THE FIREBRAND — A STORY OF THE EARLY CARLIST UPRISING.

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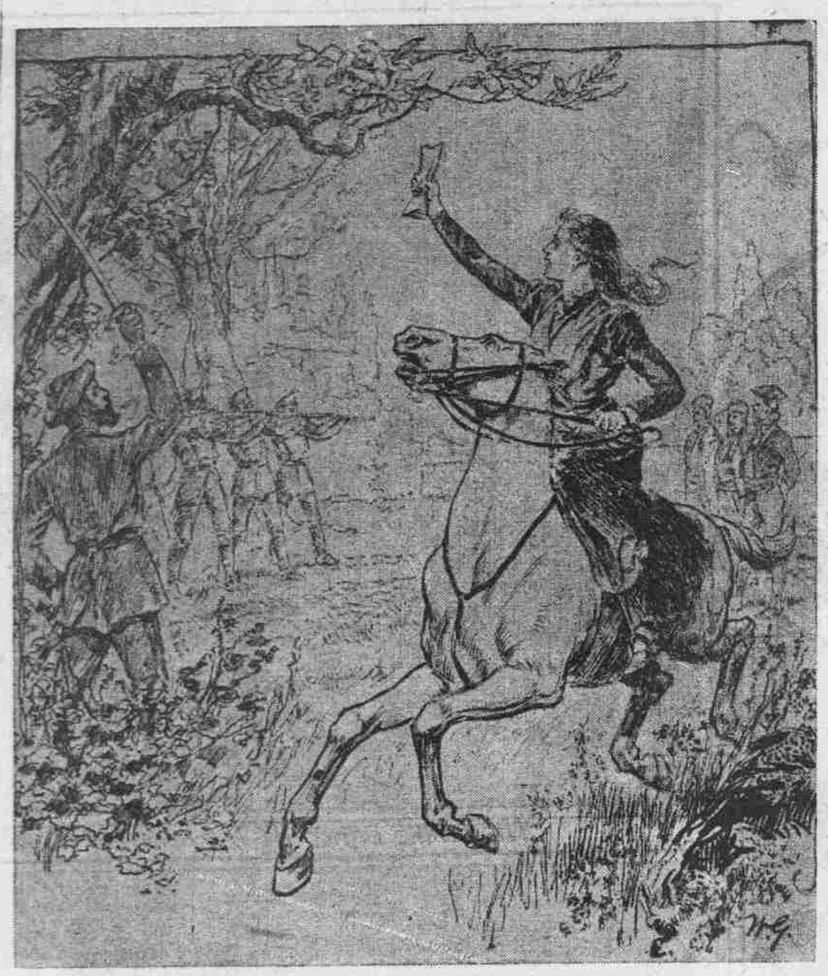
Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

Ramon Garcia, known as El Sarria, having been induced to believe that his wife, Dolores, is unfaithful, stabs a village lop, Rafael Flores, whom he finds presumably kissing Dolores through the window. His estates are confiscated and he becomes a hunted man. At the same time a young Scotch adventurer, Rollo Blair, comes to Spain, and, during an inn quarrel, is aided by John Mortimer, an Englishman. The two start to visit Don Baltasar, abbot of the monastery of Montblanch. Blair and Mortimer are entertained lavishly by the abbot, and meet Etienne St. Pierre, a French gallant, who is studying for holy orders. These three, with El Sarria, who has found protection at the monastery, are commissioned by the abbot to capture the Queen Regent and her little daughter, in the interests of the church. En route for the camp of Cabrera, the Carlist General, they pass the home of El Sarria, who learns that Dolores was not false to him, and that his downfall was plotted by Luis Fernandez. Dolores is imprisoned in Luis' home, and the son to whom she had just given birth is about to be buried alive by Luis' brother, Tomas, when El Sarria falls upon him. El Sarria rescues his child and takes it to the Convent of the Holy Innocents, where Concha is immured. Then, aided by Rollo Blair, he circumvents Fernandez and finds Dolores. Blair and his companions are surprised and captured by General Cabrera, and they cannot prove their connection with the Carlist cause, because Blair was forced to leave his credentials at the convent with Concha, as indorsement for his standing as a Carlist. They are sentenced to be shot at daybreak.



"THEY ARE NOT TRAITORS. HERE ARE THEIR PAPERS," CRIED SHE.

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CHAPTER XXI.

The Carlist soldiers conducted Rollo and his three friends to the granary of the Mill House, where they were permitted to recline as best they might upon the various piles of grain heaped here and there in preparation for the work of the morrow.

Rollo and el Sarria were placed at one side of the granary and at the other Etienne and John Mortimer lay at full length upon a heap of corn. Between paced a sentry with musket and bayonet.

As before, owing to the position of Sarria among its mountains, the night fell keen and chill. The Carlists slept and snored, all save the double guards placed over the prisoners.

"Shall we try a rush? Is it any use?" whispered Rollo to el Sarria.

The outlaw silently shook his head. He had long ago considered the position and knew that it was impossible.

Cast back upon his own thoughts, Rollo reviewed many things, his short life, the reckless ups and downs in which he had spent it—but all without remorse or regret.

"I might have been a lawyer and lived to 100!" he said to himself. "It is better as it is. If I have done little good, perhaps I have not had time to do a great deal of harm."

Then very contentedly he curled himself up to sleep as best he might, only dreamily wondering if little Concha would be sorry when she heard.

Ramon Garcia sat with his eyes fixed on the sentry who had ceased his to-and-fro tramp up the center, and now leaned gloomily against the wall, his hands crossed about the crossbar of his sword bayonet.

Rollo was not wholly comfortable on his couch of grain. The bonds about his feet galled him, having been more tightly drawn than those of his companions in virtue of his chiefship. Nevertheless, he got a good deal of sleep and each time that he awoke it seemed to him that el Sarria was staring harder at the sentry and that the man had moved a little nearer.

At last, turning his head a little to one side, he heard distinctly the low murmur of voices.

"Do you remember Pancorbo?" said Ramon Garcia.

Rollo could not hear the answer, but he caught the outlaw's next question.

"And have you forgotten el Sarria, who, having a certain Miguelite under the point of his knife, let him go for his sweetheart's sake, because she was waiting for him down in the valley?"

The sentry's reply was again inaudible, but Rollo was fully awake now. Ramon Garcia had not abandoned hope, and why should he? When there was anything to be done none could be so alert as Rollo Blair.

"I am el Sarria, the outlaw," Ramon went on, "and these are my companions. We are no traitors, but good Carlists to a man. Our papers are——"

Here the words were spoken so low that Rollo could not hear more, but the next moment he was nudged by Ramon on the leg.

"Write a note to Concha Cabezos, telling her to bring the papers here at once, if she would save our lives. You are sure she is faithful?"

"I am sure," said Rollo, who really had no reason for his confidence, except the truth of her eyes.

Then the young man, turning his back upon the dozing guard in the stone window-sill, wrote with some difficulty the following note, lying on his back and using the uneven floor of the granary for a desk:

"Little Concha," it ran, "we are General Cabrera's prisoners. Bring the papers as soon as you receive this. Otherwise, we are to be shot at daybreak.

"ROLLO BLAIR."

There was still a little space left upon the leaf of Alcoy paper, and with a half-shamefaced glance at el Sarria, he added: "And in any case do not wholly forget R. B."

He passed the note to the outlaw, who folded it to the size of a postage stamp, and apparently gave directions where and to whom it was to be delivered.

"In half an hour we shall be relieved, and I will go," said the Carlist ex-Miguelite, and resumed his steady tramp.

Rollo fell asleep again. And so soundly this time that he only woke to consciousness when a soldier in a white boina pulled roughly at his elbow and ordered him to get up.

All about the granary the Carlists were stamping feet, pulling on boots and flapping arms.

"It is a cold morning to be shot in," said the man, with rough kindliness, "but I will get you some hot chocolate in a moment. That will warm your blood for you, and in any case you will have a quick passage. I will pick you a firing party of the best shots in the three provinces. The General will be here in a quarter of an hour, and the sun will rise in another quarter. One is just as punctual as the other. A cigarette? Thank you. Well, you are a cool hand! I'm off to see about the chocolate."

And Rollo Blair, with a slight singing in his ears and an emptiness about the pit of his stomach, stood on his feet, critically rolling a cigarette in a leaf of Etienne's aloey paper.

John Mortimer said nothing, but looked after the man who had gone for the chocolate.

"I wish it had been coffee," he said, "chocolate is always bad for my digestion." Then he smiled a little grimly.

Etienne was secretly fingering his beads. And El Sarria thought with satisfaction of the safety of Dolores. He had given up hope of Concha a full hour ago. The ex-Miguelite had doubtless again played the traitor.

They were led down the stairway one by one, and as they passed through the ground floor, thick with its woolly coating of gray flour dust, a trumpet blew without, and they heard the trampling of horses in the courtyard.

"Quick!" said a voice at Rollo's elbow, "here is your chocolate. Nothing like it for strengthening the knee joints at a time like this. I've seen men die on wine and on rum and on brandy. But for me, give me a cup of chocolate as good as that when my time comes!"

Rollo drank the thick, sweet, strengthening stuff to the accompaniment of clattering hoofs and jingling accouterments.

"Come," said the voice again, "give me the cup. Do not keep the General waiting. He is in no good temper this morning, and we are to march immediately."

The young man stepped out of the mill door into the crisp chilliness of the dawn. All the east was a glory of blood-red cloud, and for the second time Rollo and his companions stood face to face with General Cabrera.

It was within a quarter of an hour of the sun rising.

CHAPTER XXII.

It was, as the soldier had said truly, a cold morning to be shot in. But the Carlists, accustomed to Cebrera's summary methods, appeared to think but little of the matter and jested as the firing parties were selected and drawn out.

"To the garden," whispered Luis Fernadez to Cabrera.

"To the garden!" commanded the General, lighting a new cigarette and puffing vigorously. "And at this point I may as well bid you good-by, gentlemen. I wish our acquaintance had been pleasanter. But the fortune of war, gentlemen!

Not one of them uttered a word. John Mortimer, seeing there was now no chance of making his thousand pounds, set an example of unbending dignity. He knew that the eyes of many were upon him, and he resolved not to shame the performance.

Etienne faced his death like the son of an ancient race and a good Catholic. He could not have a confessor, but he said his prayers, committed his soul to God and the Virgin, and faced the black muzzles not greatly abashed.

As for el Sarria, death was his metier, his familiar friend. He had lived with him for years as a man with a wife, rising up and lying down, eating and breathing in his company. Dolores and her babe were safe. He asked no more.

And not less readily fell into line Rollo Blair. The young Scot clicked his heels together as if on parade and strode out with head erect and squared shoulders in the rear of his companions.

The four men stood in order, Mortimer and Etienne in the middle, with slim Rollo and the giant Ramon towering on either flank.

"Load with ball—at six paces—make ready!"

The officer's commands rang out with a certain haste, for he could already hear the clattering of the horses of the General's cavalcade, and he knew that if upon his arrival he had not carried out his orders he might expect a severe reprimand.

But it was not the General's suite that rode so furiously. The sound came from a contrary direction. Two horses were being ridden at speed, and at sight of the four men set in order against the wall the foremost rider sank her spurs into her white mare and dashed forward with a wild cry.

The officer already had his sword raised in the air, the falling of which was to be the signal for the volley of death. But it did not fall. Something in the aspect of the rider as she swept up parallel with the low garden wall, her hair floating disordered about her shoulders, her eyes black and shining like stars, the sheaf of paper she waved in her hand, all compelled him to suspend that last irrevocable order.

It was Concha Cabezos who came when the eleventh hour was long past, and leaped from her reeking horse opposite the place of execution. With her, wild-haired as a Maenad, rode La Giralda, cross-legged like a man.

"General Cabrera! Where is General Cabrera?" cried Concha. "I must see him instantly. These are no traitors. They are true men and in the service of Don Carlos. Here are the papers!"

"Where is Ramon Cabrera? Tell me quickly!" cried La Giralda. "I have news for him. I was with his mother when she died. Let me see Ramon Cabrera, whom of old I suckled at my breasts!"

Round the angle of the Mill House swept the General and his staff, brilliant in scarlet and white, heightened by the glitter of abundant gold lace.

As his eyes fell on the row of men, dark against the dusky adobe of the garden wall, and on the two pale women, a dark frown overspread his face.

"What is the meaning of this?" he cried. "Why have you not obeyed your instructions? Why are these men not dead?"

The officer trembled and began an explanation, pointing to Concha and La Giralda, both of whom stood for a moment motionless. Then, flinging herself over the low wall of the garden, as if her years had more nearly approached 17 than 70, La Giralda caught the great man by the stirrup.

"Little Ramon, Ramon Cabrera," she cried, "have you forgotten your old nurse, La Giralda of Seville, your mother's gossip, your own playmate?"

The General turned full upon her, with the quick, indignant threat of one who considers himself duped in his countenance. It had gone ill with La Giralda, if she had not been able to prove her case, but she held something in her hand, the sight of which brought the Butcher of Tortosa down from his saddle as quickly as if a Christino bullet had pierced him to the heart.

"My mother's rosary!" he cried, and sinking on his knees, he devoutly received and kissed it. He abode thus a moment looking up to the sky—he, the man who had waded in blood during six years of bitter warfare.

"And these—" said Cabrera. "Do you know these dogs, La Giralda?"

La Giralda drew a quick breath. Would the hold she had over him be sufficient for what she was about to ask?

"These are no traitors, General," she said; "they are true men and deep in the councils of the cause."

She bent and whispered in his ear words which others could not hear. The face of the Carlist General darkened from a dull pink to purple, and then his color ebbed away to a ghastly ashen white as he listened.

For La Giralda was telling him the tale of his mother's shooting by Nogueras.

Then, all suddenly, he reseated himself, and beckoned to Concha.

"Come hither," he said, "let me see these fellows' papers and tell me how they came into your hands."

Concha was ready.

"The senor, the tall stranger, had a mission to the lady superior of the convent," she began. "From Donna Balthasar Varela it was, prior of the great Carlist monastery of Montblanch. He trusted his papers into her hands as a guarantee of his loyalty and good faith, and here they are."

Concha flashed them from her bosom and laid them in the General's hands. Mostly Cabrera was blind to female charms, but upon this occasion his eye rested with pleasure on the quick and subtle grace of the Andaluce.

"Then you are a nun?" he queried, looking sharply at her figure and dress.

"Ah, no," smiled Concha, thinking with some hopefulness that she was at least to have a hearing, "I am not even a lay sister. The good lady superior had need of a housekeeper—one who should be both free of the convent and yet able to transact business without the walls."

Cabrera looked at the papers. There was a Carlist commission in the name of Don Rollo Blair duly made out, a letter from General Ello, chief of the staff, commending all the four by name and description to all good servants of Don Carlos as trustworthy servants engaged on a dangerous and secret mission. Most of all, however, he seemed to be impressed with the ring belonging to Etienne, with its revolving gem and concealed portrait of Carlos the Fifth.

He placed it on his finger and, gazing intently, demanded to whom it belonged. As soon as he understood, he summoned the little Frenchman to his presence. Etienne came at the word, calm as usual, and twirling his mustache in the manner of Rollo.

"This is your ring?" he demanded of the prisoner. Concha tried to catch Etienne's eye to signal to him that he must give Cabrera that upon which his fancy had lighted. But her former lover stubbornly avoided her eye.

"This is my ring," he answered drily, after a cursory inspection of the article in question, as it lay in the palm of the guerrillero's hand.

"It is very precious to you?" asked the Butcher of Tortosa, suggestively.

"It was given to me by my cousin, the King," answered Etienne, briefly.

"Then I presume you do not care to part with it?" said Cabrera, turning it about on his finger and holding it this way and that to the light.

"Will you give it to me?" he said, still admiring it as it flashed upon his finger.

Etienne looked at the General calmly from head to foot.

"No," said Etienne, coolly. "You see, my cousin might not give me another."

But the Butcher of Tortosa could be as simple and direct in his methods as even Rollo himself.

"What has that to do with the matter?" growled Cabrera, who was losing his temper.

"This," said Etienne, who had been waiting his opportunity. "You are welcome to the jewel—after I am dead. But if I am to live, I shall require it for myself."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Cabrera bit his lip for a moment, frowned still more darkly, and then—burst into a roar of laughter.

Among the letters which had formed part of Rollo's credentials there was one superscribed, "To be opened in the camp of General Cabrera."

Cabrera dismissed the firing party with a wave of his hand, the officer exchanging an encouraging nod with Rollo. Then he summoned that young man to approach. Rollo saluted the General with his usual self-possession.

"Well, Colonel," said the latter, "I little thought to exchange civilities with you again, but you have to thank this young lady. The fortune of war once more. But if young men will entrust precious papers to pretty girls they must have a fund of gratitude upon which to draw—that is, when the ladies arrive in time. On this occasion it was most exactly done. Yet you must have lived through some very crowded moments while you faced the muzzles of yonder rifles." And he pointed to the lane down which the firing party was defiling.

Rollo bowed, but did not reply, awaiting the General's pleasure. Presently Cabrera, recollecting the sealed letter in his hand, gave it unopened to the youth.

"There," he said, "that I see is to be opened in the camp of General Cabrera. Well—where Cabrera is there is his camp. Open it, and let me see what it contains."

"I will, General," said the young Scot, "in so far, that is, as it concerns your excellency."

The Carlist General sat watching Rollo keenly as the Scot broke the seal and discovered a couple of inclosures. One was sealed and the other open. The first he presented to Cabrera, who, observing the handwriting of the superscription, changed color. Meanwhile, without paying any attention to him, Rollo read his own communication from beginning to end. It ran as follows:

"To the man who shall be chosen by our trusted Councillor for the mission extraordinary in the service of Carlos Quinto—these:

"You will receive from General Cabrera such succor and assistance as may seem to you needful in pursuance of the project you have in hand, namely, the capturing of the young Queen Isabella, together with her mother, the so-called Regent Christina. Thereafter you will bring them with all diligence to within our lines, observing all the respect and courtesy due to their exalted rank and to the sex to which they belong.

"At the same time you are held indemnified for all killings of such as may stand in your way in the execution of the duty laid upon you, and by order of the King himself you hereby take rank as a full Colonel in his service."

Meanwhile, Cabrera had been bending his brows over the note which had been directed to him. He arose and paced the length of the garden wall with the letter in his hand, while Rollo stood his ground with an unmoved countenance. Presently he stopped opposite the young man and stood regarding him intently.

"I am to furnish you with men for this venture," he said; "good—but I am at liberty to prove you first. That you are cool and brave I know. We must find out whether you are loyal as well."

"I am as loyal as any Spaniard who ever drew breath," retorted Rollo, hotly, "and in this matter I will answer for my companions as well——"

"I am no unfriend to plainness, sir, either in speech or action," said Cabrera. "I see you are, indeed, a brave fellow and will not lessen the King's chances of coming to his own by letting you loose on the men under my command. Still, for one day you will not object to ride with us."

Rollo colored highly.

"General," he said, "I will not conceal it from you that I have wasted too much time already; but if you wish for our assistance in your designs for 24 hours, I am not the man to deny you."

"I thought not," said Cabrera, much pleased, "and now have you any business to dispatch before we leave this place? If so, let it be seen to at once."

"None, Excellency," said Rollo, "save that if you are satisfied of our good faith I should like to see Luis Fernandez, the miller, dealt with according to his deserts."

"I will have him shot instantly," cried Cabrera. "He has given false tidings to his Majesty's Generals. He hath belied his honest servants. Guard, bring Luis Fernandez hither!"

This was rather more than Rollo had bargained for. He was already mediatating an appeal for milder measures, when the guard returned with the news that Luis Fernandez was nowhere to be found. Dwelling house, strong room, mill, garden and gorge beneath—all had been searched.

"The rascal has escaped," cried Cabrera, full of rage. "Have I not told you a thousand times you keep no watch? Well, set a torch to it and see if he is lurking anywhere about the crevices like a centipede in a crack."

Cabrera felt that he had wasted a great deal of time on a fine morning without shooting somebody, and it would certainly have gone ill with Don Luis or his brother if either of them had been compelled by the flames to issue forth from the burning Mill House of Sarria.

But they were not there. The cur dogs of the village and a few half-starved mongrels that followed the troops had great sport worrying the rats which darted continually from the burning granaries. But of the more important human rats no sign.

All the inhabitants of the village were there, likewise held back from plundering by the bayonets of the Carlist troops. They stood recounting to each other the stores of clothes, the silk curtains, the uncut pieces of broadcloth, the household linen, the great eight-day clocks, in their gilt ormolu case. Every woman had something to add to the catalogue. Every householder felt keenly the injustice of permitting so much wealth to be given to the crackling flames.

Suddenly Cabreba turned upon them.

"Hearken ye villagers of Sarria," he cried. "I have burned the home of a traitor. If I hear of any shelter being granted to Luis Fernandez or his brother within your bounds, I swear by the honor of my mother that on my return I will burn every house within your walls and shoot every man of you capable of bearing arms. You have heard of Ramon Cabrera? Let that be enough."

CHAPTER XXIV.

The change in the aspect of affairs would have made a greater difference to most companies of adventurers than it did to that of which Master Rollo Blair, of Blair Castle, in the Shire of Fife, was the leader. In the mornig they had all risen with the expectation of being shot with the sun rising. At 10 o'clock they were speeding southward on good horses holding acknowledged rank and position in the Army of the Only Catholic and Religious Sovereign.

It was not without sadness that Rollo looked his last on the whites walls of the convent of the Holy Innocents. He was glad, indeed, to have placed Dolores in safety—glad that she and her child were together, and that the god sisters were responsible for them. Between them the four had made up a purse to be sent back by Concha to the Mother Superior to be applied for the behoof of her guests till the better days should come and Ramon Garcia be able to claim his wife and first-born son.

But Concha had refused point-blank.

"The babe came through the wicket. The mother arrived by night a fugitive asking pity—"like the Virgin fleeing down to Egypt in the pictures," said Concha. "The convent needs no alms nor does the Lady Superior sell her help. Keep your money, lads. If I am not a fool, you will need it more than the sisterhood of the Holy Innocents before you come to your journey's end."

And with that she blew them each a dainty kiss, distinguishing no one above the other, dropped a courtesy to the General, whose eyes followed her with more than usual interest, leaped on her white mare and rode off, attended by La Giralda, riding astride like a man, in the same fashion in which she had arrived.

So little Concha was gone from his sight, and duty loomed up suddenly gaunt and void of interest before Rollo.

It was not long before Cabrera dropped back, that he might talk over ways and means with the young Colonel. It was clear that the guerrilla chieftain did not believe greatly in the project.

"I do not understand all this," he said. "It is not my way. What have we to do with taking women and children prisoners? Let us have no truck, barter or exchange with the Government at Madrid except at the point of the bayonet. That is my way of it, and if my advice had been taken before, my master would at this moment have been in the Royal Palace of his ancestors. But these secret embassies in the hands of foreigners—what good can come of them?"

Rollo explained such things as the Abbot of Montblanch had made clear to him, namely, that the Regent and her daughter were by no means adverse to Holy Church nor yet eager to keep the true King out of his own. But they were in power of unscrupulous men—Mendiazabal, Linares and others, who, for their own ends, published edicts and compelled the ladies to sign them. If they were captured and sequested for their own good, the ministry would break down and Don Carlos would reign undisturbed.

Rollo thought the exposition a marvel of clearness and point. It was somewhat disappointing, therefore, when he had finished, to hear from Cabrera the unmoved declaration: "A Christino is a Christino, whether in the palace of Madrid or on the mountain of Morello. And the quickest way is the best way with such a one, wherever met with."

"But, you do not mean to say that you would shoot the girl Queen or the mother Regent, if they fell into your hands?" cried Rollo, aghast at the horror.

The deep, underlying anger leaped up fiery red into the eyes of the guerrilla chief.

"Aye, that would I," he cried, "as quickly as they slew my own old mother in the barrack yard of Torosa!"

Cabrera was silent for awhile after making this speech, and then abruptly demanded of Rollo how many men he would require for the undertaking.

"I am bidden to place entire command at your services!" he said with obvious reluctance, glancing out of his little oblique eyes at the young Colonel.

Rollo considered awhile before answering.

"It is my opinion that the fewer men concerned in such a venture the greater the chances of success," he said, at last. "Furnish me with one petty officer intimately acquainted with the country between Zarazoza and San Ildefonso, and I will ask no more."

Cabrera drew a long breath and looked at the young man with infinitely more approval than he had before manifested.

He was indeed immensely relieved to find the desires of our hero so moderate. He had been directed to supply him with whatever force he required, and he expected to be deprived of a regiment at least, at a most critical time in the affairs of the Absolute King.

"Young man," he said, "you will certainly be shot or hanged before you are a month older. Nevertheless, in the meantime, I would desire to have the honor of shaking you by the hand. If you were not to die so soon, undoubtedly you would go far! It is a pity. And the Christinos are bad shots. They will not do the job half as creditably as my fellows would have done this morning!"

The man who was chosen by Cabrera to accompany them on their mission was of a most remarkable appearance. Tall—almost as tall as el Sarria—he was yet distinguished from his fellows by a most notable gauntness and angularity of figure. The iron gravity of his countenance, seamed on the right-hand side by a deep scar, took no new expression, when he was detailed by his General for this new and dangerous mission.

With a single salute he fell out and instantly attached himself to Rollo, whom he relieved of his knapsack and water bottle on the spot. Sergeant Cardono paid no attention whatever to the other three, whom he evidently regarded as very subordinate members of the expedition.

As soon as they arrived at the village where they were to part from the command of Cabrera, Sergeant Cardono promptly disappeared. He was not seen for several hours, during which Rollo and El Sarria wandered here and there, endeavoring in that poor place to pick up some sustenance which would serve them in lieu of a dinner. They had but poor success. A round of black bread, a fowl of amazing age, vitality and muscular development, and a few snails were all they could obtain by their best persuasions, aided by the money with which Rollo was plentifully supplied.

Rollo and el Sarria were carrying their scanty prey to a house, where a decent-looking woman had agreed to cook it for them, when their gloomy reveries were interrupted by a sudden apparition which burst upon them as they stood on the crest of a deep hollow.

The limestone hills had been rent asunder at the place, and from the bare faces of the rocks the neighboring farmers and villagers had quarried and carried away such of the overhanging blocks as could easily be trimmed to suit their purposes.

Part of what remained had been shaped into a hornito, or stone oven, under which a fire had been kindled, and a strange figure moved about, stirring the glowing charcoal with a long bar of iron. On a smaller hearth nearer at hand a second fire blazed, and the smell of fragrant cookery rose to the expectant and envious nostrils of the four.

It was Sergeant Cardono, who moved about whistling softly, now attending to the steaming olla, now watching the rising bread in the hornito.

Perceiving Rollo, he saluted gravely and remarked: "Dinner will be served in half an hour.' The others, as before, he simply ignored. But, in deference to his new commander, he stopped whistling and moved about with his lean shoulders squared, as if on parade.

When the dinner was ready, Sergeant Cardono announced it to Rollo as if he had been serving a Prince. And what was the young man's astonishment to find a table, covered with decent white cloth, spread under the shelter of a limestone rock, spread for three and complete even to table napkins, which the sergeant had tied into various curious shapes.

As they filed down the slope the sergeant stood at attention, but when el Sarria passed, he quickly beckoned him aside with a private gesture.

"You and I will eat after the foreigners," he explained.

El Sarria drew himself up somewhat proudly, but Sergeant Cardono whispered in his ear two or three words which appeared to astonish him so much that he did as he was bid and stood aside, while John Mortimer and Etienne de Saint Pierre seated themselves.

El Sarria helped the sergeant to serve the meal, which was at once the proof of his foraging ability and his consummate genius as a cook. For though the day was Friday the soup was very far from meager. The stew contained both lamb and fresh pork, cut into generous cubes, with a sufficiency of savory fat included. A sausage had been sliced small for seasoning, and the whole had been so smothered in garbanzos, haricot beans, rice and mixed with strips of toothsome salt fish, that John Mortimer bent and said a well-deserved blessing over the viands.

"I don't usually, in this country," he explained, "but really this is what my good old father would call a manifest Providence. That fellow of ours will prove a treasure."

"It seems so," said Rollo a little grimly; "that is, if he can scout and fight as well as he can cater and cook."

It was indeed with a feeling of intense relief that the little company of five men separated from the white and red boinas of the butcher General's cavalcade. Well affected to them as Cabrera might be for the time being, his favor was so brief and uncertain, his affection so tigerlike, that even Sergeant Cardono sighed a sigh of satisfaction when they turned their horses' heads towards the far-away Guadarama, beyond which lay the goal of their adventuring.

Rollo rode gloomily apart. He was turning over the terms of his commission in his mind, and the more he thought the less he was satisfied. It was not alone the desperateness of the venture that daunted Rollo, but the difficulty of providing for the Queen Regent and little Princess when captured. There were a couple of hundred miles to ride back to those northern fastnesses where they would be safe, and for the most part without cover and through country swarming with Nationals and Christino partisans.

Riding thus in deep meditation, Rollo, whose gaze was usually so alert, did not observe away to the right a couple of horses ridden at speed and rapidly overtaking their more tired beasts.

El Sarria, however, did not fail to note them, but, fearing a belated message of recall from General Cabrera, did not communicate his discovery to his companions, but contented himself with keeping his eye upon the approaching riders.

Rollo was, therefore, still advancing, his reins flung loosely upon his beast's neck and his whole attitude betokening a melancholy resignation, a couple of lengths before his companions, when a sudden clattering of hoofs startled him. He looked up, and there, on her white mare, which was well lathered at girth and bridle, was little Concha Cabezos, sitting her panting beast with the grace of the true Andaluce.

Her hair was a little ruffled by the wind. Her cheeks and lips were adorably red. There was a new and brilliant light in her eye; and after one curiously comprehensive glance at the company, she turned about to look for her companion. La Giralda, who presently cantered up on a lumbering Estramenian gelding. La Giralda sat astride, as before, her lower limbs, so far as these were apparent, being closely clad in leather, a loose skirt over them preserving in part the appearance of sex.

Rollo was dumb with sheer astonishment. He could only gaze at the flushed cheek, the tingling electric glances, the air, completely unconscious and innocent, of the girl before him.

"Concha!" he cried aloud, "Concha—what do you here? I thought—I imagined you were safe at the Convent of the Holy Innocents!"

CHAPTER XXV.

"I, too, have a mission, I would have you know," said Concha, a dangerous coquetry showing through her grave demeanor—"a secret mission from the mother superior of the Convent of the Holy Innocents. Do not attempt to penetrate the secret. I assure you it will be quite useless. And pray do not suppose that only you can adventure forth on perilous quests!"

"I assure you," began Rollo, eagerly, "that I suppose no such thing. At the moment when you came up, I was wishing with all my heart that the responsibility of the present undertaking had been laid on any other shoulders than mine!"

Yet, in spite of his modesty, certain it is that from that moment Rollo rode no longer with his head hanging down like a willow blown by the wind. The reins lay no more lax and abandoned on his horse's neck. On the contrary, he sat erect and looked abroad with the air of a commander, and his hand rested oftener on the hilt of Killiekrankie with the air of pride which Concha privately thought most becoming.

"And in what case left you my wife and babe?" suddenly demanded El Sarria, riding up and inquiring somewhat imperiously of the new recruit concerning the matters which touched him most nearly.

"The senora Dolores is safe with the good sisters, and as in former times I was known to have been her companion, it was judged safest that I should not longer be seen in the neighborhood. Likewise I was charged with the tidings that Luis Fernandez, with a company of Christino Miguelites, has been seen riding southward to cut you off from Madrid, whither it was supposed you were bound!"

Rollo turned quickly upon her with some anger in his eye. "Why did you not tell me that at first?" he said.

Concha smiled a subtle smile and turned her eyes upon the ground. "If you will remember, I had other matters to communicate to your Excellency," she said, meekly—almost too meekly, Rollo thought, "This matter of Luis Fernandez slipped my memory, till it was my good fortune to be reminded of it by Don Ramon."

More than once Rollo endeavored to extract from Concha to what place her assumed mission had taken her, and at what point she would leave them. It was in vain. The lady baffled all his endeavors with the most consummate ease.

"You have not communicated to me," she said, "the purport of your own adventure. How, then, can I tell at what place our ways divide?"

"I am forbidden to reveal to any save General Cabrera alone my secret instructions," said Rollo, with such dignity as he could muster at short notice.

"And I," retorted Concha, "am as strictly forbidden to reveal mine to General Cabrera or even to that notable young officer, Colonel Don Rollo of the surname which resembles a burrico's serenade!"

The speech would have been undoubtedly rude save for the glance which accompanied it, given softly, yet daringly from beneath a jetty fringe of eyelash.

Nevertheless, all Rollo Blair's pride of ancestry rose insurgent within him. Who was this Andalusian waiting maid that she should speak lightly of the descendent of that Blair of Blair castle who had stood for Bruce and freedom on the field of Bannockburn? It was unbearable—and yet, well, there was something uncommon about this girl. And, after all, was it not the mark of a gentleman to pay no heed to the babbling of women's tongues? If they did not say one thing, they would another. Besides, he cared nothing what this girl might say. A parrot prattling in a cage would affect him as much.

And ever as they rode, the Guardarama Mountains rose higher and whiter out of the vast and hideous plain, the only interruption to the circling horizon of brown and parched corn land.

At one point, indeed, they passed near enough to distinguish in the far north the snow-flecked buttresses of the Sierra de Moncayo. But these they knew were the haunts of their Carlist allies. The towns and villages of the plain, however, were invariably held by Nationals, and it had often gone hard enough with them had not Sergeant Cardono detached himself from the calvacade, and, venturing alone into the midst of the enemy, by methods of his own produced the materials for many an excellent meal. At last, one day the Sergeant came back to the party, with an added gloom on his long, lean, lantern-jawed face. He had brought with him an Estramaduran ham, a loaf of wheaten bread and a double string of sausages. But upon his descending into the temporary camp which sheltered the party in the bottom of a barranco, or deep crack in the parched plateau overgrown with scented thyme and dwarf oak, it became obvious that he had news of the most serious import to communicate.

(To be continued.)

NEWEST OF 'EM ALL.

Sunbonnet Girl Latest Product of Summer Season.

After the various sorts of Summer girls—the dimity girl, the white duck girl and the golf girl—comes the newest of all—the sunbonnet girl. With her curls flying about her sun-burned cheeks, her face never looked half so bewitching as when quaintly framed in an old-fashioned sunbonnet.

For sailing, tennis, golf, and, indeed, any outdoor sport, the Summer girl dons this favorite head covering and sallies forth, ready to enjoy whatever fun there is in store for her. She may tie the strings of her old-style headgear under her chin, or leave them fluttering to the breeze, just whichever happens to be the fancy of the moment.

She doesn't wear her little bonnet to keep off tan and freckles, for these trifles do not bother her mind. Half the time the bonnet is hanging down her back by the strings or swinging over her arm, while again may be carried by some member of the sterner sex, who flutters about the belle of the season as the proverbial moth.

Bonnets are much easier to carry than hats, and one doesn't run the risk of spoiling the freshness, as most of them will stand being laundered time and again. A little ducking or tossing about on a tennis court doesn't hurt them in the least, and besides this advantage they are extremely becoming to most faces.

For the same reason that they are popular with the maidens they are unpopular with the maidens' escort. It is tantalizingly hard to catch a glimpse of bewitching eyes, be they brown or blue, when hidden behind the ruffles that make so persistent a screen.

The golf sunbonnet, with its bright red gorgeousness, makes a charming bit of color on the smooth, green links, and are usually rather small, so as not to interfere with one's range of vision. The simplest bonnets, however, are the prettiest and the most serviceable, for when driving off, one doesn't want to be bothered with too many frills and ribbons.

For sailing there is no head covering quite so adaptable as the quaint little sunbonnet. It is less heavy on the head than a sailor hat, and its shade protects the eyes from the glare of the sun and sheen of the water. Gingham bonnets are trimmed with ruffles of fine white embroidery, and are perhaps the most useful kind of all, yet they lack the airiness of the organdies or mull, a quality which undoubtedly adds to their fascination for both wearer and beholder.

Some of the small dimity and organdie bonnets are little round affairs, with a stiffened scoop in front cut back so that the ears are uncovered. The stiff part of the bonnet is trimmed with rows of tiny ruffles or the organdie; the shirred crown stands up in a puff, and across the bottom depends a small cape-like ruffle. When made of pale blue organdie this bonnet is charming in its effect.

Sometimes the front part of the bonnet curves down on the sides and is shirred on wires to form old-fashioned puffs, while around the face is a full, lace-edged, double ruffle. In pale pink mull, with tiny Valenciennes edging, this bonnet face that can boast even a small claim to beauty looks stunning when framed by these soft, billowy ruffles, especially if they are in a becoming color.

"Tiss Me Dood Night."

"Pease, mamma, pease, tiss me dood night."
My blue-eyed babe with sunny curls
Stood pleading 'tween her sobs and tears—
I said, "I can't kiss naughty girls."

I led her to her snowy cot.
"Pease, mamma, pease," she sobbed again,
"I won't be naughty any more."
I left her, all her pleadings vain.

I had been reared in Spartan school,
And deemed it duty to control
With rigid rule, nor ever knew
That love with love should sway the soul.

I heard her sob, my mother heart
With yearning filled to soothe and cheer—
Yet I refrained, and in her sleep
My baby still lay sobbing there.

'Twas midnight when I felt a touch—
A fever'd hand lay on my brow.
My white-robed baby pleaded still—
"Pease, mamma, pease, I tan't sleep now."

All through that agonizing night
Delirious she moaned in pain.
The little broken heart still plead
For kisses that I gave in vain.

At dawn the angels hover'd near;
She nestled close, and smiled and said;
"I won't be naughty any more."
And in my arms my babe lay—dead.

And I am old—the passing years
Have brought no comfort in their flight;
My heart still hears that sobbing cry,
"Pease, mamma, pease, tiss me dood night."

—Kate Thyson Marr, in Form.