

THE RED TRAIL

By GUSTAVE AIMARD

CHAPTER XIX.

The newcomer walked gracefully up to Don Sebastian, still holding his hat in his right hand, bowed to him with exquisite grace, and thrusting his hand into his side, he said with an accent of cutting sarcasm, in a harsh, metallic voice:

"Do you recognize me, Don Sebastian, and do you believe I am really alive?"

At the same moment Belhumeur's knowing face could be seen peering through the doorway. With his eyes obstinately fixed on the General, he seemed to be impatiently expecting an answer, which the latter evidently hesitated to give.

"Who are you, senor?" said the General, "and by what right do you question me?"

"Well played," said Valentine. "Caballero, you are a rude adversary."

"Do you think so?" Don Sebastian asked, with a hoarse laugh.

"Certainly," the hunter continued, "and I am delighted to bear my testimony to the fact; hence you had better yield at once, for you are in a dilemma from which you cannot escape."

There was a silence lasting some minutes. At length the general seemed to make up his mind, for he turned to Belhumeur, who was still listening, and bowed to him with ironical politeness.

"Why stand half hidden by that door?" he said to him. "Pray enter, caballero."

The Canadian at once entered, and after giving the general a respectful bow he leaned over the back of Valentine's chair. The latter eagerly followed all the incidents of the strange scene that was being played before him, and in which he appeared to be a disinterested spectator rather than an actor.

"I am waiting," the general said, as he fell back in his chair with an air of weariness.

"We will bring matters to an end," Valentine said, drawing himself up with an air of resolution. "General, you will at once leave Mexico and give up Dona Anita, to whom you will not only restore her liberty, but also the right of giving her hand and fortune to whomsoever she pleases. You will sell your estates and retire to the United States, promising on oath never to return. On my side, I pledge myself to restore to you your daughter's body."

"Have you anything more to add?" the general coolly asked.

"Nothing; but take care, senor. I, too, have taken an oath, and from what I told you you must have seen how far I have detected your secrets. Accept or refuse, but come to a decision, for this is the last time we shall meet face to face under the like conditions. The game we are playing is a terrible one, and must end in the death of one of us, and I shall show you no pity, as, doubtless, you will show me none. Reflect seriously before answering yes or no, and I give you half an hour to decide."

The general rang the bell and the footman came in.

"Order the carriage," he said to him.

"Then," Valentine said as he rose, "it is war to the death between us."

"War to the death! be it so."

"We shall only meet once again, General," the hunter remarked; "and that will be on the eve of your death, when you are in Capilla."

"I accept the meeting, and will bow uncomplainingly before you if you are powerful enough to obtain that result; but, believe me, I am not there yet."

"You are nearer your fall than you perhaps suppose."

"That is possible; but enough of this. Light these gentlemen down," he said to the servant, who at this moment entered the room.

When the general entered his box at the theater, which was in the first circle, and almost facing the stage, the house presented a truly fairy-like appearance. The president's box was occupied by the first magistrate of the republic and some of his aide-de-camps. Several times Don Sebastian fancied that the president's eyes were fixed on him with a strange expression, after which he bent over and whispered some remarks to the gentlemen who accompanied him. Perhaps this was not real, and the general's pricked conscience suggested to him suspicions far from the thoughts of those against whom he had so many reasons to be on his guard; but real or not, these suspicions tortured his heart and proved to him the necessity of coming to an end at all risks.

Still the performance went on; the curtain had just fallen after the last act, and the general, devoured by anxiety, and persuaded that he had remained long enough in the theater to testify his presence, was preparing to retire, when the door of his box opened, and Col. Lupo walked in.

"Ah, is it you, colonel?" Don Sebastian said to him as he offered him his hand.

"Pray do not let me stop you, general, I have only a few words to say to you."

"Our business?"

"Goes on famously."

"No suspicion?"

"Not the shadow."

The general breathed like a man from whose chest a crushing weight has been removed.

"Can I be of any service to you?" he said, absently.

"For the present, I have only come for your sake."

"How so?"

"Well, I was accosted to-day by a desperado, a villain of the worst sort, who

says he wishes to avenge himself on a certain Frenchman, whom he declares you know, and he desires to place himself under your protection, in the event of the blade of his navaja accidentally slipping into his enemy's body."

"Did this worthy gentleman tell you his name, my dear colonel?"

"Yes; but I believe that it would be better to mention it in the open air, rather than in this place."

They left the theater and proceeded toward the Portales de Mercadores, which were entirely deserted at this advanced hour of the night.

CHAPTER XX.

"Now, Senor Don Jaime," said the general, "let us speak frankly, if you please."

"I wish for nothing better," the colonel replied.

"And to begin," Don Sebastian continued, "tell me who this man is from whom you hinted that I could derive some benefit."

"This man is a villain of the worst sort, as I already have the honor of telling you; his antecedents are, I suppose, rather dark, and that is all I have been able to discover."

"I think I remember. Was not this villain known by the sobriquet of the Zaragato?"

"He was, general; furious at what happened to him, and attributing it to Don Valentine, he took an oath to kill him whenever he met him."

"I must not and will not see him; but do you deal with him as you think proper. You understand that it is of the utmost importance that I should be ignorant of the arrangements you may make with him, and be able to prove, if necessary, that I had no knowledge of this. Moreover, as you are aware, I am not one for extreme measures; the sight of such a villain would be repulsive to me, for I have such a horror of bloodshed."

"I understand you only too well."

"What mean you?"

"That, if we succeed, you will be president of the republic."

"Remember, you will be a general and military governor of our richest State, Sonora," the other answered.

"It is useless to remind me of your promises, general; you are well aware that I am devoted to you."

"I know it, of course, and on that account leave you. Good-night, and come and breakfast with me to-morrow."

"I will not fail, general." The general pulled his hat over his eyes, wrapped himself in his cloak and went off hastily. On being left alone, the colonel remained plunged in deep thought; the office with which he was intrusted, for he perfectly caught the meaning of the general's hints, was serious.

At the moment when the colonel mechanically raised his head and looked despairingly up to heaven, he fancied he saw several suspicious shadows prowling about him in a suggestive manner. But the colonel was brave, and the more so because he had literally nothing to lose, hence he quietly loosened his sword, opened his cloak, and at the instant when four or five fellows attacked him at once with machetes and long navajas, he was on guard according to all the rules of the art, with his left foot supported by a pillar and his cloak wrapped like a buckler round his arm.

The attack was a rude one, but the colonel withstood it manfully; besides, all went on in the Mexican way, without shout or call for help.

Still the assailants, who were armed with short and heavy weapons, had the disadvantage against the colonel's long and thin sword, which twisted like a snake, writhed round their weapons, and had already pricked two of the men sharply enough to make the others reflect and display greater prudence in their attack. The colonel felt that they were giving ground.

"Come on, villains," he exclaimed, as he gave a terrific lunge and ran one of the bandits right through the body, who rolled on the pavement with a yell of pain.

"Stop, stop!" the man who seemed the leader of the bandits exclaimed; "we are mistaken."

As the bandits asked for nothing better than to stop, they retreated a few steps without hesitation.

"Can it possibly be you," the first speaker continued, "Senor Colonel Don Jaime Lupo?"

"Hallo!" the colonel said, falling back a step in surprise, "who mentioned my name?"

"I, excellency; a friend."

"A friend? A strange friend who has been trying to assassinate me for the last ten minutes."

"Believe me, colonel, that had we known whom we had to deal with, we should never have attacked you. All this is the result of a deplorable misunderstanding, which you will, however, excuse."

"But who are you?"

"What, excellency, do you not recognize the Zaragato?" the colonel exclaimed with glad surprise. "Well, scoundrel, are you aware that yours is a singular trade?"

"Alas! excellency, a man must do what he can," the bandit replied, in a sorrowful voice.

The colonel looked at him anxiously.

"I understand the cause of your grief," he said; "and it is the worse, because there is no remedy for it."

"Do you think so?"

"Capital! I am certain of it."

"You may be mistaken, excellency."

"Nonsense. You who so graciously place yourself at the service of those who have an insult to avenge, are forced to renounce your own vengeance."

"Oh, no, excellency, what is that you are saying?"

"I am speaking the truth. You hate the Frenchman whom you mentioned to me to-day, but you are afraid of him."

"Afraid!" he exclaimed, angrily.

"I bet you that you will not dare avenge yourself on your enemy within the next four-and-twenty hours, not even with the help of your twelve companions."

"And what will you bet, excellency?"

"Well, I am so certain of running no risk that I will bet you one hundred ounces. Does that suit you?"

"One hundred ounces!" the bandit exclaimed, his eyes sparkling with greed. "I would kill my own brother for such a sum."

CHAPTER XXI.

The house taken for Valentine by M. Rallier was, as we have already stated, situated in the Calle de Tacuba, only a few yards from the mansion belonging to General Don Sebastian Guerrero.

The hunter, therefore, would only have had a few steps to go to reach home after leaving the general. But suspecting that the latter might have given orders to have his carriage followed, he ordered his coachman to drive to the Alameda.

As the night was far advanced, the promenaders had abandoned the shady walks of the Alameda, which was now completely deserted. This doubtless was what the hunter desired, for, on reaching about the center of the drive, he ordered the coachman to stop, and got out with his companions.

Valentine, like all men accustomed to desert life, had an instinctive distrust of stone walls, behind which, in his fancy, a spy was continually listening. Hence, when he had an important affair to discuss, or a serious matter to communicate to his friends, he preferred going to the Alameda, or somewhere in the environs of Mexico, where after posing Curculla as sentry, he believed that he could safely confide his closest secrets to the friends he conveyed to the strange open-air council.

On reaching a thick clump of trees the hunter stopped.

"We shall be comfortable here," he said.

"The trees have eyes, and the leaves ears," Belhumeur answered sententially.

"Yes," Valentine remarked with a smile, "if you do not take the precaution to frighten away spies;" at the same moment he imitated the soft cadenced hiss of the coral snake.

A similar hiss was heard from the center of the clump and seemed like an echo.

"That is the chief's signal," the Canadian said. "He has been watching for us there for nearly an hour. Do you now believe that we are in safety?"

"Certainly; when Curculla watches over us we have no surprise to apprehend."

"Let us talk then," said Don Martial.

"One moment," Valentine remarked, "we must first hear the report of a friend."

"Whom are you alluding to?"

"You shall see," Valentine answered, and clasped his hands thrice softly.

Immediately a slight sound and a gentle rustling of leaves was heard in a neighboring thicket, and a man emerged, about four paces from the hunters. It was Carnero, the capataz.

"Good evening, senores," he said, with a polite bow. "I have been awaiting your coming for nearly an hour."

"We were detained longer than we expected by General Guerrero."

"Do you come from him?"

"Did I not tell you I would call on him?"

"Yes; but I hardly thought that you would have the temerity to venture into the lion's den."

"Nonsense," Valentine said with a disdainful smile, "the lion, as you call him, I assure you, was remarkably tame; he drew his claw, completely and received us with the most exquisite politeness."

"In that case take care," the capataz replied, with a shake of the head; "if he received you in that way, he is, be assured, preparing a terrible plot."

"I am of the same opinion; the question is, whether we shall allow him time to act."

"He is very clever, my dear Valentine," the capataz continued, "and seems to possess an intuition of evil. In spite of the oath I took to you when, on your entreaty, I consented to remain in his service, there are days when, although I possess a thorough knowledge of his character, he terrifies me, and I feel on the point of giving up the rude task which, through devotion to you, I have imposed on myself."

"Courage, my friend; persevere but a few days longer, and, believe me, we shall all be avenged."

"May heaven grant it!" the capataz said with a sigh; "but I confess that I dare not believe it, even though it is you who assure me of the fact."

(To be continued.)

Knew Neither Nurse Nor Baby.

"What a bright little thing!" exclaimed the society woman, patronizingly cooing at a baby out for an airing in the park. "Whose little one is this?"

"Yours, ma'am," replied the nurse.

"I'm the new nurse that kem yistherdy."—New York Press.

That's What Hurt.

"I don't like that there Mrs. Swellman at all," said Mrs. Nuritch.

"Well, you ain't got to take no notice of her," replied Mr. Nuritch.

"But the trouble is she don't take no notice o' me."—Philadelphia Press.



Passenger—When does this train start? Porter—When the whistle blows.—Nos Loisirs.

Newrich—A man can get along without ancestors. Mack—True, but his children can't.—Town Topics.

There are only two kinds of children—your own perfect, little cherubs and the ill-behaved brats owned by other people.—Town Topics.

"I, sir," began Bragg, "am a self-made man." "Yes," replied Wise, "but why apologize now? That won't help matters."—Philadelphia Press.

"One to-day is worth two to-morrows," said the philosopher. "You're another," replied Pat. "Tomorrow's pay day."—Chicago Record-Herald.

Editor's Wife—Listen how the tea kettle sings, my dear! Editor—Small wonder! I put a lot of "Spring Songs" in the fire just now.—Meggendorfer Blatter.

Patience—What reason had she for marrying him? Patrice—Why, he had money. Patience—That is not a reason; that is an excuse.—Yonkers Statesman.

American Magnate—What! You insist upon my settling a million on you? Why, yesterday you said only \$500,000. Duke—But since then I've seen the girl.—Town Topics.

Mistress (to new maid)—Above all things, I expect you to be reticent. Maid—Yes, ma'am, certainly. (Curiously) But what is there to be reticent about?—Lustige Blatter.

"Marie, can't you play tennis without making all that noise?" "Now, ma, who in the world ever heard of anyone's playing tennis without a racket?"—Baltimore American.

Jorkins—Drugged and robbed! Why don't you have some action taken in the matter? Jobson—I can't. I suppose the fellow had my permission. You see, he was my doctor.—New Yorker.

Daughter—So, mamma, you desire me to marry Mr. Baldhead. I simply detest him; he's a perfect idiot; it would take too long to enumerate all his faults. Mother—Very well, my dear; you'll be able to tell him all that when you are married.—Pele Mele.

Pinch—Don't get foolish just because you've had a little money left to you. You'd better be economical now. Gayley—Ah! it's too hard. Pinch—But if you don't live economically now you'll have to later. Gayley—Well, it isn't so hard to be economical when you have to.

Mrs. Egerton Blunt—But why did you leave your last place? Applicant—I couldn't stand the way the mistress and master used to quarrel, mum.

Mrs. E. B. (shocked)—Dear me! Did they quarrel very much, then? Applicant—Yes, mum; when it wasn't me an' 'im, it was me an' 'er.—Answers.

Wilhelm—Well, old man, I haven't seen you for an age. And how do you find matrimony suits you? Johann (sighing)—It's an expensive joy. If I had only known what I had to pay in milliners' bills—

Wilhelm—You would have remained single, eh? Johann—No. I would have married the milliner.—Lustige Blatter.

Mr. Housekeep—For goodness' sake! What are you crying about? Mrs. Housekeep—Bridget got mad and left this afternoon (sob) without a moment's (sob) notice. Mr. Housekeep—Well, you were going to discharge her, anyway. Mrs. Housekeep—I know (sob). That's the trouble. She (sob) got ahead of me.—Philadelphia Press.

"That city man spent Sunday with you, didn't he?" said Farroway. "What did he say about your place?" "Oh," replied Subbubs, "he talked nonsense; said it was a pity I didn't buy a place nearer the station." "Well, well!"

"Yes; I told him the real pity was that my place wasn't near enough to the station to sell."—Philadelphia Press.

"Yah, there!" angrily exclaimed Saymold Storey, who had curled himself up and gone to sleep on the sunny side of an ash barrel in the alley.

"Wot ye pokin' me thataway fur?" "Oxcuse me, please," said the rag-picker, dropping his iron hook in astonishment. "I did not know dere vos a man inside of dem!"—Chicago Tribune.

Henpeck—Did you hear of the nerry thing Meekley did? Underthum—Meekley? The idea! What was it? Henpeck—His wife went to her club the other night and when she came back she found the door locked. Meekley kept her waiting for fully two minutes before he answered the bell and then he pretended he had locked the door absent-mindedly.

PRECEPT AND PRACTICE.

Professor's Illustration of the Theory that Mind is a Marvelous Thing.

"The mind is a marvelous thing," said Prof. Zachariah Terwilliger to his psychology class, according to the New York Sun. "Let us consider," went on the worthy sage, "the process expressed in the good old homely phrase, 'making up one's mind.' I am on the threshold of an important decision. What I determine to do may have a grave bearing on my future. First I ponder over the matter carefully. I look at it in every aspect, examining it searchingly in all light, from all angles. By the indefinable process of reasoning I arrive at a certain conclusion. But that is not all."

"As a man of discretion, it behooves me to secure counsel. I listen carefully to judgments, noting sealously each person's individual bias. Then I assort and catalogue these outside opinions."

"I next step aside psychically and view the array. Having, as I modestly beg to claim, a plastic, although notably individual mind, I am able thus to project myself into the personalities of others, and view my own impressions and my own status as they might view them. This, young gentlemen, is an especially valuable exercise. I urge you to cultivate the faculty."

"Finally, I give one last, sweeping survey to the whole subject. Then I decide; my mind is made up irrevocably. No stress, no threats could alter that decision; no cajolery, no urging could modify it. For, there is nothing so valuable as firmness."

"This illustration has been taken from actuality. I have come to an unalterable decision."

The students departed, much impressed. The professor, in a glow of self-satisfaction, sought his home. Mrs. Terwilliger met him at the door.

"Zachariah," she said, "have you made up your mind on that matter?"

"Yes, my dear, I have thought it over and decided to say no."

"Really?" There was a touch of irony in the good lady's tone. "Well, I've thought it over, too, and I've decided you must accept. It would be nonsense to—"

Mrs. Terwilliger's aspect was ominous.

"Very well, my dear," interjected the professor quickly and meekly. "All right; do not let us have any words. Of course, I shall accept; of course."

WHAT'S IN A TITLE?

The Puritan needed a vent for the energy repressed by his rigidly ordered existence. Shorn of ornament in dress and decoration, he evidently worked off a portion of his sense of the ornate in some of the titles of the religious works of the time. Many of them are sensational and alliterative enough to satisfy the yellowest reporter of to-day. The contents of the bottles thus labeled must be of lurid and strenuous nature, or else it might be said of them, as the dramatist wrote of the cognomen of humankind:

The name is but a shadow which we find.

Too often larger than the man behind.

"The Seven Sobs of a Sorrowful Soul for Sin, or the Seven Penitential Psalms of the Princely Prophet David; whereunto are added William Humin's Handful of Honeysuckles, and Divers Godly and Pithy Ditties, Now newly augmented," is impressive, but a little cumbersome for ordinary conversation and advertising.

Another, inconveniently long, is:

"A reaping hook well-tempered for the stubborn ears of the coming Crop of Blacut baked in the Oven of Charity. Carefully Conserved for the Chickens of the Church, the Sparrows of the Spirit, and the Sweet Swallows of Salvation."

After these, titles such as the following sound tame and hardly worthy of notice:

"The Spiritual Mustard Pot to make the Soul Sneeze with Devotion"; "The Shop of the Spiritual Apothecary"; "Matches lighted at Divine Fire," and "Sixpenny-worth of Divine Spirit."

In a much milder and secular sort of a way the modern newspaper partakes of the spirit of its Puritan exemplar in the heading of the paragraph columns:

"Quirks and Quibbles"; "Nibbles for the Million"; "The Junk-Shop"; "Crumbs for all kinds of Chickens"; "Paragaphical Pudding"; "Spice Islands Passed in the Sea of Reading."

Learned That Way Herself.

"That man you are engaged to is an awful spendthrift. Are you marrying him to reform him?"

"Nope; I'm marrying him to help him be a spendthrift."—Houston Post.

Because they don't understand, it doesn't prevent many men from making an explanation.

Men enjoy farming—if they have enough money to hire it done.