito.

They passed the Franciscan convent beyond the Coso, cut through narrow tortuous side streets, each barricaded and guarded, passed the Capuchin nunnery, and came at length to the district of Santa Engracia, in which a few days before the French had gained a lodgment by sapping and mining and direct assault. As they passed along a street from which the French had been driven at the point of the bayonet, but which was now a mere heap of charred and smoking ruins, Jack saw a young lady standing before the smouldering embers of one of the houses. By her side was a little boy. The lady, who could not have been more than twenty-five years of age, was pale and haggard, and gazed upon the ruins of her home like a very statue of sorrow. As Tio Jorge and Jack came up to her, they heard her talking to the boy in low fierce tones.

"It is the Doña Mercedes Ortega," said Tio Jorge half to himself. "What is the matter, Señora?" he asked.

She turned and threw back her mantilla. Jack had never seen a face in which utter woe and desolation was so piteously imprinted. Her eyelids were swollen with weeping; her eyes blazed out of dark sunken rims; her lips were quivering.

"That was my home," she said in an agony of grief that Jack never forgot. "My husband lies there, and my father. My brothers died on the ramparts; my little girl died of fever in my arms. Only Juanino is left, only Juanino, he and I; we are alone—alone—alone!"

Jack turned away; there was a mist before his eyes. Then suddenly the woman's tone changed from grief to rage. Her next words seemed to bite into Jack's soul.

"Stay, Señor!" she cried; "stay, Tio Jorge! I call you to witness what I teach my Juanino. Yes, I teach him; he will never forget; it is for a mother to teach her son his duty. He shall be a scourge to all the accursed race. He shall kill, kill, kill, knowing no rest till he join his father—his father whom the French have killed!"

The boy looked up in her face with eyes of terror.

"Put your hands together," she continued, "and swear that henceforth, in war or peace, at home or abroad, in the street or in the field, you will kill every Frenchman you may meet, kill without mercy or ruth, and thus avenge me and all your house. Swear, Juanino!"

Jack shuddered as he heard the little fellow, whose age was perhaps seven years, repeat the terrible oath his frantic mother demanded of him. At that moment the horrors of war were brought home to Jack's mind more forcibly than ever before; nothing in the terrible retreat to Corunna had been so terrible as the picture of the young widow's desolate grief and passionate longing for vengeance.

He passed on, with Tio Jorge and Pepito, into a small plaza out of which several narrow streets radiated. The place was familiar to him, and a few steps farther on he recognized the Casa Alvarez, and remembered, what he had forgotten till now, that the house of his old friend stood almost within a stone's-throw of the Santa Engracia convent.

"This was the head-quarters of Don Hernando," said Tio Jorge. "You had better make it yours also, Señor."

"Yes. But let us go on to the ramparts now. I want to see the position, and the men. Do you know, by the by,

what has become of the family of Don Fernan Alvarez? The old Señor himself is dead."

"I cannot tell you, Señor. He was a good man, was Don Fernan. He had one daughter; was it not so? But they were far above a poor man like me, and I know nothing about the Señorita."

Jack felt a curious pleasure in knowing that the Casa Alvarez was in his own district, and would actually be his head-quarters. Hastening down the street towards the walls, he enquired whether the ramparts were manned in force at night in anticipation of attack during the hours of darkness. Tio Jorge informed him that the French had not risked a night attack in force since the beginning of the siege. They continued their mining operations, but they had found it so difficult to make headway above-ground, even in the daylight, that actual assaults and fighting seldom or never occurred between dark and dawn. The ramparts were therefore guarded by a sufficient number of sentries, but not occupied in force, the defenders being only too glad to recruit their overtaxed energies with sleep. When Jack arrived at the wall he found sentries posted at intervals of a few yards. He learnt from Tio Jorge that his command extended from the Santa Engracia convent some fifty yards to the north, where it adjoined the Porta Quemada district under the charge of a personal friend of Palafox, Don Casimir Ulloa. It happened that Don Casimir was making a round of his sentries before leaving for the night, and to him Jack was introduced by Tio Jorge at the point where their commands met. Tio Jorge then took his leave, promising to call at the Casa Alvarez on the way back, and see that a room was arranged for the Señor's occupation.

"Is all quiet to-night, Señor?" asked Jack, after the first compliments had passed.

"Yes; nothing has happened since the French blew up a house by the Santa Engracia convent just before dark. But one thing puzzles me, Señor. Do you know this part of the city?"

"I was here once before, but that was six years ago, and I was too much a child then to remember it well now."

"But you will know that beyond the wall here, which has been greatly strengthened and thickened, the ground slopes steeply down to the River Huerba. You can see it; the water shines in the moonlight. On the other side of the ravine, at the top, are the French trenches."

"I see. What puzzles you, Señor?"

"I am coming to it. Every night for ten days past I have been at this spot at this hour, and every night I have either seen or heard a French sentry exactly opposite. To-night, however, there is a difference. At dusk we saw the Frenchman tramping up and down behind the trench, just out of range of your good English muskets, Señor; we heard the guard changed; but a few minutes ago, when I looked, I found that the sentry had disappeared. Perhaps my eyes are at fault. Will you look, Señor?"

Jack looked across the ravine. A pale half-moon was shining, as yet somewhat low in the sky, and the ravine and river-bed were gloomed by black shadows. The line of the entrenchments showed rugged against the background, in which watch-fires here and there marked the night bivouac of the French. From the far distance came faint and fitful noises; the gurgling wash of the river against its embankments made the only sound in the vicinity. Jack ran his eyes along the edge of the entrenchment for a hundred yards in each direction. Certainly no sentinel was in sight.

"Perhaps he is resting," he remarked. "There is no need for him to tramp up and down in sight all the time."

"True, Señor, but why to-night? Why on this night should we miss what we have seen without exception for many nights past?"

"It is certainly strange. I shouldn't think it implied any particular danger of an attack; should you?"

At this moment Pepito touched him on the arm.

"Something crawling, Señor!" he said.

He pointed across the river towards a spot in deep shadow half-way down the opposite slope. Jack looked in that direction, but failed to perceive any moving object.

"You are mistaken, Pepito," he said.

The gipsy was stretched now at full length on the wall, peering, with his hands arching his eyes, into the darkness.

"A man crawling!" he whispered. "See!"

Jack and Don Casimir followed the boy's example, and, keeping the moonlight from their eyes, at length discerned a dark figure crawling slowly down the steep. A moment later, all three caught sight of a second figure following at a short interval the first.

"They are coming within range," whispered Don Casimir. "I will order my men to shoot."

"Stay!" said Jack quickly. "Let us wait. Pass the word along the sentries not to shoot if they see two men approaching. Two men will not overpower us and capture the city, Señor; there is something puzzling, as you say, in all this. We must find out what it means."

The men had now reached the foot of the opposite slope. On the ramparts several pairs of eyes were watching them eagerly. At the brink of the river they halted for a moment, then stepped into the water. Jack looked questioningly at Don Casimir.

"Yes," said the latter, "the Huerba is fordable here."

Two figures were wading through the water. They gained the nearer bank; they climbed up. When on dry land again they no longer crawled, but clambered as rapidly as might be up the steep ascent to the wall. Jack felt growing interest and excitement as they came up foot by foot, with no attempt at concealment. They were within four yards of the wall.

"Quien vive?" asked Don Casimir in clear low tones.

"Silencio!" said the first of the two figures, holding up a warning hand. "I am a friend; help me up."

The wall was some fourteen feet in height, and there was no apparent means of assisting the man below.

"If two of your men let down their muskets, I can catch hold of them," said the man in a whisper.

The hint was acted on. Don Casimir beckoned up two of his men, who laid themselves flat on the wall, lowering their muskets until the man below was able to grasp a barrel in each hand. Then they gradually drew up the weapons hand over hand, and the man with them. Don Casimir, with drawn sword, kept a sharp look-out to assure himself that the new-comers were alone, and that this strange incident was not part of a French plot to rush the wall.

In half a minute the spokesman was standing beside the little group.

"Do I see Don Casimir?" he said, looking keenly at the Spaniard, who had given a start of recognition as his features came into view above the parapet.

"Yes, Señor," replied Don Casimir with a bow. "This is a strange meeting."

"Strange indeed! Ah, what an hour it has been! I thought we should never have got through. Turn where we would, the French seemed to have sentries everywhere."

"Except yonder, Don Miguel," said Jack quietly, coming a little more distinctly into view.

Miguel made a quick turn at the sound of his voice, and with a scarcely perceptible pause said:

"Ah! my dear young friend, who would have thought of seeing you here? What a pleasant meeting! Yes, as you say, except yonder. But, as it happens, the sentry yonder is now keeping guard in another world." He tapped the hilt of his sword significantly. "We were not in the mood to brook delay, and he was—well, one Frenchman the less."

"All the same, they have replaced him pretty soon," remarked Jack dryly, "unless that is his ghost."

He pointed, as he spoke, to the form of a sentry leaning on his musket at the spot that had been described to him by Don Casimir as the customary post.

"It is strange," replied Miguel musingly; "one might have expected a commotion—when they found the body. But, yes—no doubt they hush these things up. It would reflect on their discipline."

Don Casimir, who had been looking from one to the other in some astonishment, here interposed.

"But—do I understand, Don Miguel, that you have come through the French lines?"

"Why, certainly, my friend; how else should I be here? We are from Seville, from the Supreme Junta, with despatches. We have ridden post-haste four hundred and fifty miles in six days, as my friend here must know, and by a miracle have succeeded in eluding the wolves yonder. But that reminds me—I should lose no time in delivering my despatches to the captain-general. I suppose he is still in the Aljafferia? How goes it in Saragossa? I fear you have been hard pressed."

"Yes, indeed," replied Don Casimir. "But the pack of wolves outside is being thinned. Every yard costs a man."

"Ah! I shall have much to hear," said Miguel, with a meaning look at Jack; "and on my side I have not a little to tell. Adios, Señores!"

With a low bow he turned away, followed by his companion, whom Jack had at once recognized, when he gained the summit of the wall, as the one-eyed servitor of evil memory. There was no look of recognition in the man's fixed stare as he left the group a few paces behind his master. Jack, however, was amused to note the attitude of Pepito, who stood fingering his little knife with an air of tragedy worthy of Mr. Kean himself.

"It was a daring feat," said Don Casimir, looking into the moonlit distance as if gauging the difficulties that must have beset any attempt to approach Saragossa from that side. "Indeed, except yourself, I believe no one has got in for at least three weeks past. But we have always known Don Miguel as a match for any Frenchman. He gave many proofs of astuteness during the first siege. He is not easy to beat when readiness and resourcefulness are needed. It is strange," he added after an interval, during which his eye rested on the figure of the French sentry, "very strange. I could have sworn it is the same man—the man I missed an hour ago. But, of course, it cannot be."

"The moonlight may be deceptive," suggested Jack; but as he left the spot to return to his quarters he looked thoughtful.

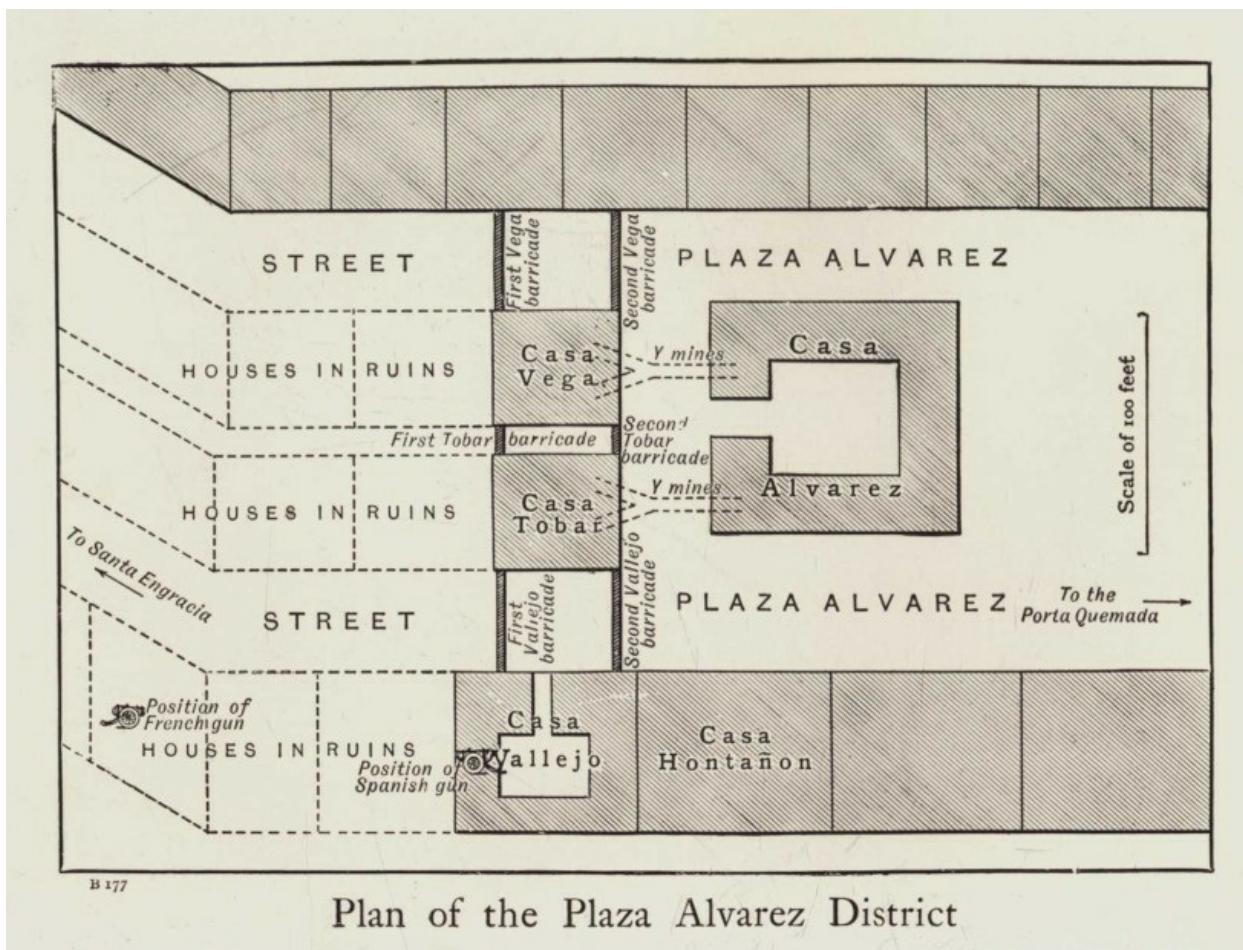
CHAPTER XXII

Juanita

The Brave Antonio—A Survey—Towards the Coso—A Deed of Daring—The Señorita Receives—Old Friends—Mig Prig—Don Fernan—An Ambush—José Pinzon—The Call of Duty

Next morning, as soon as it was light, Jack started for a round of his district. The Casa Alvarez was a large square house, standing in the middle of a small plaza of its own. Exactly opposite its front, which faced towards Santa Engracia, there were two smaller houses, known as the Casas Vega and Tobar, the backs of which were separated from each other by a narrow lane leading towards the convent. Each of these houses was the last of a block of contiguous buildings, and they were, in fact, the only houses in their blocks which were still intact, the rest being more or less in ruins. The front of the Casa Tobar looked into a street running parallel with the lane and entering the Plaza Alvarez on the side nearest the ramparts. On the other side of the street ran a row of houses parallel to the Casa Tobar block. These also were mainly in ruins. The house exactly opposite the Casa Tobar was known as the Casa Vallejo, and this, while at present unharmed, was the immediate object of the French attack. Thus in the vicinity of the Casa Alvarez there were three parallel blocks of buildings along which the French were working simultaneously. Two of the blocks were terminated by the Plaza Alvarez, and the last house in each was in a line with the Casa Vallejo. The Casa Vallejo terrace was separated by a lane from the ramparts, for the defence of which Jack was not

responsible.



Plan of the Plaza Alvarez District

Plan of the Plaza Alvarez District

The features of the locality were pointed out to him by a young Spanish lawyer, Don Cristobal Somiedo, who had taken a voluntary part in the struggle, and had acted as lieutenant to Jack's predecessor, Don Hernando de Solas. It was he, too, who introduced Jack to his little corps. It consisted of about 380 men, of whom no more than 250 could be regarded as really fit for duty, and even of these, as they paraded before him, many looked as though they should be in hospital wards. The majority of them were regulars, but nearly 100 were guerrilleros driven into the city, before the actual investment began, by the advance of the French. Among the rest were once well-to-do shopkeepers, whose businesses had been ruined, and whose houses and shops had in many cases been destroyed by the French bombs or mines. They were fighting side by side with artisans from the lower quarters of the city, and peasants from the country-side, all distinctions of class and occupation being forgotten in the common peril. Regulars and irregulars all bore marks of the toils and dangers of their strenuous life—some in their tattered garments, others in ghastly wounds, others in their haggard cheeks and fever-lit eyes. But only one spirit animated them all: the determination to spend their last energies in the defence of the city.

Passing down their ranks, Jack was struck by one face that seemed familiar to him, and he stopped before the man, endeavouring to recall the circumstances in which he had seen him.

"Buenos días, Señor," said the man, a stout thick-set fellow wearing a heavy skin cloak. He smiled somewhat sheepishly as he saluted his new commandant.

The tone of voice brought back to Jack's memory the roadside encounter with a man on the way to Medina, and the subsequent meeting in the inn.

"The brave Antonio, is it not?" he said with a smile.

"Sí, Señor," replied the man.

"I am glad to see you engaged in such excellent work."

Passing on, Jack was introduced by Don Cristobal to Pablo Quintanar, the chief of the guerrilleros, and learnt that the man, though subordinate to the commander of the district, expected a certain amount of consideration as head of an independent party of peasant-warriors. Jack was not taken with the man's appearance. He had a sinister look and shifty eyes, and replied in curt ungenial tones to the few words addressed to him.

"Antonio, the man you spoke to just now," added Don Cristobal, "is second in command of the guerrilleros, and a much better man, in my opinion, than the chief. You appear to know him, Señor?"

"I met him once," was Jack's brief reply.

Having made acquaintance with his corps, and finding that the French had not yet commenced their morning movements, Jack proceeded to complete his survey of the position. Beyond the River Huerba he could now clearly see the long rows of French trenches, the parallels cut here and there by a series of zigzags constructed with incredible labour to secure the besiegers' approach to the walls. The French had actually made good their position on the near side of the river, immediately beneath the wall, towards Santa Engracia, but they had hitherto forbore to press their advantage, the height of the bank rendering it difficult for them to storm the ramparts in that quarter, and at the same time preventing them from blowing them up by mines.

It was clear that no French attack was to be expected from the Porta Quemada side of his district, for in order to reach him the enemy would have to push their way through some hundreds of yards of streets held by Don Casimir, who had proved himself a very capable leader. But on the Santa Engracia side he was exposed to what was plainly the enemy's principal attack. Their aim was obviously to reach the Coso, and to connect the wedge they were driving into the city in this quarter with the wedge already inserted at San Agustin.

They had made considerable progress since the capture of the Santa Engracia convent four days before. They treated each block of houses as a miniature fortress. There was no attempt to carry it by storm until the defences had been attacked by sap and mine. As soon as a house was blown up they rushed in and occupied the ruins, where they entrenched themselves with bales of wool, gabions, and sacks of earth, and began to drive mines under the next block.

Anxious to see for himself something of their method, Jack entered a house next to one recently blown up, and, ascending to the top story, peeped through a loop-hole pierced in the party wall. The roof of the next house had fallen in. Some charred beams were still smouldering. Here and there a tongue of flame licked the débris, and as the breeze blew in fitful gusts, dense clouds of smoke rose into the air.

"They don't do their work very thoroughly," said Jack to Don Cristobal. "The shell of the house is still standing. A good explosion would have shattered the whole place."

"They have changed their ways, Señor," replied the lieutenant. "At first they used big charges and completely destroyed the houses; but they found that when the ruins cooled, and they occupied the space, they had no shelter from our fire. Now they use smaller charges and throw down only the wall next to them, leaving the other walls and the roof uninjured. The roof next door was not brought down by the explosion, but by our own men setting fire to

the shell."

"A counter-stroke, eh? Obviously two can play at their game. Well, it will be at least a couple of days, I should think, before the ruins are cool enough for the French to occupy the ground. Probably they are busy running a mine towards us."

A loud explosion at this moment shocked the air. Looking out of the window, across the barricaded streets, Jack saw a column of smoke pouring from a house to his left, at the corner of another block of buildings not in his quarter.

"One house nearer the Coso," he said. "Well, Don Cristobal, we must do what we can to check their progress in our direction. Our men are no doubt counter-mining."

"Not very successfully, I am afraid. We have no trained sappers and miners; only a scratch battalion formed from the workmen employed on the great canal of Aragon, a mile to the south, and they haven't been accustomed to work underground."

"We must give them some practice, then," said Jack as they left the house together.

Returning to the Casa Alvarez, which he had fixed on as his permanent head-quarters, Jack learnt that there had as yet been no sign of a French attack upon his district. The houses and barricades were well manned by the Spaniards. It was clear that their vigorous opposition had deterred the French from attempting an assault in force until they had made further progress with their mines. In pursuance of an idea that had occurred to him, Jack sent for the foreman of the canal labourers and took him at once into a small cabinet, where they remained closeted for more than two hours. At the end of that time the workman, carrying a sheet of paper, left the house, collected a gang of the labourers, and brought them, armed with various implements, into the Casa Alvarez, where he descended with them into the cellars.

Meanwhile Jack, leaving Don Cristobal in command, made his way to the Aljafferia Castle to see Palafox. His interview with the general was brief. He reported that he had taken over command of his district, rapidly surveyed it, and inspected his men. He mentioned what he had learnt of the recent operations of the French, and was informed by Palafox that he might regard himself as having a free hand in preparing measures of defence, though he would be expected to make a daily report to head-quarters. The business of the interview being concluded, Palafox said:

"You will be interested to hear that last night Don Miguel Priego—he is connected, I believe, with your father's house—got through the French lines by a stroke of matchless daring, bringing me despatches from the Supreme Junta. Their view of my country's prospects is brighter than Mr. Frere's; and Don Miguel tells me that, from information he gained during his wonderful journey across Spain, we may expect the siege to be raised within a week."

"I am glad to hear it, Señor Capitan," said Jack gravely. Then, abruptly changing the subject, he continued: "Can you tell me where I should be likely to find Padre Consolacion?"

"At the Franciscan convent, no doubt; you will pass it on the way back to your district. The padre is doing grand work."

Jack thanked the general and took his leave. He was anxious to find Padre Consolacion and discover from him the whereabouts of Juanita Alvarez. As he walked along the Coso towards the Franciscan convent he came to the house where he had left the young Señorita whose acquaintance he had made on his first entrance to the town, and remembering the trinkets of hers he had in his pocket, he decided to call and leave them with her, and at the same time enquire after her welfare and the health of the fragile old lady whom they had rescued. Rapping at the door, he was in a minute confronted by a pleasant-looking old duenna, who, on learning the object of his call, at once asked him in.

"The Señorita said that if you called you were to be shown up, Señor. Follow me."

There was nothing unusual in this; in Spain a message is always delivered in person, be the messenger high or low. Jack followed the old woman into a vast salon, darkened by the closing of the shutters except at a small window at the back.

"The Señora is ill; the Señorita receives," said his guide, and went out, closing the door.

In a chair sat the old lady, looking vacantly around the room, mumbling her lips and fingering the ends of her lace mantilla. She paid no attention to the visitor, but the younger lady rose and came forward a few steps, then stood in an attitude of mingled enquiry and expectancy.

"You will pardon me, Señorita; I could not help calling to enquire—I am not sure of your name—"

"I don't think we mentioned it, Señor. And that reminds me of my own neglect—my unpardonable neglect. I should certainly have asked the name of our—deliverer."

At this word Jack looked uncomfortable. His fluency in Spanish seemed for the moment to have utterly deserted him.

"Oh," he exclaimed at a rush, "my name is Lumsden—Jack Lumsden."

"Ah! an English name, is it not? Then you are not a Spaniard. And yet you speak—just like one of ourselves."

Jack's reply was half-apologetic.

"Oh, well, I had a good deal of practice as a child. I used to live in Spain."

"And now?"

"Now—I'm in the army—the English army—lieutenant in the 95th regiment."

"Lieutenant?—May I congratulate you?"

"Congratulate me!" repeated Jack in some surprise.

"Yes; is it not permitted? Among us it is quite the custom to congratulate a friend on his promotion."

"Certainly, Señorita—" began Jack, wondering still more; but before he could collect himself the girl continued, with a twinkle of amusement in her eyes:

"Surely it is only the other day that you were an ensign. Can you have forgotten that too? You were not always so forgetful. I fear—"

"True, Señorita, I was a kind of ensign, though in the 95th we've no colours to carry. But—"

"I fear," she continued, after a scarcely perceptible pause, "—yes, that you are—well, not quite so nice as you used to be."

Her eyes were dancing with merriment, and in a flash Jack recalled the time, six years ago, when a little maid with just such eyes had been his occasional playmate in Barcelona. True, there was little other resemblance; she had been an elf-like girl, with tangled hair, thin cheeks, and the shy manner of a child unused to the society of children. Before him now stood a tall girl with a dignity and self-possession beyond her years, her rounded cheeks and bright eyes showing that the trials of the siege had as yet touched her but lightly.

"Juanita!" exclaimed Jack, almost below his breath. "Well, of all the extraordinary—of all the stupid—"

Juanita laughed outright—the old rippling laugh that Jack now remembered well.

"I hope, Señor Lumsden, you are not referring to me," she said.

"You must think me an ass," he replied, half-amused, half-nettled. "But," he added, seeing a loophole, "it isn't my fault. It's you who have changed, not I. And I came to Saragossa on purpose to see you. To think it was you all the time!"

"Indeed we thank you. I don't know what we should have done without you," said Juanita more seriously. "We could never have got away. Don't think me ungrateful; I knew you at once; but it was all so terrible, and I saw you didn't know me. And then, when all was over, I ought to have explained, but I—well—"

"Didn't," said Jack with a smile. "I see you haven't changed so much after all. The same Juanita, mischievous as

ever."

"I'm afraid not, Jack. I'm years older than I was a few months ago. We were happy then; now everything is different."

The tears stood in her eyes.

"Yes," said Jack, "I had heard; that is why I came to see you."

They were silent; then Juanita, with a brave effort to smile, said:

"Now, Jack, tell me all about yourself."

In a few words Jack gave an account of what had happened to him since his arrival in Spain, Juanita listening with an interest and excitement that every now and then found expression in eager questions.

"But now," said Jack in conclusion, "it's your turn. I have many things to ask. Do you know, I met an old friend not long ago, who told me something about you."

"Oh! Who was that, and what was it?"

"Well, I called him an old friend—for your sake. It was Miguel Priego."

"Him!" Her shrug was expressive. "Why do you say for my sake?"

"Well, considering what he told me—"

"What did he say? Don't be mysterious."

"He said—that you were about to be married."

"Married! Good gracious! To whom?"

"To him!"

"To Mig Prig?"

Her scornful laugh was wholly convincing, and Jack could not help joining heartily in her merriment when he heard once again his boyish nickname for their common tyrant.

"That's all right, then," he said.

"But surely you didn't believe it?" added Juanita, with a touch of indignation.

"Well, time works strange changes, you know."

"Possibly," said Juanita, appreciating the retort; "but not so strange as that. Marry *him!*"

Her gesture was imperial in its disdain.

"Another of Miguel's lies!" said Jack. "But," he added thoughtfully, "there was usually a motive behind them. What can it be this time? He gave me so many details; said it had all been arranged between your father and Don Esteban; he was to have the business; and all the rest of it."

"Ridiculous! My father would have been the very last to think of such a thing. He distrusted him—with good cause."

And then she proceeded to give Jack a narrative from which, as the tale was unfolded, he gained more than an inkling of Don Miguel's designs.

More than two years before, when Napoleon formed his alliance with Spain, Don Fernan Alvarez, a shrewd observer of events, had suspected that the ostensible object of despoiling Portugal was only a ruse by which the emperor intended to make himself master of the whole peninsula. Foreseeing a period of confusion and anarchy, the old merchant resolved to take time by the forelock and set his house in order. He went to Barcelona, the headquarters of the business, and proceeded to realize his stock as far as possible, with the intention of converting it into bullion or valuables which could be laid aside as a provision for his own declining years and his daughter's future. On going into the accounts of the firm he found that Don Esteban Priego's books showed large deficiencies, threatening to more than cover his interest, not a great one, in the business. When the matter was brought to light, Don Esteban was much distressed. He had been for some time in failing health, and had left the management of his

branch almost entirely in the hands of his son Miguel, who, however, when brought to book by his father's partner, indignantly protested against the implied charge of dishonesty, and declared that if there was anything wrong he at any rate was absolutely clean-handed. There was no time to investigate the matter fully. After a stormy interview Don Fernan left the office in charge of a trusted clerk, and, taking with him the large sum of money he had realized, together with the unsatisfactory books, set out for Saragossa a few days before Barcelona was seized by the French.

Owing to the disturbed state of the country he thought it wise to travel with an escort of some score of well-armed men, half of them his own retainers, half alguazils. From some undefined motive of prudence he kept his departure secret until the last moment. But, despite this precaution, the party was ambushed at dusk, at a lonely spot on the hills within two marches of Saragossa, by a horde of brigands. The escort made a stout resistance, but being taken entirely at a disadvantage by superior numbers they were overpowered. Don Fernan himself was severely wounded in the first moment of attack; several of his men were killed or disabled; and the rest, seeing their case hopeless, made their escape.

The brigands were about to kill the wounded, on the principle that dead men tell no tales, when a body of French horsemen rode down the hill at a gallop. One startled glance, and the bandits hurriedly decamped. At that time the French were posing as disinterested friends of Spain. The cavaliers showed every attention to the wounded men, assisted Don Fernan into Saragossa, and with a self-restraint that was remarkable in the light of the subsequent behaviour of their countrymen, handed over to him his books and boxes untouched. This was a double relief to the merchant, for, if what he learnt on the way from his old body-servant José was true, he had not only saved the treasure for his daughter, but preserved it from the hands of the one man whom he had recently had so much reason to mistrust. José had been stunned during the fight by a blow from a clubbed musket. On recovering consciousness he was amazed to recognize, among the assailants, no other than Don Miguel Priego. He could not be sure. At that moment the French appeared and the brigands fled. But he felt that he could hardly have been mistaken.

"That was where Miguel got his scar," said Jack to himself at this point of the story.

A few months after Don Fernan's return to Saragossa the French began the first siege of the city. He contributed largely to the funds raised for the defence, and though scarcely able to walk played a not inconsiderable part in the actual work behind the walls. But such unwonted exertions tried his already enfeebled health. He had never thoroughly recovered from his wound. The troubles of the siege were too great a strain for a man of his age. And though his strength revived a little when the French were so signally beaten, he was again ailing when the news of the fatal day of Tudela broke his last hold on life. The Saragossans gave him honoured burial.

His last days were troubled by anxiety about his daughter and only child. He knew that if his property became subject to the lingering processes of the Spanish courts, very little of it would be left for Juanita. He had no near relatives or friends on whose integrity and business capacity he could thoroughly rely. Mr. Lumsden, his English partner, would, as a heretic, probably be unable to act as executor of a will, and in any case would be seriously handicapped in any legal proceedings. He therefore made no will, but solemnly entrusted his servant with the task of carrying out his wishes. José was forty years of age, wholly illiterate, but devoted to his old master, and even more to Juanita. He enjoyed Don Fernan's entire confidence, and was fully informed of his master's affairs. A sum of money had already been invested in England that would produce an income of about £400 a year; of this Mr. Lumsden was trustee. The remainder of his property consisted of a country house and estate near Morata, some miles west of Saragossa; the family plate and heirlooms; and the money realized by the sale of his disposable stock in Barcelona. The movable property was all given into José Pinzon's charge, to be handed over to Juanita when the country should have settled down again.

"That won't be yet, I'm afraid," remarked Jack, "but no doubt José has it safe enough. By the way, where is he?"

"I wish I knew," said Juanita anxiously. "Nothing has been heard of him since the great sortie of Captain

Mariano Galindo about ten days ago. He volunteered among the brave two hundred, and was one of the first to spike the French guns. But he never came back."

"Poor fellow!" said Jack. "I'm very sorry. We used to be great chums. There aren't many like him. You will miss him sadly."

"Yes, indeed; and I wouldn't mind about the property if only he were safe."

"But surely his disappearance doesn't affect the property?"

"Well, you see, nobody else knows where it is. Father didn't tell me. He thought there would be less risk of harm if I knew nothing about it."

"But he would be sure to provide against José's death. Ah!" he exclaimed, as a sudden light dawned, "that explains it. I had a letter from him in Salamanca, telling me about another letter left with General Palafox. No doubt everything was explained in that."

"Was explained! What do you mean?"

"The letter has disappeared—was stolen, mistaken for plans of the city. But there's still a chance left. A third letter was sent to my father. We must hope it was a duplicate of the lost one."

"Oh dear!" sighed Juanita, "to think that so many people should be troubled with poor little me!"

"We seem to have rather muddled things among us," said Jack. "But I see now what Mig Prig is aiming at. Have you heard that he is back in Saragossa?"

"Miguel back!" exclaimed Juanita; in her tone there was a hint of uneasiness. "Oh, I do hope I shall not meet him! But I won't think of him."

"He's not worth it.—I was almost forgetting. I have brought some of your trinkets from the Casa Ximenez. Will you—"

"Hark!" exclaimed Juanita, holding up her hand. There was a loud crash as of falling masonry.

"They are bombarding again," said Jack, rising. "I must hasten to my post. Good-bye, Juanita!"

"You will come and see us again when you have time?"

They both looked sympathetically at the huddled figure of Doña Teresa, who had fallen asleep in her chair.

"Poor Auntie!" said Juanita. Then, as Jack turned towards the door, she folded her mantilla about her head and dropped a low curtsy, saying demurely: "Adios, Señor!"

CHAPTER XXIII

The Fight in the Ruins

Mines and Countermines—In the Cellars—Burrowing—Y Mines—An Underground Enemy—The Foe Within—Planning a Surprise—At Dawn—Across the Barricades—In the Enemy's Works—A Bird's-eye View—Through the Wall—Sword versus Bayonet—Shut Out—A Mob Leader—Too much Zeal—Not Proven

Jack walked downstairs abstractedly, and was only brought to himself by the sudden realization that he had almost collided with a person entering at the door. Looking up with a murmured apology, he saw that the visitor was a burly priest, in long cassock and broad sombrero which roofed a round jovial face. The priest was equally apologetic, and eyed Jack curiously, stopping in the doorway and turning round to gaze after his retreating figure. Outside, Jack found Pepito perched on a stone post. He sprang to the ground when he saw his master.

"Well, imp," said Jack, "sticking to me as usual, eh?"

"Sí, Señor. Señor knows the fat padre?"

"No. Do you?"

"A friend of the Busno Don Miguel," replied the boy.

"Indeed! How do you know that?"

"I saw them talking at the door of the great big house over there."

He pointed to the Franciscan convent on the other side of the road. Jack looked thoughtful; he wondered whether this was the Padre Consolacion of whom he had heard, and was half-minded to turn back and make his acquaintance. That he had been seen in consultation with Miguel was somewhat disturbing. But, on second thoughts, he decided that he had already been long enough away from his command at Santa Engracia, and he hastened his steps in that direction, anxious to see how things had been progressing there in his absence.

When he left the Casa Alvarez, two hours before, he had given instructions for the commencement of operations by which he hoped to beat the French at their own game. From what he had learnt from Don Cristobal he saw that the mistake up to the present had been the waiting for the explosion of the French mines, the result being that the enemy gained positions from which it usually proved impossible to dislodge them. The only means of keeping them effectually in check was to practise countermining, not in the hand-to-mouth manner in which it had hitherto been attempted, but systematically, with a longer outlook, with a regard to ultimate developments rather than to the immediate repelling of attack. During his interview with the foreman that morning he had explained his ideas, and learnt that, so far as the man's limited experience went, there was no practical obstacle to their accomplishment.

The French, as he had seen, had been for some days past working steadily through the three parallel blocks of buildings that ran from the Santa Engracia direction towards the Plaza Alvarez. They had made equal progress in all three blocks. The limit of destruction was marked by the Casas Vega, Tobar, and Vallejo, the first two being at the end of their blocks immediately facing the Casa Alvarez, separated from each other by a narrow lane, while the last was separated from the Casa Tobar by the street running into the plaza. These three houses were still standing, but it was obvious that they would form the next points of attack, and it was highly probable that even now the enemy had begun to cut galleries towards them.

Jack had made up his mind to anticipate the attack. Before leaving in the morning he had learnt from the foreman, whose name was Pulgar, that the work of mining underground could usually be heard from a distance of about forty feet. From this he calculated that, if the French began to work from their side immediately after their last attack, there would be time for his own men to drive a short gallery beneath the wall of each of the three houses before there was any risk of their operations being heard by the enemy. He had therefore left instructions for a hole to be cut beneath the farther party-wall of each house, where it adjoined the house last demolished. He told Pulgar to see that the digging was done as quietly as possible, and to be on the alert to catch the slightest sound of the approach of the French miners in the opposite direction.

"Well, how are things getting on?" he asked of Don Cristobal, on arriving at his post after his interview with Juanita.

"Excellently," was the reply. "Pulgar has kept the men at work without relaxation."

"In shifts, I suppose?"

"Only one man can work at each tunnel, so he gave each man half an hour; then his place was taken by another. Here is Pulgar himself."

"You are doing capitally, I hear, hombre," said Jack. "How far have the men got?"

"The tunnels are nearly three feet long by this time, Señor. It takes about an hour to cut away a foot."

"Any sound of the French?"

"None, Señor."

"Very well. Another four feet will finish these. But we mustn't stop at that. We can't hope to keep the enemy back altogether by one explosion at those walls. It would delay them, certainly, and do considerable damage; but we'll have to prepare to give them much more trouble farther back."

"I had thought of that, Señor."

"Well, I think we'll go and have a look at the cellars. Come along. Bring your measure with you; we shall require that, and a candle."

Descending to the cellars of the Casa Alvarez, Jack found that they ran along the walls on the west and north sides of the building, at a distance of ten feet below the surface of the ground. They formed a series of arched rooms leading one from the other, with small openings for ventilation giving on the patio.

"Dark musty places these!" said Jack. "Judging by the appearance of them, they haven't been used for a century. There's not even a bottle of wine to be seen, let alone a rat. Ah! I spoke too soon; sh-h-h!"

A rat had just scurried along the wall into its hole in the corner.

"I have been thinking over things," resumed Jack, "and I shall be glad of your opinion of the plan I have partly formed. Our object, of course, must be to hold the French in check as long as possible; but if they succeed in occupying the two houses opposite, and the Casa Vallejo, we shall be very hard put to it to defend the plaza and this house. They outnumber us. It is quite likely that, in spite of all we can do, they will eventually succeed in obtaining a lodgment in these three houses or their ruins. I propose, therefore, to plan our defence on the assumption that they will do so. This house in which we now stand will be our fort, and we should arrange so that we can do the enemy as much damage as possible from this spot."

"That is reasonable, Señor," said Don Cristobal.

"Well, the greatest damage we can do will be done by mines like their own—either to destroy their mines before they have time to explode them, or to drive the enemy back when they have exploded their mines and seized the houses. To do that effectually we require to drive at least two galleries from these cellars under each house. But the Casa Vallejo is too far away. We haven't men enough, and it would take too long, to cut a gallery from here right across the plaza and street and under that house. The Casas Vega and Tobar are much nearer, and I see nothing to prevent us from cutting the galleries under them."

"In addition to the short tunnels already being cut under the party-walls?" asked Don Cristobal.

"Oh yes! You see my aim? The short tunnels are to delay their attack on those houses; the longer tunnels I propose are to check their advance on this house when they have captured the others."

"But why two long galleries, Señor?" asked Pulgar.

"Because, after we have fired one, the French will come on in greater strength again, thinking we have done our worst, and the explosion of the second will have a shattering effect on them in every way."

"An excellent idea, Señor!" said Don Cristobal, "but our men are not too strong, and it would cost immense labour to drive two galleries. It is forty feet across the plaza between this and the houses opposite; you must allow for several feet of tunnel in each house if you want to spare the walls facing us—"

"Eight feet at least," interrupted Jack. "I don't want to destroy the houses entirely."

"Well, that makes ninety-six feet of tunnelling for each house, and all the earth to be carried back as it is dug out. You will work your men to death, Señor."

Jack considered. For the moment he envied some friends of his who had commissions in the Engineers. "They would have mugged up all this sort of thing in their books," he said to himself. How could he achieve his purpose without running the risk Don Cristobal had pointed out? He stood for a time unconsciously tapping the stone floor with his foot as he thought over the problem.

"I have it!" he exclaimed suddenly. "It's a case of letter Y—you see? Drive one gallery half-way; then two branching out from it like the arms of a capital Y. It won't save time, but it will save labour, and we can't afford to knock the men up."

"That is it, Señor," said Pulgar, rubbing his hands.

"Then I will get you to arrange with the men so that they take turn and turn about. And by the way, two short tunnels must be cut between the Casa Vallejo and the house next it on this side—the Casa Hontanon, is it not? Those houses are not so capable of defence as this is, but we must do what we can to beat the enemy there also."

Pulgar at once set off to arrange with the workmen, while Jack proceeded to organize the garrisoning of the houses. Except for a few shells thrown over the ramparts nothing had been done by the French since the explosion of the previous evening. The barricades in the streets and lane were held by men of the Valencia regiment; Jack selected other men from the same regiment, and some of the best of the guerrilleros, and thus formed three companies of twenty men each to garrison the three casas, Vega, Tobar, and Vallejo. Fifty men were held in reserve in the Casa Alvarez.

As the day wore on, Jack found that the tunnelling proceeded more rapidly than he had expected. Working on a more definite plan than hitherto, the men saw that their chances of seriously checking the French advance were much greater, and dug and carried with a dogged perseverance that gave Jack a new respect for the Spanish character. By the evening the short holes under the party-walls nearest the French were ready for the charges. Thinking it advisable to see for himself what had been done, Jack crawled through one of the tunnels with a lighted candle, feeling the oppression of the dank confined air. He saw by the dim light that the sides and roof were roughly shored up with timber, and that, as he had wished, there was a slight slope upwards, so that the head of the tunnel was only about four feet from the surface. At the end he listened for the sound of the French miners, who, he guessed, were approaching, but hearing nothing concluded that they were not as yet so far advanced with their work.

Returning to the rear end of the tunnel, he arranged for a heavy charge of powder to be placed in position with the fuses. When this had been done it was time to "tamp" the tunnels—fill them up again with earth to a distance greater than the depth of the mines below the surface. This was necessary, or when the explosion took place it would exhaust its force along the open tunnel instead of in the upward direction intended. But Jack decided not to do any tamping until he was sure that the French had driven their galleries so close to his own that the explosion of his own mines would destroy the enemy's. If he found that the French tunnels were to the right or left of his own, so far away that his explosion would not greatly affect them, he would have to await the French explosion and then use his own mines to repel the attack on the buildings that would instantly follow.

Late at night Antonio the guerrillero, who had been one of the most enthusiastic of the workers, reported that at the farther end of the short tunnel into the Casa Vega he had heard the faint sound of picks. Jack instantly crawled into the tunnel to listen for himself. Undoubtedly the man was right. Giving orders that men should take turns to watch all through the night at the tunnel head, he went to bed after midnight, tired out with the day's exertions.

Before he fell asleep his mind ran over the strange events with which the last two days had been crowded. In particular he reflected on the story he had heard from Juanita, and could not help wondering at the extraordinary mischances which had befallen her affairs. The letter confided to Palafox must have contained instructions in regard to the property which old Don Ferman had preserved somewhere for his daughter, and had been written as a precaution in case anything happened to his trusted servant José. Some perverse fate seemed to have decreed that José should die and the letter be lost simultaneously. And then his thoughts turned to Miguel. His story about the projected marriage was clearly a sheer fabrication; but it showed what his intentions were. He meant to take advantage of Juanita's orphaned condition to coax or cajole her into a marriage, and thereby to secure the property which he knew must be hers. It seemed improbable that he could have learnt where her father had stored his wealth;

it might be that he supposed Juanita knew. His sudden nocturnal appearance in Saragossa, with a story of overpowering a sentry, was in itself very suspicious. Could he be playing a double game? At any rate Jack felt that he must be on his guard, on behalf of Juanita as well as himself; that Miguel would not hesitate to injure him he had now little doubt.

These thoughts, however, were banished by the important work of the next day. At dawn he learnt that hour by hour during the night the approach of the French had been more distinctly heard. All that morning he paid frequent visits to the Vega tunnel, and about eleven o'clock he felt sure, from the direction and the proximity of the sounds, that the French miners had arrived at a point in a line with the head of his gallery. The mining continued; it would take them between six and seven hours to reach the wall. Leaving Don Cristobal in charge, with instructions to keep as vigilant a look-out as ever, Jack went to see how the Y-shaped mines from the cellars of the Casa Alvarez were progressing, and then made a general round of the district. Several times during the day he had heard the sound of explosions in other parts of the city, but had been too busy to enquire about what was happening. He learnt now, however, that a block of houses twenty yards nearer the Coso, in the direction of the Franciscan convent, had been carried by the French, by which means they had extended their attacking front by nearly three times that distance. He heard also that trenches had been opened against the Jesus Convent, in the suburb of San Lazaro, across the river. It was evident that the enemy were at last arranging for a determined attack in that quarter, where they had done little since the early days of the siege. The possession of San Lazaro would enable them to harass the whole north side of the city, the only portion that hitherto had been immune, and where, consequently, the greater part of the stores was collected and the mass of the fever-stricken inhabitants huddled together.

About six o'clock he was recalled to the Casa Vega by the news that the French gallery had reached the wall and the tunnelling had ceased. It would take them some four hours, Jack conjectured, to tamp their mine; when that was done they would no doubt retire from the tunnel, and it would then be safe for the Spaniards to tamp their mine in turn. If they started to do so earlier, the sound would betray them. At ten o'clock all sounds from the French end had ceased; then Jack, after allowing a short interval, set his men to perform the tamping. Working without relaxation, they completed the task by two in the morning. Within four or five hours the French would explode their mine beneath the wall.

The first thing Jack did on being awakened by Pepito half an hour before dawn was to enquire whether any sounds of the French progress had been heard in the Casas Tobar and Vallejo. In the former he learned the mining had been heard for several hours; in the latter there had been no sounds at all. Satisfied that immediate work would only be required in the Casa Vega, he proceeded to get his men into order.

His plan, carefully thought out on the previous day, was to withdraw his garrison from the Casa Vega, leaving only one man to fire the mine; otherwise a large number would be uselessly sacrificed. The inrush of the French after the explosion of their mine was to be the signal for the firing of his own, and that in turn the signal for a sortie of the whole of his available force. By this means he hoped to drive the French back to such a distance that he could discover and blow up the galleries they were driving into the Casa Tobar, and probably into the Casa Vallejo also.

It still wanted some minutes of dawn when his motley force was drawn up in the plaza behind the walls of Vega and Tobar. It numbered only 350 men in all—some haggard burghers of the city, some rugged guerrilleros from the country districts, a few regulars from General Fiballer's Valencian regiment, a few of Palafox's grenadiers. All bore signs of the stress and toil of the past few weeks; but all were animated by one spirit of indomitable resolution. Fifty of the best marksmen were at once picked out to garrison Tobar and Vallejo and harass the French with musketry-fire from the windows. Eighty good men were drafted as a reserve. This left 220, of whom 120 were told off to make the main sortie over the barricade in the street between Tobar and Vallejo, while 30 were appointed to guard the shorter barricade across the lane between Tobar and Vega. The remaining 70 were ordered to march to

the upper side of the Casa Vega and make a demonstration at the barricade erected in the street there.

Jack had resolved to lead the principal sortie in person, and he devoted special attention to the organization of his band. Ten of the men were ordered to carry bags of powder to blow up the French galleries into Tobar and Vallejo, if the sortie party were able to push home their charge. Another ten were given short ladders and mats to assist the rest across the barricade, which was of timber, some twelve feet in height, and studded at the top with sharp nails. It had been constructed so hastily, and with so little idea of the possibility of a sortie, that it formed almost as formidable an obstacle to the Spaniards as to the French.

The sortie party beyond the Casa Vega was entrusted to Don Cristobal, the reserve to Pablo Quintanar, the chief of the guerrilleros. This man was very much dissatisfied with the post allotted him; he grumbled and protested that he deserved a more prominent part in the operations, but Jack had a vague distrust of the fellow, and somewhat curtly refused to alter his arrangements.

All was now ready. In the chill foggy dawn the men waited at their several posts for the expected explosion. Sounds floated across the river from the French lines: the blare of bugles, the rat-tat of drums, occasionally the loud call of bustling officers. Jack began to wonder whether the French would wait until their galleries into Tobar and Vallejo were ready, and then spring the three mines simultaneously. But the anxious period of waiting was at length ended. About an hour after daybreak there was a dull roar; the whole district seemed to tremble; there was the crash of falling stones and timber, a cloud of smoke and dust from the Casa Vega, and with a shout the French rushed into the ruined building beyond, to make good their position there.

Then came a terrible interval of suspense, even more trying to the nerves of the Spaniards than the long wait for the French explosion. When would they hear the answering explosion? Had the gallant fellow who had offered to fire the train perished before his work was done? Jack wondered, waited anxiously. Second after second slipped by; he could hear the ticking of the watch in his vest pocket. At last when, unable to endure the uncertainty longer, he was about to rush into the casa himself, a deafening noise like a thunderclap close at hand checked him. The French mine, acting immediately upon the wall and at a considerable depth below-ground, had spent most of its force on the wall itself. But Jack's mine, having only a few feet of earth above it, and being heavily charged, exerted its destructive effect in all directions. It blew to fragments the ruins of the house adjoining the Casa Vega, brought down what remained of its roof, shattered the remnants of the walls on either side, and filled the air for a hundred yards around with dust and débris, a few of Jack's men, even in the plaza behind, being injured by objects that were shot clean over the houses. Jack, from his position, could not see the extent of the damage; but the fact that the explosion had actually occurred left him in no doubt that the French in the ruined house beyond the Casa Vega must have been annihilated, and in the ruins, where they had but slight protection, they must have suffered heavy loss.

But he hardly waited to estimate the effect of his successful coup. Immediately after the explosion he gave his men the order to advance; they dashed from cover and began to swarm over the barricades. At the last moment Jack sent a man with orders to barricade as far as possible the newly-made breach in the Vega wall. Then, with Antonio at his side, he led the charge. The dust was still falling in clouds as they came to the Tobar barricade. So sudden was the unexpected event, and so swiftly did the Spaniards move, that their manoeuvre was not discovered by the French until the greater number had crossed and, headed by Jack and Antonio, charged down the street. But within fifty paces a shot rang out from beyond the ruined house on their left; it was followed immediately by a scattered fire, and amid yells of rage and pain many of Jack's men fell. The French were firing from the half-dismantled houses they had rushed a few days before, which, being somewhat remote from the scene of the explosion, and sheltered by the ruins of the house adjoining the Casa Tobar, had not suffered like the rest of the French position. Nothing daunted by their losses, the Spaniards pressed on with shouts of "Nuestra Señora del Pillar! A la cuchillo!" Don Cristobal meanwhile had swept round the upper barricade. The ruins beyond the houses lately burnt were carried

with a rush. Drums were heard beating not far away; there were loud shouts in French and the hurried tramp of feet. It was clear that the enemy, not anticipating danger at this point, had drawn away their troops in the direction of the Franciscan convent; they had expected that under cover of the explosion the Casa Vega would be captured, as a score of houses in the same quarter had been rushed before, by a handful of disciplined men. No plans had been made to meet so unexpected a movement of retaliation; for a moment the battle was to the Spaniards.

But Jack knew well that he durst not attempt to push his attack far. He had given orders to Antonio, who had led a small body to the assault of a house to the left, where the street bent inwards from the ramparts, to blow up the head of the gallery into the Casa Vallejo, then to retire towards that house, recross the barricade, and take up a position behind it. To cover these movements, Jack directed a party of his men to keep up a hot fire on the house at the bend of the street, from which some French marksmen had swept the front of the attacking force. Within a few minutes he heard a sharp report. At the same time Antonio's men came streaming back towards Vallejo and over the barricade. One of the French galleries was evidently accounted for.

Meanwhile Jack's own position had been hotly assailed in front. The ruined houses on the right of the street were now full of Frenchmen, who charged again and again across the débris up to the party-wall, only to be driven back by the men stationed there, under such cover as the irregular remnants of the broken walls afforded. There was no time to barricade the gap; it was only a question of time before the French must break through in overwhelming numbers. Don Cristobal had occupied the ruins adjoining the Casa Vega, but he was now ordered back across his barricade, from which he could protect the flank of Jack's force when it became necessary to withdraw it.

At this juncture Jack felt the necessity of obtaining a view of the whole position. He looked round for some point of observation. Through a large rent in one of the walls to his right he perceived the remains of a staircase to the second story. Was there time to clamber up it before the French burst in? "I'll chance it," he said to himself. Ordering his men to stand firm, he ran across the narrow lane, through the wall, and began to ascend the staircase. It was a rickety structure; its top had been blown away; it remained upright only by favour of one or two stout joists which had been so firmly embedded in the stone as to withstand the shock of the explosion when the party-wall was cracked. Up he went. The stairs creaked under him; at every step it seemed that the whole structure would fall with him. But at length he reached a spot whence, through a hole in what had been once the wall, he could see for a considerable distance over the quarter occupied by the French. To his left he saw the dreary waste of ruins through which, by patient mining and sudden rushes, the French had made their painful way from the convent of Santa Engracia, which stood a woful spectacle of destruction some hundreds of yards distant.

Eastward he traced their progress through a series of dismantled buildings, up to within a short distance of the Franciscan convent. Farther to the right they had made yet deeper inroads into the city, and were now almost within arm's-length of the Coso. Jack thought, with a sudden pang, of the danger Juanita would soon be in, and decided that at the earliest opportunity he must persuade her to change her quarters and retire northwards, loth as he was to see her in that fever-haunted spot.

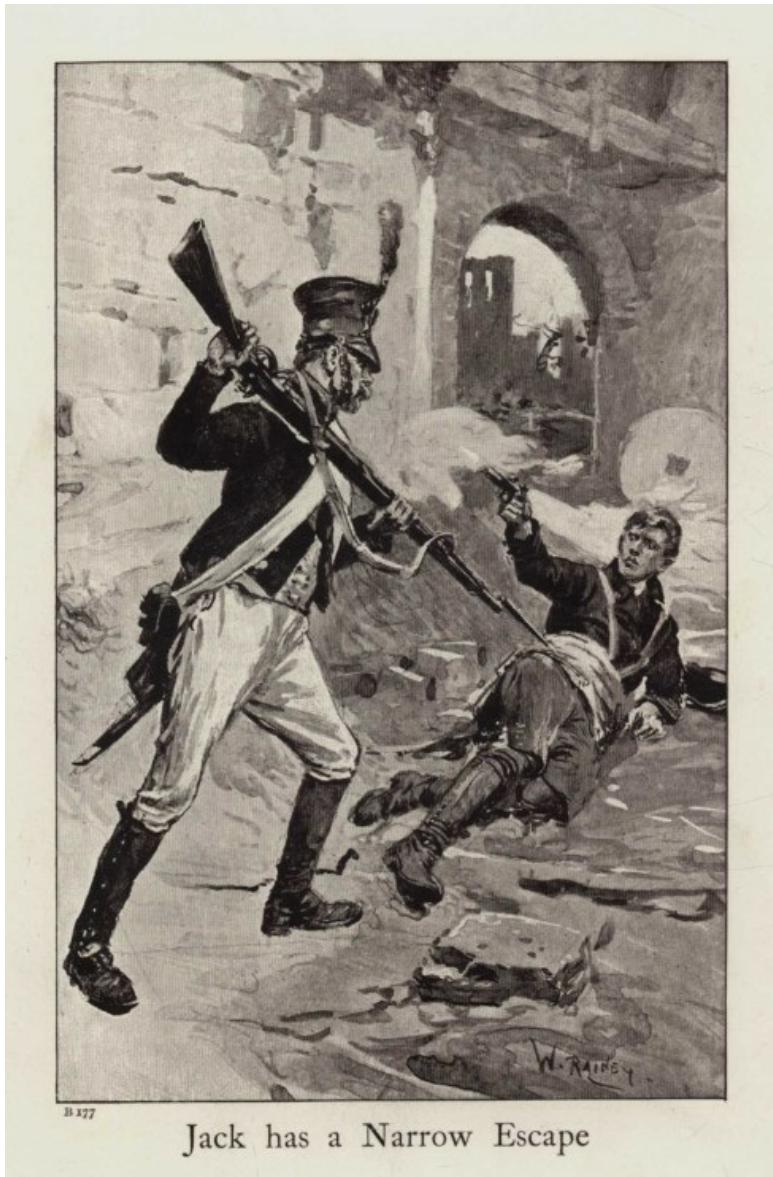
Suddenly his eye was caught by a compact body of French, about 500 in number, advancing at the quick step across the wide open space outside the Santa Engracia convent. They had evidently been hurried from the entrenchments beyond the walls. At the same time, glancing to the right, he saw another body of men issuing from some buildings near the Coso. Clearly no time was to be lost. Outnumbered already, he had only held his own up to the present by having the advantage of the defensive position. But the position was not strong. If the French occupied the adjoining ruins in force there was scarcely an inch of cover for his men. He must, therefore, at once blow up the head of the French gallery leading below the Casa Tobar, which he had been unable to do hitherto for fear of destroying his own men, and then withdraw his troops to their original position. In face of the large French reinforcements coming up, it would be as much as he could do to hold his own even there. Springing down the

staircase, three steps at a time, one of them breaking through and falling with a crash behind him, he hastened back to his men. He called up a little musketeer belonging to the Murcian tiradores—one of the few survivors of that regiment—

"Hombre, run back to the Casa Alvarez; tell Pablo Quintanar to leave a gap in the Vega wall wide enough to allow the passage of men in single file. Understand, in single file."

"Sí, Señor," said the man, and bounded off.

Now Jack prepared with all possible speed to evacuate his advanced position. He was delayed by the necessity of removing his wounded; for all this time the French had been firing into the houses, and, though their aim was bad, several shots took effect owing to the Spaniards' almost reckless exposure of themselves. Before he actually gave the order to evacuate, the French, unaware of the reinforcements hastening to their support, gathered themselves together for another charge. They came gallantly almost to the very muzzles of the Spanish muskets; then they recoiled before a terrible volley, and fell back in confusion. Seizing the moment, Jack ordered his men to retire towards the Casa Vega.



Jack has a Narrow Escape

"Leave the gap in the wall open for me," he said to one of the regulars; "I shall not be long behind you."

Then, catching up a burning rope, he hastened to the end of the French gallery, where his men had laid a train of gunpowder connecting with a heavy charge. He had just time to set light to the train before a group of three or four French soldiers dashed towards him through the ruins. His perilous task was done; he turned to follow his men, the enemy, not waiting to fire, close behind him. As he was crossing the lane dividing the Casas Vega and Tobar there was a loud explosion; the gallery had blown up, and with it the head of the French column immediately behind his pursuers. Only two men were now on his track. He glanced over his shoulder, and judged that there was time to reach the gap in the wall before he could be overtaken. At this moment his foot slipped on a loose heap of fallen masonry; he fell headlong, and before he could recover himself, the foremost pursuer was upon him. Wriggling over

instantly on his side, he drew his pistol, and managed to snap it at the man when the point of his bayonet was within a foot of him. The ball hit the man full on the forehead, and he dropped like a log.

Springing to his feet, Jack drew his sword in the nick of time to meet the attack of the second pursuer. It was sword against bayonet, and if the latter had been in the hands of a British soldier, Jack, in spite of his skill as a swordsman, might have stood a poor chance. But the bayonet, as wielded by a Continental soldier, was not the same formidable weapon, and it happened that his attacker was a Pole—one of Colonel Chłopiski's Vistula regiment, which, as Jack had already learnt, had proved the most troublesome of all the French troops since the capture of Santa Engracia. Jack had more than once shown himself to be a swordsman of exceptional resource, and at this critical moment the old French émigré who had been his fencing master in London, if he could have seen the duel, would have beamed with satisfaction. After a few passes Jack gave the Pole an opportunity to lunge; he eagerly seized it; his thrust was lightly parried, and the next moment Jack was in beneath his guard.

As he hurried away, even in that breathless moment Jack could not help feeling some pity for his two gallant foemen who would see the Vistula no more. It was in the hope of freeing their country from the bondage of Russia that the Poles had allied themselves with Napoleon. They were now purchasing their own freedom by assisting to enslave others.

Hastening across the ruins adjoining the Casa Vega, Jack saw terrible signs of the havoc wrought by his mine. The attacking French force had been a large one. It had perished to a man. But there was no time for anything but escape from the horde of French now rapidly approaching him. Scrambling over charred beams, shattered brickwork, fragments of household furniture, and the dead bodies of the fallen enemy, he drew near to the spot where the explosion of the French mine had blown a large hole in the party-wall. It was here that Jack expected to find the gap through which his men had preceded him into safety. But there was no gap. The hole was completely closed up, and the obstruction was too strong to be won through, too high to clamber over. Nonplussed for the moment, Jack turned to look for another means of escape, aware, as he did so, of loud voices in altercation on the other side of the barricade.

Bullets were now pattering on the brickwork, and the sound of scrambling feet in the adjoining ruins showed that he had been seen by the French, and that they were making towards him. There was not an instant to lose. To his left, as he faced the French quarter, the ruins were open and exposed to fire from several directions; escape was impossible that way. But on his right there still stood the remnant of what had been a lath-and-plaster wall between two rooms. He caught at this chance of even temporary concealment. Bending low, he dodged along behind its precarious shelter till he came to a ruined window within a few feet of the barricade defended by Don Cristobal. The rattle of musketry could now be heard on all hands. Jack felt sure that his appearance at the window would be the signal for a hail of bullets from the opposite side of the street, at the angle nearer the Coso where the French had obtained a lodgment. But it was now or never, and he was just wrenching away a broken iron bar, to squeeze his way through, when his ears were assailed by unexpected shouts from the street. To his amazement, he saw Don Cristobal's men come swarming over the barricade and rushing along the street towards the French. But it was not Don Cristobal who led them; the leader was a tall figure who rushed forward, sword in hand, with long robe tucked up, and bare arms, from which the sleeves had been flung back over the shoulders. He was shouting in frenzied tones. Jack recognized Latin phrases mingled with Spanish. It was the patriot priest, Santiago Sass.

Wondering what had happened, Jack jumped into the street, safe now, for the French were occupied with the rush of the headlong Spaniards. There they were, cutting their way through a large body of French troops, heedless of the pelting bullets from the surrounding houses, yelling, slashing, and, alas! many of them falling.

"What imbecile folly!" exclaimed Jack in his anger. The rash charge was useless, hopeless. All that he could do was to cover the inevitable retreat. Clambering over the barricade, Jack ran towards the Casa Alvarez, overtaking on

the way Don Cristobal, who had hastened thither on the same errand as himself.

"Men of the reserve," cried Jack, "follow me!"

Pablo Quintanar, their leader, was, strangely, not with them. They dashed after Jack and Don Cristobal, and reached the barricade just in time. The Spaniards, all that were left of them, were streaming over it, broken and disheartened, pursued by bullets from the French. Last of them all came Santiago Sass, splashed with blood from head to foot, blood streaming from a wound on his brow.

"In te, Domine, speravi!" he cried breathlessly as he staggered over the barricade.

Catching him by the arm, Jack dragged the exhausted priest out of harm's way, and then, ordering his men to hold the barricade, enquired of Don Cristobal what was the meaning of the recent extraordinary movement. He learnt that Santiago Sass, who was ever where danger was thickest, had been passing the quarter, and, attracted by the noise of the explosions, had hastened, full of burning zeal, to the nearest barricade. There, finding Don Cristobal's force, as he thought, culpably inactive, and hearing musketry on all sides, he had jumped to the conclusion that the Spaniards were skulking, and, refusing to listen to Don Cristobal's explanation, had poured out upon them a torrent of invective and exhortation, called on them to follow him, and led them furiously over the barricade. Such was his influence that not a man refused to obey his call.

Meanwhile the hot fire maintained by the reserve had driven the French back. But they showed some disposition to come on in greater strength and attempt the capture of the barricade. Santiago Sass, furious at the failure of his ill-timed sortie, and still more with Jack for forcibly removing him from the scene, began to vent his wrath upon him.

"Do not stay me!" he cried. "Cursed be any that flinches! Dominus vir pugnator! Let us haste—"

"Señor Padre," interrupted Jack quietly, "you led a most gallant charge, but look—it has cost me some twenty good men."

He pointed to the corpse-strewn street. The priest looked, and was evidently impressed. Gathering his skirts about him he sped away towards the Coso in search of more forlorn hopes to lead, the sound of his wild and whirling words being scarcely drowned by the noise of the battle.

For the rest of that day French and Spaniards continued to occupy their respective positions. The former made no attempt at organized attack; they clearly dreaded the discovery of more mines. The Spaniards were not strong enough to expel the enemy altogether. Thus, when nightfall again put an end to the fighting, the situation was essentially the same as it had been in the morning.

Reckoning up the results, Jack was able to congratulate himself on having accomplished all that he had hoped to do. The two French galleries towards the Casas Tobar and Vallejo were destroyed; the French had suffered very heavy loss in men. The explosion of their mine in the Casa Vega had not furthered their advance, and their work for three days past was rendered null. But their failure, Jack knew, would only nerve them to redoubled energy; he must be prepared for an even more strenuous attack on his position. All that he could do was to ensure that if the houses must be captured it should be with a maximum of delay and loss to the French.

As he went the round of his district, before proceeding to convey his nightly report to Palafox, Pablo Quintanar, the guerrilla leader, came up and made a complaint against his subordinate Antonio. He had been attacked, he said, and nearly murdered by Antonio for refusing to reopen the barricade thrown across the gap in the wall of the Casa Vega.

"Did you not receive my order?" demanded Jack.

"Your order was to hold the barricade, Señor."

"But you opened a gap to let in my men. I sent the order by one of the Murcian tiradores."

"Yes, indeed, and the men came through one by one, and when the last was through I closed the barricade."

"And shut me out!"

Jack looked sharply at the man, but as usual was unable to catch his eye.

"I waited for the Señor," he protested, "five, ten, twenty minutes; but he did not come. What was I to think but that he was dead? If I had known—"

"You would have acted otherwise. Well, as you did make so unfortunate a—mistake, perhaps the less you say about Antonio's attempt to mend it the better. Buenas noches, hombre!"

Jack turned on his heel, and, wondering what conceivable motive Pablo Quintanar could have for doing him a hurt, set off for the Castle Aljafferia.

CHAPTER XXIV

"A bon Chat, bon Rat"

Under a Cloud—The Door—Padre Consolacion—A Daughter of Spain—The House in the Lane—An Unexpected Visitor—A Gambit—in the Shadow—The Worm Turns—A Blue Paper—The Simple Way

As he made his way through the throng of people filling the corridors and halls of the palace, Jack could not but observe that the looks he met were rather of suspicion than friendliness. He was known by sight to many of the habitués of the castle. Tio Jorge had never tired of praising his exploits and acclaiming him as a staunch friend of Spain; and yet many now scowled on him, whispered to each other as he passed; one or two even fingered their knives.

Surprised at this change of attitude, he was still more surprised to find it reflected in the bearing of Palafox and Don Basilio and other members of the Junta who were present when he made his report. Palafox listened to him coldly, spoke a few words of the faintest praise, and dismissed him without a sign of real approval or encouragement.

Tio Jorge met him as he was re-entering the town by the Porta Portillo, and Jack felt a sense of relief when he saw that the big peasant's greeting was cordial as ever. After an exchange of news Tio Jorge, who had scanned his face anxiously, said bluntly:

"I am a plain man, Señor. You will answer me a plain question."

"Certainly, anything in reason," said Jack in surprise.

"They're saying—I could not believe it—but they are all saying that you wish to surrender; at least, that you do not think we can hold out. Now, whatever we may think, we do not talk of these things; it is not good for the people to hear such things. If any man says them, he does not live to say them twice. Tell me plainly, Señor, have you spoken of surrender?"

"My good friend," said Jack with a smile, "when you yourself hear an Englishman talk of surrender, then you may believe it; till then—"

"Then it is false?" asked Tio Jorge.

"Absolutely."

"I knew it. And that proves," added Tio Jorge after a moment, "what I thought from the first: you have an enemy in Saragossa, Señor."

And then he explained. The despatch brought by Don Miguel Priego had been in several points so different from, so much less discouraging than, that previously brought by Jack, that the Saragossans' first flush of enthusiasm

for the English had soon disappeared. The undoubted retreat of Sir John Moore, and the subsequent departure of his army from the shores of Spain, were twisted to mean a desertion of the Spanish cause. There was at first no personal feeling against Jack, though his country was regarded with bitterness, but it had lately been rumoured, on the authority of Don Miguel's servant, that he had been overheard, in the Cafe Arcos, expressing a despondent view of the chances of holding the city, and hinting that it would be wise to make terms with the French. Only the energetic and successful work Jack had been doing in the Santa Engracia district, and the strong support of Tio Jorge himself, had given pause to those who wished to treat him as all who counselled surrender were treated—to gibbet him in the Coso.

Jack recognized at once that Don Miguel's malignity was not to be ignored. The bare suspicion of disloyalty had been sufficient to bring a full tale of victims to the gallows, and the fact that he was an Englishman would not preserve him if the feelings of the populace were once thoroughly roused. Fortunately Tio Jorge was his friend; and Tio Jorge was a host in himself. Jack had seen no more of Miguel or his man since their remarkable apparition on the ramparts. He resolved to keep a good look-out; though, after all, it was wily, underhand machinations rather than open violence he had to fear from them.

He had determined to see Juanita and advise her to remove immediately to a safer part of the city. He therefore took leave of Tio Jorge at the door of the house in the Coso where she was staying. The same old duenna admitted him.

"The Señora is very ill," she said. "The Señorita receives. There is a visitor with her now."

"I will wait, then."

"Not so, Señor. The Señorita gave orders that the Señor was always to be shown up if he called."

Entering the sala, he saw a tall cloaked figure between him and Juanita.

"Ah!" said Juanita, coming forward eagerly with outstretched hand; "how do you do, Jack? You are just in time to show Don Miguel to the door."

"With pleasure," said Jack, returning at once to the door and holding it wide open.

Miguel had faced round, and stood swinging his hat in the middle of the room. A fierce scowl darkened his face as he looked from one to the other. Juanita reseated herself, turned her back on him, and resumed some needle-work for the wounded on which she had been engaged. Jack stood in an attitude of polite expectancy at the door.

"I protest—" began Don Miguel; but Jack cut him short. Speaking in a quiet, even tone, he said:

"You have taken leave, Don Miguel?"

The Spaniard stood for a moment irresolute; then, flinging on his hat, he strode across the room, made no response to Jack's bow, and disappeared. The moment the door was shut Juanita sprang up, ran towards Jack, and took him by both hands.

"Oh, Jack, Jack," she said, "you don't know how glad I am to see you!"

"Has that hound been bullying you?"

"Bullying! He dare not. I am not a child! But listen, amigo mio; he came to ask me to marry him. He did! He had the audacity! You should have seen him—heard him—his nasty oily voice; oh, he seemed to be quite sure that he had only to ask! 'And you think of marriage at this fearful time!' I said. And he wanted me to believe that he was thinking only of my safety. When the town falls, he said, I shall want a protector. 'And you, one of Palafox's hussars, how can you protect me?' And then he smiled, and spoke in dark hints of some special power he will have, and I grew angry, and asked whether he meant to turn afrancesado, and then—and then you came, Jack, and I wondered what he would do; and—and he went, and I couldn't help remembering the time when you and I were so terribly afraid of him, and—oh, Jack, it was magnificent—it was indeed!"

Juanita laughed, and Jack himself smiled at the recollection of Miguel's undignified exit.

"But, Juanita," he said, "I came to warn you."

"Against him?"

"No; against the danger you run in staying here. The French are coming nearer every hour; almost at any moment they may reach the Coso. They are driving their mines steadily towards the centre of the city. You must find a place—I can't call it a home—elsewhere."

"But, Jack, that is arranged already. Padre Consolacion is going to take us to a house near the Porta Portillo to-morrow. What do you think?—the padre came to see me only a minute or two after you left the other day."

"Was that the Padre Consolacion? I saw a benevolent-looking priest enter as I went out."

"Yes. And, only think, he wanted me to marry Miguel!"

"The padre?"

Juanita nodded.

"Of course I told him it was impossible—quite impossible. He sat down and crossed his white plump hands on his hat and began to talk. Miguel must have won him with his plausible manner. I love the padre, but I couldn't listen to him; could I, Jack? He asked me why I was so opposed to what he thought was an excellent match, and one that my father had so much desired; and then I told him that it was all lies, lies; my father had never wished anything of the sort. And the poor old dear was puzzled, and kept tapping his thumbs together and looked at me so sorrowfully, and then he was called away to attend to a dying officer. And—Jack, tell me, will this siege ever end? Can we hold out any longer? Are there big armies mustering to relieve us, as they all say?"

She bent forward with clasped hands. Jack hesitated for a moment.

"Juanita," he said, "I won't disguise my real belief. I don't believe in the big armies. Saragossa will fall—unless one of two things happens."

"And they?"

"Unless General Palafox sends out a large sortie and defeats the French, or unless their ammunition gives out. Neither is probable."

"Then what will become of us? How long will General Palafox resist? Cannot someone plead with him? Think of the thousands who have died, and the thousands who are dying—the poor women and children in their horrible cellars! Oh, Jack, what a terrible thing war is! Does Napoleon know, can he know, of all the horrors he has brought upon us? Has he any heart at all? Jack, my poor aunt is dying, I fear. I can do nothing. Every morning when I go out to carry food and water to the brave soldiers—"

"You do that, Juanita?"

"Why, yes; every girl in Saragossa does that or something else to help; and every morning I go fearing that I shall never again see Tia Teresa alive. And if she dies, I shall be quite alone in the world. Father gone, José gone—Ah! but I have you, Jack, and the good padre, and if the worst comes you will look after me, won't you?—take me to England, perhaps—I used to like your mother,—and Napoleon will never conquer England, will he, Jack?"

"Not he," said Jack with a laugh. He saw that the events of the past few days had wrought her nerves to a high pitch of excitement, and tactfully turned the conversation into a quieter channel. He asked for the name of the house to which she was going on the morrow, assured her that, when the inevitable capitulation came, the French would allow generous terms to such brave defenders, and at length took his leave, promising to visit her whenever he could snatch an opportunity.

"And will you be able to save the old house?" she asked, as he was going out at the door.

"I shall do my best, for the sake of old times, be sure of that."

"I know you will. Vaya usted con Dios, Jack!"

Before he reached the foot of the stairs, Jack saw, in the dim light of the small hanging lamp, a portly figure

ascending. He crossed to the other side and waited to allow the visitor to pass.

"Buenas noches, Señor!" said Padre Consolacion, sweeping off his large shovel hat; then he stopped as he recognized the same youth whom he had seen earlier in the week.

"Padre mio," cried Juanita from the top, "come along; I want to speak to you."

"Buenas noches, Padre!" said Jack; and the priest, after a moment's hesitation, went up slowly.

Hard by the Casa Alvarez a narrow tortuous lane of mean houses, dirty in appearance and evil in repute, ran almost due east from the ramparts. It was not a district in which, before the siege, any person worth robbing would choose to be abroad after nightfall. But when, towards dusk on this fifth of February, a well-dressed man passed rapidly down the street and disappeared into one of the least reputable of the houses, the few denizens who observed him did so without a thought of their knives, almost without a sense of curiosity. To such a height of abnegation had the public danger brought the professional lawbreakers of Saragossa.

It was a house of three stories, and the stranger, threading his way gingerly through the gloomy entrance and up the narrow stairway, gathered from the evidence of all his senses that every story was fully occupied. In hardly another street in this part of Saragossa could a house have been found where its whole population was not herded in cellars below-ground. But here the lane was so narrow, and so closely surrounded by buildings, that the inhabitants were in no danger from the French bombardment, and lived in a security which few of their fellow-citizens enjoyed.

As the visitor passed room after room on his upward way, the sounds of coarse laughter, the oaths of men, the shrill expostulation of women, and the querulous cry of children came to him through closed or half-closed doors, and he drew his cloak around him with an instinctive movement of disgust. Treading almost noiselessly he reached the attic floor, where the doors of three rooms opened on to a narrow landing. Although evidently a stranger to the house he showed little hesitation. With infinite caution he tiptoed across the landing to the farthest door, and put his eye to a crack in the panel, through which a narrow beam of light fell on the dirt-encrusted wall behind him.

The room into which he looked was in keeping with the rest of the house. The fitful light of a tallow candle showed a man bending over a crazy table, two truckle-beds ranged at right angles to each other in the far corner, and a few articles of clothing hanging from hooks on the wall. The man was intently studying a blue paper spread out on the table, spelling out the words with difficulty, and repeating them under his breath with a growl of impatience that accentuated the unpleasing effect of a countenance by nature unprepossessing.

For some minutes the man beyond the door, drawing shallow breath, watched him closely as he struggled with the intricacies of the document. There was apparently a passage in it that completely baffled him. He turned the paper this way and that, examined it even upside down, but without success, and at last, in a burst of anger, dashed it down on to the table with an audible oath.

The visitor took this as his cue for entry, and tapped gently at the door.

"Adelante!" was the answer, after a distinct pause.

He turned the handle and went in. The man had faced round towards the door, and the dim light of the candle disclosed the narrow features, low receding forehead, thin lips, and shifty eyes of Pablo Quintanar. The blue paper had disappeared.

There was a momentary silence. The host was evidently waiting for his visitor to introduce himself.

"Buenas noches, hombre!" said the stranger suavely, with a conciliatory bow. "I trust I don't come at an unseasonable hour."

The guerrillero scanned him from head to foot with a quick suspicious glance.

"That depends, Señor, upon your business, who you are, and what you want with me."

"As to who I am, hombre—may I take a chair? thank you!—my name is Miguel Priego. As to my business, that is not so simply stated; we must improve our acquaintance first."

The man started at the mention of his visitor's name; and the latter duly noted the fact. But as the guerrillero merely stood in an attitude of expectancy, Don Miguel, loosening his cloak and placing his hat on the table, continued:

"I have been, my friend, as you may perhaps have heard, four days in Saragossa. During these four days I have been searching for you."

The man's hand went like a flash to his knife, and Miguel, quickening his measured tones, hastened to add:

"No, my friend, not in that way, or, as you can imagine, I should not have come alone. I have been searching for you because I think we are both of one mind regarding, let us say, the policy of our brave commandant General Palafax."

"Say what you have to say, and have done with it. I don't understand your fine phrases."

Don Miguel smiled indulgently. It was clear to him that his host fully grasped his meaning.

"Well, to put the matter quite plainly, you—that is, you and I—regard all this," waving his hand in the direction of a cannon-shot from the ramparts, "as useless waste of life—sheer obstinacy; a noble enthusiasm, but misguided. Is it not so? Now, acting upon our convictions we—that is, you—have already done our little best to bring this distressing conflict to an end. We—that is, you—have endeavoured—unsuccessfully endeavoured—to relieve our commandant of certain plans which, if placed in proper hands might—I say might—"

At this point the guerrillero, who had been standing facing his visitor, sank into a chair, his face blanched, his mouth twitching. On the blank wall before him his imagination was casting the grim shadow of a gibbet.

Don Miguel smiled faintly, and waved his hand reassuringly.

"There is no need, my friend, for emotion. If we were not of the same mind you might, of course, have some ground for uneasiness; but fortunately we understand one another. Is it not so?"

"Sí, Señor," the man replied, recovering himself with an effort. "Sí, Señor, we understand one another."

"That is well. Now we can proceed. You can understand that our good friends out yonder, who also wish to end this terrible siege, are grieved by your ill-success. They are saying hard things about you. They even went the length of giving me your name, which, if I were less discreet, might well have been awkward for you. I don't disguise that if they capture Saragossa while you are still in their debt—one thousand pesetas, is it not?—they may treat you somewhat harshly. But, fortunately, you have a chance of retrieving yourself."

Don Miguel paused. His host had now to some extent recovered his composure.

"And what is that?" he asked sullenly.

"I happen to know, hombre, where our noble commandant has placed the papers you failed to find. If you can deliver those papers to me I will see that our friends outside do not forget you."

The man smiled cunningly.

"Thank you, Señor! If I run the risk it would suit me better to claim the reward myself."

"As you please, my friend. But remember that without my assistance you can do nothing. A few more days will end the siege, and then—" He smiled, then added reflectively: "They say it is an easy death."

Pablo Quintanar winced. He felt himself in the toils, and had some difficulty in resisting the impulse to throw himself upon his visitor and end the interview with a knife-thrust. But he felt that Don Miguel, with all his languid urbanity, was fully on his guard, and choking down his animosity he replied:

"What does the Señor wish me to do?"

Don Miguel's voice throughout the interview had been carefully modulated to defeat any eavesdropping. He now rose quietly, and, rapidly opening the door, peered out on to the landing. There was no one in view. He

stretched himself over the balustrade and saw, on the flight below, what appeared to be a tall figure lurking in the shadow. He seemed satisfied. Quietly re-entering the room, he closed the door.

Then began a long colloquy between the two men, Miguel giving precise directions as to the whereabouts of a certain box, and the means whereby it could be secured.

"I think, my friend, there is nothing more to say," he remarked in conclusion. "The matter now rests with you."

"One moment, Señor," said Quintanar, motioning him to be seated. He had listened deferentially to what Miguel had been saying, and had obediently fallen in with every proposition; but there was now a vindictive look in his eyes that caused Miguel a strange uneasiness.

"Certainly," he replied, "but I have little time to spare."

"I will not detain you long—not longer, Señor, than you wish, though I think that when you have heard what I have to say, you may not be in such a hurry. The point is this. If—mind, I say 'if'—I knew the whereabouts of a letter in which your name is mentioned in connection with a little affair on the Barcelona road—you remember?—a couple of years ago?—if, I say, I had such a letter, that is, if I knew where such a letter was to be found, would it be worth anything to you, Don Miguel?"

Pablo Quintanar grinned maliciously. He had been the victim for the past half-hour; it was now his turn. Miguel had done his best to dissemble his start of surprise and anxiety; but the man's searching gaze was upon him, and though he replied with a show of confidence he felt that it was not convincing.

"My name has no doubt been mentioned in a good many letters, my friend; but I am quite indifferent whether I am well or ill spoken of. Hard words break no bones."

"That may be, Señor, but they sometimes break reputations, and you are dancing on a thin rope. But if I tell you that this letter also has a message about a sum of money hidden by the writer, how does that alter the case?"

"I can tell you better if you inform me what the message is, and what the name of the writer is."

"Well, I can tell you the name of the writer; it is the late Señor Alvarez."

"Ah! I heard that a letter had been lost—that, then, was what you found instead of the plan. Do you know, my friend, that this places you in a very awkward position? You will do well to hand the letter over to me. The slightest whisper of suspicion—"

The man glared viciously at the speaker, then snapped out:

"You may be quite sure that as you are the only man who knows anything about it, I shall take care that you swing on the same gallows."

Don Miguel shifted his feet uneasily.

"You need not fear, my friend; I am not the man to betray you. I merely thought it would be safer for you if this letter were in my possession."

"Oh, no doubt! but, Señor," added Quintanar with a harsh laugh, "I couldn't allow you to take the risk—especially as the letter is of no value to you. I need not detain you, Señor."

Miguel considered a moment, tapping the floor lightly with his foot.

"What do you want for the paper?"

"Well, Señor, I am not unreasonable. Let us say one thousand pesetas down and a quarter of the treasure when you find it."

Miguel laughed softly.

"Thank you, my friend! Before I pay a thousand pesetas I should like to know what I am paying it for."

Quintanar, hesitating for a moment, slowly drew out a blue paper from beneath his jacket, and said:

"What do you think of this?

'I am convinced that Miguel Priego was at the bottom of this dastardly outrage. Unfortunately, we have no proof at present that would satisfy a judge, but if any of the men who assisted him can be found and induced to give evidence it is still possible that he may be brought to book.'

What do you think of that, Don Miguel? Ah! I thought I should interest you."

Miguel forced a smile, and, waving his hand airily, said:

"If that is all the letter contains I would not offer a maravedi for it."

"Oh, there is more, a good deal more! I need not read it all, but listen to this:

"The sum saved from Miguel's brigands, together with a large amount in jewels and bullion, I have thought it best to secrete until more settled times. You will find appended to this letter instructions which, taken together with a communication I have made to your son Jack, will enable you or him, or such other person as you may be so good as to depute, to find them in the event of anything happening to my servant José Pinzon, who is fully acquainted with all my dispositions."

Don Miguel, greed written in every lineament, leaned forward on his chair, listening eagerly.

"Well," he said impatiently, as the man concluded, "what are the instructions?"

"Those, Señor, I cannot read. They are in some strange tongue; but no doubt you, having education, will be able to make them out. That is to say, if you make it worth my while to hand you the letter. You know my price."

Carefully refolding the letter, Quintanar replaced it in a pocket inside his jacket. In doing so he took his eyes for a moment off Miguel, whom he had been watching with the utmost vigilance, to assure himself that the document was safely stowed away.

The other, his face aflame with rage and cupidity, instantly seized the opportunity. Drawing his feet quietly beneath him, he sprang from his chair and bore the guerrillero to the ground. But the man, although taken unawares, recovered himself with surprising agility. Before Miguel had time to draw his knife he had clutched him by the throat, and with a dexterous turn had reversed their positions, Miguel now being on the ground, Quintanar above him, his long knife uplifted to strike.

CHAPTER XXV

Pepito finds a Clue

Morning Light—Bombarded—An Afrancesado—From the Roofs—In the Casa Vallejo—A Fight at Daybreak—Anticipated—The Jesus Convent—New Barricades—Repulsed—Borrowing a Gun—Round-Shot and Grape—Out of Action—Odds and Evens

Jack was awakened next morning by the sounds of altercation outside the small room on the ground floor of the Casa Alvarez that he had reserved for himself.

"You shall not!" he heard Pepito cry in his shrill voice. "The Señor sleeps; you—shall—not—"

Then his voice was stifled by the noise of scuffling. A heavy thud shook the door, as though some massive body had been driven against it. Springing from his bed, on which he had lain down in all his clothes save his boots, Jack went to the door, opened it, and saw Antonio, the guerrillero, raining blow after blow on the small form of

Pepito, who had twisted himself about one of the big man's legs and held on grimly, though he must have suffered not a little.

"Come, come!" said Jack; "what is it, Antonio? Pepito, let him go!"

Pepito sprang away instantly.

"The Busno wanted to wake the Señor," he piped, with a fierce look at Antonio.

"You waked me between you. Well, Antonio?"

"Señor, I was on night duty; I was to be relieved at two o'clock, so it was arranged by Don Cristobal; the chief was to relieve me. He did not come. I waited, one hour, two hours; he did not come. The Señor knows I would not leave my post. At five came Don Cristobal on his round of the posts. I told him; he put a man in my place and I went home tired as a dog, and there, in the top room I share with the chief, there, Señor, I saw him, Pablo Quintanar, on the floor, still, dead, and blood all round him."

Jack looked sharply at the man. There was every sign of amazement and agitation in his face, but Jack remembered that he had quarrelled with his chief on the previous day, and could not but suspect there had been a repetition of the dispute when the men met in their lodging, and that, possibly by accident, it was Antonio's knife that had done the fatal work. Antonio appeared to guess what was passing in his captain's mind.

"I swear I did not do it, Señor. I knew nothing of it till I saw him there on the floor. We quarrelled; yes, the Señor knows that, but I keep my knife for the French; I would not—"

"Take me to the place," interrupted Jack coldly. Staying only to pull on his boots, he accompanied the man to the dirty lane and into the dingy house from which Miguel had stealthily issued some six hours before. Pepito was at his heels as he climbed the filthy staircase; the gipsy sniffed and snorted at the foul odours his nostrils encountered, and put his hand on his knife as he passed each doorway.

They entered the attic. The gray light of a dull morning coming through a narrow skylight barely illuminated the sordid room. On the floor, stretched on his face, with arms extended towards the door, lay the figure of the guerrillero. This was no death in fair fight, face to face with his enemy; but the base, stealthy thrust of an assassin.

"That is how I found him, Señor," said Antonio.

"Yes; it is the Spanish way."

He had noticed that the dead man's hand clasped a knife. Stooping, he removed it from his grasp; the steel was bright and clear, as though it had never been used for any but innocent purposes. Jack, as he held the weapon, reflected. The man had drawn his knife. It must have been for attack or for self-defence against an enemy in front of him; therefore the blow from behind that killed him must have been dealt by a second person. Antonio was scarcely likely to have brought another man into his personal quarrel; Jack was inclined to believe that he was guiltless, as he said. He looked around the room; there were few signs of a scuffle. It was useless to institute an enquiry among the other people in the house, and the sound of musketry and cannon-shots without already called him to his duties.

"Bury the poor wretch," he said, "and then come to me."

"The Señor believes I did not do it?"

"Yes, yes; we have no time for enquiries. There is work for us who are left alive."

He hurried away. There had been something sinister about the guerrillero, something that Jack could not fathom; perhaps it was resentment at a stranger being brought in and placed above him; but Jack could not help feeling a passing pity for the Spaniard who had met his death by the hands presumably of one of his own countrymen, instead of in heroic combat with the enemy.

He returned to his post. The situation as it had been left on the previous evening had now been complicated. The cannon-shots he had heard in the attic had been fired from two pieces mounted by the French at the angle of the street. An epaulement of sand-bags and gabions had been thrown across between the ruined blocks, and from that

point of vantage the French gunners were pointing their cannon so that their shots fell plump upon the walls of the Casas Vega and Tobar. These, it was clear, would before long be a heap of ruins. Jack sent men to the end of his subterranean galleries to listen whether mining operations had been resumed by the French. When they returned, reporting that no sound could be heard, he concluded that the signal failure of their last mines had been enough for the enemy, and that in future they would probably trust entirely to cannonade, followed by attacks in force. He could not reply to their artillery; all that lay in his power was to hold his men in readiness to repel a charge, and to fire his long Y-shaped mines when the French attack was being pressed home.

Some two hours later he was consulting with Don Cristobal on the possibilities of capturing the French guns in a night attack, when Pepito came up, looking even more than usually mysterious. He stood before Jack with his hands behind him, waiting until his master, now deeply engrossed in conversation, should notice him.

"I should dearly like to make the attempt," Jack was saying, "but your arguments are, I am afraid, conclusive. We can't afford to lose any of our men unless we can be sure of success, and after their recent warnings I don't think we shall catch the French napping. We must give up the idea, I suppose, but you will see that our men keep a keen watch on the epaulement, Señor— Well, what is it, Pepito?"

Pepito came forward carelessly.

"I found these, Señor," he said, handing two papers to Jack, who took them carelessly. Without unfolding them, he asked:

"Where did you get these?"

"In the tall house, Señor."

"Which tall house?"

"Where the Señor went just now."

"Where the man was murdered?"

"Sí, Señor. The big Antonio took him away. I was there. In a minute, two men came in. 'Now we get a bed,' they say. They pull the dirty quilt off the bed. One man carries it; the other pulls off the mattress. There, on the boards, I see two papers. I snatch them, and say: 'I take these to the Señor Capitan'. The man laughs; and here they are, Señor."

Jack unfolded the papers and glanced at them curiously. Suddenly he started, and keenly scrutinized one of them.

"It is explained now, Señor," he said to Don Cristobal, at the same time laying the papers before him.

"Quintanar was a spy."

"An afrancesado!" ejaculated the Spaniard.

"Unhappily. One of the papers, you see, is a pass through the French lines; the other a rough plan of our defences. See, the miserable fellow had begun to dot in our mines under the houses opposite. Someone must have discovered his treachery, and killed him without remorse."

"So perish all traitors!" said Don Cristobal.

At this moment a man rushed in with the news that a small breach had been made in the wall of the Casa Tobar.

"We must do something to check them," said Jack, rising. "A few good marksmen on the top of this house might pick off their gunners; let us go and see."

They went up the staircase towards the roof, Pepito, left alone, put his hand into his pocket, and drew out a small silver buckle, such as Spanish burghers and officers wore on their shoes.

"Señor has the papers," he muttered. "Ca! I have the buckle. The buckle is better than the papers."

He swung it round his forefinger, humming under his breath, and was still toying with it when Jack came downstairs again. Then he hurriedly thrust it into his pocket, and stood unconcernedly as though waiting for orders.

A moment's glance had shown Jack that his plan of placing marksmen on the roof would be useless. The Casas Vega and Tobar, though much lower than the Casa Alvarez, were not low enough to allow an effective fire over them. But what could not be done from the Casa Alvarez might be done from the lower roofs nearer the guns. Jack lost no time in making his way to the flat roof of the Casa Tobar. Carefully crawling along and peeping over, he saw that the angle of depression was just sharp enough to allow a good marksman to take aim at the gunners' heads. It would be dangerous work, for the French would instantly perceive the source of the shots, and would bring a concentrated fire to bear in return. There was no parapet to the roof, but a parapet could perhaps be extemporized with sand-bags, between which the Spaniards' muskets might be placed.

Returning to the ground, Jack explained what he had in his mind, and Antonio at once volunteered to make the attempt. With some of his men he climbed to the roof, where they pushed sand-bags along until they came to the edge. Then one of the men tried a shot. He missed. But Antonio took more deliberate aim, through the interstice between two sand-bags, and hit one of the French gunners in the arm.

Three Frenchmen had been hit before the enemy discovered whence came these disconcerting shots. Then bullets began to patter on the walls and roof. But the Spaniards were too well protected by their extemporized parapet to be in much fear, and continued their firing without suffering serious loss. Before the day was out the French found it the part of discretion to withdraw their gunners, and for the time being the cannon were useless.

Jack was not surprised next morning to learn that the French mining work had been renewed. This time the sounds were heard in the Casa Vallejo. The French had evidently seen that their only chance of carrying the position was by reverting to the slow burrowing which had been successful in earlier days. Jack went himself to the attacked house. The sounds through the wall were very faint, but there could be no doubt that the enemy were engaged in repairing the gallery destroyed in the sortie, though they were as yet thirty or forty feet away. It was probable that they had resumed, or would soon resume, operations in the Casas Vega and Tobar also, and dispositions must be made to meet them.

It was Jack's practice every morning to call the roll of the men under his charge. Every day the force dwindled, and the physical weakness of the survivors had patently increased. Wishing to spare them as much as possible, he had been indisposed to set them to the arduous work of mining until he felt sure that he was seriously threatened. The fact that the French had resumed their tunnelling showed that there was now no time to be lost, and the morning was but little advanced when men were busily engaged in clearing out the galleries, in Vega and Tobar, that had been tamped and fired, so that they might be recharged. But while the sounds of mining grew clearer in front of Vallejo, hours passed without the Spaniards detecting any signs of activity towards the other two houses. Leaving men to keep watch there, and report if any change took place, Jack returned to Vallejo, where it seemed evident that the only present danger was to be apprehended.

He stood with Don Cristobal near the end of the short gallery beneath Vallejo and the ruined house beyond. About eleven o'clock he was struck by a difference in the sounds, which up to the present had been fitfully interrupted.

"Listen, Señor!" he said to Don Cristobal. "I fancy the French are making several tunnels this time. Don't you think so? There is no break in the sound now, as there would be if they were driving only one or two; and yet there is a slight difference in the quality of the sound at successive moments. Do you hear? There; that was a deeper sound than the one before it."

"You are right, Señor," returned the Spaniard. "We can do little on our side, I fear."

"No. You see what a piece of arrant folly that rush of Santiago Sass was. Several of our best miners were killed; and what with the necessity of defending the barricades, and maintaining constant garrisons in the houses, we simply can't hope to match the French underground. All we can do is to wait till the right moment comes, and then explode

our little mine first. If we let the French anticipate us, the explosion of several mines at once will blow ours up or make it useless, and all our work will be thrown away."

"How many galleries do you think the enemy are cutting?"

"If we listen carefully we can tell."

They were silent, and after about a quarter of an hour Jack declared that he had counted four separate operations. He sent for one of the more experienced miners, and asked him to count independently. The man confirmed his opinion, adding that he thought there would be no danger of explosions from the French side for a day or two.

The rest of that day passed quietly. But early next morning the necessity of maintaining adequate guards at the exposed points of his position was brought home to Jack. During the night a large number of French had been silently posted in the ruined house at the end of the lane to the north of the Casa Vega. Issuing from these ruins, almost as soon as day dawned, they rushed towards the barricade, bearing fascines and scaling-ladders. But Don Cristobal, who was in command at this point, proved equal to the occasion. He sent off a messenger to Jack in the Casa Alvarez as soon as he saw signs of the French movement, and with the thirty resolute men of his command he held the enemy off, showing much coolness in awaiting their onset and ordering his men to fire at the right moment. When Jack came up at the head of a considerable reinforcement, the French were decisively driven off, leaving more than a score of dead behind them. They retired in confusion, some going into the ruins from which the attack had been made, others retreating down the street until they found protection from the Spaniards' musketry at the sharp bend in the roadway.

Hastening then to the Casa Vallejo, Jack found that the sounds of miners at work had been steadily growing more distinct. It was clearly time to prepare his own mine. The gallery extended some six feet beneath the floor of the ruined house adjoining. A heavy charge was laid in it; then the mine was tamped as quickly as possible. All was now in readiness. Through that day Jack scarcely left the place for a moment. It was of the utmost importance that the time for exploding the mine should be well chosen. He dared not run the risk of allowing the French to drive the heads of their tunnels past his own, for indeed they might not pass it, but come clean upon it, in which case they would either explode it themselves, or more probably withdraw the charge. His object was to allow them to approach as near as seemed safe, and then to fire the train. After an anxious day he retired to rest, convinced that a sharp conflict could no longer be much delayed.

At ten o'clock next morning, the 8th of February, he judged that the French miners could only be a few feet distant. Withdrawing all his men from the Casa Vallejo to the Casa Hontanon, next door, he waited tensely for a few minutes, then himself fired the train. There was a thunderous explosion, the walls of the room in which he was seemed to rock, then came the crash of falling beams, followed by a death-like silence. The mine had done its terrible work effectually; for the rest of the day there was no further sound of the French.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Ebro the French were gradually preparing for a grand assault. The part of the city along the river bank had been hitherto little damaged, for it was protected by the transpontine suburb of San Lazaro, and to some extent by a few gun-boats moored near the bridge. The key to the position was the Jesus Convent, a building of bricks, with a ditch on the French side of it. The French batteries had made large breaches in its masonry, but in order to carry it by storm it was first necessary for the enemy to trench their way towards it by slow degrees, every step having to be taken under fire from the walls. Their work was delayed for a time by a sudden rise of the river inundating their trenches and driving them back for several hundred yards—a flood hailed with joy by the defenders, who regarded it as another miraculous interposition on the part of Our Lady of the Pillar.

Their condition was becoming pitiful in the extreme. All fresh meat and vegetables were exhausted; they had nothing now to subsist on but fish and salt meat. The few chickens that could be got each sold for a sum equivalent

to an English pound. The French had seized all the water-mills along the banks of the river, so that the corn, of which the Spaniards yet possessed large stores, could not be ground, and they were forced to make a rough unwholesome bread of grain merely crushed or bruised. Fever, bred in the damp vaults in which most of the people lived, was carrying off hundreds every day; yet the emaciated survivors scarcely murmured, and the faintest suggestion of surrender was still sufficient to carry a man to the gibbet. Cheered by their brave untiring priests, they hoped against hope that relief would come.

But the floods subsided, and there was no sign of the long-expected succour. On the morning of February 8th, twenty-two French guns opened fire on the convent. Within a few hours the outer walls were battered down; then Marshal Lannes in person ordered the place to be carried by assault. Five hundred men instantly sprang from the trenches. The Spaniards in the convent, mingled regulars and monks, made what resistance they could, but they were unnerved by the preceding cannonade, and before the furious rush of the French grenadiers they fled and left the convent to its fate. Within the walls the French found hundreds of wounded and sick, and in the courtyard there were some two hundred corpses, men, women, and children, piled up awaiting burial. Even the French were sick at heart when they saw on these pale cold faces the terrible signs of fasting and disease. They themselves had suffered in their trenches. Among them too men fell fast; and even in their ranks there were heard murmurs against the long waiting of this cruel siege.

But though they had gained possession of the convent, their capture of the whole suburb was to be delayed for yet a few days. News was brought in to the French marshal, from his outlying positions, that a Spanish army was marching towards the city. The captain-general's brother, Francisco Palafox, had succeeded in raising a small force of 4000 men, and was now but twenty miles away. The attack could not be pressed in this quarter until the exact strength of the new enemy was ascertained. Marshal Lannes himself, therefore, drew off with 12,000 men, and once more the hopes of the dwindling garrison within the walls flickered up into the semblance of a flame.

Meanwhile Jack, in his little district, had become convinced that the defence could not be maintained for many more days. But he was determined to hold his own to the very end. After his explosion beyond the Casa Vallejo there had been a prolonged silence on the French side, but in the evening renewed sounds of mining in two quarters showed that though two of the four French galleries had been injured, the other two were still workable. It was only a matter of hours before the wall must fall. All that Jack could do was to ensure that the house should be held as long as possible after the explosion of the French mines, and that this should cause his men the minimum of loss. During the night of the 8th he built a fresh barricade between Vallejo and Tobar, some yards in the rear of the first one, leaving a means of ingress into the threatened house. On the roof of Tobar he stationed men, just before dawn, to give notice of any French movements in the ruins at the farther end of the block. Meanwhile the garrison of Vallejo were withdrawn behind the barricade, with orders to rush in and reoccupy the house as soon as the explosion had taken place.

At seven o'clock on the morning of the 9th a deep rumbling noise, as of a miniature earthquake, shook the quarter. Volumes of pungent smoke rolled along the lanes, and the crashing sounds proclaimed that the party-wall of Vallejo had fallen in.

"Into the house!" shouted Jack.

The men burst into the building. Taking advantage of the cover afforded by heaps of shattered masonry, woodwork, and furniture, they stood firm to meet the attack of the French, who, as soon as the dust and smoke began to clear, charged furiously up to the ruined wall. Their front ranks were mowed down by the withering fire of the Spaniards, but the gaps were instantly filled, and the undaunted enemy pressed on again. The volumes of smoke and the heaped wreckage of the house made it difficult sometimes for the combatants to see one another. For the moment the advantage was with the Spaniards. Nothing could dislodge them from behind their barricades of

brickwork, furniture, even piles of books. But the French were swarming in at the other end of the block of buildings, and some, mounting on heaps of débris, were able to fire over the heads of the men in front of them into the Spanish position. Jack saw that with the fall of the party-wall of Vallejo the remains of the roof and front wall of the house beyond had also come down. Profiting by this circumstance, he sent a number of men on to the roof of Tobar, whence they were able to enfilade the French marksmen. They were assisted by a strong fire from the front barricade, where Antonio, now the leader of the guerrilleros, was doing yeoman service. Finding that after repeated charges no impression had been made on the Spanish defences, the French drew back disheartened, and, unwilling to face the risk of meeting again such heavy losses, made no further serious attempt during the morning to carry the position. The action degenerated into a fitful exchange of musket-shots, whenever a Frenchman or a Spaniard inadvertently exposed himself.

"Well done, hombres!" said Jack, who had gone from point to point cheering them on, reinforcing weak spots, narrowly escaping the enemy's bullets as he moved at times across the line of fire. He had been quick to mark instances of special bravery or skill, and the few words of praise he spoke nerved the ardent Spaniards to still more strenuous exertions.

In the afternoon, as he was resting in the Casa Alvarez, news was brought that the French had been seen clearing away parts of the débris in the ruins at the farther end of the Vallejo block.

"What does that mean?" he exclaimed, starting up. "They will only expose themselves to direct fire from the roofs and the barricade."

Hastening with Don Cristobal to the roof of the Casa Tobar, he sought for an explanation of the new movement. Suddenly it occurred to him: the French were about to bring the gun, which had been driven away from the angle of the street, to a position whence it would bear upon Vallejo, and the work they were doing was for the purpose of clearing away anything that might intercept its fire.

"We can't hold Vallejo against a bombardment," he remarked. "Stay! Perhaps Don Casimir would lend us a gun from his ramparts. Things have been pretty quiet with him lately. Antonio, run off with twenty men and ask Don Casimir to let you have an eight-pounder, with grape and round-shot. If we can get a gun to bear, Señor, the work the French are doing will assist us as much as themselves."

"Can we mount the gun?" asked Don Cristobal, descending with Jack.

"We can but try. 'Where there's a will there's a way', as we say in England."

Twenty minutes later Antonio returned with his men, hauling the eight-pounder briskly along towards the barricade. It was easily taken into the patio of the Casa Vallejo, but to move it thence into a position facing the French would necessitate the breaking of the wall of one of the ground-floor rooms.

It was approaching nightfall when, from his post of observation on the roof of Tobar, Jack saw that the French had completed their work. He could just perceive the muzzle of their gun, carefully blinded with beams, protruding from a sort of screen in the ruins of the second house from Vallejo. He was confident that they would not begin their bombardment until the following morning, and he hoped to use the hours of darkness to place his own gun. Before darkness fell, with Don Cristobal's help he took, from several points, careful observations of the position of the French gun, and on the stone floor of the room opening on to the patio in Vallejo he drew chalk lines indicating what appeared to be a suitable position for his eight-pounder.

As soon as it was dark he set two men to break a way with picks through the wall of the patio, at a spot where there was a window. The work was carried out with the aid of dark lanterns, large pieces of cloth being hung over every gap to conceal any glimmer of light from the French. The gun was then hauled through the hole and laid by the chalk lines; it was screened with bags of earth, and then, after it had been loaded with ball, a horse-blanket was hung over the muzzle, which alone was in sight of the enemy.

"Now we can get some sleep, Señor," said Jack. "We've had a hard day's work. I confess I'm longing for the morning, to see whether we can once more get in first. You have arranged the sentries for the night?"

"Yes. Nothing has been neglected."

"A special guard for the gun?"

"Antonio and two of his guerrilleros will take turns through the night."

"We haven't any better men. I can hardly keep my eyes open. Come along."

There was but a faint glimmer of light beyond the Ebro when Jack again took his place beside the gun.

"I'm not a gunner," he remarked to Don Cristobal, "but I fancy I can manage to lay and fire it myself; it's point-blank range, you see; I can hardly miss. Now, hombres," he said, turning to the eight men with him, "everything depends on our shooting first, so keep as mum as door-mats."

Waiting till the increasing light showed him clearly the muzzle of the enemy's gun, he carefully pointed his own piece. He aimed at a beam covering the gun at a point which, as nearly as he could judge, corresponded with the trunnion. Don Cristobal watched him anxiously as he lit the match. What would be the result of the shot? One moment of suspense, then Jack applied the match; there was a flash and a roar, followed immediately by the crashing of timber.

It was impossible to see the effect of the shot through the cloud of smoke that hung between the buildings; but, whatever it was, Jack knew that it would awake the enemy to feverish activity. Running his piece in, he had it rapidly sponged and then reloaded with grape. While this was being done, he sent orders to the garrison to open fire on the French position, to which there would certainly be a rush. As soon as the smoke cleared he saw that the French gun had also been run in. Before it could be loaded, however, Jack applied his second match; his canister of grape searched every square foot of the area around the French gun, and the men serving it were annihilated. Before another complement of gunners could be brought up, Jack had his piece cleaned and charged again, this time with round-shot. He saw now that the first shot had broken and splintered the beam; the third shivered it to fragments. A great cheer arose from the garrison when they saw the damage already done. A second charge of grape, together with sharp musketry-fire from every point occupied by the Spaniards, scattered the French reinforcements who were now attempting frantically to withdraw the gun out of range. Again Jack loaded with shot, and a fierce shout of exultation broke from the Spaniards on the roof-tops as they saw the enemy's gun completely dismounted, and the remnant of the French fly in all haste to the rear.

This spirited defence had the effect of keeping the French quiet in that quarter for the rest of the day. Jack maintained his vigilance unrelaxed, but there was no movement from the enemy's direction either above or below ground.

"Another day saved!" said Jack to Don Casimir, who, having heard of what had happened, had come to congratulate him on his successful manipulation of the gun.

"Yes, one more day. But how long can we still hold out?" replied Don Casimir. "Surely, Señor Lumsden, you are not among the credulous people who think that we shall save the city?"

"Since you ask me plainly, Don Casimir, I am not. But what does that matter? We have to hold our quarters, and I confess that I sha'n't be satisfied unless I can say, when the end comes, that here at all events we are still unbeaten.—Do look at that odd little gipsy boy of mine. He is a strange child. When the fighting is going on he is never to be found; he hasn't any courage of that sort; but he always turns up when it is over, and looks as proud as though he had fought with the best. What has the brat got now?"

Pepito approached jauntily, twirling a small silver buckle round on his finger.

"Well, what is the mischief now?" asked Jack with a smile.

"That is for Señor to say," replied Pepito gravely.

"You found that buckle, I suppose. Well, it looks a very good silver buckle; what is there to explain?"

"I found it in the tall house. It was under the dead man. I saw it when they took him away."

"Yes. What then?"

Pepito put his hand into his pocket and produced a second buckle, the exact fellow of the first.

"Now I have two," he said.

"So I see. One isn't much use without the other. I suppose you will want them sewn on your shoes now. You found that too, eh?"

"No, I cut it off. Señor thinks they are the buckles a poor Busno would wear?"

"Well, no; they are a little unusual for a guerrillero, certainly. But he may have been a bandit first."

"No, no. They were not his. Señor, listen as I tell. I find in the room one buckle; I think I know it. I put it in my pocket. I go out at once into the streets to look. What do I see? I see a man walk; one shoe has a buckle, the other shoe has not. I open my eyes wide; I say to myself: 'Ho! ho! That is what I thought!' But I was not sure. I wait. A time comes. I see the one-buckle Señor go into the Café Arcos. I follow; big Jorge Arcos knows me now. I keep much in the dark; Señor One-buckle must not see me. But I see him; I see his foot; I am under the table. I put buckle one next to buckle two; they are brothers. I take my knife and cut off buckle two. It is Señor No-buckle now! Señor knows?"

Jack had been impressed, not so much by the gipsy's story as by the solemnity of his manner of telling it.

"You have something more to tell me. What is it?"

"Señor One-buckle, Señor No-buckle—who is it? One-buckle, I find it under the dead man in the tall house; two-buckle, I cut it from the shoe of—of the master of Señor One-eye."

"Señor Priego?"

"Sí, Señor!"

CHAPTER XXVI

Wanted: Don Miguel Priego

Circumstantial Evidence—A Council of War—Miguel's Despatch—A Statement of Facts—The Inevitable Inference—Shambles—In the Belfry—Without Guile—The People's Curse

Jack had had so many evidences of Pepito's sagacity that he could not doubt the accuracy of the boy's report. The shoe buckles almost certainly belonged to Don Miguel. From this one seed of fact sprang a whole sheaf of problems. Miguel had been in the room when the guerrillero was murdered; he may not have dealt the blow himself, but certainly he was there. Then why was he there? Had he learnt that the man was an afrancesado and gone personally to serve him as every good Spaniard would wish to serve a traitor? That was improbable, for the murder had been committed in secret, no report had been made of it, and Miguel was not the man to let slip the chance of adding to his popularity by ridding the city of a domestic foe. No, he had not gone to the house as an enemy; could he have gone to it as a friend? What bond of union could there be between Don Miguel Priego, in civil life a well-to-do merchant and now also major in Palafox's hussars, and a poor obscure peasant who had no standing whatever as a citizen or a soldier?

Suddenly the idea came to him: could Miguel have visited the man because he was an afrancesado? The suggestion was like the letting out of a flood. Jack recalled the suspicious entry of Miguel and his man into

Saragossa; the strange tale about an overpowered sentry; the curious reappearance of a sentinel in the French trenches almost immediately afterwards. Had Miguel got in, not in spite of the French, but with their connivance? His rapid journey across country from Seville: how could that be accounted for unless he had been helped through the districts in French occupation, and provided with relays of post-horses at every stage? The inevitable conclusion was that Miguel was himself an afrancesado, and had come into the city on some traitorous errand. Knowing that the guerrillero was of the same kidney, he had visited him for some purpose of his own. A quarrel had arisen; during the struggle one of his buckles had been wrenched off, and it lay unnoticed on the floor. It was improbable that Miguel himself had dealt Quintanar the fatal blow; but, remembering Perez, the one-eyed man, Jack was in little doubt where to look for the assassin.

There was only one thing wanted to complete his assurance of Miguel's treachery. Miguel had certainly brought to Palafox a despatch from the Supreme Junta at Seville. If he were a true Spaniard, and had really gained admittance to the city by a hazardous feat of arms, the despatch must have been intact when Palafox received it. On the other hand, if Miguel was a spy, in the pay of the French, it was little likely that they would have allowed a despatch to pass through their lines without mastering its contents. In that case they must have found means to open and read it, without leaving anything to arouse suspicion in the mind of Palafox when he received it. How was that possible? Palafox would certainly have remarked any sign of tampering with the seal; the despatch could not have been opened without tampering with the seal, and that—Stay! Jack vaguely remembered having read somewhere that a seal could be removed by dexterously slipping a thin hot blade between it and the paper. Had that been done with Miguel's despatch? The question had no sooner formed itself in Jack's mind than conviction flashed upon him; he felt absolutely sure that the man he had always so much disliked on personal grounds was a renegade and a traitor.

Next morning he rose from his bed unrefreshed, but with a plan of action formed. He made his dispositions for the continued defence of his district with keenness and care. Then, somewhat after one o'clock, he left the work in charge of Don Cristobal, and made his way by narrow lanes towards the other end of the city. The streets were almost entirely deserted now; only a few brave women and ministering priests went about fearlessly on errands of mercy. All the men were engaged on the ramparts or in the houses, striving with dogged energy to hinder the creeping advance of the French. He had crossed the part of the city most in danger from bombardment or mines when he met Tio Jorge, whom he had not seen for a few days.

"Tio," he said, "can you come with me? I am going to see the general, and I should like you to be with me."

"Assuredly, Señor. And in truth, I think it well you should have a friend with you, for the murmurs against you are growing stronger. It is whispered that an afrancesado was lately slain in your quarter, and men are saying that he was not the only one there. They are puzzled, for if you are an afrancesado, as some think, why are you fighting the French so desperately every day? I only tell you what they think and say, Señor; it is well I am your friend."

Jack set his lips; he traced this to Miguel's inveterate malice. Hurrying along with the big peasant, he arrived at the Aljafferia Castle, and was admitted after some delay to Palafox's room. The general had now taken to his bed; the fever had gained a terrible hold upon him, and but for his indomitable spirit he would probably ere this have died. He was surrounded by a group of his advisers, among them Don Basilio, Santiago Sass, Padre Consolacion, and General San March, who, having failed to hold the Monte Torrero against the French in the early days of the siege, had since been under a cloud. The priests scowled at Jack as he approached; the lean Santiago Sass and the rotund Padre Consolacion looked at him with equal distrust.

"Come, Tio Jorge," said General San March, "you are in time to support me. I have been asking the captain-general to allow me to lead a sortie across the Ebro, now that the French are weakened there by the withdrawal of so many men."

"Useless, useless!" cried Palafox from his bed.

"Useless, Señores!" echoed Tio Jorge. "What men have we now for sorties? Three weeks ago, yes; but now—most of our men can hardly stagger under the weight of their muskets. The time for sorties is past; but let us hope the French are withdrawn from San Lazaro by news of our brothers coming to aid us—"

"And we will never give in, never give in!" cried Santiago Sass. "No, not even though traitors within our walls give the gates to the enemy."

Tio Jorge was on the point of resenting, on Jack's behalf, the glare with which the priest accompanied these words; but Jack laid his hand on the man's arm, and, advancing to the bedside, spoke to the worn figure lying there.

"You remember, Señor, the despatch that was brought to you from the Supreme Junta, little more than a week ago, by one of your officers who made his way by night through the French lines?"

"I remember it."

"You have that despatch still?"

"I have. Why do you ask?"

"Pardon me, Señor, you will see in a few moments. You observed nothing unusual about the seal?"

"Nothing."

"It was the usual seal of the Junta," put in Don Basilio. "I have the despatch."

"Will you allow me to look at it?"

The chaplain hesitated; he appeared to be about to ask a question, but Tio Jorge interposed.

"The despatch, Señor Padre! The Señor has a reason; I know it not, but he fought with me by the Casa Ximenez, and what he says, por Dios! there is sense in it."

"Produce the despatch, Padre," said Palafox.

Don Basilio went to a cabinet, and after a little search found the despatch and handed it to Jack. The seal was broken across the middle. Jack examined the edges carefully, lifting the wax slightly with his thumb nail. He looked up.

"It is as I thought," he said. "Will Don Basilio look?"

The priest took the paper and looked at it with an air of puzzlement and surprise.

"I see red wax and paper," he said coldly. "What of that?"

"Do you not see, Señor Padre, a slight browning of the paper beneath, as though it had been scorched?"

The chaplain scrutinized the seal again. The other priests watched him in silence; Palafox kept his burning eyes fixed on Jack; and Tio Jorge stood with his lips parted as though wondering what deep mystery was concerned here.

"I do see a faint coloration," said Don Basilio at length; "a light tinge at the edge of the wax, becoming a little darker beneath the seal. What then?"

"This, Señor. The paper, I suggest, was scorched by the passage of a hot keen blade beneath the seal."

There was a painful silence. Then Tio Jorge cried, "Por Dios! that explains everything. It is all clear. The man that brought it is a villain, an afrancesado, Señores! And 'tis he who has sought to harm the brave English Señor here! Death to all traitors! Death to Don Miguel Priego!"

"Stay, stay!" said Padre Consolacion, his round face wearing a look of concern. "This is a terrible charge to bring against a reputable citizen of Saragossa."

"One of my own hussars," murmured Palafox.

"He was my pupil," continued the padre. "I have known him since he was an infant. I knew his father, an estimable man; he cannot be a traitor. If the despatch was opened, it must have been without his knowledge. Of that I am sure."

"The evidence is not sufficient—not sufficient," said Palafox. "You must be mistaken, Señor Lumsden."

"I am sorry, Señores," returned Jack; "but will you bear with me while I put certain facts before you? You remember how strangely Don Miguel made his entrance into the city some days ago? He had overcome a sentinel, he and his man, and came by night across the Huerba, scaling our ramparts by the aid of muskets held out to him by two of Don Casimir's men. I was present, Señores, at the time. I had just gone to take over the command with which the Señor Capitan-general honoured me, and was walking along the ramparts with Don Casimir Ulloa, who told me how amazed he was to see no sentinel in the French trenches, where for many nights before a sentinel had never failed to be. Even as he spoke we saw two figures creep down the slope and approach the walls. They, as you know, were Don Miguel Priego and his man. They forded the river, clambered up the slope on our side, and were assisted over our ramparts, and we heard from Don Miguel's lips the story he told the general afterwards."

"It was a bold feat," interjected Padre Consolacion. "Don Miguel was ever a man of daring."

"But, Señores," continued Jack, "no sooner was Don Miguel safely within our walls than, in the French lines opposite, a sentinel suddenly reappeared. Had the Frenchman, slain by Don Miguel, come to life again? Why had Don Casimir heard no sound? Would the discovery of their dead sentinel have been regarded by the French as an ordinary accident, of no more account than the finding of a dead rat? And now we find that the despatch brought by Don Miguel had been opened. Is it not natural to conclude that it was opened by the French, and that the temporary absence of the sentinel was part of an arrangement between them and Don Miguel to give colour to his story?"

"Surmise! All baseless surmise!" said Padre Consolacion.

"One thing more," went on Jack quietly. "The other night a man was murdered in my quarter of the city. He was assassinated in his room at the top of a lofty house. In that room was found this pass through the French lines, and this drawing of our defences."

Everyone started as Jack produced the papers.

"Besides these, there was found this shoe-buckle, that had been torn off in the man's scuffle with his assailant. Two days afterwards the fellow-buckle was brought to me, and Don Miguel Priego was seen in the streets with shoes which had both lost their buckles. It was this that convinced me. Had Don Miguel reason to dispute with an afrancesado unless—"

"Enough!" cried Santiago Sass. "It is clear he is a proved villain! To the gallows with him! Where is he? With my own hand will I hang him in the midst of the Coso! To the gallows! To the gallows!"

And, gathering his cassock about him, the priest rushed madly from the room. Almost before the door was closed behind him a tremendous explosion set the whole building vibrating, and caused Palafox almost to jump from his bed.

"My convent!" cried Padre Consolacion. "It is my convent at last! Tio Jorge, come; they will have need of us."

"And of me!" cried Palafox, springing up.

"Stay, José," said Don Basilio, "you are not fit to go out."

"Do not stay me, Padre," answered Palafox, clasping his cloak, and with trembling fingers buckling on his sword. "I must go; I must share the dangers of my people."

The chaplain made no further protest, and soon Palafox, accompanied by San March, Tio Jorge, and Jack, was hastening towards the scene of one of the most awful catastrophes that ever befell a beleaguered city. The French, undetected by the defenders, had driven a mine beneath the great Franciscan convent, and charged it with 3000 pounds of powder. The convent was at the moment full of fighting-men; the cellars were occupied by many families of citizens; and one part of the building was crammed with 400 workpeople, men and women, who were there engaged in making clothes for the soldiers. All these perished when the mine was fired; and when Palafox arrived on the scene, the whole district for many yards around was strewn not merely with broken masonry, but with mutilated human remains.

All thought of Don Miguel's treason was for the moment banished by the hideous spectacle. Yet, awful as the damage was, the Spaniards had not awaited the arrival of their leaders before attempting reprisals. A wide opening had been made by the explosion, in the wall near the porch; the pavement of the church of San Francisco had been torn up; altars, pulpits, columns, arches, lay in shattered fragments; but Spaniards had rushed in from the streets, and, barricading themselves behind the ruins, were showering bullets upon the incoming French. Some had climbed into the galleries; others had mounted by a narrow spiral staircase into the belfry, which had strangely withstood the shock; and from these elevated positions they poured murderous volleys upon the invaders. As the rays of sunlight streamed through the broken stained-glass windows, they fell upon groups of furious combatants, imparting varied tints to the clouds of smoke and dust that rolled through the shattered nave, and glinting on the bayonets of the French infantry as they pressed desperately forward. The Spaniards fought with the fury of despair. Inspired by the presence of their idolized general, by the heroic efforts of Tio Jorge, and the fiery exhortations of Padre Consolacion and Santiago Sass, who had soon appeared on the scene, they defended every nook and corner with obstinate tenacity, and when night put an end to the terrible conflict, had succeeded, at a huge cost, in driving the French from a portion of the building.

Jack had climbed into the belfry along with a body of peasants under the command of a French émigré, the Comte de Fleury. He was almost overcome by the sickening sight. All around, the roofs of the neighbouring houses were covered with dismembered limbs; the gutters, through which for eight centuries nothing but rain had streamed, now ran red with blood, that poured into the street as if from the mouths of the dragons, vultures, and winged monsters that decorated the Gothic walls. He could not help exclaiming at the folly of maintaining a resistance against such heavy odds. It was terrible enough that soldiers, whose duty brought them face to face with sudden death, should fall by hundreds to the French arms; but innocent and helpless citizens, young boys and girls, were all included in this late carnage, and Jack shuddered at the dire results of what he could now only regard as sheer obstinacy and blind rage.

Creeping down when the din was over, and French and Spaniards alike were resting from the fray, he found that Palafox, in a complete state of collapse, was being carried back to his bed. Along with Tio Jorge, Jack accompanied the sad group. The halls of the Aljafferia Castle were thronged with some of the more substantial merchants who were yet left alive. They had come to plead with the general to ask for terms from the French. But at the first suggestion there arose such an outcry from the peasants and the poorer citizens, incited by their priests, that the merchants were in danger of being torn limb from limb. No voice was louder than that of Santiago Sass in demanding that the defence should be still continued. The French who had withdrawn from the eastern suburbs had not yet reappeared, and the priest vehemently declared that the catastrophe at the Franciscan convent was the turning-point of the siege, and that from that moment the hand of Our Lady of the Pillar would work wonders on behalf of her city. Backed up by him, the people clamoured for a proclamation to be issued, enjoining still more strenuous resistance, and not till this had been drawn up by Don Basilio, and Palafox had affixed his tremulous signature, did the crowd disperse.

Jack remained for some time in the castle. He wished he was older and more experienced. He then might have pointed out to some of the bitterest of the Junta what fearful hardship they were bringing on the city by their insensate resistance. But he saw that they were in no temper to listen to expostulations from anyone, and he dared not speak his thoughts even to his friend Tio Jorge. He was about to return to his own district when he saw Padre Consolacion enter with a brisker step than was usual with him. The priest came straight towards him.

"Señor, Señor," he said, with a mingled look of regret and indignation, "he that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor endureth a reproach against his neighbour, he shall never be moved. I knew it could not be true; I knew the boy I taught at my knee could not be a traitor; I knew—"

"Señor Padre," interrupted Jack, "you don't mean to say you have told him?"

"Indeed, and what more natural? Is it right to condemn unheard? Should I not ask of the man himself what—"

"Come to the general!" shouted Tio Jorge, catching the priest by the arm. "Come to the general! He must know of what you have done."

They made their way to Palafox's room, where none but Don Basilio remained with him.

"Don José needs sleep," said the chaplain, meeting them at the door. "What do you want with him?"

"Caramba, Padre!" cried Tio Jorge, "he must know whether the man be a traitor or not. Listen to Padre Consolacion!"

The priest seemed amazed at the fuss Tio Jorge was making.

"I went, Señores, to find Don Miguel Priego, to ask him, on his honour, whether there was a word of truth in the English Señor's story. He was indignant, as I knew he would be. He demanded to know why he, a loyal son of Spain, should be suspected on such flimsy grounds. He scoffed when I spoke of the scorched paper, and—"

"You told him that, Padre?" said Palafox, raising himself on his elbow.

"I did, of course, and he flew into a passion, and said that with morning light he would come and meet his accuser and give him the lie to his face."

"Send for him now; bring him here instantly. Shall there be treason in our midst? Tio Jorge, do you go and command Don Miguel Priego instantly to my presence."

It was an hour before Tio Jorge returned.

"Proof! Proof of treason!" he cried furiously. "He is gone; he and his man. See what your meddling did, Señor Padre! No sooner was your back turned than the accursed afrancesado fled."

"Fled!" echoed the priest in consternation.

"Meet his accuser—give him the lie to his face', you said," exclaimed Tio Jorge with bitter mockery, "'with morning light'! He is gone, and even now, I doubt not, is making merry with the French who have hired him. A curse light on him! May he die by a traitor's hand, even as he is a traitor!"

"Write, Don Basilio," said Palafox, "write a proclamation! Proclaim Miguel Priego to all men a traitor, and call upon all true men to seize upon him and bring him before us to suffer the penalty of his crime. My unhappy country! Let me die, let me die!"

He turned his face to the wall. The stern chaplain wrote a proclamation; within an hour printed copies were distributed throughout the town, and the name of Miguel Priego, hitherto lauded to the skies, was now hissed with venomous hate by every loyal citizen of Saragossa.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Eleventh Hour

Tantaene Irae?—Taking thought—Pepito's Charge—Horrors of the Siege—Beyond the River—A Ring of Steel—Unconquered Still—Patriots All

With morning light the French completed their capture of the Franciscan convent. By a series of desperate charges they cleared the vast ruins of the Spaniards who had held their position during the night, the brave Comte de Fleury and his men were bayoneted on the narrow stairway of the bell-tower, and with one final rush the French pursued the fleeing remnant of the defenders to the very edge of the Coso.

Not long afterwards the French outposts beyond the Aljafferia Castle were surprised to see a strange and motley procession issue from the Portillo Gate. A mob of peasants—for the most part women and children—ragged, famished, fever-stricken, almost mad, rushed pell-mell towards the French lines, preferring to die by the hands of the enemy rather than endure longer the terrors of the beleaguered city. Reaching the outposts, they begged to be allowed to pass through towards their village homes; this being refused, they implored the French to kill them, not to drive them back. But the marshal would not forgo this opportunity of teaching the obstinate defenders a lesson. He ordered the poor creatures to be fed, and then sent back to the city, hoping thereby to impress the Spaniards both with his humanity and with the abundance of his stores.

When news of this incident was brought to Jack, he read it at once as a sign that the inevitable end could not now be long delayed. Heroic as the defence had been, the strain upon poor human nature was too heavy to be borne, and though the priests and the mob-leaders were still vehemently opposed to surrender, it was clear that only surrender would save the city from the most horrible of fates. Not even the most violent fanatic would have the heart to prolong the struggle for more than a few days.

Things being still quiet in his own quarter, Jack determined to see Juanita, and advise her upon her course when the city fell. He left Don Cristobal in charge, and made his tortuous way around the captured part of the town towards the northern end of the city. Pepito accompanied him.

Juanita was looking pale and worn. Her aunt was seriously ill, and the girl had spent sleepless nights in watching her.

"Oh, Jack, Jack," she cried, "surely the end must come now! It is wicked of our Junta to hold out longer. The people are dying like flies. Two were carried out of this very house yesterday. Are we all to die?"

"General Palafox must capitulate soon," said Jack, "and that is what I wanted to see you about. Have you thought of what you will do when the capitulation takes place?"

"Why, you will be with me; you will look after my poor aunt and me."

"No, I shall be a prisoner."

"A prisoner! Oh, but you must escape! It will be easy to escape in the confusion. What shall we do if you are a prisoner, Jack?"

"I can't run away. I have to defend my quarter till the last. And then—well, it's the fortune of war—the French will make sure of all the officers, you may depend on that. But about yourself, Juanita; you won't be in any danger—except from Miguel."

"Why from Miguel? Won't he be a prisoner too?"

Jack laughed grimly.

"Miguel has taken care of that. Last night he disappeared from Saragossa—just in time to escape being gibbeted as an afrancesado, a traitor, and a spy."

Juanita's eyes blazed, her cheeks flamed with the hot Spanish blood.

"Kill him! Kill him, Jack!" she cried. "He was a traitor to my father; he is a traitor to Spain! Oh, if I were a man!"

Jack was amazed at the girl's fury.

"I don't think I'd like to soil my hands with him," he said quietly. "Besides, he will keep out of my way. But don't you see, Juanita, that he will come in with the French, and then—I'm afraid he might bother you, you know."

Juanita drew herself up with a proud air.

"I could borrow a knife!" she said. "A Spanish girl is not afraid to die."

"Don't talk like that. What need is there for you to die? I shall have to give you orders, as I give my men. Señorita Juanita Alvarez, you are to make your way, after the capitulation, to some place of safety, where I will find

you—

"You, a prisoner?"

"Oh, I don't mean to remain a prisoner! I shall say good-bye to my captors at the earliest possible moment, and then find you, and we will steal our way to the coast, and find a ship and sail for England. Mother will be glad to see you."

"I have always wanted to see England," said Juanita musingly. "But what about my property—that all this mystery is about?"

"We don't know where it is; but, you remember, a duplicate letter was sent to father in London, and we can find out all about it there. And then, when the war is over, no doubt father will come back with you and put everything straight. And then—"

"Well, Señor?" said Juanita archly.

"Oh, then I suppose you'll marry a Don—of some sort—"

"How dare you, Señor Lumsden!" she cried with flashing eyes.

Jack looked astonished at her sudden anger.

"But never mind that," he went on. "The question is, is there anywhere that you can go to when the city falls?"

"Ay de mí! Our old country house near Morata was shut up months ago; only one old man remains in charge. The garden must now be a waste. But I have friends at Calatayud, some miles farther away, and I could stay with them. It is quite sixty miles distant. Could I get there safely?"

"I think so. After the siege many peasants will be returning to their homes. I will enquire if any are going in that direction, and will let you know if I find some respectable people with whom you might travel. Your old duenna would, of course, go with you. And then I thought of lending you a special friend of my own, who has done me many a good turn; he is outside now—a young gipsy boy who—

"Pepito! Oh, he and I are good friends!"

"You know him, then?"

"Of course I do. He comes to see me every day, and talks about you all the time. Strange to say, he thinks a great deal of you, Jack."

"Poor little chap! I owe him a good deal. Well, he shall go with you, and you will make your way to Calatayud, and I will come to you there in—let me see, under a week. I shall have had enough of the Frenchmen in a week."

"But suppose you can't escape, Jack?"

"Never fear," said Jack with a smile. "That is all arranged, then?"

"Yes, I suppose so," replied Juanita doubtfully. "You will be sure to find me, Jack?"

"Unless you hide away—like your treasure."

Returning to his quarter he found that the French had still made no further attempt upon it. The situation indeed, remained unchanged for several days. They were so fully occupied in pushing the advantage they had gained in the direction of the Coso that they could afford to leave Jack's little block of buildings for the present. They continued to occupy the ruins facing the Casa Vallejo, and Jack discovered, by observations made from the roofs of the Casas Tobar and Alvarez, that a considerable body of troops was held ready in Santa Engracia to reinforce any point that should be threatened by the Spaniards.

Though his own position was thus left unmolested, every few hours brought news of the steady progress the enemy were making elsewhere. One after another the blocks of buildings adjacent to the Franciscan convent fell into their hands. Jack saw that, even if he could hold his own in front, the French were gradually creeping around his flank, and that in the course of a few days he would be attacked from the east as well as the north. On February 12th Don Casimir sent for the gun he had lent. An urgent message had come from Palafox asking for all artillery that

could be spared. It was needed for the defence of the Coso. The French had established two batteries among the ruins of the convent, one of which raked the Coso, while the other commanded the street leading to the bridge across the river. Jack had already withdrawn Don Casimir's gun from the direct view of the French, and he trusted that its total disappearance from his defences would remain for some time undiscovered.

But although he was not seriously pressed, he was alarmed to see how his small force had dwindled and was still dwindling in numbers. A few fell by the musket-shots of the French; far more dropped out through sickness, and of these almost none recovered. A form of typhus fever had broken out in the city, attacking especially the guerrilleros from the country and wounded soldiers who had no fixed homes. The Countess Bureta was dead; many of the other ladies who had nobly done their best in nursing the sick and wounded had perished; the stock of medicines was exhausted. Many invalids lay unattended on the stone pavements of the courtyards, with nothing but a little straw for their beds. In the intervals of fighting the worn survivors were to be seen sitting on stone benches, shivering in spite of their cloaks, their hands scarcely able to hold their weapons. So weak were they that the slightest wound proved fatal. Jack was sick at heart as he saw his ranks depleted day by day through the loss of some stalwart guerrillero or seasoned tirador who had succumbed to an enemy more terrible than the French.

Once or twice he thought of finding relief in leading a desperate sortie on the enemy's entrenchments. But consideration showed him the futility of any such move. He might inflict some loss on the French, but even if he drove them from their advanced position, he could not hope to retain the ground he might thus win. His efforts must be confined to defensive work; he must hold his own, as he had hitherto succeeded in doing. He had now been for a fortnight in command of the Casa Alvarez district, and during that period the French had not made any real progress. Indeed, they had lost very heavily in men, and had suffered so many disasters from the Spanish mines that they appeared for the present to have suspended all mining operations in Jack's quarter.

As the days passed by without any serious demonstration against his position, Jack inferred that the French, like the Spaniards, were suffering from the long-continued strain. The force under Marshal Lannes' command was evidently not sufficient to maintain a simultaneous attack on all the points at which they had effected an entrance into the city. On the 13th the corps sent out to drive away the army collected by Francisco Palafox returned to the siege; their mere appearance had been sufficient to scatter the relieving army of which the Saragossans had expected so much. It was at once apparent that the interrupted attack on the San Lazaro suburb was to be actively pressed. The French entrenchments were pushed closer to the river; heavy siege-guns were brought into position, and epaulements were constructed across all the roads by which the Spaniards holding the suburb could escape.

On February 18th a vigorous bombardment was commenced. No fewer than fifty-two guns opened fire at daybreak, the main point of attack being the San Lazaro convent, which commanded the bridge across the Ebro, the sole link between the city and the suburb. The effect of the bombardment was stupendous. Roofs crashed in beneath the bursting bombs, the crackle of flames was mingled with the clang of alarm-bells from every belfry, the whole city shook as with an earthquake. The Spanish batteries responded vigorously. The Spaniards fought for every inch of ground in the streets, but they were steadily beaten back. A breach was made in the convent wall; the French rushed in, massacring the monks who dauntlessly opposed them, cutting down without mercy crowds of men, women, and children who had sought a refuge in the church itself. The yells of the combatants were mingled with the screams of the wounded and dying, and not till every one of the occupants of the convent was slain did the hideous clamour cease.

Retreat to the city was now cut off, and scattered bands of Spaniards wandered frantically about, seeking a means of escape and finding none. Three hundred, led by a bold fellow named Fernando Gonzalez, succeeded in running the gauntlet of the French fusillade and forcing their way across the bridge into Saragossa. Many who sought to escape by the river were drowned, and 3000 who tried to make their way along the bank towards the

country were headed off by a regiment of French cavalry and compelled to lay down their arms. Palafox himself, though so ill that he could scarcely stand, came at the head of his troops to the succour of the suburb, but his efforts were vain. The French remained masters of the position, and were now able to place their guns so as to command the northern part of the city, which hitherto had been almost untouched.

While this terrible struggle had been in progress, the Spaniards had suffered a serious disaster elsewhere. At three in the afternoon three huge mines, charged with more than two tons of powder, were exploded beneath the University, which was carried with a rush. With it fell several buildings in its neighbourhood, and in the evening the French penetrated to the Coso, where they gained several houses, among them one which had repulsed no fewer than ten previous assaults. The Spaniards lost ground also near the Trinity convent, and the district known as the Tanneries began to suffer severely from the new French works thrown up in the captured suburb of San Lazaro.

That night Jack held a serious consultation with Don Cristobal and several of his more trusty men. The successes won by the French in other parts of the town would no doubt encourage them to make a renewed attack on the only quarter along its outer rim which had yet withstood them.

"I am not going to give it up without a tussle," said Jack resolutely. "If they bring artillery to bear, our barricades must fall; but we still have the houses opposite. The Y mines in Tobar and Vega will do enormous damage if the French get in there. I rather suspect they will fight shy of the houses and try to rush in from the streets. All that we can do with our little force is to man the windows and roofs of the houses and delay them as long as possible."

It was a pathetic sight to see the unquenched eagerness of the haggard crowd. Not one faltered; all were as resolute as though it were the first day of the siege. Jack arranged with them for their respective posts on the morrow, and waited anxiously for daylight.

About twelve o'clock on February 20th Tio Jorge and Jorge Arcos were staying their hunger in the latter's café with a mess of boiled rice and half-baked corn-meal. Their begrimed, black-bearded faces wore a look of savage gloom. No one was with them. Outside, in the Coso, not a living person was to be seen.

"By all the saints, I vow I will not surrender!" Tio Jorge was saying.

"Nor I!" replied his friend. "Nor would the general himself, but that he is ill. Had he been well, no one could have persuaded him to beg for terms from the French dog. When I heard it last night I could not believe the news. For two months we have fought; shall we yield now? I for one will not yield; I will die rather!"

"And we could have told the general it would be of no use. We have killed too many of the accursed French for them to let us march away. I could have laughed when Señor Casseillas came back after his journey to the French camp, and said that we must lay down our arms without conditions. And the general is dying! God have his soul! He has given the command to San March. Ay, 'twas San March who lost the Monte Torrero—curse him! But the Junta! —the saints be praised our brave padres are members of the Junta, and will not let the others yield. Traitors, por Dios! I myself will shoot any man, high or low, who counsels surrender. But Don Basilio, and Padre Consolacion, and Padre Santiago Sass—ah, they will never yield! The priests of Spain are men, mi amigo!"

"Yes; they will fight and—"

A shattering explosion from the other side of the Coso interrupted him.

"Where is that?" cried Tio Jorge, starting up. Running to the door he saw, beyond the Franciscan convent, a cascade of dust and stones darkening the air. "'Tis towards the Casa Alvarez," he cried, "where the English Señor still holds out. The dogs are attacking there. Come, Jorge Arcos, we can do nothing elsewhere; come, and let us help the brave Englishman!"

Together they left the café. The crash of the explosion had drawn others to the street, and as the two leaders hurried along, past the barricades, up narrow by-ways, pursuing a roundabout course towards the Huerba, they were joined by ones and twos and threes, who came in answer to their hail. At the corner of a lane near the Seminary thirty men who had escaped with Fernando Gonzalez from San Lazaro swelled their numbers.

"To the Casa Alvarez!" shouted Tio Jorge.

A second explosion made him hasten still more eagerly.

"To the Casa Alvarez!" he repeated. "War to the knife!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Last Fight in Saragossa

The Last Muster—The Fougasse—A Forlorn Hope—Spiking the Guns—A Race with Death—A Sally—Solicitude—Jorge Arcos Volunteers—To the Bitter End—A Bolt from the Blue—The Last Sacrifice—The Courage of Despair—Truce

At the Casa Alvarez a stern fight was in progress. On the preceding day what Jack had foreseen had at length come to pass: the French had once more brought guns to bear on his position. Warned by their previous experience, they blinded their batteries in such a way that their gunners were protected from the muskets of the Spaniards on the roofs. They cleared a space at the end of the ruined block of which the Casa Vallejo formed a part, and there placed two guns; another was mounted at the end of the street between that house and the Casa Tobar; a fourth at the end of the street in which the Vega barricade was erected. It was clear to Jack that he could not hope to prevent the enemy from gaining a footing in the houses; all that he could do for the present was to await developments, and act as the need of the moment dictated.

But, to be prepared for emergencies, he rapidly constructed, beneath the floor of the Casa Vallejo, a fougasse—a shallow mine in the form of a truncated cone, with its axis inclined towards the point of attack. Over this he piled some tons of brickwork and stones which, in the explosion, would be hurled many yards to the front and flanks. With this, and the as yet unexploded Y-shaped mines beneath the Casas Tobar and Vega, he hoped to destroy the French who would rush the houses when the bombardment ceased, and thus to enable his men to retake the positions they must lose.

He had only 200 men now with him, and many of these were on their last legs. But when the rumour spread through the quarter that the French were preparing to make a serious attack, some fifty poor wretches, scarcely able to crawl, staggered from their squalid lodgings, and begged to be allowed to take part in the defence. They were a pitiful sight, gaunt and haggard, with ague-stricken limbs and fever-lit eyes. They were incapable of hand-to-hand fighting; many of them were too weak even to lift their muskets to their shoulders; but they could fire muskets rested on window-sills and through loopholes, and Jack, gladly as he would have spared them, was too hard-pressed to reject any aid, however slight. A score of women came forward, offering to load muskets for the men, and thus save time. Among them Jack recognized the lady he had seen as he came with Tio Jorge to take over his command. He remembered her attitude of frenzied grief; he recalled the fierce command she had laid upon her little boy. The child was no longer with her; the little fellow had died of fever a few days before. The poor creature had now lost father, brothers, husband, and son, and had come with the wild fury of a mad woman to wreak vengeance on the enemy.

About ten o'clock in the morning the French opened fire with all their guns upon the Casa Vallejo and the barricades. Jack made what reply he could from the roofs and windows, but the batteries were so well screened that

the fire of his men was almost wholly ineffectual. Great gaps were soon made in the wall of the house and in the barricades, and seeing that the attempt to hold the latter in the face of the bombardment would entail a useless loss of life, Jack withdrew his men behind the Casas Vega and Tobar, and held them in readiness to rush into the houses when his mines had exploded. After two hours' bombardment the four guns ceased fire. Immediately afterwards three parties of French dashed forward in headlong charge. The Spaniards, who, on the cessation of the bombardment, had sped back to their posts, met the enemy with dauntless front. The Frenchmen in the streets fell rapidly under a hot fire from the roof and windows of the Casa Tobar and from the advanced barricades, but, seeing the hopelessness of continued resistance to the overwhelming numbers opposed to him, Jack withdrew his forces again, and sent word to the men stationed at the mines to light their matches in readiness for firing the trains. With exultant shouts the enemy, for the most part Poles and voltigeurs, swarmed into the houses. Jack gave the word first at Vallejo. The fougasse exploded with a terrific crash. It was this explosion which had interrupted Tio Jorge's conversation in the café. But though not a Frenchman was left alive in the house, the places of the dead were instantly filled by their furious comrades, who were only kept from rushing across the street towards the Casa Alvarez by the concentrated fire of the Spaniards there posted.

A few minutes later the French in Tobar and Vega met with a like fate. Jack had exploded in each case one of the arms of his Y-shaped mines, and for the time both houses were cleared of the enemy.

But Jack had long since seen that, unless he could deal them a harder blow than any he had recently been able to strike, he must inevitably be swamped by superior numbers. Even though the explosions should slay a hundred of the French to every ten of his own men, the former could be continually replaced, while a loss to him was irreparable. He could hold the enemy in check for the moment, but a time must come when his gallant little force must be overwhelmed and annihilated—unless he could effect some diversion.

His greatest danger came from these formidable batteries, to which he could make no effective reply. Under cover of their fire the French could at any time repeat the rush across the street by which they had carried Tobar. Was there no way by which the guns could be silenced?

During the two hours' bombardment Jack had spent many anxious minutes in thinking out this problem. What were the chances? The explosion of the fougasse, followed by that of the Y mines, would not only deal immense destruction, but would also, he hoped, have a tremendous moral effect. Could he not make a rush for the guns while the French were demoralized and at sixes and sevens? Would there be time to spike them? Ought he to diminish his little force even by the minimum number of men necessary to perform the feat? He now had no more than 180 men all told. The French, he computed, had numbered nearly 700 at the beginning of the day. Could he, with, say, 50 men, hope to penetrate their ranks and return in safety?

"It must be tried," he said to himself, and from that moment bent all his energies to ensure the success of his daring scheme. Before firing the Y mines he collected his whole disposable force, and, amid a breathless silence, addressed them.

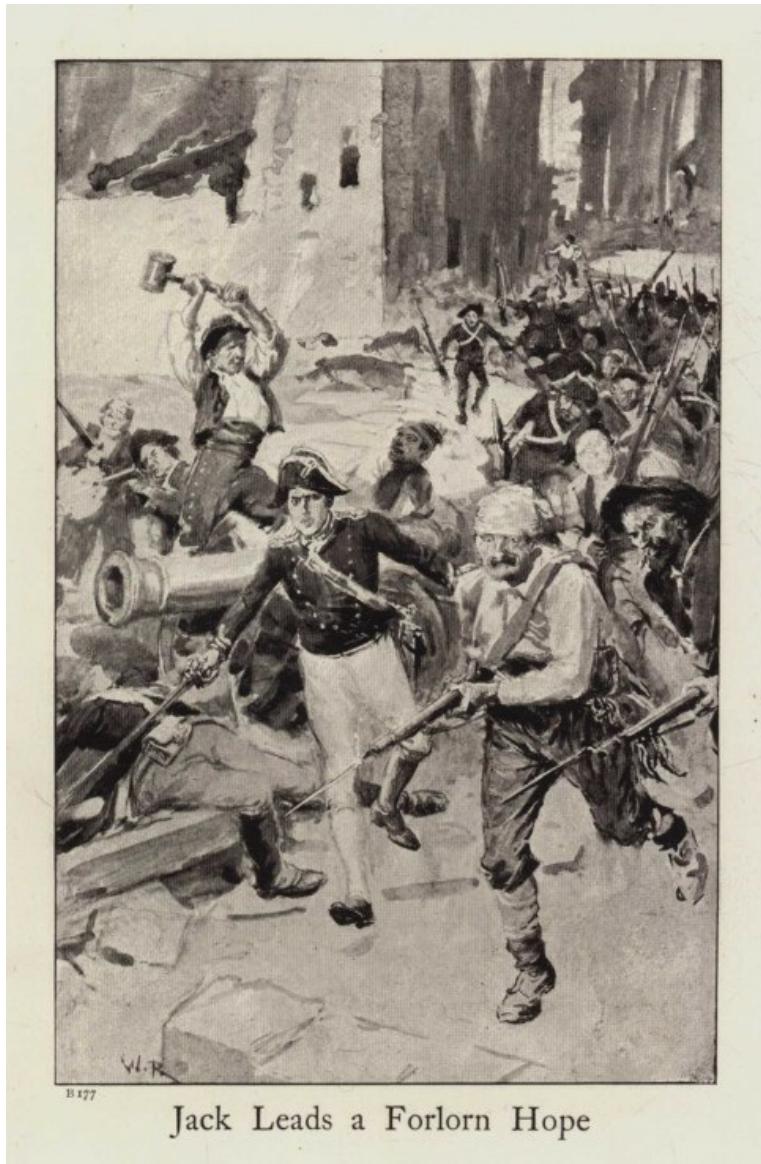
"Hombres," he said, "there is one thing for us to do. The French guns must be spiked. I will lead the way. I want fifty men to follow me. It will be dangerous, perhaps fatal work. Who will volunteer, for Saragossa and Spain?"

Every man held out his hand. Jack felt proud of the unswerving patriotism and courage of his troops. The trouble was, not to accept, but to refuse their offers. He quickly selected fifty of the strongest. Ten of these he sent to find long nails and hammers, and they soon returned, bearing tools of all sizes and shapes. The rest were armed with muskets and bayonets. Jack gave as many as he could pistols in addition.

"Now, hombres," he said, "when the mines explode, the French in the houses will be destroyed, and those behind them dismayed. We must seize that very moment to rush into the Casa Vega. I shall go first. You must

follow close upon me as rapidly as you can. I intend to make for the guns. We shall spike them. We shall then rush back through the ruins and the houses beyond the Casa Vallejo and take the French there in the rear. Don Cristobal will still defend his barricade. Antonio here will hold the rest of you in readiness to sweep upon the French in Vallejo and the street. If I am overcome, and you cannot hold the second barricades, retreat to the Casa Alvarez and fight to the death."

The Spaniards were eager to start, and almost too impatient to wait for the explosion. When that occurred, the larger débris hurled into the air had scarcely reached the ground before Jack, followed by his devoted fifty, dashed through the dust that was swirling in vast eddies from the ruins. Entering the Casa Vega by a low side doorway, almost suffocated by the pungent fumes and the clouds of dust, they scrambled through the ruins, springing over stones and beams, broken furniture, burning draperies, every man taking his own course and trying to avoid impeding his comrades. A few seconds brought them to what had been the party-wall of the house. Bearing to the left, Jack dashed into the charred ruins of the adjoining house, through the midst of a few Frenchmen who, injured but not killed by the explosion, were crawling painfully away. A glance to the right!—he saw that the next clearing was still held by the force supporting those who had rushed the houses; but they were in no sort of order, having scattered to seek shelter from the beams and stones that had descended upon them as from the crater of a volcano. A glance in front!—across the narrow street, in the wrecked house nearest the gun, Jack saw in an instant that he had a more formidable foe to reckon with. The French there, some 150 in number, had not been affected materially by the explosion; but it had taken them by surprise, and for the moment they were at a loss what they should do. Before they could realize what was happening, a band of fifty fierce yelling Spaniards, led by a young officer with sword in one hand and pistol in the other, was among them. A score fell at the first onset; the rest scattered to right and left of the Spaniards, and by the time they had collected their wits, and perceived how small was the party engaged in this desperate sortie, Jack and the first of his men were already engaged with the gunners. The onslaught was so sudden, and Jack was so intent on the work in hand, that he was scarcely conscious of what happened until afterwards. One of the gunners, in the urgency of the moment, picked up a linstock and raised it as a kind of club. Jack sprang straight at him, toppled him over by the mere force of his impact, and came upon another gunner, whose smoking musket showed that he had just fired. Him Jack cut down; the others meanwhile fell to the bayonets of the Spaniards. The gun was reached. Jack sped past, while a burly Catalan, with two strokes of his huge mallet, drove a nail into the vent. Then the whole party, diminished by half a dozen who had fallen, swept on across the street towards the spot where stood the two guns that commanded the Casa Vallejo.



Jack Leads a Forlorn Hope

Jack Leads a Forlorn Hope

The few seconds occupied by the tussle about the first gun had given the gunners at the other two time to form up. At the same time the French behind Jack had recovered from their surprise and were swarming upon his track. Would he have time to complete his work? A few bullets pattered on the jagged remnants of walls still standing; but the French were too much afraid of hitting their own men to fire volleys, and those who did shoot were too flustered to take good aim. Amid a din of shouting, Jack dashed into the ruins on the far side of the street. Some two-score men were there drawn up ready to receive him. Fortunately they were on the French side of the epaulement that had been thrown across the ruins. Had they occupied the other side they could have held their assailants at bay long enough for the reserves to come up from the direction of Santa Engracia and take them in the rear.

In a moment the two bands met. The French were outnumbered, but for a few seconds they held their own around the guns. Then the Spaniards closed about them, and with their backs to the epaulement the valiant gunners

fell, to the last man.

The first gun was quickly spiked. At the other a gallant pair of Frenchmen caused a momentary delay by their desperate defence. But they were in turn overpowered, and fell covered with wounds. A nail was driven home, and the hazardous exploit was complete.

But the peril was only just beginning. The sortie had been so sudden and impetuous that even if the French had been thrice as numerous the chances were on the side of the assailants. But they had now had time to rally. Sixty yards of ruins lay between the breathless Spaniards and the Casa Vallejo, which was strongly held by the French. Jack hoped that the diversion from the Casa Alvarez would keep these sufficiently employed; it was a race between him and the French who were now coming up from the rear of their position. For an instant he thought of retaining a few of his men and attempting to check the pursuit while the remainder ran on and stormed the French in Vallejo. But he saw in a flash that this exposed him to the danger of being headed off by the enemy, who would make greater speed along the comparatively clear street than he could make through the ruins. Without a moment's hesitation he bade his men run for their lives. That he was right was proved at once. Stalwart Poles and little voltigeurs were swarming along the roadway; Jack could see them through the gaps in the ruined walls, and hear them as they dashed along out of sight parallel with his own men. Would they outrun him? Would they succeed in joining hands with their countrymen in Vallejo, and meet him in such force that his own gallant band, now diminished by half, would fall a helpless prey to them?

There broke out at this instant, ahead of him, a pandemonium of cries, which seemed too great to proceed even from the mingled horde of French and Spanish in Vallejo. The foremost of his men were now at grips there with the enemy. He dashed into the house, and found a desperate combat in progress there, but was surprised to see no Frenchmen upon his flank. He had expected to find those who had rushed along the road now pouring into the house through the gap in the walls. But the French in the house were engaged on two sides; on one side by Jack's own party, on the other by the second sortie-party, under Antonio's command. That was not all. Amid the din Jack heard the stentorian voice of Jorge Arcos shouting words of encouragement to his men and of obloquy to the French; immediately afterwards the bellow of Tio Jorge echoed through the ruins. Jack understood now what had so suddenly checked the French in the street. How the great mob-leaders had come upon the scene he knew not; it was sufficient that they had come in the nick of time. They had evidently manned the nearest barricade, and, battered as that had been, it was good enough yet to afford a strong defence. With a sense of relief Jack threw himself into the midst of the fray; in a few moments the French in Vallejo were accounted for. Emerging into the street, Jack saw his bulky friend chasing the French back towards the spiked gun. The sudden sally over the barricade, when they least expected it, and when their ranks were in the disorder of pursuit, had been too much for the enemy. They gave way before Tio Jorge's impetuous rush; then, as Jack, with a feeling of elation that once more the enemy were foiled, arrived at the barricade, he heard Jorge Arcos shout to his men to retire, and they came pelting back, followed by a few wild shots from the discomfited French.

"Viva la España! Viva Saragossa! Viva el Señor Ingles! Viva Tio Jorge!"

The air rang with the jubilant shouts of the Spaniards, panting, dishevelled, many of them utterly exhausted. A strange calm succeeded the turmoil. Scarcely a live Frenchman was now to be seen; the ground was strewn with dead, and with wounded whom Jack did not dare to remove. He knew that the lull could only be temporary; the French would undoubtedly send for reinforcements. After their successive checks they would not be content until they could bring absolutely crushing force to bear upon the obstinate defenders. The crisis was still to come, and Jack, after warmly congratulating Tio Jorge and Jorge Arcos, as well as Antonio, on the brilliant success they had done so much to bring about, returned to the Casa Alvarez to concert means of meeting the most formidable attack of all.

Before he reached the house he saw a girl flying towards him, her mantilla streaming behind.

"Oh, Jack, Jack," she cried, "I thought you would be killed!"

"Juanita!" he exclaimed. "But you should not be here. It is no place for you. You ought not to have run into danger. Come back with me at once."

"I came to help. I will help! Tia Teresa died last night; I have no one now. I can do something. And you—you are hurt! Oh, Jack, you are covered with blood! Come, come, at once, let me do something for you."

"I didn't know it," said Jack simply. He brushed his hand across his brow; it was smeared with blood. Looking at his coat he saw blood trickling through a rent in the sleeve. "It's nothing," he said. "I don't feel a scratch. If you must help, Juanita—and it is brave of you,—why, there are many others who need attention more than I."

"You first, Jack. Come at once; I insist! How can you lead your men if you are blinded with blood? Jack, you are doing grandly; it is splendid!"

"You are right, Señorita," put in Tio Jorge, who had come up with them. "All the men say the English Señor is a hero, and, por Dios! the French will never get the better of him."

By this time they had reached the house, where Juanita insisted on bathing and binding up Jack's wounds before she attended to any of the others. Jorge Arcos had been slightly wounded in the dash across the barricade, and afterwards Jack remembered, with a strange glow, the roughly-expressed gratitude of the savage innkeeper as Juanita tenderly assisted him.

While she went about on her errand of mercy, Jack consulted with his lieutenants. The new-comers recognized him unhesitatingly as their leader, and declared that they would remain with him and support him to the utmost of their power. None doubted that the next fight would be the most terrible of all; it was only a question how long an interval would elapse before it came. The Spaniards had lost some forty men since the morning; they were all on the verge of collapse; only Don Cristobal's men, who had been unmolested at the Vega barricade, were for the moment fit for active work.

To ascertain the movements of the French, Jack went with Tio Jorge and Jorge Arcos to the roof of the Casa Hontanon, that adjoined the empty shell of Vallejo. From that coign of vantage they could overlook the whole district. After a time they saw in the distance a compact body of some 200 men approaching through the ruins from the direction of the Franciscan convent. With great difficulty they were dragging a gun over the heaps of obstacles. It must have been taken from one of the batteries now mounted near the Coso. Slowly they approached; nearly an hour elapsed between their first appearance and the placing of the gun at the end of the street facing the Tobar barricade, on the same spot whence the spiked gun had been withdrawn.

As soon as the gun was fairly in position, a renewal of the bombardment of the barricade was commenced, and the sound of heavy shots showed that an attack was being simultaneously made on the Vega barricade.

"We can't hold Vallejo any longer," said Jack. "We shall be cut off from support."

"Not so, Señor," said Arcos at once. "I will hold it with twenty men. If the French capture it, our flank will be at their mercy."

"But if the French attack in force you cannot escape."

"Caramba, Señor! What does that matter? A man must die, and I vow I'd rather die fighting for Saragossa than of fever in the cellars—or of rage in a French prison."

"You are a true son of Spain, hombre," exclaimed Jack, and the gleam in Arcos's eyes showed that he wished for no higher praise. "The barricades, now—it is useless to attempt to repair them?"

"Sí, Señor," replied Tio Jorge, "but we can fill up the breaches with sacks and baskets of earth, if we push them out from the sides of the street."

"Very well. Will you see that that is done?"

Tio Jorge instantly departed on his errand. Arcos had already gone to select his twenty men for the perilous post in the ruins of Vallejo.

At half-past three in the afternoon the French cannonade suddenly ceased. Jack had placed his men in position, but as he saw that nearly a thousand men were being launched against scarcely more than two hundred, he felt that even the desperate valour of his patriotic troops could not prevail against such odds. But it never occurred to him, or to a single member of his gallant force, that there was any alternative to the one simple course—to hold on to the end. Palafox had entrusted him with the defence of that quarter; he would defend it to the last gasp, and he knew that no British officer in the same situation would have come to any other conclusion.

The attack had begun. In the two streets the French were rushing ten abreast at the barricades. In the ruins approaching Vega and Vallejo their formation was necessarily broken, but they swept forward with a dash and a courage which Jack, remembering their former failures, could not but regard as magnificent. The front ranks seemed to melt away under the fire of the defenders, who, well disciplined by their long experience, fired calmly and with deadly accuracy, wasting no powder, and watching the French advance in seeming unconcern. But though the enemy fell by scores, there was no halting now. They swarmed up to and through the breached barricades, and ran a race with death towards the grim skeletons of the shattered houses. For a few seconds there was a tense silence; the majority of the defenders had discharged their pieces and were either reloading or preparing to repel with the bayonet. Then the opposing forces met; there was a sudden babel of noise, steel clashing against steel, pistols cracking, men shouting fiercely in their several tongues, and some crying out in the agony of death. The street was narrow; for a time the French could make but little impression on the unbroken front opposed to them, but Jack, from his post on the roof of Hontanon, saw that it was now a question of the most desperate close fighting. As soon as the head of the attacking column was lost to view beneath him, he hurried down to take his part in the tremendous struggle.

It was as he had feared. As soon as the French swarmed over the Vallejo barricade, the Casa Vallejo and its garrison became completely isolated. At the moment of his arrival a furious fight was proceeding at the inner barricade. The French charge, led by a gigantic Polish officer, had driven the Spaniards behind their last defence and threatened to dislodge them from that. Jack at once summoned twenty men from the reserve stationed at the Casa Alvarez, and with them threw himself into the breach, where, amid fragments of beams, displaced sacks and baskets of earth, and the débris of part of the wall of Vallejo thrown down by the explosion of the fougasse, a stern hand-to-hand fight was being waged. It was almost impossible, in the turmoil and rush, to distinguish friends from foes, but in the centre of the human whirlpool the huge form of the Polish officer was conspicuous. He was wielding a large bar of iron, which he had picked up among the ruins, and even at that moment Jack marvelled at the man's immense strength. Disdaining the blows aimed at him by men who looked mere pygmies beside him, he was step by step forcing a way through the barricade towards the open space fronting the Casa Alvarez. Jack, with his reinforcements, had arrived not a moment too soon. As he pushed through towards the spot where the deadly iron, wielded with as much ease as though it had been a malacca cane, rose and fell with fatal regularity, the onward rush of the French was stayed for a moment. Another second would have brought the two leaders together; but Jack was not yet to cross weapons with the Pole. At the very instant when they came within striking distance there was a terrible crash; Pole and Englishman started instinctively. A huge mass of masonry had fallen from Vallejo upon the outer barricade, into the midst of the crowded ranks of the Frenchmen, of whom a score at least were buried beneath the ruins. Even above the clash of weapons, the shouts of the combatants, and the groans of the wounded, a shrill mocking voice could be heard exulting in the deadly effect of the avalanche, and raining frantic curses upon the French. In the moment of surprise the enemy gave way. Glancing up, Jack saw the figure of the madwoman, the demented Doña Mercedes Ortega, giddily poised upon a jagged corner of masonry that threatened every instant to

follow the rest into the street below. The poor creature had seen from the Casa Alvarez that the outer wall of Vallejo had been so breached that a push would precipitate it into the street upon the barricade. Escaping from Juanita's detaining hand, as Jack afterwards learnt, she had crept from the roof of the Casa Hontanon on to the wall of Vallejo; had leapt from point to point of the uneven summit, reached the corner overlooking the street, and with the strength of frenzy had pushed the masonry down, working more havoc among the enemy than had been wrought by many an elaborately-prepared mine.

While she stood on her precarious eminence, wildly gesticulating in her insane triumph, there was the report of a musket from down the street. She swayed for a brief moment upon the crumbling wall, uttered one heart-rending shriek of "Juanino!" and fell lifeless upon the ruins below.

The interruption was but momentary. At the instant when the hapless Doña Mercedes fell, Jorge Arcos, desperately wounded, struggled from the ruins of Vallejo, followed by half a dozen of his men, all showing terrible signs of the struggle they had made to hold the position. While a portion of Jack's force continued their gallant attempt to repel the French from the barricade, the rest swarmed into the house, only to be driven out again with heavy loss by the enemy, who, backed by a large force in the ruins, had now an overwhelming superiority in numbers. In the street the gigantic Pole, swept away from before Jack, returned to the attack at the head of a compact band of his compatriots, and the Spaniards, still fighting furiously, were driven back inch by inch through the gap in the barricade, their retirement being hastened by shots from the walls of the Casa Tobar, which, together with its neighbour, the ruined Casa Vega, had fallen into French hands. Save for the Casa Alvarez and the surrounding streets, the whole of the quarter towards Santa Engracia had now been captured, and Jack, extricating himself from the mêlée, saw that it was time to play his last card.

"Señor," said Antonio, running up at this moment, "Don Cristobal sends me to say that he still holds his barricade, but that he will not be able to do so for more than a few minutes longer."

"You are the man I want, Antonio," replied Jack. "Run to the Casa Alvarez, send every man of the reserve to me, and go into the cellars and fire the last of our mines. Don't wait; do it at once."

Antonio, who was almost unrecognizable from his wounds, at once returned to the house. Immediately afterwards the remnant of the reserve dashed out, and threw themselves into the fray with a vigour which for a moment checked the enemy's advance. A few seconds later there came the deafening crash which Jack expected. Huge fragments of the walls of the houses were projected into the street, injuring a few of the Spaniards who were still tenaciously defending the extremities of the inner Vallejo barricade, but working fearful havoc among the French between the two barricades and in the street beyond. Volumes of blinding smoke poured from the shattered houses, into which, at Jack's order, Antonio rushed with a party of men. He himself, calling on the rest of his troops to follow him, sprang through the barricade, leading an impetuous charge against the distraught enemy. Even as he did so he heard the strident voice of Santiago Sass behind him, urging on the men, and shouting Latin words of denunciation and triumph. Dismayed by their repeated failures, appalled at the apparent inexhaustibility of the defenders' resources, the French were now giving way like sheep, in spite of all the exertions, example, and admonition of their officers. The big Pole, carried away in the rush towards the outer barricade, there turned and lifted his iron bar to deliver a crushing blow at Jack, who was just behind him. The fraction of a second occupied by his wheeling round cost him his life. Before the blow could fall, Jack closed with him and ran him through the body.

Meanwhile the French in Vallejo, some of whom had been hurt by portions of the flying masonry, had caught the infection of panic, evacuated the position, and fled helter-skelter across the ruins. Jack saw the danger of allowing his men to become widely scattered in pursuit. Stopping at the outer barricade, he ordered his men to withdraw, in spite of the frenzied imprecations of Santiago Sass, who would have thrown himself single-handed against a host. The Spaniards retired slowly; they were clearly indisposed to relinquish the pursuit, though all were

well-nigh spent, and some, indeed, when the excitement had subsided, dropped their weapons and fell beside them on the ground. At length the whole of the force was withdrawn behind the inner barricade.

Jack stood there panting, wondering how long respite he would have before the French came on again, when he heard his name called from behind, and, turning, saw Juanita running towards him.

"Go back!" he cried; "for God's sake, go back, Juanita! This is no place for you."

"A white flag, Jack! a white flag!"

"What do you mean?"

"A man is coming round the corner of the street with a white flag. I saw him from a window."

"What! Another regiment coming to attack us!"

"No, it is not a regiment. It is one man carrying a small white flag, and another, an officer, walking by his side. Oh, it must be a flag of truce, Jack! See, there he is, turning the corner of the street."

It was as she said. Above the epaulement protecting the French gun at the end of the street a white flag was held aloft. A moment afterwards the Frenchman bearing it stepped into the street, and, accompanied by an officer, began to approach Jack's position, picking his way among the débris and the bodies of the slain.

"I must go to meet him," said Jack. "Have you anything to match his flag, Juanita? I've nothing fit to be seen."

Juanita handed him her handkerchief. Tying this to a musket, Jack gave his extemporized flag to one of his men, and walked down the street to meet the Frenchman.

CHAPTER XXIX

French Leave

Overtures—Capitulation—Prisoners of War—Colonel de Ferrusat—In Tudela—Personally Conducted—Adding Insult to Injury—Quos ego—Before a Fall—Out of Bondage

Meeting midway down the street, the officers courteously saluted each other.

"I come with a flag of truce, Señor," said the Frenchman in very bad Spanish.

"I understand French, monsieur," replied Jack with a slight smile, which the other returned. The Frenchman continued, speaking now in French:

"Marshal Lannes has given the order to cease fire, and has sent an aide-de-camp into the town to discuss terms of capitulation."

It was impossible not to feel an unutterable sense of relief. But Jack gave no sign of it to the Frenchman.

"Can you give me any particulars?" he said.

"Yes, monsieur, certainly. Last night General Palafox sent his aide-de-camp to ask our marshal for a three days' truce, and asking impossible terms. These, of course, were refused, and the fighting was resumed. But your people seem now to be more amenable to reason, and, to tell you the truth, monsieur, I have great hopes that this very afternoon the end of this most lamentable siege will come. It is, of course, impossible and useless for your people to continue the struggle."

"That, monsieur, is a matter for our general to determine."

"Allons, allons, monsieur! You have made a brave defence, but you are being driven in at all points, and it can only be a matter of a few hours before we capture your whole city."

"I can only speak for myself, monsieur," said Jack quietly; "but it is now nearly three weeks since I had the

honour to be appointed to this quarter. I am now, monsieur, where I was then."

The French officer smiled, and bowing, half-ceremoniously, half-humorously, said:

"Pardon my oversight. Permit me, monsieur, to offer my congratulations to a so gallant foe."

After an exchange of courtesies, Jack returned to his men, who had watched the scene with mingled excitement and distrust.

"Hombres," he said, "a truce is proclaimed. There will be no more fighting for the present."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Juanita. "That means that we shall capitulate at last."

"Capitulate!" cried Santiago Sass. "Never, hombres! To the Aljafferia palace with me! Never will we surrender—never! never!"

But none followed him save Tio Jorge. No sooner had he gone than a tremendous explosion occurred near the University. Some French engineer officers, who had not heard of the cessation of hostilities, exploded a mine, and the jet of stones ascended to such a height that it was visible to the whole town. Crowds of people rushed towards the Aljafferia palace, crying for vengeance on the treacherous French, and demanding that the French envoy, at that moment in consultation with the Junta, should be instantly put to death. He was only saved from being torn in pieces, by the intervention of some Spanish officers with drawn swords, and by a message from the French marshal expressing regret for the unfortunate accident. Marshal Lannes' message to the Junta was peremptory. He allowed two hours for deputies to be sent him with full powers to arrange a capitulation. The news was brought to Jack by Tio Jorge, whose weather-beaten face was expressive of the deepest dejection.

The interval was spent in anxious suspense. Juanita went from one to another of Jack's wounded men, doing all that was possible to ease their sufferings. It was her tender ministry that soothed the last moments of big Jorge Arcos, who was past recovery, and who died breathing words of thankfulness.

Later in the evening Jack learnt the result of the negotiations. The Spanish deputies had again tried to extort impossible terms from Marshal Lannes, but his most effective reply was to unroll before them a plan of his mines, from which they saw that the centre of the city was in imminent danger of being blown to atoms. After this the discussion was short. Jack had to inform his gallant but exhausted men that the garrison was to march out next morning and deliver up their arms. All who would not take the oath of allegiance to King Joseph were to be sent as prisoners to France. He pointed out that the terms were on the whole lenient. The French knew how to respect a brave enemy. And he did not fail to impress upon the men that, so far as they personally were concerned, they could always remember that nowhere else throughout the city had the defence been more stoutly maintained or more successful. This recollection would sweeten whatever was bitter in the surrender.

When the men had accepted the inevitable, and the quarter had settled down, Jack found time for a serious consultation with Juanita. Now that her aunt was dead, there was nothing to fetter her movements. Jack had found a number of respectable farming people who would return, after the capitulation, to their homes in the direction of Calatayud, and had arranged that Juanita should accompany them. He explained to Pepito what was required of him—that he should go with the Señorita, and never leave her except at her own command. Once more he assured Juanita that within a week, by hook or by crook, he would rejoin her. Then, late at night, he accompanied her back to her lodging, and took leave of her in a spirit of unbounded hopefulness.

Next morning the last scene of this great siege was enacted. At daybreak all the posts around the city were occupied by the French. At noon the French troops were drawn up in order of battle on the Aragon road, holding lighted matches in readiness to prevent any attempt of the Spaniards to break loose. Then the garrison marched out. Jack never forgot the sad and touching spectacle. With Don Cristobal and other officers he stood, under guard of a detachment of the 5th Léger regiment, near the Portillo Gate, and witnessed the whole scene as the mixed column, soldiers and peasants, defiled past. It was a motley crowd. There were young and old, some in uniform, others in

peasant rags. Even the most ragged had tried to smarten up their appearance by tying bright-coloured sashes round their waists. Their large round hats, surmounted with feathers, and their brown ponchos flung over their shoulders, made their very tatters picturesque. Their pale emaciated features were scorched, and scarred with wounds. Many had long black matted beards. All had been so much weakened by disease and privation that they could scarcely stagger along under the weight of their weapons. Some were smoking cigarillos, and affecting an air of proud indifference to their fate; others took no pains to conceal their rage, but ground their teeth and glared out of their gleaming haggard eyes at the enemy they had withstood so long. Women and children were mingled with them, and these wept bitterly, and, flinging themselves on their knees before the effigy of Our Lady in the gate, prayed for solace in their affliction. The whole population numbered but 15,000 souls; nearly four times that number had perished during the two months of the siege.

The scene was closed by the warriors delivering up their arms and flags, many of them then being unable to refrain from tears and violent cries of rage and despair. Within the city the victorious French had now begun to plunder the houses and churches of all the valuables left in them. At the Aljafferia Castle, Palafox, ill as he was, had been brutally treated by a French colonel, appointed temporary governor of Saragossa. Jack learnt long afterwards that even before the brave captain-general had recovered from his illness he was carried off to France, where Napoleon, instead of treating him as a prisoner of war, with the generosity due to a chivalrous foe, chose to regard him as a traitor, and kept him for several years a captive in the gloomy keep of the Chateau of Vincennes.

Jack himself was more fortunate. Along with Don Cristobal and other officers he fell at first into the more kindly hands of the captain who had brought him the flag of truce. He remained in the French camp for two days after the capitulation, and was able to assure himself that Juanita had got safely away. Meanwhile the main body of the garrison had already been put in motion for France. On the 23rd Jack's own turn came. He took a friendly farewell of the French captain who had been responsible for him, and who was in entire ignorance that he had an Englishman, not a Spaniard, to deal with. His last sight of Saragossa was made terrible by a scene he witnessed as he set out among a large company of officers and men, defenceless prisoners. They passed a spot where two Spaniards in priests' robes stood upright against a wall, opposite a firing-party of French. As the volley rang out, Jack recognized the victims of this act of cold-blooded murder; they were Don Basilio Bogiero and Santiago Sass.

Monsieur le Colonel Hilaire Maxime Lucien de Ferussat, of the 121st regiment of the line, felt pardonably annoyed when he found that his corps, or what remained of it, had been selected, with another of Morlot's regiments, to escort the Spanish prisoners to Bayonne. The duty involved hard marching, and brought no glory, and Glory, as he was never tired of declaiming at his mess-table, was the sole object for which every true Frenchman should live and die. He had not distinguished himself very greatly in the operations of the siege; indeed it was whispered among his fellow-officers, who did not love him, that his selection for the escort duty was by no means a mark of Marshal Lannes' favour. He himself, however, seemed quite unconscious of everything except that he had a grievance in being thus shunted for some weeks off the highroad to fame, and, as was only to be expected, the wretched prisoners in his charge bore the brunt of his displeasure. They were physically incapable of prolonged marches, but that was nothing to monsieur le colonel. He was determined to reach Bayonne as soon as possible. He played the drover with the unfortunate Spaniards, and many of them succumbed to fatigue and illness on the road. The men of his escort, adopting his attitude, and themselves resenting the rapidity of the march after all their hardships, were in no mood to spare the wretches committed to their charge, and many a prod with the butt-end of a musket, or the more lethal bayonet, quickened the steps of laggards until they could endure no longer, but dropped and died.

Mounted on a fine Andalusian charger, Colonel de Ferussat rode up and down the line, roundly abusing the

non-commissioned officers of his party whenever he saw any tendency to straggling among the prisoners.

"Peste!" he said to one sergeant, in charge of a herd of some 200 miserable skeletons; "if you value your chevrons you will step out more briskly. No more of this lagging, or, saprelotte! I'll reduce you." A moment or two later he turned to the captain of a company: "How long, monsieur le capitaine," he cried, "how long do you propose to spend in herding these pigs of Spaniards? Your men are dawdling as if they were sweethearts in the Bois."

Such remarks caused a quickening all along the column until the lost ground was made up. With such a commander it was not surprising that the men took short measures to save themselves trouble. Many a prisoner who found the pace too fast, and sank down with a groan, was spared further suffering. One bullet was usually enough.

Late in the afternoon of the second day after leaving Saragossa, Colonel de Ferussat's column wound its way into Tudela, a place held in bitter memory by those of the prisoners who had formed part of Castaños' army on the fatal 23rd of November. The scared inhabitants sullenly submitted to having the prisoners, with their guards, quartered upon them. Every building of any pretensions was occupied; but the smaller houses were left, for monsieur le colonel had a wholesome dread of scattering his men too widely.

Colonel de Ferussat took up his quarters in the Plaza de Toros. His chagrin was somewhat mollified when he found that under the same roof was lodged no less a personage than General Chabot, who was on his way southward to rejoin his division, operating under General Gouvin de Saint-Cyr in Catalonia. The colonel thought a good deal of generals, for did he not expect to be a general himself some day? When, therefore, on entering the house, he found General Chabot himself lolling at ease, his coat thrown open and his jack-boots unlaced, he saluted with an air of unction, and prepared to make himself amiable.

"Bonsoir, monsieur le général!" he said, sweeping his plumed hat at a radius of a yard.

"Bonsoir, colonel!" responded the general. "En route for France, I presume?"

"Yes, monsieur le general, and with the most paltry set of prisoners a French officer ever had. As scarecrows they'd disgrace any farmer's field in La Beauce."

"Ah! I had heard from some of your predecessors on the road about the end of the siege. I wonder at such a rabble being able to hold out so long."

"Rabble indeed, monsieur le général. But there! what are Spaniards but rabble! If you had only seen them three months ago, when the marshal whipped them at this very spot!"

"You were at the battle, colonel?"

"Ma foi!" ejaculated the colonel, "I was indeed present on that amusing day."

"I shall be glad to hear something of the fight—if you can spare time, colonel."

"You honour me by the request. Would you care to ride over the field with me? We have time before it is dark."

"Certainly; I shall understand the details so much the more clearly if I see the actual site."

In a few minutes the two officers were riding side by side over the battle-field, on which many grim tokens of the struggle lay scattered. Striking into the road that led from the village in a south-westerly direction, between olive groves and stone fences, they passed the hill of Santa Quiteria, where the Spanish centre, under San March and O'Neill, had been so cleverly outflanked by Maurice Mathieu, and arrived at length at Cascante, the extreme left of the Spanish position, where La Pena, with characteristic stupidity, had remained inactive throughout the fight. Then, retracing their course, they turned to the left, and rode past the spot where Colbert had held his cavalry until the pursuit began. Leaving Tudela on their right, they came within sight of the Cerro de Santa Barbara, where Roca had been so brilliantly outmanoeuvred by General Morlot.

General Chabot had been so eager to obtain a comprehensive view of the whole scene of action that he had set a quick pace, which the colonel found rather discommoding to his rotundity. But he bore it all without a murmur, for he was deeply imbued with the importance of paying becoming deference to the higher powers. He was, however,

somewhat blown and heated when he pulled up at a large house near the Ebro, commanding an excellent view of the Cerro de Santa Barbara and the country whence Morlot had delivered his attack. Round two sides of the house ran a veranda, the roof being supported by light pillars resting on a low balustrade. Beneath the veranda stood a group of Spanish officers. They had just marched in, and were awaiting the preparation of the interior of the building, which was being got ready for them. A sentry with fixed bayonet was stationed at the corner of the veranda, and a squad of some twenty men had piled arms in the open plaza beyond. An equal number of Frenchmen were inside the house.

"A capital horse of yours, colonel!" said the general admiringly, as they reined up just outside the balustrade. "Mine is wheezing a little, you observe, while yours is hardly breathed."

"It is an excellent beast indeed," panted De Ferussat, with a gratified smile. "I got it from a ridiculous old Spanish nobleman at Pamplona, months ago—at a low figure, I assure you; hi! hi! But look, monsieur le général, it was out there"—he pointed towards the Ebro—"that we first came in touch with these cowardly curs of Spaniards."

He made no attempt to moderate his voice. Every word was clearly audible to the gaunt group in the veranda, and some of them looked with a glare of impotent rage at the ill-mannered officer. As if to obtain a clearer view of the field he edged his horse up to the balustrade, and continued his narrative.

"There were about 50,000 of them, but we had at least half that number, so that there was not much doubt of the issue. The more Spaniards in the field, monsieur le général, the more there are to run away. Hi! hi!"

He laughed, a harsh grating cackle of satisfaction that made several of the Spaniards behind him turn livid with wrath. General Chabot, to whom his remarks were ostensibly addressed, seemed ill at ease. Like most of Napoleon's lieutenants, he was a rough-and-ready soldier, but he at any rate had a genuine Frenchman's respect for a gallant foe, and he was reluctant to connive, even tacitly, at De Ferussat's gross insult to helpless prisoners. But, all unconscious of the contempt with which his superior officer was beginning to regard him, the colonel continued:

"Our division, you observe, was posted behind the Cerro de Santa Barbara yonder. There were thousands of Spaniards on the summit. Behold how steep the slope! Imagine their marvellous bravery! Ma foi, monsieur, but courage is indeed magnificent at the top of a hill! Hi! hi! They plumed themselves that we could not get at them. But mark, monsieur le général, that was a mistake—oh! trifling, but a mistake all the same. Why? There were French at the bottom. I was there, monsieur. To me turns General Morlot, and says: 'De Ferussat, mon ami, your battalion will take that hill.' A word—parbleu! and at a word the thing is done. Do you see, monsieur le general, that narrow cleft on the hillside? Voila! That is where we climbed up, I and my men." The general glanced somewhat incredulously at the protuberant figure beside him. "It was unguarded, and before the Spaniards knew what was happening, behold! we are upon them. A few minutes, then pouf!—General Roca's division is pouring past the spot where we are now standing, squeezing through the streets of the city on to the Saragossa road. Farther to the left yonder, General Lefebvre-Desnouettes—alas that he is now a prisoner!—broke the enemy's centre with his cavalry; and presto! the other Spanish generals were kissing the heels of Roca's braves, off to Saragossa. Tredame! how these Spaniards can run when there is a French bayonet behind them! It was laughable, truly a comedy, a farce. I laugh always when I think of it. Hi! hi!"

Colonel de Ferussat's recollections had once more overcome his gravity; but the first strident notes of his cackle had barely had time to lacerate the ears of the prisoners when there was a slight commotion behind him. Even while his mouth was agape he felt a powerful grip upon his collar, and in a twinkling he was turning a complete somersault from the saddle to the balustrade, and thence to the floor of the veranda. While he had been delivering himself of his double-edged reminiscences a young Spanish officer, unobtrusively detaching himself from the group, had moved quietly to within striking distance of the sentry on guard, who was listening with open-mouthed appreciation. Disposing of him with a single knock-down blow, the officer had leapt upon the balustrade and hurled the fat colonel from his seat.

As De Ferussat rebounded from the balustrade, his steed, naturally nervous at this unusual experience, started aside, and the reins were jerked from the Frenchman's grip. In an instant the young officer threw himself into the vacant saddle, and as the horse, now thoroughly alarmed, dashed madly forward, its new rider just succeeded in grasping the reins short at the neck, and clung to his seat by the sheer muscular grip of his knees.

The whole incident had passed rapidly, but General Chabot, with the readiness of an old campaigner, bent forward to clutch the near rein of the maddened horse. His own horse swerving at the critical moment, he missed his grip and himself almost overbalanced, and though he at once spurred his charger into a gallop, endeavouring to unbutton the holsters containing his pistols, the fugitive had gained at least twenty yards before the pursuer's horse settled into its stride.

Jack almost shouted with glee as he lay forward on his horse's neck and got his feet into the stirrups, expecting every moment that a hail of bullets would come flying after him. But, hearing the clatter of the general's horse behind, he lifted himself and laughed, and began to hum a song he remembered Shirley was fond of:

"Oh, who will o'er the downs so free,
Oh, who will with me ride,
Oh, who will up and follow me—"

The general was up and following him, but he cared nothing for that. Not a shade of misgiving crossed his exultation. While the general pursued him he was safe. The group of French soldiers in the square had rushed to their arms, but were unable to fire, for General Chabot was between them and the fugitive. Colonel de Ferussat, purple to the verge of apoplexy, was spluttering with rage and pain, intensified by the evident delight of the Spanish officers, who, forgetting that they were in the man's power, were openly laughing at him. In the street, meanwhile, soldiers and civilians alike cleared out of the way of the dashing horsemen, not realizing at first what had happened. When they did understand, Jack was beyond their reach. He could not stop to choose his course. He urged his steed straight along the road, out at the north gate of the town, into the country of vineyard and olive grove, gaining on his pursuer, even steadyng his horse somewhat when he found that the beautiful and spirited animal had the heels of the general's charger. Chabot must have recognized this, but with dogged pertinacity he held on for nearly two miles, only desisting from the chase when he found that his horse was failing. Then he discharged his pistol; the shot flew wide. Jack turned on the saddle and swept off his sombrero in ironical salutation; and as the Frenchman drew rein, Jack jogged the heaving flanks of his steed with his spurless boots, and cantered gaily off into the dusk.

CHAPTER XXX

The Whip Hand

No Thoroughfare—A Mountain Inn—A Night with Guerrilleros—The Parting Guest—A Little Dinner—Antonio in Command—A Night Surprise—On the Latch—Mars and Bacchus—The Festive Board—Monsieur Taberne off Duty—A Toast—The Score—Crowded Moments—A Fight in the Glade—Quietus

Nothing ever gave Jack more pleasure to remember than that ride from Tudela. The scent of spring was in the air, birds were twittering ere they tucked themselves up for the night, and under him was a beautiful horse, whose easy swinging motion was a double joy after so many weeks of hardship and confinement.

"It is good to be alive," he thought, as he rode on, humming gaily. "And now what am I to do?"

He had only the vaguest idea of the country. He was riding north-west from Tudela. The red glow of sunset was fading on his left hand. Calatayud, where he hoped to find Juanita, was far to the south-west. Now that he was quite clear of pursuit, his best plan, he thought, would be to double on his track, and, while avoiding Tudela, and any other place likely to hold a French garrison, to make his way back again towards Saragossa, keeping somewhat west of the highway until he struck the road between that city and Calatayud.

"But it will not do to go too far west," he thought, "or I shall get among the mountains, and then goodness knows when I'll find my way out again."

Cautiously enquiring his way at cottages along the road, he arrived in about three hours at the outskirts of the township of Agreda. It was necessary to pass through the place. He thought it more than likely that the French would have a garrison there, for the mountain ranges beyond were the haunt of several guerrilla bands which the enemy were making spirited but ineffectual efforts to keep in check. He therefore rode in, with one pistol cocked in his right hand, and the holster of the other unbuttoned, in readiness for any emergency.

The moon was rising, and Jack, as he passed through the principal street, noticed that narrow lanes led out from it on both sides, presumably towards the vineyards with which the surrounding valley was covered. His horse trod silently on the roadway, owing to a thick bed of last year's leaves placed upon it by the people, for the purpose of making manure. There was no light in any of the houses; everybody appeared to have retired to rest, and Jack was congratulating himself on having reached the last house, when he came suddenly upon five mounted French carabineers, with drawn swords, blocking the street. They had apparently just come into the town from the other end, on a reconnoitring expedition. They saw him at the same moment, and with a shout dashed forward. With only his two pistols to rely on, Jack chose the discreet part, and instantly wheeled his horse round to the right into one of the lanes, in which there was no more than space for one rider to pass. It was a steep ascent, and his horse, gallantly breasting the hill, showed signs of fatigue natural after the long distance already travelled. Something must be done to check the pursuit, for if the Frenchmen had fresh horses they were bound to run him down as soon as they drew out of the lane. Springing from his horse where the path opened into the vineyards, he fired at the leading man, who was within a few yards of him, and then, with some compunction, discharged his second pistol at the trooper's horse. It fell. There was a cry, followed by confused shouts. Jack quietly remounted, and threaded his way through the vineyards, bearing to the left until he struck a road that appeared to lead in the direction he wished to go. He looked cautiously about, in case his recent assailants had belonged to a scattered party. Finding no trace of an enemy, he sped on his way.

The road was rocky and uneven, winding among the hills, which showed bare and ghostly in the increasing moonlight. After riding on for some six or seven miles, wondering where he was going and how long his horse would hold out, he was passing by the brink of a ravine overhung by a dark wall of rock, when in a narrow cleft to the right he fancied he saw a glimmer of artificial light. At once dismounting, he led his horse towards it, carefully picking his way over the rough ground. At the end of the narrow defile he came to a venta of rough-hewn stone, with large casements, all of which were closed with wooden shutters. The light he had seen proceeded from a round knot-hole in the shutter of one of the rooms on the ground-floor. The hole was higher than his head. Remounting, he drew his horse sideways to the house, and, stooping, put his eye to the peep-hole. He saw a spacious room, part kitchen, part dining-room, and part dormitory, to judge from the dirty mattresses spread here and there on the floor. In the centre of the wall to the right was an immense chimney-piece, where a pile of pine-logs were crackling and blazing merrily. Over the fire two huge black kettles were suspended, and in front a long iron spit, garnished with fowls and goats'-flesh, was turned by a miserable-looking dog, which, perched against the wall in a wooden barrel, must have suffered both from the heat and from the tread-mill work it was forced to do.

Opposite the fire, at a more comfortable distance, Jack saw a large table, around which, seated on benches, crippled chairs, and upturned casks, a score or more of men were beguiling the time, till supper should be ready, by frequent applications to the wine-jug. A glance at their dress was sufficient to inform Jack of their condition. They wore short tight-fitting jackets, low-crowned black hats with the brim looped up on one side, breeches fastened at the knee with coloured ribbons, and long leather gaiters. From pegs on the wall hung long brown cloaks, and in the corners lay heaps of sabres, pistols, and long carbines.

"Guerrilleros, for a ducat!" said Jack to himself, "and a desperate set. They have not even troubled to post a sentry. I'm afraid they'll have to be my bed-fellows to-night, at any rate."

Without hesitation he rapped smartly on the door with the butt of a pistol. There was a sound of movement within, heavy steps approached the door, and a gruff voice demanded:

"Quien vive?"

"España!" said Jack, giving the usual countersign, then by a happy inspiration adding: "Amigo de Antonio el valiente guerrillero."

With an exclamation of delight the man inside drew the bolts and threw open the door. The light from a lamp streamed out, and Jack, bending his head, asked whether he could be put up at the inn for the night.

"Verdaderamente, Señor," replied the guerrillero, recognizing from Jack's tone that he had a caballero to deal with. In a few minutes the horse was stabled, and Jack was seated at the table, partaking of the savoury stew poured bubbling from the chaldrón, and answering the men's eager questions about the end of the siege of Saragossa. They belonged to the band of which Pablo Quintanar and Antonio had been the leaders, and were burning with anxiety as to the fate of those sturdy guerrilleros. Many a deep growl of rage and indignation burst from them when they learnt of Quintanar's treason, many a sigh of satisfaction when they heard of his fate; and when they knew that Antonio had come safely through the siege, they were all confident that somehow or other he would escape from the French, and hasten to rejoin them in their mountain fastnesses.

Jack in his turn asked for information, which the men were not very ready to give. All that he learnt of their movements was that they had recently left Soria and were going southward by easy stages, hoping to meet members of their band escaping from Saragossa. He spent a comfortless night in the dirty inn, and departed next morning early, glad to have got off from such rough companions without the loss of his horse, on which they had cast longing eyes.

All that day he travelled by devious paths among the mountains, asking his way of the few people he met, putting up at night in a ruined cabin, and arriving late on the following evening in the neighbourhood of Morata. Remembering that the Alvarez country house was near at hand, he found on enquiry that it lay a few miles to the north, and was at present in charge of one old man, who had been a gardener on the estate. Suspecting that Morata itself might be garrisoned by the French, he decided to turn off before reaching the town, and to seek shelter for the night at the Alvarez villa.

Spring had set in unusually early this year, and as Jack rode through the lanes he rejoiced in the bright sunshine and the scent of lavender and rosemary, violets and narcissus, that filled the warm air. He reached the villa at dusk. It stood half-way up a hill, in a walled garden, amid luxuriant foliage of laurels. On three sides the garden wall was approached by the young growth of olive plantations. The house itself was a long low building of white stone, mellowed by age and weather. A broad oak balcony ran round, sheltering the ground-floor rooms from the sun's rays; and amid its massive columns creeping plants, already in full leaf, pushed their way towards the roof. As Jack rode up, the odours of honeysuckle and clematis greeted his nostrils, and he noted the small white stars of the jessamine glittering among their narrow dark-green leaves.

The caretaker, a bent old man, received Jack somewhat mistrustfully, but thawed when he was assured of his

friendship for the Alvarez family, and volubly deplored the ruin which had fallen upon it. He conducted the visitor over the house and round the immense garden, shaking his head at the wildness of its untended state; all the rose-trees wanted trimming, the fruit-trees pruning, and the strawberries, already ripe, were rotting in their beds. He did what he could, but what was one gardener for such an immense garden? He made up a bed for Jack in one of the upper rooms, and promised to provide as good a breakfast as possible in the morning.

Shortly after six Jack was urgently aroused by the old man.

"Señor, Señor," he said, "there are cavalry approaching up the hill. They are French—I am sure they are; it is not safe to stay longer."

Jack was up in a trice. Hurrying to the stable he quickly saddled his horse, stuffed some bread into his pocket, and made off by a side gate leading out of the garden just as the horsemen drew rein in front of the house. Fortunately the wall hid him from too curious eyes as he led his horse rapidly away. Gaining an olive plantation a quarter of a mile up the hill, he decided to wait there for a while, in the hope of discovering something about the horsemen whose advent had broken his sleep. After about half an hour, peeping over a stone fence, he saw them leave the casa, and strike off in a north-easterly direction among the foot-hills. Only the tops of their helmets were visible as they trotted past, a shoulder of the hillside hiding the rest of them from view. He counted forty-two. As soon as they had disappeared he returned on foot to the house, taking his chance of any Frenchman remaining there. He found the old gardener in a frenzy of rage and agitation.

"The cursed Frenchmen!" he cried. "Gone—yes, they are all gone, but they are coming back—this evening. They are foraging, and among them is a dastardly Spaniard, an afrancesado, Señor. He asked me questions; he wanted to know where José Pinzon, old Don Fernan's servant, is. As if I would answer him, even if I knew!—a traitor, who knows the country and is guiding the French to spoil his countrymen. He told them that the casa would give them good lodging when their work is done, and ordered me—yes, the dog of an afrancesado ordered me—to have ready a good dinner for them—for him and three officers, and nearly forty men—by the time they return. They come from Calatayud; would to God they'd break their necks in the hills and never return alive!"

Jack was sympathetic with the old man, but after all much less concerned with his troubles than with the possibilities of a scheme that had flashed upon him. The guerrilleros he had lately left were marching in that direction from a point somewhat to the west of the line taken by the French. There was little chance of their falling in with the foraging-party, but it was at least possible that, if they could be found, they might be able to arrange a little surprise for the French when they returned. Were they still in the neighbourhood? Jack thought it worth while to spend a few hours in discovering this, and decided to return to the plantation where he had left his horse, and ride off. Before going he asked the old Spaniard to leave unbolted a door he had noticed at the back of the house; it was evidently little used, and now almost hidden by tangled masses of creepers.

"I may want to get in to-night," he said.

His horse, refreshed by a good night's rest, covered the ground at a rapid pace. Jack eagerly scanned the bare hills for signs whether of friend or foe; it was always possible that the French had turned off in his direction after visiting this or that farm or country house. But he saw nothing for nearly two hours, when, having ridden, as he estimated, some twenty miles, he suddenly heard a voice, from a rocky ridge at his left hand, calling him to halt. He reined up instantly, and shouted back in Spanish:

"Who are you? I am a friend."

"Get off your horse and put down your pistol then."

It was a peremptory order, which Jack at any other moment might have resented; but there was no time to spare, and he decided immediately to risk compliance. The speaker then emerged from behind his rock, and stood revealed in the rough yet gaudy costume of a guerrillero.

"Hombre, take me to your captain," said Jack, stepping towards him. "I must speak with him instantly."

The man pointed out a narrow path between the rocks, just wide enough to admit a horse, and a few minutes later Jack was led into the presence of his stalwart friend Antonio. Explanations were soon exchanged. Antonio, having become an inoffensive civilian on the fall of Saragossa, had had no difficulty in making his way to the mountains. Falling in with a portion of his old band that had been raiding French convoys along the Saragossa-Tudela road, he had, only a short time before Jack's arrival, effected a junction with the smaller band whom Jack had met in the inn. He was now the leader of a total force of over a hundred men, among whom Jack recognized with pleasure several of his sturdiest fighters during the siege.

When Antonio had explained to the others who Jack was, their enthusiasm knew no bounds. The Saragossa veterans had already told them what their English leader had accomplished during the siege; how theirs had been the only quarter in the city in which the French had made no progress during the last three weeks. Antonio now waxed eloquent on the same theme, and wound up by commanding his men to serve the Señor as they would their own captain.

If anything had been wanting to complete his welcome it would have been supplied by the news he brought. Antonio no sooner heard that a French foraging-party was in the neighbourhood than he decided to cut it off. He was anxious to start immediately and ambush it on its way back to the house, but Jack suggested a better plan. The country around the house, being, though hilly, fairly open, presented little opportunity for a successful ambuscade, and in the event of the guerrilla troop being discovered, there would be great likelihood of the majority of the enemy escaping. It would be better, Jack suggested, to surround the house at night; not a Frenchman should then escape. Antonio at once agreed. He said that he would leave the planning entirely to the Señor, which, Jack thought, was as it should be; for Antonio, though a brave and dashing leader of a storming-party, had little claim but that of bull-dog courage to his position as captain.

At four o'clock the band, well-mounted and eager, set out on their march. The road followed led by a circuitous course to the foot of the hill on which the Casa Alvarez stood. It was past seven when, as they wheeled round to the left, they saw the twinkling lights of the house more than a mile above them.

"They are very bold," remarked Jack to Antonio. "There must be a considerable force of French in Calatayud, perhaps at Morata also, or these foragers would have made some attempt to conceal their movements."

"Few or many, Señor," declared Antonio, "we'll capture these dogs and hang them up in a string."

"No, no; but we needn't talk about what we'll do with them till we have them. I've been thinking out a plan of attack as we rode along. It will be best to leave our horses some distance from the house. If one of them began to neigh it would at once put the French on the alert. We must attack on foot in any case. There is a hollow a little farther on where we can leave the horses under guard."

"Very well, Señor."

"Now we don't want to lose any lives if we can help it, so I think it will be best for us to get an idea of the enemy's arrangements. I know the house, and I propose to go forward alone and see what I can find out. The old gardener will have left the back-door unlocked on the chance of my returning. If when I get there I see a good chance of your succeeding in a rush over the walls up to the house, I'll give you a signal—a shrill whistle, say; one of your men can cut me a reed."

"No need, Señor; I have a whistle here."

He produced a big steel whistle, which he handed to Jack.

"That's well. If you don't hear anything from me in the course of an hour after I leave you, you may conclude that I am captured. You had better then rush the sentries, who will no doubt be posted at the front gate. At the same time your men will scale the wall. One body should be sent to cut off egress from the stables, and another to enter by

the back-door. I leave the rest to you."

Half a mile farther on they came to the wooded hollow of which Jack had spoken. The horses were left there as arranged, and the guerrilleros, headed by Jack and Antonio, advanced cautiously up the hill to within three hundred yards of the house. By the light of the rising moon two sentinels could be seen standing at the front gate, between which and the house lay fifty feet of flower-garden. Jack wondered whether sentries had been placed on the other sides, but judged from the evident carelessness of the French that that precaution had not improbably been neglected. There was no cover for the attacking force beyond about two hundred and fifty yards from the gates, but at both sides the plantations would conceal them. The guerrilleros stole into the shade of the trees; the main body remained at the corner of the wall ready to attack in front; smaller parties worked round the sides, until the whole enclosure was practically surrounded.

Jack accompanied the party which had gone to the wall facing the rear of the house. Under cover of the overhanging branches of a chestnut he climbed over the wall, which was about eight feet high. No sentry was posted at the back of the house. In a few minutes Jack had run up the garden and come to the back-door. Already he had heard sounds of merriment proceeding from the house. He placed his ear against the door, listening for footsteps within. Hearing nothing in the vicinity, he lifted the latch and slipped inside, finding himself in a large square stone-floored room, which had evidently been used as a storehouse for the gardener's tools. At the far side of the room was a door leading, as he knew, to the corridor surrounding the patio. As he cautiously opened this door his ears were saluted by a deafening babel from a room on the right, opening on to the corridor. To judge by the sounds, a large party of French troopers were there enjoying their evening meal. Shouts of laughter were mingled with bursts of song and the clatter of knives and crockery. The patio was pitch dark save where a beam of light fell across it from a window of the room on the right, and another from the kitchen on the opposite side. Hugging the rear wall of the patio, Jack made his way cautiously across its tiled floor to the window of the kitchen. A door opened into the kitchen from the corridor, opposite to the middle one of the three arches in the colonnade of the patio. Keeping well in the shadow, Jack saw several Frenchmen leave the kitchen carrying dishes and flagons, and cross the patio to the room whence the boisterous sounds were proceeding. He saw also another man, a tall fellow, whom in the half-light he seemed to recognize, carry a dish into a room at the farther end of the corridor, and close the door behind him. While the door was open Jack heard a burst of song from within. Evidently some of the Frenchmen were also regaling themselves there.

Peeping in at the kitchen window, he saw the gardener, now alone. He tapped. The Spaniard looked startled for a moment. Then a light of recollection came into his eyes. He made hurriedly for the door, and in another moment was with Jack.

"I've a hundred men outside," whispered the latter. "Where are the officers?"

"In the room at the end, Señor."

At this moment the door of that very room opened again, and the tall servant came out, and turned down the corridor at the farther end of the patio.

"He is going to the cellar under the stairs for wine," whispered the old man. "Curse them! They are drinking my old master's store of Valdepenas."

The man had left the door open, and from within the room came the sound of a mellow baritone voice trolling out a sentimental ditty:

"J'ai fait un bouquet pour ma mie,
Un bouquet blanc;
J'ai mis mon coeur dedans,

Dedans mon bouquet blanc.
Comm' nous partions, v'là qu'elle cri-i-e:
 'Oh! reviens t'en.'
 'Marche!' dit mon lieutenant.
 Je lui laiss' mon bouquet blanc.
J'ai mis mon coeur, j'ai mis mon coeur dedans,
 Dedans mon bouquet blanc."

Shouts of applause followed the last words. Immediately afterwards the tall servant returned with a huge flagon, re-entered the room, and shut the door.

"Hombre," said Jack in a whisper, "you must go into that room."

"But, Señor, I'm afraid for my life. There's a big hound of a Frenchman there whose very voice makes me shiver."

"You must go in. I caught sight of a screen as that man entered just now. All I want you to do is to go in and show yourself—ask if they are fully supplied—and give me time to slip in behind you; then wait outside the door till I call."

The old man hesitated for a moment, then plucked up his courage and walked along the corridor, Jack following. The Spaniard opened the door, and was instantly ordered to go about his business. He moved back at once, but meanwhile Jack had slipped inside the room, and found that in an angle of the four-leaved screen he could conceal himself, not only from the persons in the room, but from anyone passing through the door. He quietly slit a hole in the screen with his penknife, and peeped through.

Around a ponderous old table of black oak, illuminated by a dozen wax candles and covered with dishes and flagons and glasses, sat four men. At the head, with his braided scarlet coat open from the neck, sat a fat, red-faced, big-moustachioed officer, whom Jack recognized at once as the blusterous commissary from whom he had coaxed such valuable information at Olmedo. At the foot sat a French captain, who was already half-drunk; on the other side was a young lieutenant, with pink cheeks. With his back to the door there was a man in Spanish dress, who at that moment beckoned forward the tall servant to fill the captain's empty glass. As the man moved round the table, Jack caught the glitter of Perez' one eye, and at the same instant recognized the seated Spaniard as Miguel Priego himself.

Listening, Jack was amused to find that Commissary Gustave Taberne had lost nothing of his braggadocio.

"Parbleu, Señor Don What-do-you-call-yourself, this is wine of the right sort. Nothing in this world is so soul-satisfying as good Valdepenas after a hard day's work. Mind you, I say 'after'. I'm not like Captain Horace Marie Etienne d'Echaubroignes yonder, who'll drink in bed, on horseback, or in a pig-stye—it's all one to him. No; the emperor would call me a pig if I got drunk before my work was over. I can drink a gallon without staggering, and have a bottle at my hand without touching it; but when my duty is done—ah ça! then I can fill my skin in comfort, and sing a song with any man."

The long-named captain scowled at the reference to himself, bent forward over the table, and stuttered:

"Monsieur l'inten—l'intendant, do you mean that for a—a reflection?"

"Not at all, not at all, monsieur le capitaine. It was a compliment—to your versatility and your—h'm!—capacity."

"Eh bien!" rejoined the captain, lifting his glass unsteadily, "if you mean it that way—"

The commissary winked at Miguel.

"J'ai fait un bouquet pour ma mie,
Un bouquet blanc,"

he hummed. "Tiens! Songs like that suit a gay young bachelor like you better than a man of my age, with a wife and family. Come, Señor Don Something-or-other, sing us one of your Spanish songs—a serenade such as your gallants sing by night under their lady's window. Tol-lol-di-rol! Come now—sing up."

"Really, monsieur, after hearing your excellent voice, I do not feel able to enter into competition with you," said Miguel stiffly.

"Ah bah! Allons! you are still in our debt. You did us a good service to-day, in truth; but remember, we found your lady-love for you yesterday. Ohé! her eyes, her cheeks, parbleu! I envy you the lovely—how does she call herself—la belle Juanita? Tol-lol-di-rol! Chantez, mon ami."

"We Spaniards are not accustomed to discuss such matters in mixed company," said Miguel, still more irritably.

"We Spaniards! Par exemple! I'm not a Spaniard; nor are you, my friend, to judge by your reception in the Spaniards' houses to-day."

His tone was decidedly nettled, and the young lieutenant looked uncomfortable, and seemed about to hazard a remark. The captain was solemnly drinking.

"Eh bien!" said the commissary, changing his tone. "There's no need for us to quarrel. The lovely Juanita is to be your bride; that is settled. We'll see what we can do with King Joseph to hasten matters. And so, without more words, let us drink a health to her!"

"Perez, another bottle," said Miguel.

The one-eyed servant came across the room, and Jack slipped out of sight between two leaves of the screen. The commissary sang on:—

"J'ai mis mon coeur dedans,
Dedans mon bouquet blanc.
Comm' nous pardons, v'là qu'elle crie:
'Oh! reviens t'en.'

Voila qu'il en revient!" (as Perez re-entered).

"You can go and get your own supper," said Miguel when the cork was drawn.

Perez left the room. As soon as he had gone, Jack, relying on the commissary being engrossed with the bottle, opened the door an inch, and beckoned the old Spaniard in.

"Now, Señor Don What's-your-name," said the commissary, "we Frenchmen will drink a bumper to the fair Spaniard, the black-eyed beauty. Messieurs, aux beaux yeux de la belle Ju—an—i—"

He had lifted his brimming glass half-way to his lips, and turned with a fat smile towards Miguel, when he paused, his hand stayed in mid-air, and he broke off in the middle of Juanita's name. Advancing towards him from behind the screen he saw a young Spaniard, with a drawn sword in his right hand, and in his left a pistol, cocked and pointed.

"You will excuse me, messieurs," said Jack quietly, "intruding upon you thus unceremoniously—pray keep your seats," he added, as the lieutenant pushed back his chair, and the fuddled captain half rose. "In fact, I shall take it so ill if you move but a hair's breadth that I cannot answer for my nerves!"

For all its banter, Jack's tone had in it so much of deadly earnestness that the officers sank limply back into their seats, the instinctive movement towards sword and pistol arrested as if by a sudden palsy. Miguel had remained

on his chair without moving a muscle. With him the French were four to one, for as a combatant the old man did not count; but each of the four knew that the first among them to take up the gage would fall instantly to Jack's pistol, and the knowledge dulled the edge of their courage.

"Hombre," continued Jack, addressing the old gardener, "bolt the door."

The man was trembling in every limb, but hastened to obey the order.

"That is right. Now, feel in my left-hand pocket. You will find a whistle. You have it? Then open yonder window and blow three times."

The man went to the window behind the commissary, opened one of its leaves, and blew three shrill blasts. While this was going on, the four sat helplessly in the same position in which Jack had surprised them. The lieutenant's pink cheeks had paled; the commissary's rubicund features had become like mottled soap; the captain was red with sottish indignation; Miguel had never moved. Jack could only see his back.

"With your permission, messieurs," Jack went on, "this good man will make a little collection. Hombre, relieve that gentleman at the head of the table of his sword and pistol. No, no; not this side of him. You may get hurt if you come between us, and we cannot spare a good Spaniard—can we, Don Miguel? Go round him. That's right. Now bring the weapons and put them on the floor behind me. So. Now, go round in the same way and get the next gentleman's arms."

Before the man reached the lieutenant, a confused hubbub came into the room from the front of the house through the open window—the clash of steel, the report of firearms. Almost at the same moment loud sounds of the same kind came from the direction of the patio. The old servant hesitated, stood still, his fingers working nervously.

"Go on, hombre," said Jack sternly, his pistol still pointed.

While the uproar on both sides gathered strength, the Spaniard tottered towards the lieutenant, and with shaking hands disengaged his sword and pistol, which he placed alongside of the commissary's on the floor behind Jack. He was just repeating the process of disarmament with the captain when loud shouts were heard at the door, followed by heavy blows from the butts of muskets. Apparently the French troopers had been driven across the patio, and were seeking their officers in the inner room. Jack did not move a muscle, but he devoutly hoped that the door would stand the strain; otherwise the window was his only chance, though in any case he could not desert the old man.

The noise outside provided a strange contrast to the quietness within. Almost silently the Spaniard had disarmed three of the four feasters. It was now Miguel's turn. In advancing towards him the old man, alarmed by the tremendous thunderings on the door behind him, and by a bullet that crashed through one of the panels, incautiously stepped between Miguel and Jack. In an instant, with an extraordinary muscular effort for so slightly built a man—an effort nerved doubtless by the knowledge of what his fate would be if he fell into the hands of his countrymen,—Miguel seized the man by the middle, and, swinging him round so as to make of him a screen between himself and Jack, dashed towards a curtain of arras that apparently overhung a doorway on the opposite side of the room. At the same moment a number of Spaniards, headed by Antonio, came headlong through the open window.

"Secure the Frenchmen!" shouted Jack, springing after Miguel. He could not fire. When he reached the curtain he stumbled over the old Spaniard, whom Miguel flung back at his pursuer as he dashed through the door into the dark anteroom beyond. Jack recovered himself in an instant, but Miguel had disappeared, and when Jack had followed him into the darkness he heard him stumbling over furniture on the other side of the room. Then began a desperate chase. As is common in Spanish houses, room opened into room, and Jack pursued the traitor through door after door, occasionally catching a fleeting glimpse of him by the moonlight filtering through the windows of rooms on the outer wall, but losing him again in the darkness before there was time to fire. At last Miguel, gaining a slight lead, was able to open a window at the back of the house, and sprang out into the garden, flinging the leaf of

the window back almost in Jack's face. Outside he fell sprawling on the ground, but was up in an instant, and rushed madly down the path cutting the garden in two.

Jack leapt through the window after him, stumbled, recovered himself, and was off after the fugitive. Tearing through the bushes that had overspread the path, he flew along, saving his breath, setting his lips, fiercely determined to bring the wretched man to book at last. Miguel had reached the wall; with the agility of despair he sprang at it, and was over. Jack was a better runner; he made as little difficulty of the wall; pursuer and pursued were now in full career through the olive plantation. Miguel's breath was failing; he knew that he could not escape. Stopping suddenly in an open glade, he turned round, and a bullet whistled past Jack's head as he closed with his quarry. The headlong rush had spoiled Miguel's aim.

Disdaining to use his pistol, Jack at once engaged Miguel with his sword. The Spaniard stood fiercely at bay, panting with his exertions, his face showing livid with fear in the pale moonlight. There were a few rapid passes; then with a groan he dropped his sword, his forearm gashed from wrist to elbow.

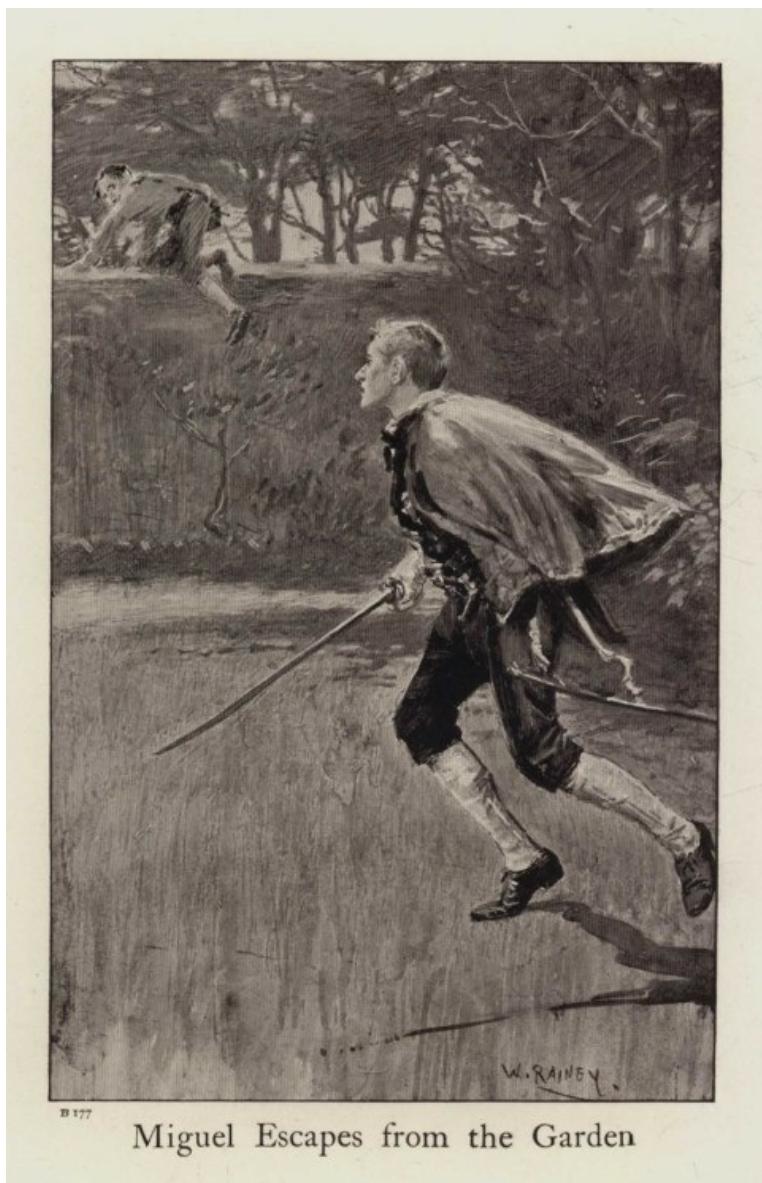
"Hold!" he gasped. "I am at your mercy. Spare me!"

Jack dropped the point of his sword.

"What—are—you—going—to—do—with—me?" panted Miguel.

"Do with you? There is only one thing for me to do: deliver you to your fellow-countrymen. They shall judge you."

"Not that, for the love of God!" was the agonized reply, whispered rather than spoken. "You know what that means! Spare me that! Rather finish what you have begun. For old time's sake you would not throw me to those wolves. Ah! their fiendish tortures! See! have done with it; strike here!"



Miguel Escapes from the Garden

He tore open his shirt and bared his bosom to the sword. It was well acted, but Jack was not for a moment deceived. Miguel, he knew, had not the slightest expectation of being taken at his word. Yet the alternative! When once the guerrilleros had him in their power there would be no torture too horrible for the renegade and traitor. Jack remembered with a shudder the tales he had heard—even those told him by Miguel himself in Salamanca. Could he deliver the wretch, vile though he was, to so awful a fate? Could he allow the traitor to go free? It was a painful dilemma.

So they stood while a man might count ten.

There was a crackle in the undergrowth, the sound of a light footfall, and, lifting his sword, Jack half-turned. As he did so a heavy form struck against him. He felt a scorching pain between the shoulders, and pitching heavily

forward sank unconscious to the ground. The dilemma had solved itself.

CHAPTER XXXI

Doctor Grampus and a French Cook

An Amateur—Pantomime—At Cross Purposes—Miguel's Pocket-book—Links—In Cipher—Potatoes—Monsieur Taberne on Duty—The Compelling Onion

When Jack came to himself it seemed to him that he was in a shaded room by an open window, for the air gently fanned his temples, and he saw a wide stretch of blue sky. He turned his aching head.

"Hullo!" said a voice in English.

"Hullo!" murmured Jack in reply, automatically, not knowing what he said. He looked with puzzlement at the speaker, a tall, stout young fellow in guerrilla costume.

"There, I wagered you wouldn't know me in this rig. Don't you remember Dugdale, at Salamanca—Percy Dugdale, don't you know?"

"The Grampus!" whispered Jack.

"The very same. I might have bet you'd know Grampus better than my good old respectable honoured ugly name. Here, drink this."

He held a cup to Jack's lips. After drinking, Jack closed his eyes and fell asleep.

"Where am I?" he asked, waking an hour later.

"Feel better? That's grand. Where are you? High up among the hills, in a sort of cave, lying on a pile of blankets, with a splendid outlook over—well, nowhere in particular."

"In the hills!" repeated Jack feebly. "How did I get there? I can't remember. Is anything wrong with me? I don't seem to be able to move. I don't feel right."

"There's gratitude! Why, you're as right as a trivet. You're really doing splendidly! Now, you're not to talk. Doctor's orders."

"Oh!"

Jack was silent for a moment, and dozed away again.

When he woke, Dugdale came towards him from the entrance of the cave.

"What's the matter with me? How do you come here? I can't remember anything."

"I said you were not to talk. Doctor's orders."

"Tell the doctor I want to see him."

Dugdale chuckled.

"Bet it'd be no go. Truth is, I'm the doctor. I've pulled you through, and when I get home I'm going to demand a diploma from the doctors' college or whatever it is gives a man a licence to be a sawbones."

"I must know all about it. I can't remember. How long have I been ill?"

"Nearly three weeks. Now, if you'll promise not to get excited, I'll tell you what happened. You know a man named Antonio?"

"Yes, of course; he helped me in Saragossa."

"Well, if he weren't a friend of yours I'd punch his head. He is the leader of this band of ruffians that scooped me up, two months ago, when I was riding over the hills to see the fun at Saragossa. Antonio wasn't with them then.

I couldn't understand a word they said. They couldn't understand a word I said. I roared 'Inglese! Inglese!' till I was sick. No good. They kept me with them and made me get into this outrageous toggery, and with them I've been ever since, like a canary in a cage."

"But—"

"You mustn't talk. Doctor's orders. Lucky for you I was here, or they'd have sent you to kingdom come. With their nasty messes!—ugh!"

"Where did you get your medicines, then?"

"Silence! Don't believe in medicine. Bet Antonio three to one in Frenchmen—only he couldn't understand—that I'd pull you through on cold water; and I've done it,—thank God!"

The sudden change to earnestness in Dugdale's tone was almost comic.

"And you were pretty bad, I can tell you. Raved like one o'clock. All about Pomeroy and Pepito, and some chap whose name rhymed with ass, and Mig Prig—most about Mig Prig,—and you laughed and shouted 'Fire the mine!' and 'Pommy, I'll punch your head,' and all sorts of funny things."

"But what made me ill?"

"A villainous stab in the back. By gum! if I had the beast here I'd trounce him, I bet I would. You and Antonio had captured a foraging-party of French at a country-house down there; you tackled the officers single-handed; dashed plucky of you, begad! and you sprang out after a scoundrelly Spaniard who escaped, a fellow in French pay; and afterwards you were found among the olives with a hole in your back and your sword covered with blood."

"I remember now," cried Jack. "I must get up. I must save Juanita."

He tried to rise, but found that he had no power.

"Juanita be hanged, whoever he may be. Lie still, and don't talk. I haven't finished yet. Wish I'd been with you, but these confounded brigands won't let me stir from head-quarters. I've had the most disgusting luck. I came out to see the fun, and hanged if I've seen any at all. Well, they found you with a hole in your back and brought you here, and they were in a deuce of a way about you. They had a score or more of French prisoners with them, including officers, one of them a fat, red-faced fellow—"

"I remember it all now. That's my friend the commissary."

"Well, he's peeling onions at this moment. A little change for him, but all in the same line of business. It was he told me what had happened; lucky I can make out two French words out of ten. By Jove! what bloodthirsty ruffians these Spaniards are! If it hadn't been for me all the prisoners would have been garroted or roasted before slow fires, or something. When I saw what was in the wind my blood boiled. I couldn't stand that; no Englishman could; so I made 'em a speech. Lord! I never knew I could rattle it off so; I must go into Parliament. Of course they couldn't understand what I said, but I threw my arms about, and pointed to my neck, and shook my head, and generally played the goat, as I've seen 'em do at the hustings; and they made out what I meant, and so the prisoners are here still,—except the captain, who died of over-drinking."

At this moment Antonio came quietly into the cave; he had been in and out during Jack's periods of unconsciousness, and now showed every mark of delight at his impending recovery.

"The saints be praised, Señor!" he said. "We feared you would die. We should have grieved."

Jack was touched by his simple sincerity.

"I am not gone yet," he said, smiling, "thanks, I understand, to my friend Señor Dugdale here."

"He is a clever doctor, Señor," said Antonio.

"He tells me that you have the Frenchmen we captured at Morata."

"Sí, Señor, and another lot too."

"Indeed! It is well that he managed to persuade you to do them no harm."

"What does the Señor mean?"

"My friend Señor Dugdale tells me that you were going to torture the prisoners, and he made a speech and—"

"Oh, that!" exclaimed Antonio, with a wave of the hand. "We didn't understand. We thought the Señor wanted us to cut all their throats; but I knew you would not like that."

Jack became almost hysterical with laughter at this explanation, and Dugdale bundled Antonio out of the cave, and told Jack he must go to sleep again. He allowed no more talk on that day, but the patient was so much better next morning that he made no objection when Jack asked to see the guerrillero again.

"I want to hear what has happened," said Jack to him. "I am anxious."

"I know, Señor; but there is no need. The day after we got back with the prisoners, the gitano Pepito came and said the Señorita Juanita had been captured by the French and was living with a colonel's lady in Morata. I got my men together and we went down at once, and in the night surprised the French, killed a great many, and captured the rest. But the Señorita was not among them. We found the colonel's lady; she told us that the Señorita had escaped."

"Where is she?" asked Jack anxiously.

"We do not know, Señor. The boy Pepito was frantic; he said you would punish him for losing the lady, and he went away to find her. He has never come back."

"Did he say anything about Señor Priego—the man who was in Saragossa, you remember?"

"He said that Señor Priego was with the French who captured the Señorita, but no more."

"And you did not capture him at the house? It was he I was fighting in the olive-grove."

"Por Dios, Señor, if I had known that! When we found you lying on the ground we let a few minutes slip. We thought you were dead, Señor. Then we searched all around, but we could find no one. Was it the cursed afrancesado that wounded you, Señor?"

"No. It was someone who came behind my back; his servant, I have no doubt. He has twice attempted my life."

Antonio swore a hearty oath, and vowed a terrible vengeance should either Priego or his servant fall into his hands. Jack was much perturbed. He hoped that Juanita in escaping from the French had escaped also from Miguel, but the latter had much to gain by not letting her slip through his hands.

"There is one thing, Señor, yet to be told," added Antonio. "In the morning, when we were bringing away the prisoners, one of my men found this at the back of the house, lying on the grass."

He produced a leather pocket-book, which he handed to Jack.

"I can't have this," said Dugdale, entering at this moment. "You're not well enough yet to be bothered with business."

"You will do me more good by letting me get to the bottom of things. My hand's all wobbles. Take the pocket-book, old fellow, and tell me what is in it."

Dugdale opened the case, and, taking out a number of papers, unfolded them one by one.

"All in foreign lingos," he said ruefully. "Can't read one of them."

"Let me see them," said Jack.

Dugdale handed him one of the papers. It was a pass through the French lines, signed by Marshal Lannes. At the first glance Jack understood. The pocket-book must have been jerked from Miguel's pocket when he fell on escaping from the house. Jack examined the papers eagerly. The second was a note from the marshal's aide-de-camp Saint-Marc: "In consideration of Monsieur Priego's services to the Government of His Majesty King Joseph, his excellency will use his influence with the commandant at Bayonne to facilitate the interview sought by Monsieur Priego". The third was a memorandum evidently relating to private business. The fourth was a long blue paper, on unfolding which Dugdale cried:

"By George, Lumsden, this is curious! Hanged if there isn't your name here!"

Jack took the paper with still more eagerness. He saw at once that it was in the same handwriting as the letter he had received from Don Fernan Alvarez at Salamanca. It was in Spanish, addressed to Mr. Lumsden, and Jack had only to read a few words to be assured that this was the very letter entrusted to the charge of General Palafox—the letter whose disappearance had so much perplexed him. Before he had read more than two or three lines, however, Antonio broke in:

"Señor, I know that paper. I saw it often in the hands of Pablo Quintanar in Saragossa. He used to take it out of his pocket every night and read it, and always when he came to a certain place he stopped, and frowned, and cursed. I am sure it is the same."

In a flash the mystery of Quintanar's assassination was made plain to Jack. Miguel must have discovered in some way that the letter was in the possession of the guerrillero, and the wretched man had been slain from behind by one-eyed Perez while Miguel tried to wrest the paper from him. Jack was aghast at this additional proof of Miguel's villainy; his heart misgave him as he thought of what might be Juanita's fate.

He read the letter. It gave a clear narrative of the events of which Juanita had told him—Don Fernan's making up of the accounts of the business, the journey from Barcelona to Saragossa, the ambush on the road, the suspected treachery of Miguel Priego. Then followed a declaration of the old merchant's intentions in regard to his property. In the last sentence he stated that the place where the treasure had been concealed was known only to his servant José, but that the secret was contained in a short postscript, which could only be read in the light of a private communication made to Jack himself in Salamanca.

Jack looked eagerly at the postscript. He uttered an exclamation of joy as he realized that Miguel must have found the letter useless to him. For the postscript consisted of a single line of sprawling uneven capital letters, set close together, not divided into words, and conveying to the uninitiated absolutely no meaning.

"What do you make of that?" said Jack, handing the letter to Dugdale.

"No good. Don't know a word of Spanish except pan, agua, cebolla, which I hear every day, and a few—interjections, I think they call 'em in grammar."

"I don't mean the letter, I mean the postscript."

"The postscript!" He held the paper at arm's-length, shut one eye, and frowned. "H'm! Looks like a cat's swearing, or Welsh. Too bad even for Spanish. Some infant set to practise his capitals, eh?"

Jack smiled.

"I'm as much in the dark as you are. Perhaps you wouldn't mind making a copy of the letters, in case the original goes astray?"

"Very well. Bet you I'll make a dozen mistakes. It dazzles my eyes. You'd better call 'em out one by one."

Accordingly Jack read the twenty-nine letters off separately, and Dugdale, whose inaptitude with the pencil was clearly shown by the frequency with which he licked his lips, made laborious strokes on a sheet of paper taken from Miguel's note-book.

"There," he said, when the task was finished. "Looks a deal prettier than the original, don't it?"

In big boyish capitals Jack saw the following puzzling sentence:—

S E O S F L S A E O A P E J E J P J J F J P J X P A P P F

"It's all right, Grampus," he said, after comparing it with the original. "How long shall I be on my back here?"

"Can't say. Why?"

"Because I've something to do when we've discovered the cipher. You and I must do that, and, by all appearance, it will take time."

"No good asking me. Never answered a riddle in my life. Blinks of Merton tried me just before I came down. Strolled into my room one morning—Blinks always dawdles,—threw his leg over a chair, and piped up: 'Grampus, my dear, would you like to answer a question?' 'Well?' says I. 'Tell me,' says he: 'Why do birds in their little nests agree?' 'Bet you they don't always,' says I. He was put out; I could see it. He don't like a chap to be serious, you know. Yet he's a good sort; so to please him I said: 'Why do they, then?' 'Because if they didn't they'd fall out,' says he, and strolled away quite happy. I call that mighty clever, don't you?"

Jack made a rapid recovery. The fresh air, the good simple food, the unremitting care of Dugdale and Antonio, and perhaps, more than all, his own strong determination, soon set him upon his feet. When he was first allowed by the Grampus to leave the cave, he was much amused at the sight of Commissary Taberne sitting on an upturned pail, peeling potatoes, and singing as blithely as a bird:

"Ma mie,
Ma douce amie,
Réponds à mes amours;
Fidèle
A cette belle,
Je l'aimerai toujours.

Si j'avais cent coeurs,
Ils ne seraient remplis que d'elle;
Si j'avais cent—"

"Bravo, monsieur, et bonjour!" said Jack,

"Ha! Qui est-ce que j'ai l'honneur de voir?"

The commissary sprang off his perch, catching at the bowl of potatoes just in time to prevent a cataclysm. He presented a queer figure as he stood there, in Spanish vest and pantaloons, with bare arms and legs, for it was a hot day. Laying his hand on his portly middle, he made a bow as low as he conveniently could.

"I congratulate you, monsieur," he said. "I am pleased to see you once more in health. Ah ça! but you have the courage, you English! It was magnificent—to come into the room alone and face me, Gustave Taberne, single-handed. Parbleu! you took me by surprise, or—Ah! and I congratulate myself that it was not my sword that wounded so admirable a warrior. Nom d'un tonnerre! that wretch, that scamp, that renegade, that Don Miguel What's-his-name—if I could catch him! Gr-r-r-r!"

"I hope you have been well treated, monsieur," said Jack politely.

The commissary shrugged.

"Me voici!" he said. "Here am I, a commissary-general of the emperor's, accustomed to feed huge armies, the winner of innumerable victories that others have the credit of,—and behold me, peeling potatoes for a herd of unwashed, thieving, villainous, abomin—"

"Stay, stay!" interrupted Jack. "I really cannot hear my friends abused."

"Pardon, monsieur. I for one moment forgot myself. I have feelings, I am sentimental, I am upset; I see myself on the road to glory; then, vlan! the vision dissolves; it is a mirage!"

"The marquisate is a little farther off, you mean, monsieur?"

"Hé quoi?"

Monsieur Taberne looked puzzled.

"Do you remember, monsieur," asked Jack, "a little inn at Olmedo, where one day last November you made your first acquaintance with the puchero, and honoured with your conversation a young Spaniard, about my own age, who happened to be able to speak a little French?"

"H'm! h'm! I have a slight recollection of the incident. I got a good deal of information out of the young cockerel, if I'm not mistaken."

Jack smiled.

"You were looking forward then, monsieur, to being made a peer of France, like Marshal Lefebvre, Duke of Dantzig. I am sorry that this little check has happened in your career. You promised then, you remember, to join me some day in drinking a bottle of Valdepenas—none of your tarred vinegar of Toro, you know—when your duty was done. You have one more potato to peel, monsieur. While you are doing that, no doubt my good friend Antonio will produce a bottle of Valdepenas from his store."

During this speech the commissary had stared at Jack in amazement.

"Par le sambleu!" he ejaculated, "it is the very same!"

He dropped down on his tub, his mouth agape, and mechanically took up his last potato, which he began to pare with the dexterity of long practice. He was evidently casting back to that November day, and racking his memory to recover the details of his conversation. Jack's eyes twinkled. The commissary caught his look, and, flinging the newly-peeled potato into the bowl, uttered a huge guffaw.

"Zut!" he cried, "I see twice, monsieur, that you are a dangerous person to meet. One needs to be of the greatest discretion. It is not only your sword that is formidable. Tenez: voici le Valdepenas! I had hoped you would have been my guest. N'importe; Valdepenas is Valdepenas. The fortune of war is now to you; perhaps on another occasion—"

"No, thank you," said Jack, laughing, "unless our two nations are at peace. Let me say, monsieur, how glad I am that you take your little mischance with so much philosophy. I am not in command here, of course, but if there is anything I can do—"

"Morbleu, monsieur, you can do me an infinite favour. The potatoes—they are nothing; but the onions!—sapristi! when one weeps for sentiment, it is noble, it is French; but when one weeps for onions, it is a degradation. Bien sûr! précisément ça! allez!"

CHAPTER XXXII

The Prisoner at Bayonne

Running the Gauntlet—A Bait—Figments—Prophecy—Judas—At Large

"You will excuse a little delay, monsieur le colonel. The letter from Monsieur le Maréchal Lannes is somewhat—indeed I may say very—unusual. We must assure ourselves that everything is en règle—a mere formality, but in official business we live by rule and regulation. Monsieur will understand."

The lieutenant-general in command of the port of Bayonne leaned back in his chair and smiled deprecatingly, at the same time eying his visitor with no little keenness. The stranger was a Spanish officer in the French service, and as such to be distrusted; and although his manner lacked nothing in ease and assurance, there was something in his

bearing and expression that added to the Frenchman's instinctive suspicion. But from motives of prudence he forbore to explain that he was detaining his visitor until an aide-de-camp had ransacked the archives for an undoubted autograph of Marshal Lannes with which the letter brought by the Spaniard could be compared. For nearly half an hour the two chatted on indifferent subjects, the Spaniard growing more and more impatient, the Frenchman more and more apologetic. At last the aide-de-camp entered, and handed a document to the general, which the latter keenly scrutinized.

"I am glad to say, monsieur," he said, rising, "that I find his excellency's letter perfectly in order. I am delighted to make the acquaintance of one who, as the marshal informs me, has done good service to the emperor and to France, and, let us hope, to Spain. Captain Broussier will see that you are granted the most complete facilities for a private interview with the man José Pinzon. I understand that he is at present delirious—fever, monsieur, carries off too many of our prisoners,—but he has lucid intervals. For any service I may be able to render you, command me."

Captain Broussier led the way from the general's quarters near the Place d'Armes, across the St. Esprit bridge that spanned the Adour, to the grim citadel in which some hundreds of prisoners, Spanish, Portuguese, and English, were immured. Passing under the massive archway, they entered the great courtyard in which the unhappy captives were allowed to take exercise; some were sitting, the picture of dejection; others maintaining the semblance of cheerfulness; many endeavouring to add, by basket-weaving and similar light occupations possible within prison walls, to the wretched subsistence allowance doled out to French prisoners of war. A group of Spaniards, looking up as the two officers passed through the courtyard, caught sight of the afrancesado, and as they did so their attitude underwent an instant and extraordinary change. Listlessness gave place to the most intense interest; every man showed, each in his own way, the most passionate hatred of the new-comer. But for the presence of the two French sentries in the courtyard, and half a dozen more in the guard-house beyond the gate, they would have thrown themselves upon him as he passed. He caught the look of murder in their eyes and paled visibly, shrinking as if for protection closer to his companion, who noted the action and its cause, and smiled questioningly.

"Some men of—the opposite party—in Saragossa. Misguided, but dangerous; they bear me no good-will."

"If appearances go for anything, monsieur, those basket knives of theirs would have some pretty work to do but for the bayonets of our men yonder."

The Spaniard winced. He was clearly relieved when they passed from the courtyard into a long corridor leading to the room used as a hospital for the prisoners. There were several occupants, many in the last stage of disease, and the captain, having directed that a screen should be placed round the bed of the patient whom the visitor had come to see, left hastily. A visit to the hospital of the citadel was not without its dangers, for prison fever was no respecter of persons.

Upon a low truckle-bed in one corner of the room a man, shrunken to a skeleton, lay stretched, apparently at the point of death. He was conscious, for the light in his eyes was clear although dim, but so weak was his breathing, so wasted his figure, that at any moment it seemed the wan flame of life might flicker out. He turned his gaze slowly upon the stranger as he approached; then there came into his eyes the same look of inextinguishable hatred that had transfigured the wretched prisoners in the courtyard.

"Traitor!"

It was a mere movement of the lips, from which no sound issued; but the visitor, already unnerved, started as if stung; his face flushed, bringing into relief the livid scar across his brow. Then, collecting himself with an effort, he said, ignoring the unspoken insult:

"It pains me, my good José, to find you thus—sick and a prisoner. I have come a long way to see you, to bring you freedom—for the sake of old times. Fortunately I am not too late. A few more days in this place would have killed you; but we shall soon see what liberty and good nursing will do, eh, my friend?"

An eager light came into the sick man's eyes. In his feeble state he was unable to grasp the full import of what his visitor was saying. He was only capable of mastering one idea at a time. The word "liberty" had sent a sudden flash of colour into his cheek. The mere prospect of freedom, dim though it was, had banished for a brief moment his mortal antipathy to the man beside him. The walls of his prison-house fell asunder; he saw himself once again among his own people, the trusted servant of a beloved mistress whom he had sworn to serve, and whom his capture had left unprotected, exposed to all the dangers of a besieged city. The other, watching him keenly, was quick to note the changed expression of his face; and without giving the weakened intelligence time for ordered thought, he continued in the same tone of kindly interest:

"But I must first give you news of the señorita. I know, my good José, you care nothing for yourself. It is of her you think. I honour your fidelity; it is because of that that I am here."

"What of her? Tell me!" whispered the sick man. The voice was scarcely audible, but the eyes showed an agony of doubt and apprehension; he had wholly forgotten his distrust. He moved as if to raise himself; but he was unable to lift his head from the pillow.

"Make your mind easy; she is well, quite well. I left her with the wife of the old porter. She is a worthy woman, and devoted to the señorita. My influence with the government of King Joseph ensured the safety of your mistress after the fall of the city. She sends you the kindest messages. When you did not return from that brave sortie, she feared you were dead, and she grieved. But I learnt that you were a prisoner, and when I told her she clasped her hands and cried for joy, and bade me come at once to find you. 'Tell my good José that I shall know no peace until I am assured of his safety. I pray for him. He is much in my thoughts.'"

The sick man's eyes filled with tears. He would have lifted his hand to dash them away, but his strength was unequal to the effort. The visitor continued, his accent carefully modulated, gentle, persuasive:

"But, alas! my good friend, she is poor, very poor. The house in Saragossa is destroyed, burned during the siege. The house at Morata is pillaged by brigands. There is no rent from the estate; the people are all dispersed; and the good aunt is dead. The worthy porter and his wife have scarcely enough to keep themselves. It is terrible, this war; would that all good Spaniards thought with me that it is best to make peace with the king!"

The speaker bent forward, intently watching the effect of these words. As he had expected, a look of keen distress crossed the prisoner's face. Again he strove to rise, as if by raising himself he could shake off his intolerable weakness. He was suffering acutely. The visitor was silent for a while, giving the imagination of the sick man full play. Then he continued:

"I, alas! can do little to help. I am poor, my good José, miserably poor. I have sacrificed all—you will know how. I would willingly share my last crust with the señorita, but in this fatal war so many things may happen. I begged her to take shelter in a convent, but she would not; brave girl, she would stay to help her people! 'José,' she said, 'could assist us if only he were free. He alone knows what my poor father has done to provide for me. Go to him, Miguel; tell him of our distress; he will find a means of helping us.'"

"What would you wish me to do?"

The visitor, bending low, caught the whispered words. The man's clear eyes were upon him, and he checked the involuntary expression of satisfaction that crossed his face. But, instantaneous though it was, the sick man, strangely sensitive to shades of tone and manner, seemed to be instinctively aware of it, and the other was clearly ill at ease under his searching gaze.

"Well, my good José," he said hesitatingly, "your illness places us in a difficulty. I have here an order for your release" (he drew from his pocket a blue paper which might or might not be what he described); "I hoped that we should have been able to return to Spain together. You could have then placed the señorita beyond the reach of want; for from what she told me it is clear that your master left a large sum in your charge. But, alas! you are not at present

able to travel. The best plan that I can think of is that you send the señorita instructions where she can find her property—you can either write her a letter or give me the message,—and I will see that you are released and nursed back to health. You can return to Spain when you are fit to travel."

The sick man feebly shook his head, whispering:

"I must not tell—anything. I swore it."

"Yes, you swore it, and you have kept your oath. But it was never Don Fernan's wish that the señorita should be allowed to—to starve while her fortune remained hidden. It is your duty to be guided by circumstances—by common sense."

The other winced, but still replied: "I cannot; I swore it. Not till the war is over."

Then, a ripple of impatience showing above his suave manner, the visitor said hastily:

"Certainly, but the war is over; the fall of Saragossa finished the war. Joseph is again king in Madrid."

"You are mistaken, Señor. If what you say is true, the war is only just beginning." There was a light in the man's eyes, a fierce energy in his whispered words, that seemed first to embarrass, then to anger his visitor.

"Well, my friend, if you will not listen to reason, if you prefer to allow your mistress to starve, I can do nothing more. I will give her your message." He rose from his seat. "And I shall at least have the satisfaction of being able to add that such an ungrateful rascal is dead; for in this hole you won't live another week, and you can't expect me to do anything for your release."

"Stay!"

The afrancesado caught the word and halted expectantly as he was turning away. With a supreme effort the sick man had raised himself on his elbow, and, struggling hard for breath, gasped out:

"Liar! Traitor! Spy! Do you think—I do not—do not see you—for what you are? Go back—go back, accursed afrancesado, to those who have—bought you. Out of my sight! The price of blood!—Judas!—the doom of Judas—awaits you—the doom—of—Judas!"

The afrancesado recoiled as at the stroke of a lash; then an ugly look crossed his face, and his hand sought the hilt of his knife. But even as it did so the man sank back half insensible, the gleam of fierce rage faded from his face, and while Miguel was hesitating whether to stay or go, the prisoner began to talk in a low but distinct voice, as repeating a lesson he had learned by heart.

"Yes, Señor, dear master, I swear it. I will watch over the señorita as long as I have life; I swear it. None shall ever know except the señor Ingles. In the garden—the old—"

His voice was dying away again into a whisper; the afrancesado bent eagerly over him to catch the feeble tones, and when he rose a look of mingled greed and malignant triumph shone in his eyes. He waited for a while longer, while the sick man continued to babble in the same strain, his voice occasionally rising so that it could plainly be heard by the sufferers in the neighbouring beds. Murmurs arose, and, helpless as they were, their mutterings struck the heart of the afrancesado with a cold chill of dread. Rising, and throwing one hurried backward glance at the now silent figure on the bed, he hastened from the room, pursued by the vengeful glance of all who were conscious enough to recognize him.

An hour later the sick man opened his eyes and looked around, as though fearing to meet once more the traitor's malign glance.

"What is that you were saying about a promise, and a garden, and a señorita?" whispered the prisoner in the next bed.

"Saying! When?" he asked with a note of mortal anguish.

"Just now, when the vile afrancesado was with you. Have you forgotten?"

The man waited a moment, expecting a reply. None came; the man had fainted.

The afrancesado did not leave Bayonne that night as he intended. Stricken with the prison fever, he took to his bed, and there lay for several weeks, tended with unstinted care by his one-eyed servant. When he recovered from his delirium he was eager to set out, as soon as his strength permitted, on his return journey to Spain, and was amazed to hear from the French commandant that he must consider himself a prisoner.

"Nonsense!" he said; "la prisoner! What have you against me?"

"The prisoner you talked with in the sick ward, monsieur—"

"Is he dead?" asked Miguel eagerly.

"He may be, but his body has not been recovered. His health rapidly mended from the day of your interview with him, and ten days ago he escaped by swimming the Adour—a marvellous feat for a man in his condition."

"Escaped!" screamed Miguel, starting up. "I must go, I must go at once, before it is too late!"

"Then you did not arrange the escape, monsieur?" said the Frenchman, surprised at the other's violence.

"Arrange it! Am I a fool? Am I mad? Arrange the escape of my worst enemy! I must go! He has gone to rob me; he will ruin me; I must go, before it is too late!"

His agitation was so sincere that, after a consultation among the French officers, the afrancesado was permitted, a few days later, to depart with his servant, and they rode southward out of Bayonne at a furious pace, the stones clattering, the dust flying behind, and all who saw them staring after them in amazement.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Palafox the Name

Nonplussed—In the Convent—A Warning—The Key—Permutations and Combinations—Light Ahead—Don Fernan's Message

One day the guerrilla camp in the mountains was thrown into some excitement by the sudden reappearance of Pepito. All the guerrilleros by this time knew something of the strange complications in which the English señor was involved. They had been constantly on the look-out for the gipsy boy whom he was so anxious to see; and when, on this sunny morning, the boy was seen bounding up the hillside, they flocked to him in a crowd, crying "Qué hay de nuevo? Qué hay de nuevo?" Pepito made them no answer. He had already caught sight of his master sitting some yards above him, and rushed forward with a piercing cry of delight.

"Found, Señor!" he shouted. "Found!"

Jack needed no telling who was found.

"Where is she?" he asked.

"Glad Señor is well, glad Señor is well!" shouted the little fellow. "The Señorita will be glad too. Oh, she will! When I told the Señorita—"

"Where is she?" repeated Jack impatiently.

"When I told the Señorita that Señor was ill, she jumped up; said she must come; but the old Busna looked ugly; said no; and I come to fetch Señor."

"Pepito, tell me at once where she is."

"Safe, at a convent near Cariñena, Señor, all among the trees and flowers. Señor can go, now he is well, and I know who will be pleased. Yes, I know!"

"You're a good boy, Pepito." He turned to Dugdale. "Grampus, when shall I be fit to ride?"

"Good heavens! Not for a long time. Look here, Lumsden, I'm not going to have my cure spoilt and my career ruined by you going raiding before you're fit. Don't laugh. I'm in dead earnest. I'm sick and tired of playing the fool at Oxford. As soon as I get home I'm going to be a doctor. New idea, you know; fresh air and cold water. The pater will laugh himself into a fit when I tell him; but don't you see, if you back me up, and I can show you as my first case—why, bet you the old boy comes round and doubles my allowance, to encourage me. See?"

"All right!" said Jack, laughing. "But you must finish my cure quickly, for the instant I can manage it I'm going to ride over to Cariñena."

"What for? What is there special about Cariñena?"

"Well, I've a—a friend there I want specially to see."

"H'm! A friend? Bet you my first year's fees it's a girl. Now look here, Lumsden, don't be a fool. An Englishman oughtn't to marry till he's thirty at least. I've got ten years yet, and it won't be too much. It takes time to be able to face a girl without flinching, and for my part I'd rather learn Greek verbs than—"

"Oh, shut up!" exclaimed Jack. "Who said anything about marrying? Juanita—"

"Oho! Juanita! Sorry for you, my boy; no cure for that complaint. Well, I'll take care of you, but it'll be a long time yet before you can ride."

Nearly a month passed away before Jack, after a few experiments, was pronounced fit to undertake the ride to Cariñena. The period of waiting was diversified by one or two expeditions against French convoys, in which Antonio achieved brilliant successes. Jack chafed at being obliged to remain inactive, and to share in these raids merely in imagination. He spent hour after hour in attempting to decipher the postscript of Don Fernan's letter, always without success. Remembering the enigmatical phrase in the letter he himself had received in Salamanca, "Palafox the Man, Palafox the Name", he believed that the key must be contained in that; but though he tried to fit it to the ciphered message, and made considerable demands on Dugdale's patience, he drew no nearer to solving the puzzle, and finally gave it up in disgust.

At length the day arrived when, feeling well and strong, he set off on his ride to the convent. Pepito had several times conveyed verbal messages between him and Juanita, but nothing had been committed to paper for fear lest it should fall into the hands of the French. Guided by the boy, who rode before him, he reached the convent in the afternoon of a beautiful April day, and was at once admitted to the presence of Juanita, with whom he found the old duenna he had seen in Saragossa.

Though Juanita greeted him with as much cordiality as ever, he was conscious of a slight difference in her manner; there was not quite the same frank comradeship she had shown in Saragossa.

"I am very glad to see you looking so well, Jack," she said. "Will you take a cup of chocolate?"

"Thanks!" replied Jack briefly. He sipped it for a brief interval without speaking, then said suddenly: "I say, Juanita, I am mighty glad you escaped, you know. It was good of Padre Consolacion to help you—after trying to persuade you to marry Miguel, too. Tell me about it."

Without her usual animation Juanita recounted how she had been captured as she neared Morata by a party of troopers, among whom she had recognized Perez, Miguel's one-eyed man. She had been treated kindly enough by the wife of a colonel of chasseurs, who, however, irritated her beyond endurance by constant reference to her approaching marriage. Miguel himself had only seen her once. He had asked what had become of her father's old servant José, and shown some annoyance when she refused to answer. But she had had another and a more frequent visitor. After the capitulation, Padre Consolacion had been surprised to find that, though he had been as consistent an opponent as Don Basilio and Santiago Sass, he had not met with the same fate at the hands of the French. He could only conclude that he owed his security to the good offices of Miguel, whom, however, he now held in utter

abhorrence. Making his escape from the city, he had gone into hiding at Morata, where he soon learnt of what had befallen Juanita. It was not difficult for him, with the assistance of the people of the house, to obtain secret interviews with her. On the day before Miguel went with Commissary Taberne on the foraging expedition, Juanita learnt from the colonel's wife that pressure was to be brought to bear in high quarters for the purpose of bringing about her marriage with Don Miguel. She sent a message by a secret channel to Padre Consolacion, informing him of this alarming news. On the next evening, almost at the moment when Jack was surprising the commissary, she had slipped out of the house in the dress of one of the Spanish maid-servants, fled to where the priest was awaiting her, and by him was escorted to the convent, where she was joined in a few days by the duenna, after the sudden swoop of Antonio had cleared the place of French.

"The padre is a trump," said Jack. "I confess I didn't like him in Saragossa; but then, of course, he hadn't found Miguel out. I thought he must be either stupid or something worse. I shall do him more justice in future."

He would not perhaps have been so cordial if he had known that it was to Padre Consolacion he owed the strange alteration in Juanita's manner which had puzzled him. When he left her in the convent, the padre's last words had been: "Now, querida mia, though I have helped you to escape a marriage with a traitor and a villain, remember I shall not approve, I shall forbid, your marriage with a heretic. You will understand me."

All unconscious of this, Jack waxed eloquent in praise of the padre, and went on: "Well now, I've something to tell you besides what you have heard from Pepito. You remember that a letter left with General Palafox for my father disappeared—a letter about your property?"

"Yes. I hate the sound of the word 'property'."

"I have the letter. It was—perhaps you guess—in the possession of Miguel."

He proceeded to tell the whole story. Juanita listened with growing interest, and when it was concluded every trace of her stiffness had passed away.

"Ah, Jack!" she cried, "now we can get this wretched treasure that has nearly cost your life—for but for it you would never have come to Saragossa—and then—oh! do you think we can get away to England?"

"I'm very sorry, Juanita. I was just going to tell you that I'm afraid we can't get the treasure."

"Why not? You said the letter was about it."

"So it is. But, unfortunately, the secret of its whereabouts is locked up in a postscript—a single line of capital letters, which I can't read. It is in cipher."

"Show it to me. You have it with you?"

Jack took out the paper, and unfolded it before her. She read over the postscript letter by letter:

S E O S F L S A E O A P E J E J P J J F J P J X P A P P F

"Certainly a most curious-looking sentence," said Juanita. "And have you no clue at all?"

"None whatever. I thought I had. I made sure I had, but when I tried to work it out in the cipher it proved useless."

"What was it?"

"Well, I had never told anyone. Your father said I was to burn the letter as soon as I received it, and I did so; but now that things have altogether changed, there can be no harm in telling you all about it. In the letter I received at Salamanca, Don Fernan said that I was to remember the phrase, 'Palafox the Man, Palafox the Name'. It occurred to me, of course, that the clue to the cipher might be found in that phrase; but, try it as I might, I couldn't make anything of it. You see, the cipher message contains all the letters of the word Palafox, but there are a number of J's and other letters that have nothing to do with it."

"And you gave it up!" exclaimed Juanita, with some scorn. "Just like a boy!"

"Really, Juanita—" began Jack, but she interrupted him.

"Don't talk. Let me see if I've a little more perseverance. I count six P's, three A'S, one L, three F's, two O's, and one X; that accounts for PALAFOX. Why are there so many P's? Besides, there are four E'S, six J's, and three S's. What can EJS stand for? EJS, ESJ, JES, JSE—I see it! Take an O out of PALAFOX and you have JOSÉ. That is the name of our old servant, and of the Captain-General too. Now, do you see, Señor Don Juan?—the key to the cipher is JOSÉ PALAFOX."

"What an ass I am!" said Jack. "It never struck me that Palafox's Christian name might be included. But what then? The only ciphering I ever did was in money sums, and weights and measures. How do you work out the thing now?"

"Why, it's clear that my father's message is made up of the words JOSÉ PALAFOX, which have only nine different letters. It's not likely that the message contains only nine letters; therefore one letter of the cipher probably stands for several, and I shouldn't wonder if all the letters of the alphabet were represented by those nine. Suppose we put down the letters of the alphabet and the other letters underneath, and see what can be made of it then."

"We don't know what language it is in."

"Probably Spanish, like the letter itself. Let us try."

She wrote down the twenty-seven letters of the Spanish alphabet, and under each the corresponding letter of the key words:—

a b c ch d e f g h i j l ll m n ñ o p q r s t u v x y z
J O S E P A L A F O X J O S E P A L A F O X J O S E P

"There you are, Jack. Now look. The first letter of the cipher, s, may stand for either c or m or x; we can't tell which of the three until we get a little further."

"It's a pretty puzzle," said Jack. "The next letter is E; that may be either ch or n or y, and if we put either of them after c, m, or x, we sha'n't begin to make any Spanish word that I know of."

"No," agreed Juanita, putting her pencil to her lips. "It looks as if the sentence can't be Spanish."

"Don Fernan wrote to me in English. Let us try that. I'll do it this time."

Jack wrote down the letters of the English alphabet, placing the key-words below as before:—

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z
J O S E P A L A F O X J O S E P A L A F O X J O S E

"S is either c, n, or y this time, and E is either d, o, or a. We can drop d and e, because they can't follow any of the first three; that leaves co, no, and yo. This is getting interesting, Juanita."

"Yes, I am getting quite excited. Now for the next letter, O. That can stand for b, j, m, u, x. I'll write down all the combinations, and see how they look."

They were fifteen, as follows:—

cob nob yob
coj noj yoj
com nom yom
cou nou you
cox nox yox

"Some of these are too comical for anything," said Jack; "but we've one complete word, *you*. Let us see what the

next comes to. S again; that's *c*, *n*, or *y*. Then F; that's *i* or *t*. No English word begins with *ct*, *nt*, or *yt*, so *t* goes out. Now for L; that's *g* or *r*; and the combinations now are:—

cig	nig	yig
cir	nir	yir

I say, your father wouldn't begin by addressing me as 'you nigger', would he? The next letter is S; *c*, *n*, or *y* again. Not a single one of them helps to make a word. We are on the wrong track, Juanita."

"Perhaps the first word is not *you* at all."

"Well, let's go back and see how many of the fifteen combinations of the first three letters will fit on to the fourth. It's quite clear that you can't make a word by putting *c* or *y* after any of them; there's only *n* left, and all we can make is *coun* and *noun*. Don Fernan wouldn't go in for grammar, would he? If we drop *noun* we've only *coun*, and that looks most unlikely."

"Be quick with the next letter, Jack. Why do you talk so much? I could jump with excitement."

"Don't be in a hurry; perhaps the whole thing will come to grief again. The next letter is F; that stands for *i* or *t*; *i* won't do, but *t* will, and we get *count*; that's a word at any rate. I wonder what we're to count. Now for L; that's *g* or *r*; and S again; that's *c*, *n*, or *y*. And unless I'm a Dutchman, that makes the word *country*."

Juanita clapped her hands and laughed.

"You *are* getting clever!" she said.

The irony escaped Jack, who was busy working out the next word. In a few minutes he had made out *house*.

"Country house!" exclaimed Juanita. "Oh, you are slow, Jack; do be quick! What about the country house?"

But the same process had to be gone through with every letter, and it was quite half an hour before the whole message was deciphered. The excitement of Juanita and himself increased with every fresh discovery, and when the task was finished, and the simple English words were written down, each gave a gasp of relief. The message consisted of but six words:—

Country house old well twelve feet.

"I see it! I see it all!" exclaimed Juanita. "Oh, Jack, we shall get it after all! I don't care for the treasure itself one bit really, not one bit; but I could dance with joy at defeating that wretch Miguel, and I should like to have some money to give to the poor people ruined in Saragossa. You must go, Jack. The well is in the garden behind the house, near the wall. It has not been used for many years; we got water from a new well by the kitchen. Only to think that all is coming right after all!"

"Yes," said Jack; "Pepito and I will go to-morrow. How deep is the well, Juanita?"

"I don't know. It doesn't matter. Twelve feet means something. You will find out what, Jack. And then—"

"Then, Juanita, for England!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

Dead Men Tell no Tales

"It is locked, Señor."

Pepito had dismounted at the gate of the Casa Alvarez on the hillside.

"Shout, Pepito," replied Jack from the saddle of his mule. "Perhaps the old man will hear us from the house."

The gipsy put his hands to his mouth, and called shrilly. There was no answer, no sound save the hum of bees and the song of birds.

"We must climb the wall, then," said Jack, springing to the ground.

"See, Señor, a face in the bush!" cried Pepito, pointing through the iron railings into the garden.

Looking, Jack saw, framed in the foliage of a dense laurel, the face of the old gardener.

"Adelante, hombre!" he said.

Instantly the face vanished. Jack called again; no voice answered, no footstep was heard. The two riders tied their steeds to trees in the plantation on the right, then scaled the wall and hastened towards the house.

Nearly two months had elapsed since Jack's night adventure. He was struck by the alteration in the place. It had looked untidy, ill-cared-for, then; it was now a wilderness. Flowers and shrubs bloomed in unchecked luxuriance; hollyhocks drooped their heavy heads, sprays of woodbine twined in and out among the laurels, unpruned vines crept over the weedy paths, the sweltering air was sickly with mingled perfumes. The house stood white and brown in the glowing sunlight; lush creepers almost hid the door; the dry wood-work was blistered, the lattices falling away; all was decay, silence, and desolation.

It was high noon of a sultry summer day, yet Jack shivered. He rapped at the door. There was no response save an echo. He walked round the house; every window was shuttered, every door barred. He went on down the garden at the back, following the directions given him by Juanita, and Pepito crept along behind him, his big eyes wide with awe. A vulture flew up in front, and clattered away on creaking wings. He stepped from the path, and pushed his way through tangled shrubs and matted undergrowth towards a broad chestnut in the angle of the wall. Tendrils of convolvulus clung around his feet, the scent of thyme came in gusts with the cloying odour of gardenias. Suddenly the rank vegetation ceased, and before him, in a clear space, he saw the circular covering of the old well.

Frame and winch had been removed. A broken moss-grown bucket lay hard by; near it was a long bar of wood. Around the well was a broad patch of soft black earth. As Jack approached to remove the wooden cover from the well-mouth, Pepito touched him on the arm.

"Marks, Señor!" he said under his breath; "footsteps, and marks of a mule's hoofs; fresh, Señor; made to-day."

Jack started. A green lizard, sunning itself at the edge of the well, disappeared in a flash. He saw the hoof-marks in the soil; his heart sank with a sudden misgiving. The well-cover seemed to have been clumsily replaced.

"Help me lift it," said Jack.

They removed the heavy cover. The well opened black before them. Pepito peered over the edge; he saw nothing; there was neither rope nor ladder.

"How can we get down?" said Jack.

Looking around, he saw what appeared to be the end of a ladder projecting from beneath a bush. He dragged it out; a snake dropped from it and vanished in the grass; it was a ladder some sixteen feet long.

"It will not reach the bottom of the well," said Jack. His eye caught the bar of wood.

"Bring me that, Pepito."

He laid it across the well-mouth; on its mossy side there was a dull splash of red. The bar stretched across the opening. Lifting it again, Jack gave it to Pepito, and, taking the ladder, lowered this into the well till only the topmost rungs were above the brickwork.

"Put the wood through," he said.

Thus the ladder hung dangling on its support, fifteen feet into the well. Pepito looked at his master enquiringly.

"Yes, you are to climb down. Stay!" he added, as the boy prepared to step down on to the swinging ladder.

He took some papers from his pocket, twisted them into a loose mass, and wound about them the end of a long vine tendril. Then he kindled them from his tinder-box, and let the flaming mass down quickly into the well. It burned until it was consumed.

"There is air enough. Go down, Pepito."

He steadied the ladder as the boy descended step by step. Jack counted twelve rungs, then ordered the boy to stop.

"Do you see anything, Pepito?"

A few moments passed. The gipsy's eyes were adjusting themselves to the gloom.

"A hole, Señor, a big hole in the wall."

"Can you get into it?"

"No, Señor, it is on the other side, too far away."

Bidding the boy ascend, Jack shifted the ladder across the bar. Pepito went down again, and soon Jack heard his muffled voice exclaim that he was in the hole.

"Do you find anything there? Search thoroughly."

A minute passed. Jack was crouched at the brink, holding the joists of the ladder firmly with both hands.

"There is nothing, Señor; all emptiness."

"Come up again."

He stepped out on to the brickwork, and Jack rose to his feet.

"Dead! dead! dead!" said a quavering voice behind him.

He turned with a nervous start. While he had been engaged at the well, a figure had been slowly approaching from a thicket of laurel, furtively, with hesitation, stopping for a moment, then taking another unsteady step and stopping again. Jack recognized the old gardener, but how altered! His limbs shook as with a palsy; his lips mumbled without sound; his eyes were wild.

"What is it, hombre?" said Jack quietly without moving.

The old man stood as if listening. Then, raising his shaking right hand, the long fingers working convulsively, he murmured:

"I saw it! ... Dead!"

Then he smiled, a thin wan smile, and tottering forward pointed waveringly to the well. Jack recoiled. The old man's smile was more awful than a sob of agony.

"They came through the gate;" he pointed across the garden to the farther wall. "There were two; I was hidden in the copse; I watched them. I watched them. They brought a mule; it was a fine mule, with gay trappings,—a fine mule..." The old man passed his hand across his brow. "What was I saying? I have forgotten."

"They brought a mule," said Jack.

"Yes, they brought a mule. They led it across the garden, trampling down the poor flowers—my flowers! I saw them! There were two. One was in front—the cursed afrancesado; I knew him; yes, did I not serve him at my master's table? the afrancesado! He was in front; behind him a man, a long thin man, a one-eyed man, with the mule. They crushed the flowers—my flowers ... what was I saying?"

"They came across the garden," said Jack.

"They came across the garden. They came here, here! where we are standing. The man, the one-eyed man, fastened the mule to yonder tree; then they stooped down and lifted the cover. It was heavy...I watched them. They peered down into the well, into the deep well, but they could see nothing. Then the tall man, the man with the one eye, went away; the other, the afrancesado, waited, and while he waited he cast pebbles into

the well ... horrible! horrible!" He covered his eyes with his hand, as if to shut out some dreadful thing. "What was I saying?"

"The tall man came back," said Jack.

"The tall man came back; he brought a ladder; he fetched a beam, that beam, and they let down the ladder into the well, the deep well ... I watched them. 'Twelve steps,' said the afrancesado, the cursed afrancesado, and the tall man, the man with the one eye, went down ... Twelve steps! ... The other, the afrancesado, bent over; there was a noise below; the afrancesado said 'Bien!'—I heard him. Then the man, the long man, the man with the one eye, came up, slowly; there was a box, a heavy box; the other took it, and the man, the one-eyed man, went down, ... twelve steps ... He came up again; there was another box, a small box. I knew it; it was the master's. Then he went down again, ... twelve steps, ... and the other, the afrancesado, the accursed afrancesado, drew his knife, silently; it flashed in the sun; I watched him..." The old man stared fixedly before him. "What was I saying?" he whispered.

"He drew his knife," said Jack.

"He drew his knife," said the old man, still in a whisper. "The other, the long man, the man with one eye, came slowly, slowly, up. He stretched his left hand for the box, he raised the arm with the knife. He was behind him. He leant forward; I saw him—him, and the long man, the man with one eye—he drove it between his shoulders..."

The old man made as if to brush a cobweb from before his eyes.

"Horrible! horrible! ... down! down! down! ... What was I saying?"

CHAPTER XXXV

Doom

Outcast—Spectres—Conscience—Tracked—Vanity—Scylla—Charybdis—José—Faithful unto Death

Within a few miles of Calatayud, a narrow path, little more than a foot-track, leads down from the hills on to the highroad to Saragossa. Just before joining the highway, the path winds between two low bluffs that screen it from the sight of wayfarers below. Indeed, any muleteer or arriero unacquainted with the country might almost pass unawares the spot where road and hill-path meet, so completely is it hidden by the ash-gray contours of the hills.

About the time when Jack dismounted at the gate of the Casa Alvarez, a man was making his way downward along this narrow track, urging a heavily-laden mule with low cries to hasten its flagging pace. He was a young man, in the costume of a muleteer; his cheeks were pale and sunken, his eyes unnaturally bright. Every now and again he would throw an anxious backward glance over his shoulder, not consciously, as if he feared pursuit, but as though in obedience to some impulse of which he was hardly aware.

When he approached the point where the track joined the road he stepped to the mule's head and brought the animal to a stand-still, looking from left to right as if in doubt. After a moment's hesitation he tied the mule to one of the rare saplings that grew at the side of the track, and advanced warily towards the highway, pausing at short intervals, and bending his head forward to listen. There was no sound save the silver trill of a lark far above, and the soughing of a light breeze as it lapped the edges of the hills. The man moved forward again, still more cautiously; rounding a knoll, he came to the road, that stretched in gentle undulations for several hundreds of yards in a straight line east and west. No one was in sight. The man gave a sigh of relief, followed by one of those quick uneasy backward glances that seemed to be habitual with him. Rapidly scanning the road once more, he returned to the

mule, released the bridle from the tree, and slowly led the laden animal down the path.

He was within a dozen paces of the dusty highway when he halted suddenly, dragging heavily upon the reins. His dusky, olive-hued features paled, the hand that grasped the bridle trembled nervously; his whole attitude was one of dire apprehension. For a moment he stood intently listening, his eyes fixed in a wide stare; then, wheeling the mule sharply round and prodding the weary beast desperately with the knife he drew from his belt, he raced back along the track. For a full quarter of a mile he continued his upward course; then he stopped, and again turned his head towards the road in the attitude of listening. At first he could hear nothing but the throbbing of his heart and the quick breathing of the mule by his side; but gradually the clatter of many hoofs on the hard road became more and more audible through the clear air, though the horsemen were hidden from view by the obstructing hills. They arrived at what he judged to be the place he had just left. He heard "Halt!" in a rough stentorian tone. The voice was Spanish, and its effect on the anxious listening man was as that of a galvanic shock. With a smothered cry he dashed forward, dragging the unwilling mule, which he goaded with alternate stabs of the knife and whispered words half of menace half of entreaty.

There was no halting now. For mile after mile they continued their flight, until, when both mule and man were exhausted, they at length stopped at the edge of a wild gorge high up in the mountains. There, for the first time since he fled the voice, the man looked carefully around. The place was evidently new to him. In his flight he had diverged at the first opportunity from the track, along which he had come, not then alone, earlier in the day. The new path was more difficult than the old; it wound away from his obvious destination; it led, indeed, almost due north into the heart of the mountain country—the Sierra de Moncayo, the precipitous granite range where King *Æolus* had his mythic throne. But the fugitive knew not, cared not, whither he went, so long as it was away from the voice of his countrymen. And he avoided, with the shrinking of dread, the track he knew.

One thing was remarkable during his late impetuous flight. He seemed to have forgotten his strange trick of glancing backward over his shoulder. Many times he turned half round to see if he was followed, but consciously, less abjectly, for all his panic fear.

When he had rested for a few minutes, he rose and carefully scanned the surrounding country, debating with himself what course to follow. His view was circumscribed by the irregular masses of bare rock and sparsely wooded slopes that formed the horizon. But he appeared at last to have made up his mind, for, pulling the mule slowly round on the narrow track, he took a few steps as if to return in the direction from which he had come. But his bearing was timid, uncertain, vacillating, and when a mountain eagle swept from its eyry, and screamed just above his head, he started as if struck, hauled his poor beast feverishly across the track, and once more pressed in hot haste towards the north.

For some time he marched on rapidly. Then the fatigue of travelling over the steep uneven track again made itself felt; his pace slackened; he moved along behind the mule as if mechanically, while mechanically he still urged it forward with his knife. For minutes at a stretch he seemed as in a dream, immersed in dark thought. Again he glanced fearfully backward, not as though seeking a visible object of menace, not at the frowning hills, but with eyes that attempted to pierce the infinite for a something beyond. At moments he started from his waking nightmare to a full consciousness of his position among these bleak inhospitable hills. The phantoms dogging his thoughts then vanished, giving place to real cares—physical pain, a sense of desolation. At such times he searched anxiously for a path to the west, whereby making a circuit he might reach his goal, avoiding the highroad, where he had so narrowly escaped the hands of his countrymen the guerrilleros. But the track wound on, swerving sometimes to right or left, yet leading remorselessly northward, no by-path branching towards Calatayud. He dared not turn back. The danger of the road, had he known it, was past; but the awful risk of capture made him sick with fear. He plodded on, sunk more and more in dark imaginings, until at last, when the red sun was sinking below the distant purple peaks on his

left, the mule suddenly stopped, and, breathing heavily, dropped upon its knees. The poor brute was spent. The man awoke with a start from his reverie. He was on the edge of a deep gully; giant rocks hemmed him in on either side; the path—there was no path! For the first time he realized that the granite hills held him in their grip.

He looked at the mule, that lay with lolling tongue and starting eyes. The animal was famished. He had no food for it, none for himself; only now was he conscious of his own gnawing hunger. He loosened the girths, and, removing the heavy panniers from the mule's back, enabled it to rise. There was nothing to tie it to. Sinking down on a flat rock, he held the bridle and peered into the deepening gloom. He dared not move forward; one careless step in this wild place might hurl them both into an abyss. There he sat, and the darkness gathered, and the chill of night wrapped him round.

What were his thoughts as he waited and endured? Who shall say? Human justice may falter, may be long upon the road; Eternal Justice is instant, relentless, inevitable. The sense of doom was upon this man, as he held sombre vigil with the cold accusing stars.

It was an unkempt, haggard, agued figure that rose stiffly and dizzily from his hard couch as soon as the pale dawn came creeping through the narrow gully among the hills. He could just see the mule standing motionless a few yards away. He shuddered as his eye fell upon the brass-clamped coffers at its feet. Then he moved as if to pass away, leaving behind him both mule and treasure, the visible links that bound him to the past. But after a few staggering steps he hesitated, set his teeth in desperate resolve, and returning, painfully lifted the boxes on to the panniers, the mule standing with drooped ears, and shivering in the raw air. In the half-light he led the famished beast away from the ravine, searching the rocky ground narrowly for marks of its track. Here and there appeared a stone covered with gray lichen; at these the mule halted and licked a scanty, bitter meal. At one point a silver rivulet poured from a fissure and fell clattering upon the rocks far down the steep. There Miguel dropped to his knees and drank with the animal, then went on again.

It was nearly two hours before he saw, on the far side of a deep ravine, a foot-path winding about a wall of rock. Was it the path he had left? He did not know. Only the guerrilleros he feared to meet could have told him that but one other path led across these barren heights. Leading the mule cautiously down one face of the ravine, he hauled it with infinite difficulty up the other. The poor beast, faint with hunger, had scarcely strength to crawl when at last it scrambled with its burden on to the track. But for the constant goad it would have fallen by the way. The path ran north and south; Miguel hesitated which direction to take. Northward he would have to scale steeper heights, but would increase his distance from the garden of his fear; southward, he might reach Calatayud and safety with the French, but who knew what danger might lie between? As the question beat this way and that in his tortured brain, his eyes lit upon a long, thin, jagged rock in which, in the gloom of the preceding evening, he had marked with a shudder a grotesque resemblance to a human form he would have given worlds to forget. Then he knew that he was upon the track from which he had wandered; he would persevere in the attempt to find a cross-path to the west. Surely there must be one that would lead, by however long a circuit, to his goal?

He turned wearily towards the north and instinctively glanced back across the hills, now variously tinted by the ascending sun. As he did so his eyes dilated, and for some moments he stood as if rooted to the ground. In the clear distance two figures mounted on mules were coming towards him. Even while he looked he saw one, the smaller of the two, pointing in his direction. The other drew rein for an instant, then both urged their mules to a trot. A bend in the path hid them from view, and Miguel leapt round, knowing that he was in very truth a hunted man. For nearly a day he had been pursued by the phantom of his crime. He had run from the shadow of a sound, fled from the perils his own imagination had created. Terror of he knew not what had left him all unstrung. But now that vengeance

dogged him in real bodily form his mind braced itself to meet it. Only for a moment did his heart quail with misgiving; he reeled slightly, and clutched at the mule's bridle for support; then, recovering himself instantly, he struck the jaded beast, and with a fierce cry drove it before him up the path.

Suddenly the track bent eastward, it ceased to rise, he seemed to be on the northern slope of the watershed up which he had toiled during the previous day. He topped the crest. The path stretched downwards before him; and, scattering the loose stones to right and left, Miguel raced on with the mule until at a turn in the track a vast and brilliant panorama opened before his yearning eyes. Below him, at the edge of the long slope, stretched a rolling wooded country intersected by numerous watercourses shining in the morning sun. Far away on the horizon a silver streak wound and doubled on itself. It must be the river Ebro. Could he but gain the rich champaign below, he hoped that, for a time at least, he would be safe. In some copse or covert, vineyard or olive-ground, even in the byways of some hamlet, he might find a temporary refuge. But with the thought itself its utter hopelessness was borne in upon him. His pursuers must be closing in fast, although the windings of the track hid them from him when at intervals he turned to see. Panting himself, he dragged his panting beast with reckless haste, though in his inmost consciousness sure that the road was too long, the time too short. One solitary hope remained to him. If he left the mule with its retarding load, abandoned the prize for which he had staked his all, he might perhaps even yet find some rocky defile, some favouring grove, wherein to hide and baffle pursuit. But no, the renunciation was too great for his blighted soul. For the treasure he had schemed and sinned; he could not, dared not, let it go.

Scrambling on down the mountain track, he spied at length, some hundreds of feet below him, a narrow hillroad to which his headlong course must lead him by and by. Its farther side bordered a ravine. The road seemed near at hand, but as he continued his flight he found that the downward track zigzagged on the face of the slope, so that sometimes two or three of its coils lay immediately beneath him. There was no shorter way. Approaching the end of the last of these windings, he was warned by the clatter of dislodged stones that his pursuers were now hard upon his heels. He threw a quick glance upward; there, two hundred feet above him, the riders crossed his sight, following at headlong speed the first winding of the track. Without pause he raced staggeringly along.

All unknowing, he had himself been watched for some time from below. At the edge of the hill-road, hidden from him by a jutting mass of rock, a man was resting, seated on a boulder, eating a frugal meal from a wallet hung at his neck. He was a gaunt, hollow-eyed man, with wasted cheeks; thin, unkempt locks straggled from beneath his cap; his long tangled beard was snowy white. His attitude was of one in pain. At first he watched the impetuous muleteer dully, without attention; then he started, paused in lifting a piece of bread, and stared long with quickening breath. As the mule turned the last of the zigzags a sunbeam flashed on the brass of one of the boxes. The seated man rose; his eyes, opened to their fullest width, now fixed themselves with a glare of the intensest hatred upon the fugitive approaching, until once more he was hidden from sight.

Then with the stealthy movement of a cat the worn, panting wayfarer glided from the brink of the ravine to the opposite side of the road, and crouched down under cover of the rocks that had hidden him from the man above. Almost ceasing to breathe, he drew his knife, and waited. His movements suggested that he expected the muleteer to emerge into the road between himself and the animal. But not thus was the event ordered. Rounding the last turn of the path, Miguel, to avoid a projecting rock, had changed sides; thus when, after a few seconds, he reached the junction of path and road, the mule was between him and the man who lay there waiting, ready to strike. The anticipated moment was come. But Miguel was snatched from human vengeance; for him was reserved another fate. With an inarticulate cry of baffled rage the ambuscader sprang forward as if to overtake the mule, but, under the impetus gained during the last few yards of the hill-path, the beast was still moving quickly in an oblique direction across the road. Miguel at one and the same moment heard the cry and saw the flash of the knife. Till then he was unaware of his enemy's presence, so absorbed was his attention with the path ahead and the progress of the pursuers

behind. At the cry he gave a startled side-long glance at the wild menacing features glaring at him across the mule's neck. In that dark look he read his doom.

It fell more quickly than any of the four persons—the actors themselves, the spectators above—could have thought possible. The two riders on the steep hill-path had now come within full sight of the scene passing on the road. As they gazed, holding their breath, they saw the mule between the two men staggering across the road. Startled by the sudden flash of the uplifted blade, the poor beast swerved towards the ravine, driving Miguel, all unconscious, on to the brink. He had already slipped towards the almost perpendicular descent before he realized his peril; then he clutched wildly at the slackened bridle, dragging the mule after him. It stumbled at the edge; burdened with its treasure-laden panniers it could not recover its footing, and in a moment man and beast, with one mingled scream of terror, disappeared into the yawning gulf.

The spectators above had halted, transfixed by the appalling tragedy. Then they hastened downward impetuously. The older man had fallen forward on the very edge of the ravine. Jack feared that he would follow Miguel Priego to destruction. But when, reaching the road, he threw himself from his mule and stooped to the prone figure, he found that the man had fainted, overcome by his fierce passion and the agitation of the last tense moments. Then for the first time Jack was aware of the thunderous roar of a torrent, and looking into the ravine he saw a white flood swirling over the rocks hundreds of feet below.

"Pepito," he said in a strained voice, "clamber down carefully. See what has become of Don Miguel—if anything can be done for him."

While the boy was gone on his perilous errand Jack loosened the clothing of the prostrate man, fetched water from a mountain-rill, and bathed his head. He opened his eyes, but there was no speculation in them. They wandered vacantly and closed again. Jack looked at him pityingly, and, as he looked, felt vaguely that the worn features were familiar to him. They reminded him of someone he had known as a child in Barcelona, a man who had mended his toys for him, and carried him on his back when tired; who had petted him and scolded him by turns, and whom he had alternately plagued and domineered over. Was it José Pinzon? Jack could scarcely believe it. The José he had known was a man touching his prime, strong, stalwart, bright-eyed, raven-haired; the man lying before him was bent and aged, wasted, hoary, decrepit. Yet the likeness to the old José was remarkable. Was it possible that the faithful servant had not been killed in Galindo's sortie, as Juanita had believed?

It was three-quarters of an hour before Pepito returned from his descent of the precipice. Nothing living could have survived so terrible a fall; Miguel must instantaneously have gone to his account. Fragments of the boxes, but for which the mule might have regained its footing, lay scattered on the rocks, and out of the ruin Pepito had recovered but one relic—one gold pendant,—which he handed to his master; all else had been swept away by the torrent. Then he helped him lift the poor wayfarer to the back of his mule, and together they bore him to a muleteer's cabin in the hills.

For three days the man lingered there, unconscious for the most part, and in intervals of consciousness talking at random of people and things that were quite strange to his hearers. Jack nursed him with every care; but it was evident from the first that his days were numbered. On the third evening, when the sun was near setting and the cicadas had commenced their chant, the man opened his eyes wide and looked amazedly about him. He made an effort to rise, but fell back upon the rough blanket that formed his bed. He seemed to be listening. Jack, watching him, saw for the first time a glimmer of intelligence in his eyes. Through the open door came the sound of hoofs rapidly approaching. There was a strange eagerness in the man's upward gaze. The sound ceased; Pepito came into the hut, followed by a young lady and a priest fetched in hot haste from Cariñena. The former bent over the bed and looked hard at the pallid face; the latter fell on his knees and began to recite the prayers for the dying.

"José! José!" whispered Juanita; "you know me, my dear friend?"

"My mistress!" he murmured faintly.

She clasped his hand; a look of glad content shone for a brief moment in the sick man's eyes. There was a silence; then, as the light faded, came the solemn voice of Padre Consolacion:

"Domine, in manus tuas animam suam commendamus!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

Sergeant Wilkes wants to know

Mr. Lumsden and Me—Me and Mr. Lumsden—A Lady in the Case—The Pleasure of your Company—O'Hare and the Ladies—The Grampus takes Cover—The Eve of Parting—The Age Limit—Poor Mr. Dugdale!—The Question

"Want to know about the fight at Corunna, do you? Hanged if you ain't always wanting to know something. Well, attention! dress by the right! and stand easy while I endeavour to reconstruct the situation."

The scene was the quay at Lisbon; the speaker was Sergeant Wilkes; the audience was a knot of green-coated recruits who, to judge by their docility, regarded the sergeant with admiration and awe. Since he had won the three stripes Wilkes had lost nothing of his loquacity, and had, indeed, cultivated a vocabulary of words long enough to match his new importance.

"Here you are, then; that there stands for the formidable French battery at the summit of the eminence"—he placed a jack-knife on the wall before him,—"this here stands for General Disney's brigade"—he put a plug of black tobacco at a distance from the knife,—"this here stands for the Reserve of that exemplary and notorious general Ted Paget"—he ranged two pebbles to the right of the tobacco,—"and this here," taking up one of the pebbles, "is Captain O'Hare's company. Look at him well, 'cos 'twas Captain O'Hare's company, and me in it, that won the battle on that most fatal and obstrepulous day. We was a-going up the hill towards that there battery, when blowed if we didn't get variegated with a lot of French dragoons in among the farmyards. Then up comes Mr. Lumsden, and says to me, 'Corp'ril Wilkes,' he says—I was only a corp'ril then, you understand—'Corp'ril Wilkes,' he says, 'we've got to shove down that there wall and drive the mounseers out. You an' me can do it if we puts our backs into it,' says he. 'Right you are, sir,' says I, 'we'll fustigate the mounseers and extipulate them to the last individual.' Them were the words I used. Well—"

"I say, sargin," said Corporal Bates, strolling across the road, "that's a smart little craft a-spanking up the river there. Looks like a despatch-boat, eh?"

"Don't interjeculate," said Wilkes irritably. "You always must put your spoke in. I was just telling the young 'uns how Mr. Lumsden and me won the fight at Corunna; who cares for a despatch-boat?—which it ain't, but only a common sloop."

"Go on, sargin, if you please," said one of the men.

"Well, as I was saying, Mr. Lumsden and me was just a-going to shove down the wall what was intermediate between us and the mounseers when—"

"Hold hard a bit, sargin," put in Bates; "ain't that there little chap on the boat there rather like the gipsy brat what Mr. Lumsden took up with?"

"Corp'ril Bates, if you keep on interrupting your superior orficer I shall rejuce you. Gipsy brats is neither here nor there; what the young 'uns want to know is how me and Mr. Lumsden licked the French at Corunna."

"That's him; that's Pepito!" cried Bates, heedless of Wilkes' increasing irritation. "P'r'aps he'll be able to tell us what's become of his master."

Bates sheered off, and Wilkes resumed his much-interrupted narrative. He was in the middle of a very vivid description of how Mr. Lumsden and himself fought eight Frenchmen at the wall, when he became aware of a commotion at some distance along the quay. Chagrined to find the attention of his audience wandering, he stood up, exclaiming:

"What are the rampaging Vamooses at now?—hang them!"

But he saw, not Portuguese, but a number of men in the well-known green of the 95th Rifles, marching up the street, cheering vigorously. Among them, in the middle of the causeway, strode two young Spaniards, the one slim and lissom, the other broad and bulky. Both walked buoyantly, and seemed in high good-humour. Behind them, over their heads, could be seen the antic figure of Pepito, perched on Bates's shoulders, and looking as proud as a peacock. Wilkes stared at the procession as it approached, wondering to see two Spaniards with the unprecedented escort of British Riflemen. All at once he drew himself up, struck his feet together, and, just as the head of the procession reached him, brought his hand to his eyebrow in the stiff military salute. His face was a study in its successive expressions of perplexity, vexation, and pleasure.

The recruits were taken too much aback to be able to make their salute before the procession had passed.

"Who's that ragged Don you're saluting, sargin?" asked one of them.

"Who's that, you dough-faced clod-hopping chaw-bacon, you!" cried Wilkes, seizing the opportunity of venting his feelings. "Why, that's Lieutenant Jack Lumsden, him what helped me to lick the mounseers at Corunna. And I'll make it warm for Charley Bates," he muttered, "stealing a march on me like that. Why didn't I perpetrate the disguise? That's what I want to know."

Meanwhile Jack and the Grampus had continued their progress until they arrived at the head-quarters of the 95th. There, two or three subalterns were seated at an open window, to catch a breath of air from the sea, grateful on that hot June day.

"Hullo!" said Pomeroy, catching sight of the procession, "what are the rascals up to now?"

"Some mischief, you may be sure," said Smith, looking over his shoulder. "I shall be glad when we get marching orders to join Sir Arthur. The men will get horribly loose if we're here long."

"By George!" said Pomeroy, "they appear to have got two Spaniards among them. Why—what—look here, Shirley, isn't that Lumsden's boy Pepito grinning like a monkey on Bates's shoulder?"

"Eh! What? Where?" said Smith, pushing his head out. "Jehoshaphat! That fat Spaniard—ha! ha!—don't you see, you fellows?—ha! ha!—he's the Grampus, bigger than ever. Gad! I shall die of this! The Grampus in Spanish toggery!"

"And the other fellow's Jack himself!" shouted Pomeroy excitedly. "Hurrah! hurrah!"

"Sound the trumpets, beat the drums!" quoted Shirley. "Hurrah! Three cheers for Lumsden! But what am I to do with my epitaph?"

"What's all this pandemonium about?" cried a loud voice from the door of the room. "I wish you gentlemen would behave less like a pack of schoolb—"'

"Lumsden's back, sir," said Smith. "The men are escorting him up the street."

"Good gad!" ejaculated Colonel Beckwith. Then, without more ado, he caught up Smith's cap from the table, stuck it on his head, and ran downstairs buttoning up his jacket on the way. He reached the door just in time to meet Jack before he entered.

"'Pon my honour—how d'e do?—glad to see you, hang it! You're not dead, then, after all?"

"Not a bit, sir," said Jack, heartily returning his handgrip. "Come to report myself, sir."

"Good gad! What a—what a villainous brigand you look! But we'll soon put that right. 'Pon my honour, I am deuced glad to see you."

The colonel shook hands again, and for some minutes Jack's arm was going up and down like a pump handle as he returned the greetings of his old friends, who meanwhile volleyed questions at him with clamorous excitement.

"Uncommonly kind of you fellows," he panted, "but if you'll excuse me—"

"Not a bit of it," cried Smith. "Excuse you, indeed!"

"No, begad," said the colonel. "You'll come in and let us drink your health—three times three. Come along."

"Most happy, sir, if you'll just allow me five or six minutes. The fact is, there's a lady on board, and—"

"Good gad! A lady!"

"And I came to get a coach to fetch her."

"Of course. A lady! My barouche is at your service. Here, Ogbourne, bring the barouche round in two minutes, for Mr. Lumsden.—Used to be your man, I think; a useful fellow.—Hang me! I must go and find Captain O'Hare."

Not many minutes later the subalterns at the window were as much surprised as interested to see the colonel's heavy rumbling chariot draw up at a house almost exactly opposite.

"I say, you fellows," cried Smith, "get out of sight. We don't want the lady to think we're a lot of peeping Toms."

"She's probably as old as your grandmother," said Pomeroy, "and long past blushing. Still—"

Consequently, when Juanita and her old duenna stepped out of the coach and entered the opposite house, there were no spectators of the scene. But when Jack returned to head-quarters he was instantly the mark of a running fire of questions. His fellow-officers, from the colonel downwards, were consumed with curiosity to know whether she was young or old, tall or short, dark or fair; where he had found her; what was her name. Shirley eagerly asked whether she was the famous Maid of Saragossa; Pomeroy was boiling with impatience because the Grampus had absolutely refused to give any information.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," cried Jack, "I can't attend to you all at once. The lady is the Señorita Juanita Alvarez, daughter of my father's old partner, on her way to England, and the friend with whom she is staying has invited the officers of my company to dinner to-morrow, so that if you care to go I'll introduce you en bloc."

"Bedad now," said Captain O'Hare, "that's mighty perlite. I must practise my best bow, and get my hair cut. 'Tis a powerful pity pigtails are just gone out of fashion, for sure I always looked killing in a pigtail. Ah well!"

"Come, Mr. Lumsden," said the colonel, "the Señorita has driven you out of our heads. What have you been doing with yourself? We learnt when Mr. Frere came home that you had gone to Saragossa, and not a man of us expected to see you again. Ogbourne, get some tumblers, and we'll do the honours."

It was late before the meeting broke up, and then not one of the company was satisfied. Jack had given them, indeed, a full and interesting account of the siege of Saragossa in general, but he appeared to be woefully lacking in detailed information about his own part in it. He was not so affectedly modest as to conceal the facts that Palafox had entrusted him with the defence of a certain district, and that the district was still in Spanish hands when the siege ended; but of the weeks of ceaseless work, unresting vigilance and anxious thought which had purchased his success he said never a word. Colonel Beckwith watched him closely as he told his story, and at its conclusion made a brief comment which gave him a thrill of pleasure.

"Gentlemen," he said, rising, "I speak for you all when I say that we're glad to have Lumsden back at the mess. There are big gaps in his story which somebody has to fill; but we don't want 'em filled to know that he's been an honour to the British army, and a credit to the Rifles. I give you Mr. Lumsden!"

When the cheers that followed the toast had died away, Jack on his side was eager to learn what had brought his old friends back to the Peninsula. Hearing that a new campaign was opening under Sir Arthur Wellesley, his face clouded for a moment.

"Sure an' ye've done enough for glory," said Captain O'Hare, noticing the expression, "and there's never a doubt

the colonel will let ye go home to your sorrowing mother,—not to speak of escorting the colleen."

Jack blushed.

"Thank 'ee!" he said, "but I'm not going to run away from the regiment. Have you got a uniform to spare?"

"What, aren't ye in love then? Sure an' when I was your age I was desp'rately in love with half a dozen at once—the milkmaid, and the doctor's daughter, and the girl in the haberdasher's in Sackville Street, and a lot more."

"I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more,"

quoted Shirley lugubriously.

"Honour, bedad! That's what I said to Patsy O'Dowd when she taxed me with making eyes at Honour O'Grady, and she boxed my ears,—and Patsy had a powerful heavy hand, begore. And if ye're not afraid of someone cutting you out—Mr. Dugdale, for instance ... By the way, is he going home too?"

"Not a doubt of that, sir," said the Grampus himself. "Amateuring isn't such fun as you'd think; why, I had to peel the onions till the Frenchman came! I'm sick of it; and I'm going home to practise doctoring on a new plan."

"What's that about onions?" called Colonel Beckwith from the head of the table.

The Grampus proceeded to relate his capture by the guerrilleros, and to expatiate on various little grievances incident to his state of bondage, which the company appeared to find vastly entertaining. This want of sympathy with his misadventures nettled even the good-natured Grampus, who became more and more red and indignant, until at length he burst out:

"Well, at any rate I did some good, and that was no laughing matter. If it hadn't been for me they'd have tortured some scores of poor devils of Frenchmen that Lumsden bagged—so there!"

"Story! story!" was shouted round the table.

"You must get Lumsden to tell you that. He caught 'em; but 'twas a speech I made saved 'em from being fried or boiled or something."

"Now, Lumsden, fill up that gap," said the colonel.

Seeing that there was no help for it, Jack gave a brief account of his adventure with the commissary's party at Morata, awarding a due meed of praise to Antonio the guerrilla captain.

"He was a good sort," he added, "quite mild-mannered for a Spaniard. None of them knew a word of English, and he complained that his men had been roused to fury against the prisoners by the violent harangue of the English senior. He could hardly hold them."

"Oh, come now!" expostulated Dugdale. "I didn't know Spanish, but I made myself clear enough."

"Exactly," said Jack; "when you pointed to your throat and then to the fire, the poor simple guerrilleros were only in doubt as to whether you meant roasting or garrotting."

A roar of laughter completed the Grampus's discomfiture.

"Bet you—" he began in desperation; but finding himself unable to state a wager that would meet the case, he buried his face in a tankard, from which it took a considerable time to emerge.

Next day it was a quiet and subdued group that crossed to the house opposite. Captain O'Hare was unmistakeably nervous, Pomeroy self-consciously gorgeous, and Shirley pale with sitting up late the previous night over a Spanish grammar, conjugating the verb Amor in all its moods and tenses. The Grampus took his revenge in chaffing them, and they all grunted approval when Captain O'Hare exclaimed:

"Bedad, if 'twas on Shannon's shore 'tis meself that would be at home, but 'tis a mighty different thing meeting a Spanish lady on the banks of the Taylus without a word of the lingo to turn a compliment."

But they were agreeably surprised when, after being welcomed in broken English by their portly and amiable Portuguese hostess, they were greeted in the same tongue, spoken with the prettiest accent imaginable, by a charming young señorita. Her beauty made an instant and visible impression on Captain O'Hare's susceptible soul.

The dinner was long remembered and talked of by the officers of O'Hare's company. There was a numerous party, Spanish, Portuguese, and English. Jack was unwillingly the hero of the evening, and the flattering attentions paid him would have been still more embarrassing had he not been so preoccupied in watching Juanita, who appeared to him in a quite unaccustomed light. He had admired her courage during the dark days of the siege; he had got an inkling even then of the essential brightness of her temperament; but he was hardly prepared for her perfect ease and self-possession, the vivacity of her conversation, and her social tact. He felt an inexplicable sinking at the heart; Juanita seemed to be farther away from him than at any time since he had first met her in Saragossa. They had been frank comrades during the hazardous journey across country to the coast, and the delightful voyage that had just closed their adventures, and under stress of circumstances Jack had for so long taken the lead that it was a sort of awakening to find that she was now independent of his counsel and protection. Moreover, she was going to England. He had intended to go with her, but the return of his regiment had altered all that. Till this moment he had not realized what a separation might really mean. He felt that they were at the parting of the ways.

It was from Juanita's lips that his brother officers heard the full story of his work in Saragossa, and after. Simply, without exaggeration, yet glowingly, she described how, with unfailing resource, he had met and frustrated all the attacks of the French on his little garrison and kept the flag flying to the last. Captain O'Hare followed her story with unwavering interest. He was not the man to praise lightly. Indeed, it was not the custom in that age of hard fighters to scatter vain compliments; his subalterns were therefore the more deeply impressed when, in a pause, he turned to Juanita and said in a tone vibrant with earnestness:

"By my faith, Señorita, yours is a story of which every soldier, British or Spanish, may be proud. I honour your countrymen and countrywomen for their glorious defence of Saragossa—there is nothing finer that I know in all history. And we British officers are proud to think that one of ours, one of the 95th, is among the heroes of the siege. We all try to do our duty; few of us get the chance, like my friend Lumsden, of doing so much more than our mere duty; and by my soul, if we do get the chance, I only hope we'll make as good a use of it."

Jack, who had spent a most uncomfortable half-hour, was greatly relieved when the ladies withdrew. But his troubles were not over, for Captain O'Hare, resuming the brogue which had disappeared during his late outburst, said with a chuckle:

"By Vanus and all the Graces, 'tis a lucky thing for you, you young scamp, that Peter O'Hare is not fifteen years younger. 'Tis meself would have tried a fall wid ye—ay, and come in at a canter. Indeed an' I'm not sure 'tis too late even now. She was mighty civil to me at dinner, indeed she was."

The worthy captain laughed heartily, and turned to make himself agreeable, in halting French, to a colonel of Portuguese artillery.

"Hang it, Lumsden," said Pomeroy, "I call it a crying shame, that merely because a man happens to patter a little Spanish he should not only be shoved over the heads of better men than himself, but cut out more presentable ones with the jolliest girl I've seen this end of the Bay."

Jack smiled and held his peace.

"I say, you fellows," said Shirley, "give me a rhyme for Saragossa, someone. I've just knocked off a little gem of a thing—'Lines to J—a A—z', but hang me if I can tag the last of 'em."

"A good job too!" said Smith. "The whole company seems to be moonstruck. 'Pon my word, I believe I'm the only one of you that can keep his head."

"Ah," said the Grampus with a capacious sigh, "'tisn't the head, it's the heart!" There was a general laugh at his

lugubrious accent; whereupon, with a sudden return to everyday life, he cried: "And I'll bet you, Harry George Wakelyn Smith, you're one of the first to find it out."

Smith snorted scornfully. He little imagined that long before the war was over he would himself meet the lovely Spanish damsel in distress who was to become Lady Smith of Aliwal and give her name to a certain little town, the Saragossa of South Africa.

Jack, who had taken his comrades' good-humoured banter with unfailing cheerfulness, now slipped away to join the ladies in the sala. When he entered the room, he noticed at once a deeper flush than usual on Juanita's cheeks, and felt that something was amiss. It was some little time before he could escape the renewed attentions of the circle. Then, seating himself beside Juanita, he said anxiously:

"Is anything wrong, Juanita?"

"Wrong! No, of course not. Why should anything be wrong?"

She turned her head away, and tapped her hand impatiently with her fan. Jack, noting the flush on her cheek, felt uneasily that her manner belied her words.

"I don't know," he said. "I was afraid there was something. I wanted to tell you, Juanita, that—that—well, things have changed, you know. There is to be another campaign; I shall have to march with the regiment. There's no help for it. I can't go back to England—not yet."

"I knew; I was told it—by somebody else."

There was that in her tone which made Jack wish that he had told her earlier of what his unexpected meeting with his old comrades must inevitably involve. He had shrunk from the explanation—he did not quite know why.

After a moment's silence she added slowly: "I am sorry for Mr. Dugdale; he will have a lonely journey, I fear, and he's so very fond of company."

"Lonely! But you get on very well together."

"Oh yes! I like Mr. Dugdale very much, but you see—I shall not be there. I have made up my mind, quite decided, not to go after all. England is a cold, foggy, horrid country, and I'm sure I shouldn't like the English. I ought never to have come so far." She rose from her seat. "I will go back to the dear Sisters at Cariñena."

As she moved towards the balcony at the far end of the room, Jack caught the sparkle of tears in her eyes. He felt that he must be in fault; how or why he could not tell, and he was too much perturbed at Juanita's distress to think the matter out. He merely followed her. When they reached the balcony they stood for a few moments silent in the twilight, looking with unseeing eyes at the dim plaza below. There was a murmur of voices from the dusk, at first vague and indistinct, the words gradually stealing upon their consciousness with clearer and clearer meaning.

"There he was, poor little beggar, crying his eyes out. 'Ogbourne,' says I, 'what's amiss with Pepito?' 'Oh!' says he, 'crying for the moon. He wants to go with the Spanish señorita and stay with Mr. Lumsden at the same time; which ain't possible.' 'Well,' says I, 'I ain't so sure o' that. They do say he rescued her from old Boney himself and from a rascally Don too—yes, and they say she's main fond of him, which is only natural—considering.'"

Even in the dusk Jack, stealing a look at Juanita, saw that she had flushed hotly. As she half-turned to re-enter the room, he imprisoned the little hand that lay on the balustrade. She did not draw it away.

"But," continued the insistent voice, "what I want to know is, when's it to be?—that's what I want to know."

Glossary of Spanish Words

adelante, forward! come in!

adios, adieu.

afrancesado, a Spaniard who had accepted the French domination.

agua, water.

alcalde, mayor, chief magistrate.

alguazil, constable, guard.

amigo, friend.

arriero, muleteer, carrier.

ay de mí, alas! woe is me!

azucarillo, a confection of paste, sugar, and rose-water.

bergantin, brig.

bien, well.

bueno, good: *buenos días*, good-morning; *buenas noches*,

good-night; *buenas tardes*, good-afternoon.

caballero, rider, gentleman, cavalier.

calle, street.

caramba, an exclamation.

casa, house.

cebolla, onion.

cerro, hill.

chorizo, spiced sausage.

cigarillo, a small cigar, whiff.

con, with.

contessa, countess.

contrabandista, smuggler.

copa, cup, goblet.

coso, wide thoroughfare.

cuchillo, knife.

cura, parish priest, parson.

dia, day: *buenos días*, good-morning.

Dios, God: *Vaya usted con Dios* (lit. go with God), good-bye.

don, a title, equivalent to esquire.

doña, a title, equivalent to madam.

el, *la**, the.

España, Spain.

fonda, inn.

garbanzo, a species of bean.

gaspacho, a compound of vegetables and condiments.

gitano, gipsy.

gracias, thanks.

guerrillero, an irregular warrior, member of a guerrilla band.

hidalgo, nobleman.

hombre, man, a common mode of address to inferiors.

javaneja, an old-fashioned dance.

junta, council.

mañana, to-morrow.

Maragato, one of a race of mingled Gothic and Moorish blood, inhabiting a district in N. W. Spain.

**maravedi*, the smallest Spanish coin.

marchesa, marchioness.

mareamiento, sea-sickness.

mi, mio, mia, my.

muchas, many.

noche, night: *buenas noches*, good-night.

nuestra, our.

padre, father.

pan, bread.

patio, courtyard, characteristic of the better Spanish houses.

patron, landlord.

peseta, silver coin worth about tenpence.

plaza, square, open space: *Plaza Mayor*, great square.

par, by.

porta, gate.

posada, tavern, inn.

puchero, a sort of hot-pot.

qué hay de nuevo? what news?

querida, darling.

quien, who: *quien vive?* who goes there?

regidor, alderman.

sala, hall, drawing-room.

san, santo, santa, saint.

señor, sir, a title used in addressing equals or superiors.

señora, madam, lady.

señorita, miss, young lady.

sí, yes.

silencio, hush! silence!

tarde, afternoon.

tia, aunt.

tio, uncle.

tirador, sharpshooter.

usted, you.

valiente, brave, valiant.

vamos, come along!

vaya, go: *vaya usted con Dios* (lit. go with God), good-bye.

venta, small wayside inn.

verdaderamente, verily, indeed.

viva, hurrah! long live!

vive: *quien vive?* who goes there?

[The end of Boys of the Light Brigade: A Story of Spain and the Peninsular War by Ely, George Herbert]