THE FIREBRAND

A STORY OF THE EARLY CARLIST UPRISING.

BY S. R. CROCKETT, AUTHOR OF "THE STICKIT MINISTER" "THE BLACK DOUGLAS" ETC.

"YOUR MOTHER'S HAIR, WET WITH YOUR MOTHER'S BLOOD!" HE CRIED.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

Ramon Garcia, known as El Sarria, having been induced to believe that his wife, Dolores, is unfaithful, stabs a village fop, 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. Rollo, through Concha, succeeds in establishing the identity of himself and comrades, and they are released and forwarded on their mission by Cabrera. Sergeant Cardono and La Giralda are sent by Rollo to San Ildefonso, near which the Queen Regent and her court, deserted by the royal guards, are staying, plague-bound and in danger of an attack by gypsies, to spy out the situation. Cardono visits the gypsy camp, where he reveals himself as Jose Maria, the brigand, who, it had been supposed, was garroted, and where he learns the plans for the proposed attack on the Queen Regent. Meanwhile La Giralda gains important information at the palace, and on the return of the two scouts Rollo proceeds, with his party, to the rescue. They barricade the palace and resist the gypsies, who succeed, however, by kidnaping the Princess Isabel. Rollo rescues Isabel, and starts with her for the hermitage. Bodies of plague victims are posted as sentinels at the doors and storehouse about the hermitage and the attack of the gypsies is awaited. The gypsies are repulsed, and Rollo, aided by Concha, restores the young Princess to the Queen. The royal party is captured by Cabrera, who condemns the Queen Regent, the young Queen Isabel and Senor Munoz to death.

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CHAPTER XLII.—(Continued.)

"Why, what is there to do?" said Ramon, with a lift of his eyebrows. "Here in the camp of Cabrera we are watched, followed, suspected. Do you see that fellow yonder, with the smartly set obi-na? He is the miller's son from near Vitoria in Alava. Well, he hath been set to watch that none of us leaves the camp unattended. I will wager that if you and I were to wander out 50 yards further, yonder lad would be after us in a trice!"

"Ah!" said Concha, in a brown study. "Yes, he is not at all a bad-looking boy and thinks excessively well of himself, like some others I could mention. Now, El Sarria, can you tell me in which direction lies Vera, the headquarters of General Ello?"

"That can I!" said El Sarria, forgetting his caution. And he was about to turn him about and point it out with his hand when Concha stopped him."

"The miller's son is craning his neck to look," she whispered. "Do not point. Turn about slowly, and the third stone you throw, let it be in the direction of Vera."

El Sarria did as he was bid, and after the third, he continued to project stones Vera-ward, explaining, as he did so—"Upyonder reddish clef the road goes, a hound path, a mere gout's slide, but it is the directest road. There is open ground to the very foot of the ascent. Many is the time I have ridden there, God forgive me, on another man's beast!"

Concha's eyes, surveying the landscape, lighted continually upon the handsome young Vitorian in the red boina, lifted again sharply, and then sought the ground. At this El Sarria sighed and decided mentally that, with the exception of his Dolores, no woman was to be trusted. If not at heart a rake, she was by nature a flirt. And so he was about to leave Concha to her own devices and seek Rollo, when Concha suddenly spoke.

"Don Ramon," she said, "shall we walk a few hundred yards up the mountains away from the camp and see if we are really being watched?"

El Sarria smiled grimly to himself and rose. The stratagem was really, he thought, too transparent, and his impression was strengthened when Concha presently added: "I will not ask you to remain if you would rather go back. Then we will see whom they are most suspicious of, you or I. A girl may often steal a horse when a man dares not look over the wall."

In the abstract this was incontestable, but El Sarria only smiled the more grimly. After all Dolores was the only woman upon whose fidelity one would be justified in wagering the last whiff of a good cigarillo. And as if reminded of a duty, El Sarria rolled a beauty as he dragged one huge foot after another slowly up the hill in the rear of Concha, who, her love locks spraying in the breeze, her basquina held coquettishly in one hand, and the prettiest toss of her head for the benefit of any whom it might concern, went leaping upward like a young roe.

All the while Rollo was sitting below quite unconscious of this display. His head was sunk on his hand. Deep melancholy brooded in his heart. He rocked to and fro as if in pain. Looking down from the mountain side Ramon Garcia pitied him.

"Ah, poor, innocent young man," he thought, "doubtless he believes that the heart of this girl is all his own. But all men are fools—a butterfly is always a butterfly and an Andaluse an Andaluse to the day of her death."

Then, turning his thoughts backward, he remembered the many who had taken their turn with mandolin and guitar at the rejas of Concha's window when he and Dolores lived outside the village of Sarria, and he (ah, thrice fool) had taken it into his thick head to be jealous.

Well, after all, this was none of his business, he thanked the saints. He was not responsible for the vagaries of a pretty young women. But, with the corner of an eye more accustomed to glinting on rifle barrels than to the flashing eyes of beauty, El Sarria could make out that the Vitorian with the red boina was following them, his gun ever his shoulder, trying, not with conspicuous success, to assume the sauntering air of a man who, having nothing better to do, goes for a stroll in the Summer evening.

"'Tis the first time that ever I saw a soldier off duty take his musket for a walk," growled El Sarria, "and why on the Sierra de Moncayo does the fellow trick himself out as for a festal day?"

Concha looked back over her shoulder presumably at El Sarria, though why the maiden's glance was so sprightly and her lips so provokingly pouted is a question hard enough to be propounded for the doctorial thesis at Salamanca. For Ramon Garcia was stolid as an ox of his native Aragon, and extraneous glances and pretty gestures were as much wasted on him as if he chewed the cud. Still he was not even in these matters so dull and unobservant as he looked, that is, when he had reason for being observant.

"Here comes that young ass of Alava," he murmured. "Well, he is at least getting his money's worth. By the saints favorable to my native parish the holy Narcissus and Justus, but the burro is tightening his girths!"

And El Sarria laughed out suddenly and sardonically. For he could see the lad pulling his leathern belt a few holes tighter, in order that he might present his most symmetrical figure to the eyes of this dazzling Andalusian witch who had dropped so suddenly into the Carlist camp from the place whence all witches come.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Concha and El Sarria sat down on an outcrop of red sandstone rock and gazed back at the prospect. There below them lay the camp and the house in which was imprisoned the reigning branch of the royal family of Spain. A couple of sentries paced to and fro in front. A picket had established itself for the night in the back courtyard. Beyond that again stood the tent in which the general was at present engaged in drinking himself from his usual sullen ferocity into unconsciousness.

A little nearer and not far from their own campfire, at which the sergeant was preparing the evening meal, sat Rollo, sunk in misery, revolving a thousand plans and ready for any desperate venture as soon as night should fall. Concha gave a quick little sigh whenever her eye fell on him. Perhaps her conscience pricked her—perhaps not. With the heart of a sad woman doth neither stranger nor friend intermeddle with profit.

The sauntering Vitorian halted within speaking distance of the pair.

"A fine evening," said he affably. "Can you give me a light for my cigarette?"

It was on the tip of El Sarria's tongue to inquire whether there were not plenty of lights for his cigarette back at the camp fires where he had rolled it. But that most excellent habit, which Don Ramon had used from boyhood, of never interfering in the business of another, kept him silent.

"Why should I," he thought, "burn my fingers with stirring this young foreigner's olla? Time was when I made a pretty mess enough of my own."

So, without speech, he blew the end off his cigarello and handed it courteously to the Carlist soldier.

But Concha had no qualms about breaking the silence. The presence of a duenna was nowise necessary to the opening of her lips, which last had also been silenced without intervention of a chaperon.

"A fine evening, indeed," she said, smiling down at him. "I presume that you are a foot soldier from the musket you carry. It must be a fine one from the care you take of it. But as for me, I like cavaliers best."

"The piece is as veritable a cross-eyed old shrew as ever threw a bullet 10 yards wide of the mark," cried the Alavan, tossing his musket down on the short elastic covering of the hill-plants on which he stood, and taking his cigarette luxuriously from his lips. "Nor am I an infantryman, as you suppose, Doubtless the senorita did not observe my spurs as I came. Of the best Potosi silver they are made. I am a horseman of the Estella regiment. Our good Carlos the Fifth (whom God bring to his own!) is not yet rich enough to provide us with much in the way of a uniform, but a pair of spurs and a boina are within reach of every man's purse. Or if he has not the money to buy them, they are to be had at the first tailor's we may chance to pass!"

"And most becoming they are!" said Concha, glancing wickedly at the youth, who sat staring at her and letting his cigarette go out. "'Tis small wonder you are a conquering corps! I have often heard tell of the Red Boinas of Estella!"

"I think I will betake me down to the camp—I smell supper!" broke in El Sarria curtly. He began to think that Mistress Concha had no further use for him, and, being assured on this point, he set about finding other business for himself. For with all his simplicity Ramon Garcia was an exceedingly practical man.

"The air is sweet up here; I prefer it to supper," said Concha. "I will follow you down in a moment. Perhaps this gentleman desires to keep you company to the camp and canteen!"

But it soon appeared that the Vitorian was also impressed by the marvellous sweetness of the mountain air, and equally desirous of observing the changeful lights and lengthening shadows which the sun of evening cast, sapphire and indigo. Venetian red and violet-gray among the peaks of the Sierra de Moncayo. When two young people are thus simultaneously stricken with admiration for scenery, their conversation is seldom worth repeating. But the Senorita Concha is so unusual a young lady that in this case an exception must be made.

"You are doubtless a fine horseman!" she cried, clasping her hands. "Oh, I adore all horses! I love to see a man ride as a man should!"

The young man colored. This was, in truth, the most open joint in his armor. Above all things, he prided himself upon his horsemanship. Concha had judged as much from his care of his spurs. And to be mistaken for an infantry tramper!

"Ah," he said, "if the senorita could only see my mare La Perla. I got her three months ago from the stable of a black-blooded national, whose house we burnt near Zaragoza. She has carried me ever since without a day's lameness. There is not the like of her in the regiment."

At this Concha looked still more pensive. Presently she heaved another sigh and tapped her slender shoe with a chance spray of heath.

"Oh, I wish——" she began, and then stopped hastily, as if ashamed.

"If it be anything I can do for you," cried the young man, enthusiastically, "you shall not have to wish it long!"

As he spoke he forsook the stone on which he had been sitting for another nearer to the pretty cross-tied shoes of Andalusian pattern that showed beneath the skirts of Concha's basquina.

"Ah, how I love horses," murmured Concha. "Doubtless, too, yours is of my country—of the beautiful, sunny Andalusia which I may never see again!"

"The mare is indeed believed by all who have knowledge to have Andalusian blood in her veins," answered the Alavan.

Concha rose to her feet impulsively.

"Then," she said, "I must see her. Also I am devoured with eagerness to see you ride."

She permitted her eyes to take in the trim figure of the Vitorian, who had also risen to his feet.

"Do go and bring her," she murmured. "I will take care of your musket. You need not be a moment, and—I will wait for you!"

A little spark kindles a great fire in a Spanish heart, and the young man, counting the cost, rapidly decided that the risk was worth running. The horses of the Estella regiment were picketed in a little hollow a few hundred yards behind the main camp. It was his duty to watch these two strangers, of whom one had already gone back to the camp, while as to the other—well, Adrian Zumaya of the Province of Alava felt at that moment that he could cheerfully devote the rest of his life to watching that other.

In a moment more he had laid down his musket at Concha's feet, and set off as fast as he could in the direction of the horses, keeping well out of sight in the trough of a foothill until he was close to the cavalry lines, and could smell the honest stable smell which in the open air mingled curiously with those of aromatic thyme and resinous juniper.

In five minutes he was back, riding his best and sitting like a centaur.

Concha's eyes glistened with pleasure and she ran impulsively forward to pat the cream-colored mare, a clean-built, well-gathered, workman-like steed.

Now the young man was very proud of the attention and interest this pretty Andalusian girl was showing in his equipment and belongings, to the exclusion of those of his comrades. Perhaps he might have been less pleased had he known that the young lady's interest extended even to the gun he had left behind him, the charge of which she had managed to extract with deft and competent fingers.

The young man's last act before he laid himself down in his new quarters had been to take from his coat the circular disk with the letters, "C. V.," the badge of the only Catholic, absolute and legitimate King. Then approaching the precipice as nearly as in the uncertain light he dared, he cast it from him in the direction of the Carlist lines:

"Shoot whom you will at sunrise, Queen or camp-wench, King or knave," he muttered, "You shall not have Adrian Zumaya of Vitoria to put a bullet through."

So easily was allegiance laid down or taken up in these civil wars of Spain! And that night it was noised abroad that young Zumaya of the Estella Regiment of Cavalry had taken his horse and gone off with the pretty senorita whom he had been set to watch.

Upon which half of his comrades envied him and the other half hoped he would be captured, saying: "It will be bad for Adrian Zumaya of the Estella Regiment if he comes again within the clutches of our excellent Don Ramon Cabrera."

And this was a fact of which the aforesaid Adrian was exceedingly well aware. But the most curious point about the whole matter is that when he awoke late next morning he found the sun shinning brilliantly into the mouth of the cave. The camp had vanished; there was a haze of sulphur in the air which bit his nostrils, and lo, beneath him on a little plot of coarse green grass and hill plants, a cream-colored horse was quietly feeding.

"It is my own Pearla," he cried, as, careless of danger, he hastened down. There was a red object attached to the mare's bridle. He went around and detached a red boina, to which was pinned a scrap of paper. Upon it was written these words:

"I hope you have not missed either of the objects herewith returned. They served me nobly. I send my best thanks for the loan. C. C."

"That is very well," said the young man, smiling, as he mounted his horse, "but all the same had my heels not served me better than my head your best thanks, pretty mistress, had come too late. They would not have kept me from biting the dust at sunrise with half a dozen bullets in my gizzard, instead of waking here comfortably on an empty stomach. Well, I suppose I must don the cap of liberty now, and be a Chapelgorri. It is a pity. 'Tis not one half so becoming as the boina to one of my complexion."

CHAPTER XLIV.

Yet for all this brave adventure Concha was as far as ever from meeting with General Ello. She had not even reached Vera, where it sits on the northern slopes of the Moncayo, although El Sarria had quite correctly pointed out the path and La Perla had served her like the very pearl and pride of all Andalusian steeds.

For once more, as so often in this history and in all men's lives, the cup had slipped on the way to the lip; the unexpected had happened, and Concha found herself in the wrong camp.

She rode at full speed as we have seen, out of sight, that is, the sight of La Perla's owner. And owing to the red boina, which Master Adrian considered to become her so well, she came very near to riding out of this history. For, through the higher arroyo of Aranda de Moncayo, which, like a slice cut clean out of a bride's cake, divides the shoulder of the mountain, she rode directly into the command of a field force operating under the personal command of General Esperto, the future dictator and present commonder-in-chief of all the armies of the Queen Regent.

At first she was nowise startled, thinking only that Vera and General Ello were nearer than had been expected. "Well," she thought, "so much better."

But as she came near she saw the measured tread of sentries to and fro. She observed the spick and span tents, the uniforms and the shining barrels of the muskets which in another moment, would have arrested her headlong course.

Concha at once perceived even without looking at the standard which drooped at the tent door of the officer in command, that this could be no mere headquarters of Carlist partidas.

As women are said by the wise men to be of their lover's religion if he have one, and if he have none never to miss it, so Concha was quite ready to be of the politics which were most likely to deliver Rollo from his present difficulties. Therefore, takng the red boina from her head, an act which disturbed the severe precision of her locks, she dashed it full speed into the camp, crying: "Viva la Reina! Viva Maria Christina! Viva Isabel Segunda!"

Checking her steed before the standard, Concha first saluted the surprised group. Then giving a hand to the nearest (and best-looking) officer, she dismounted with a spring light as the falling of a leaf from a tree. With great solemnity she advanced to the staff from which the heavy standard hung low, and taking the embroidered fringe between finger and thumb, touched it with her lips.

Yet if you had called our little Concha a humbug—which in certain aspects of her character would have been a perfectly proper description, she would have replied, with the utmost simplicity and with a completely disarming smile: "But I only did it for Rollo's sake."

Which was true enough, but (strangely enough) the thought of an audience always stirred the Mistress Concha to do her best—for Rollo's sake!

"Take me to the General," she said, with a glance around the circle. "I have ridden from the camp of the enemy to bring him tidings of the utmost importance! Every moment is precious!"

"But the General is asleep," a staff officer objected; "he gave orders that he was not to be called on any account!"

"Tell him that upon his hearing my news depend the lives of the Queen Regent and her daughter, the young Queen! The cause itself hangs in the balance!"

And to hear Concha pronounce the last words was enough to have made a convert of Don Carlos himself.

The Commander-in-Chief solved the difficulty, however, at that very moment by appearing opportunely at the door of his tent.

General Espartero at this time was a man of 45. His service in South America had touched his hair with gray. In figure he was heavily built, but, in spite of fever swamps and battle wounds, still erect and soldierly.

"What news does the senorita bring?" he asked with a pleasant smile.

"That I can only tell to yourself, General, the girl answered; "my name is Concha Cabezos, of Seville. My father had the honor to serve with you in the war of the independence!"

"And a good soldier he was, senorita!" said Espartero, courteously. "I remember him well at Salamanca! He fought by my side like a brother."

Concha knew better than to blurt out her news concerning the presence of the Queen and her daughter so near his camp. That wise little woman had her terms to make, and for so much was prepared to give so much.

Therefore, from the first she kept Rollo in the foreground of her narrative. He it was who single-handed had saved the little Queen. He it was who had defended La Granja against the gypsies. It was, indeed, somewhat unfortunate that the Queen Regent should have conceived a certain prejudice against him, but then (here Concha smiled) the General knew well what these great ladies were—on mountain heights one day, in deep sea abysses the next. Rollo had compelled the party to leave the infected district of La Granja for the healthy one of the Sierre de Moncayo. What else, indeed, could he do? The road to Madrid was in the hands of roving partidas of the malignant, as His Excellency knew, and it was only in this direction that there was any chance of safety. That was his whole offence.

Most unfortunately, however, when on the very threshold of safety, his party had been ambushed and taken by Cabrera. But the captor's force was a small one, and with boldness and caution the whole band of the maligants, together with their prisoners could be secured. The Carlist General had threatened to murder the two Queens and the Duke of Rianzares at sunrise, as was his butchery wont; and if Espartero would deliver the royal party, not only was his future assured, but the fortunes of all who had taken any part in the affair.

The General listened carefully, looking all the while, not at Concha, but down at the little folding table of iron which held a map of Northern Spain. He continued to draw figures of eight upon it with his forefinger till Concha's eyes wearied of watching him, as she nervously waited for his decision.

"How came you here?" he asked at last.

"I borrowed a mare and a Carlist boina and rode hither as fast as horseflesh could carry me. I heard from a friend of the cause that your command was in the neighborhood."

"And from whom did you receive that intelligence? I thought the fact was pretty well concealed? Indeed, we only arrived an hour ago."

Concha cast about for a name. The necessary fiction was also, of course, 'for Rollo's sake.' A thought struck her. She would serve another comrade, as it were, en passant.

"From a good friend in the Carlist ranks," she said," one Sergeant Cardono."

The General looked a little nonplussed, for like many generals of all nationalities, he had no slight penchant for omniscience."

"I never heard of him," he said, sharply. "Who may he be?"

Concha leaned yet closer and laid a small, soft brown hand gently upon the General's gold-embroidered cuff. The General, not being so simple as he looked, drew back his arm a little, so that the hand rested a moment on his wrist (for Rollo's sake) before it was gently withdrawn.

"You have heard of Jose Maria of Ronda?" she whispered.

The General's face lighted up and as swiftly dulled down.

"Certainly, what Andalusian has not?" he said. "But Jose Maria is dead. He was executed at Salamanca."

"Ah, said Concha, "that tale was for the consumption of Don Carlos and his friends. In fact he is the best spy we Nationals ever had—aye, or ever shall have."

"Ah," said Espertero, lost in thought. There were some matters which seemed to need clearing up, but on the whole the thing looked probable.

Concha, in her whirlwind of excitement, would have liked the General to attack the Carlist camp immediately, but the more cautious Don Baldomero only shook his head.

"That is all very well when a small force is to be crushed at any cost," he said, "or a strong position taken along lines previously studied by daylight, or opened up by artillery. But when our object is to preserve the lives of persons so important to the world as the royal family of Spain, lying at the mercy of ruffians who would not hesitate to murder every one of them in cold blood, it is best to wait till the morning. Lo, I will push forward my forces on all sides, and, if all goes well, surprise Cabrera at the earliest glimmer of dawn."

"And my friends who have suffered so much to bring this about?" urged Concha, anxiously, "what of them?"

"I promise you on my honor that they shall be protected and rewarded!" said Espartero.

"And brave Don Rollo, the Scot—even if the Queen continues to dislike him?" persisted Concha.

"Senorita," smiled the General, "it will be a vastly greater peril to the young man, I fear, if you like him! He will have so many jealous rivals on his hands!"

For Baldomero Esparlero was also an Andalusian, and the men of that province, high and low, never permit themselves to get out of practice when there is room for a compliment.

Concha looked the General full in the face with her deep, magnificent eyes, aquamarine, violet, or dark gray, according to the light upon them. They were (as she would sometimes own) fallacious eyes, and upon occasions were wont to express far more than their owner meant to stand by. But the latent lover behind them once fixed, these same eyes could convince the most skeptical of the unalterable nature of the affection which they professed. So it was in the present instance. Concha merely looked at the General squarely for a moment and said without flinching, "I love him!"

Espartero stooped and touched her brow lightly with his lips, graciously and tenderly as a father might upon a solemn occasion. Then he gathered up her little brown hands in his. They were trembling now, not rock-steady, as when they held the musket on the balcony of La Granja.

"My daughter," he said, "do not fear for your young Scot. Queens and Consorts and Premiers are not the most powerful folk in Spain—not, at least, so long as Baldomero Espartero, the Andalusian, commands these good lads out there."

Then the future dictator stepped to his tent door, summoned a staff officer, and ordered him to put a tent at the disposal of the young senorita. "Request the commandants of the several columns to come immediately to me at headquarters, as also the gypsy spy, Ezquerra, our late headsman of Salamanca!"

Thus did Mistress Concha "for Rollo's sake."

CHAPTER XLV.

But Rollo himself, our firebrand from the slopes of Fife Lothians—what of him? The foxes that Simson sent among the cornfields of Philistia with the fire at their tails ran not more swiftly than his burning thoughts.

After a long time Rollo raised his head. With supremist indifference he heard about him the first hubbub of the hue and cry after Concha. So heavy was his heart within him that (to his shame be it writ!) he had never even missed her, as she went up the mountain. Yet she would have missed him had 50 Queens and Princesses been in danger of their lives—aye, and her own honor, and that of her race at stake throughout all their generations.

Rollo, however, gave no heed, but following his intent, stalked slowly and steadily to the General's quarters.

"I am Colonel Rollo Blair," said the young man. "I brought hither the royal party, and I must see General Cabrera."

"Young man," said the other, in good English, "I am a countryman of yours—insofar, that is, as a poor southern mabe, whose ancestors fought on the wrong side at Bannockburn. But for your own sake I advise you not to disturb the General at this hour. The occupation cannot be recommended on the score of health."

"I thank you, sir," said Rollo; "but I have my duty to do and my risks to run as well as you. And if you, an Englishman, desire to be art and part in the shooting of a Queen mother and her little royal daughter, well—I wish you joy of your conscience and your birthright of Englishman."

The other shrugged his shoulders and answered: "I have nothing to do with the matter. Colonel Rollo Blair brings the party hither and General Cabrera shoots them. You two can divide the responsibility between you as you please!"

"That is just what I mean to do," quoth Rollo, and lifted the flap of the tent door.

"General Cabrera," he said, "I would speak to you."

An inarticulate growl alone replied, and though there was more wild beast wrath than permission to enter in the tone, Rollo lifted the flap and entered.

Cabrera was lying on a camp bed, his face a deathly white, from which a pair of small, bloodshot eyes peered out with startling effect. He had bound a red handkerchief about his black hair, and altogether his appearance was more that of an enraged tiger roused from the enjoyment of his kill than that of a leading General in the service of the most Christian and Catholic of pretenders.

"Your Excellency," said Rollo, "I have come to urge you to reconsider your intentions with regard to Queen Maria Cristina, widow of the late King, and the child, her daughter, and that for several reasons."

"Let me hear them as briefly as may be, senor," thundered Cabrera. "I shall then make up my mind whether it would not make for the King's peace that such a firebrand adventurer as you should not be shot along with them. And I can tell you this, that if all the pretty girls in the peninsula were to come with a whole herd of papal bulls, they would not save you a second time!"

As he spoke Cabrera reared himself on his elbow and glared at Rollo, who stood still, holding the tent flap in his hand.

"These are my reasons for this request, General, said Rollo, without taking the least notice of the threat: "First, such an act would alienate the sympathy of the whole civilized world from the cause of Don Carlos."

"For that I do not give the snap of my finger," cried Cabrera. "I bite my thumb at the civilized world. What has it done for us or for Don Carlos, either? Next!"

"Secondly, I appeal to your pity, as a man with the heart of a man within his breast. This lady hath never done you any wrong. Her daughter is little more than a babe. Spare them, and if an example must be made, be satisfied with executing Senor Munoz, and myself. I shall right willingly stand up by his side, if the shedding of my blood will save the Queen and the little Princess!"

"And the fair maid, Dona Concha?" said Cabrera, mockingly; "what would she say to such an act of self-sacrifice?"

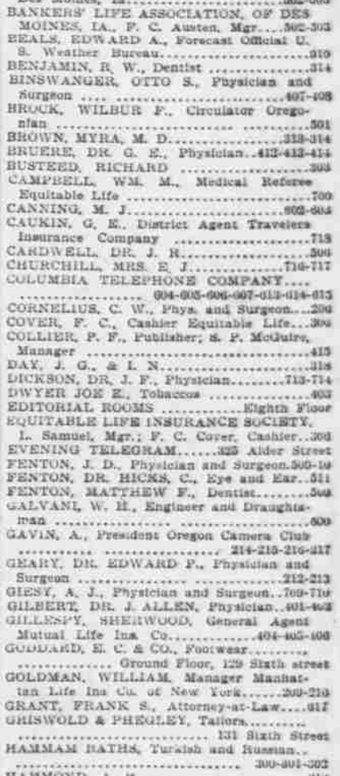
"She would rejoice to see me do my duty, General!" said Rollo, with confidence.

Cabrera laughed long, loud and scornfully.

(To be continued.)

THE PALATIAL

OREGONIAN BUILDING



Not a dark office in the building; absolutely fireproof; electric lights and artesian water; perfect sanitation and thorough ventilation. Elevators run day and night.

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