

THE RED

By GUSTAVE AIMARD

TRAIL

CHAPTER VII.—(Continued.)

The president looked round the assembly, rose in the midst of a profound silence, stretched out his arm toward the general, who stood cold and passionless before him, and, after darting at him a withering glance through the holes made in the crape that concealed his face, he said, in a grave, stern and impressive voice:

"Caballeros, remember the words you are about to hear. In the first place, in order to reassure you and restore your freedom of mind, learn that you have not fallen into the hands of Indians thirsting for your blood, or of pirates who intend to plunder you first and assassinate you afterward. When you have acted as impartial witnesses you will be at liberty to continue your journey, without the forfeiture of a single article. The men seated on my right and left, although masked, are brave and honest hunters. The day may perhaps arrive when you will know them; but reasons, whose importance you will speedily recognize, compel them to remain unknown for the present."

One of the travelers belonging to the second caravan stepped forward; he was a young man, with elegant and noble features, tall and well built.

"Caballero," he answered, in a distinct voice, "I thank you, in the name of my companions, for the reassuring words you have spoken. I know how implacable are the laws of the desert; but permit me to ask you one question."

"Speak, caballero."

"Is it an act of vengeance or justice you are about to carry out?"

"Neither, señor."

"Enough of this," the general said haughtily; "and if you are, as you assert, an honorable man, show me your face."

"No, Don Sebastian," said the president, "for in that case the game would not be even between us."

The general attempted to smile, but in spite of himself the smile died away on his lips. The president looked round with flashing eyes and began speaking again in a sharp, cutting voice.

"Now, listen, señores," he said, "and judge this man impartially; but do not judge him according to prairie law, but in your hearts. Gen. Don Sebastian Guerrero, who is standing so bold and upright before you at this moment, is one of the greatest noblemen of Mexico. His fortune is immense, almost incalculable. This man, by the mere strength of his will, and the implacable egotism that forms the basis of his character, has always succeeded in everything he has undertaken. Coldly ambitious, he has covered with corpses the bloody road he has followed to attain his proposed object, and he has done so without hesitation or remorse; he has looked on with a smiling face, when his dearest friends and nearest relations fell by his side; for him nothing which men respect exists. He had a daughter, who was the perfection of women, and he coldly lacerated her heart; he finally drove her to suicide, and the blood of the poor girl spurted on his forehead while he was triumphantly witnessing the legal murder of the man she loved, and whose death he resolved on because he refused to pander to his honor. This human-faced tiger, this monster with the mocking skeptical face, you see, señores, has only one thought, one object, one desire—to attain the highest rank, even if, to effect it, he were compelled to clamber over the panting corpses of his nearest relations and friends; and if he cannot carve out an independent kingdom in this collapsing republic, which is called Mexico, he wishes to seize, at least, on the supreme magistracy, and be elected president. This man is Gen. Don Sebastian Guerrero, military governor of Sonora."

"Oh!" the audience said involuntarily, as they instinctively recoiled in horror.

"If this man is the ex-governor of Sonora," the hunter who had already spoken said, in disgust, "he is a wild beast, whose ferocity has placed beyond the pale of society, and it is the duty of honest men to destroy him."

"He must die! he must die!" the newcomers exclaimed.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Nonsense," said the general, shrugging his shoulders with a contemptuous smile. "I know now who you are; your hatred of me has unconsciously discovered you. Remove that veil which is no longer of any use. You are the French hunter whom I have constantly met in my path to impede my projects, or overthrow my plans."

"Add," the hunter interrupted, "and whom you will ever meet. Brothers," he added, turning to his assistants, "my mask alone must fall; retain yours, for it is important for my plans of vengeance that you should remain unknown."

The four men bowed their assent and the hunter threw away the crape that covered his features.

"Valentine Gulliois!" the general exclaimed; "I was sure of it."

"Listen then," the hunter coldly continued; "when my unhappy friend fell at Guaymas, in my paroxysm of grief I allow that I intended to kill you; but reflection soon came, and I saw that it would be better to let you live. Thanks to me, one week after the Mexican government, not satisfied with disavowing your conduct, deprived you of your command without inquiry and refused to explain to you the motives of their conduct."

"Ah, ah," the general said, "it was to you, then, that I owe my recall?"

"Yes, general, to me alone."

"I am delighted to hear it."

"You remained, then, in Sonora, without power or influence, hated and despised by all, and marked on your forehead with that indelible brand which was imprinted on Cain, the first murderer; but Mexico is a blessed country, where ambitious men like yourself can easily fish in troubled waters, when, like yourself, they are not restrained by any of those bonds of honor. But you could not remain long bowed beneath the blow that had fallen on you and so you resolved to leave Sonora and proceed to Mexico, where, thanks to your colossal fortune and the influence it would necessarily give you, you could carry on your ambitious projects. Your preparations were soon made—listen attentively, general, for I assure you that I have reached the most interesting part of my narrative."

"As you fancied, for certain reasons which it is unnecessary to remind you of, that your enemies might try to lay some ambush for you, you thought it necessary to take the following precautions, the inutilty of some of which I presume that you have recognized. While, for the purpose of deceiving your enemies, you started in disguise, and only accompanied by a few men, for California, in order to return to Mexico across the Rocky mountains; while you gave questioners the fullest details of the road you intended to follow, with your men—your real object was different. The man in whom you placed your confidence, Don Isidro Vargas, who had known you when a child, and whom you had converted into your tool, took the shortest, and, consequently, most direct route for the capital, having with him not only twelve mules loaded with gold and silver, the fruit of your plunder during the period of your command, but a more precious article still, the body of your unhappy daughter, which you had embalmed, and which the captain had orders to inter with your ancestors at your Hacienda del Palmar. Your object in acting thus was not only to divert attention from your ill-gotten riches, but also to attract your enemies after yourself. Unfortunately, I am an old hunter so difficult to deceive that my comrades gave me long ago the glorious title of the Trail-hunter, and hence, I alone was not deceived."

"Still your presence here gives a striking denial to the assertion," the general interrupted.

"You think so, señor. That proves you are not thoroughly acquainted with me; but patience, I hope that you will, ere long, appreciate me better. Again, you have not reflected on the time that has elapsed since your departure from Hermosillo."

"What do you mean?" the general asked, with a sudden start of apprehension.

"I mean that before attacking you, I resolved to settle matters first with the captain."

"Ah!"

"Well, general, it is my painful duty to inform you that four days after he left Pitic, our brave friend Don Isidro fell into an ambush resembling the one into which you fell to-day, with this exception—"

"What exception?" the general asked, with greater interest than he would have liked to display.

"My men were so imprudent," the hunter continued, "as to leave the captain the means of defending himself. The result was that he died, bravely fighting to save the gold you had intrusted to him, and the coffin containing your daughter's corpse."

"Well, and I presume you plundered the caravan, and carried off the gold and silver?" he asked, contemptuously.

"So, most probably, you would have acted under the circumstances, Don Sebastian," the hunter answered, "but I thought it my duty to act differently. What could you expect? I, a coarse, uneducated hunter, do not know how to plunder, for I did not learn it when I had the honor to serve my country. This is what I did; so soon as the captain and the peons he commanded were killed—for the poor devils, I must do them the justice to say, displayed a desperate resistance—I myself, you understand, friend, I myself conveyed the money to your Hacienda del Palmar, where it now remains in safety."

The general breathed again, and smiled ironically. "Instead of blaming you, señor," he said, "I, on the contrary, owe you thanks for this chivalrous conduct."

"Do not be in such a hurry to thank me," the hunter answered; "I have not told you all. Captain Don Isidro Vargas not only escorted the money, but there was also a coffin. Well, general, why do you not ask me what has become of that coffin?"

An electric shock ran through the audience on hearing the ironical question so coldly asked by the hunter.

"What!" Don Sebastian exclaimed.

"The assassin can have no claim to the body of his victim, and you are morally your daughter's murderer, I have robbed you of this body, which must rest by the side of him for whom she died."

There was a moment's silence. The general's face, hitherto pale, assumed a greenish hue. At length he yelled in a hoarse and hoarse voice:

"It is not true; you have not done this. You cannot have dared to rob a father of his child's body."

"I have done it, I tell you," the hunter

said coldly. "I have taken possession of the body of your victim, and now you understand me; never shall you know where this poor body rests. But this is only the beginning of my vengeance. What I wish to kill in you is the soul and not the body; and now begone, and remember that you will find me in your path everywhere and ever."

"One last word," the general exclaimed, affected by the deepest despair, "restore me my daughter's body; she was the only human creature I ever loved."

The hunter regarded him for a moment with an undefinable expression, and then in a harsh and coldly mocking voice, "Never!"

Then, turning away, he re-entered the grotto, followed by his assistants.

Don Sebastian, who was the more overwhelmed by the last blow because it was unexpected, stood for a moment like a man struck by lightning. At last a heart-rending sob burst from his bosom, two burning tears sprang from his eyes and he rolled like a corpse on the ground.

In the meanwhile the Jester had ordered the peons to saddle the horses and load the mules. The general was placed by two servants on a horse, without appearing to notice what was done to him, and a few moments later the caravan left the fort of the Chichimeques.

When the Mexicans had disappeared to the windings of the road Valentine emerged from the grotto, and walked courteously up to the hunters.

"Forgive me," he said, "not the delay, but the involuntary alarm I caused you; but I was compelled to act as I did. You are going to Mexico, where I shall soon be myself, and it is possible that I may require your testimony some day."

"A testimony which will not be refused," the first hunter gracefully answered.

"What?" the hunter exclaimed in amazement, "are you French?"

"Yes, and all my companions. We have come from San Francisco, where, thanks to Providence, we amassed a fortune, which we hope to double in the Mexican capital. My name is Antoine Rallier, and these are my brothers, Edward and Augustus; the two ladies who accompany us are my mother and sister."

The hunter pressed the hand his countryman offered him.

"Then," he said, "I will not let you go alone! These mountains are infested by dangerous bandits, but with my protection you can pass anywhere."

"I heartily accept the offer; but why do you not come with us to Mexico?"

"That is impossible for the present."

Two hours later the Fort of the Chichimeques had returned to its usual solitude; white men and Indians had abandoned it forever.

CHAPTER IX.

We will now leap over about two months, and invite the reader to accompany us to the heart of Mexico, to the capital. Half-past nine was striking by the cathedral clock at the moment when a dull sound resembling the rustling of reeds shaken by the wind was audible on the gigantic highway joining the city to mainland. This sound soon became more distinct, and changed into the tramping of horses, which was deadened by the damp air and the ground, softened by a lengthened rain. A black mass emerged from the fog, and two horsemen wrapped in thick cloaks stood out distinctly in the moonlight.

These horsemen seemed to have made a long journey. They at last reached a low roofed house through whose dirty panes a doubtful light issued, which showed that the inhabitants were still awake.

The horsemen stopped before this house, which was an inn, and without dismounting one of them gave the door two or three kicks and called the host in a loud, sharp voice. The latter was in no hurry to answer, and would have probably left the strangers for some time in the cold if the man who had kicked, probably tired of waiting, had not thought of an expeditious means of obtaining an answer.

"Ah!" he shouted, as he drew a pistol from his holster and cocked it, "since this dog is resolved not to open, I will send a bullet through his window."

This menace had scarce been uttered ere the door opened as if by enchantment and the landlord appeared on the threshold.

"Believe me, señor, that if I had known what a distinguished caballero did me the honor of stopping before my humble dwelling, I should have hastened to open," he said.

"A truce to such impertinent remarks, and open the door."

A glance was sufficient for the travelers to understand the place to which accident had led them, still they did not display any of the disgust with which the sight of this cut-throat den inspired them. They seated themselves as comfortably as they could at a table, and the one who had hitherto addressed mine host went on:

"Look here, we are dying of hunger, patron; could you not serve us up a morsel of food?"

"Hum!" said the host, with an embarrassed air, "it is very late, caballero, and I don't believe I have even a maize tortilla left in the whole house."

"Nonsense," the traveler replied, "I know all about it, so let us deal frankly with each other; give me some supper, for I am hungry, and we will not squabble about the price."

"Even if you paid me a piastre for every tortilla, excellency, I really could not supply you with two," the landlord replied, with increased constraint.

(To be continued.)

What the Stork Learned.

The Owl—Twins, eh? Ain't you afraid they'll displease your patrons? The Stork—Certainly not. Cupid says he often hears 'em telling each other that two can live as cheaply as one.—Puck.

Speak Kindly to Your Wife



Everything had gone wrong in the house that day.

The cleaning was only half done, the place was upside down, the butcher's boy came late, the dinner was miserably cooked.

She expected him to be cross. He had every right to be cross, she knew. She had mismanaged everything. She was just a failure.

And she threw her arms around his neck, sobbing.

But the man was more of a man than she thought. He did not speak one unpleasant word. He did not utter a single syllable of blame. He did not even frown the least bit.

Instead, he put his arms around her and held her close, and said:

"Cheer up, little woman. It's all right."

It might have been because he disliked a scene, but it wasn't. It might have been because he understood that disagreeable words would not make things any better, but it wasn't that, either.

It was because he was a man with a heart big enough to know the magic of a kind word.

Poets and authors have written volumes about kind words, but none of them nor all of them have ever come anywhere near expressing all the beauty, all the power, all the comfort that lives in one little word of kindness.

The world was a different place to that woman. Her tiredness vanished. Her tears were dried. Her disappointment in herself was taken away. Her love for her husband was magnified a thousandfold. There was only sunshine where there had been clouds.

It was a little bit of heaven for her. And it cost the man—nothing.—Cincinnati Post.

The Straw Ballot.

Time was when the straw ballot was not only a novelty but a circulation maker of fine repute. People grasped at straw ballots in the olden days like drowning men grasp at real straws. That was before the days when the straw ballot came to be looked upon more as an indication of the way the wind does not blow than otherwise. The truth is, the mythical man of every locality who declared, after a crushing defeat when he had confidently expected victory, that there were "more liars in his county than anywhere else on earth," probably hit a good deal further from the truth than he thought. Things that are as fearfully and as wonderfully made as straw ballots are things well enough to let alone. If the New York papers were full of them as of yore—which, happily, they are not—they would mean nothing. The day of the straw ballot has passed.—Washington Herald.

When Life Is Wasted.

Life is wasted every time one gives away to gloomy, selfish, angry or revengeful thoughts; when resentment or a grudge against man or fate is allowed to find root in the heart; when the temper is let fly loose over a trifle; when one goes to pieces nervously when obliged to repeat a remark and the voice is allowed to rise in anger; when one forgets that a loose temper is a sign of vulgarity and lack of culture.—Philadelphia Press.

Minnie's Sincere Prayer.

There had been a dressmaker in the house and Minnie had listened to long discussions about the very latest fashions. That night when she said her prayers, she added a new petition, uttered with unwonted fervency:

"And, dear Lord, please make us all very stylish."

Fortunate.

"I," said the long-haired man, "am wedded to my art."

"How fortunate," rejoined Miss Cayenne. "You can at least get your divorce without filling the newspapers with gossip."—Washington Star.

Hard luck never misses an opportunity to take a fall out of a soft snap.

TELEPHONES ON CARS.

Useful in Train Dispatching—Connections Quickly Made.

There are three methods followed in the application of the telephone to electric railway dispatching: (1) Fixed telephone substations in booths placed at suitable points along the line. (2) Jack boxes at poles to which portable telephones carried in the cars may be hung and connected for temporary use. (3) Portable telephone sets hung upon the front of the car, the vestibule platform of which serves as a booth, and attachment made by flexible wires to jacks at numerous poles along the line.

On some railway lines, says Technical Literature, the method of connecting a telephone on the car with the line is not by means of a jack at the side of one of the poles, but by a long slender rod carrying the wires, which may be hooked upon the main lines any place.

The telephones used on electric railroad systems must give transmission which is clear and loud, and must be of types not liable to be placed out of service by the jar of continuous transportation on a car.

Application of the telephone to train dispatching on electric railways has resulted in a marked economy of both plant and operation and that the ability of the superintendent to be informed as to the position of the various cars and to communicate with their operators gives a greater service efficiency to the road.

The telephone is of great service in severe snowstorms by reason of the facility which it affords for information to be given the train dispatcher as to the condition of the road. In cases of mishap the telephone affords means for quick clearance of the track by the facilities of obtaining wrecking cars or repair hands. In cases of accident not only can medical help be summoned for the injured but means can be taken to procure information relative to details of the occurrence which may be of great importance in ascertaining the liability of the company.

Found Its Way Home.

The story of a pet seal, captured when a pup by a lighthouse-keeper on the coast of England, is given in "Reminiscences of a Sportsman." The young seal was fed, and allowed to have the range of the kitchen, and the members of the household became greatly attached to it.

It would make its way dally down to the water, and pass many hours swimming about. It secured more or less food in that way, but always returned to its place in the kitchen at night.

Blindness finally came to the seal with old age, but it continued its journeys to the sea, and returned home as regularly as before.

As old age increased, it caused annoyance by its peculiar cry for food and its lessened ability to get about. At last the family decided they must part with it, and not wishing to kill it, they arranged with a fisherman to carry it well off—some twenty miles—and drop it into the sea. They expected that it would come to a natural death in that element. But on the second day it appeared again at its accustomed place.

Another effort was made to get rid of it by arranging with a sailing vessel to take it several hundred miles out to sea and then drop it in. This was done, and some time passed away without any sign of the seal. But seven days after its departure the kitchen maid, who slept near the door of the kitchen, fancied during the night she had heard the plaintive cry of the seal; and the next morning its emaciated body was found on the threshold.

Trusting His Partner.

The Carrolls all confidently believe that their Billy, aged five, is destined for future distinction. Perhaps they are right; at any rate, he is not lacking in that sagacity in choosing "associates in enterprise" said to be essential to success.

Last summer Billy was seen walking slowly along the hotel piazza, thoughtfully scanning the faces of guests seated there. Finally he stopped at the chair of an old lady with whom he was on friendly terms.

"Say, Mrs. Jones, can you crack nuts?" he inquired, his hands in his pockets.

"Why, no deary, I'm very sorry, but I can't," replied Mrs. Jones, apologetically. "You know I've lost most of my teeth."

"That's what I thought," said Billy, relaxing from anxiety to his sunny smile, and extending his two hands confidently. "Say, will you keep these nuts here for me while I go get the rest of 'em?"

On Second Thought.

"Don't you remember, you said you would drown yourself if I didn't marry you?"

"Yes, I remember; how foolish I was!"

"Do you consider that it was foolish?"

"Yes; I should have threatened to drown myself if you did marry me."—Houston Post.