

THE RED TRAIL

By GUSTAVE AIMARD

CHAPTER IX.—(Continued.)

The traveler looked at him fixedly for a moment or two, and then laid his hand firmly on his arm and pulled him toward the table.

"Now, look here," he said to him curtly, "I intend to pass two hours in your hotel, at all risks; I know that between this and seven o'clock you expect a large party." The landlord attempted to give a denial, but the traveler cut him short.

"Silence," he continued, "I wish to be present at this meeting; of course I do not mean to be seen; but I must not only see them, but hear all they say. Put me where you please, that is your concern; but as any trouble deserves payment, here are ten ounces for you, and I will give you as many more when your visitors have gone, and I assure you that what I ask of you will not in any way compromise you. Now, I will add, that if you obstinately refuse the arrangement I offer—"

"Well, suppose I do?"

"I will blow out your brains," the traveler said distinctly.

"Hang it, excellency," the poor fellow answered, with a grimace, "I think that I have no choice, and am compelled to accept."

"Good! now you are learning reason; but take three ounces as a consolation."

The landlord, forgetting that he had declared a few moments previously that he had nothing in the house, instantly covered the table with provisions, which, if not particularly delicate, were sufficiently appetizing. When their hunger was at length appeased, the traveler who seemed to speak for both thrust away his plate and addressed the landlord, who was modestly standing behind him, hat in hand.

"And now for another matter," he said; "how many lads have you to help you?"

"Two, excellency—the one who took your horses to the corral, and another."

"Very good. I presume you will not require both those lads to wait on your friends to-night?"

"Certainly not, excellency; indeed, for greater security, I shall wait on them alone."

"Better still; then, you see no inconvenience in sending one of them into the Ciudad?"

"No inconvenience at all, excellency; what is the business?"

"Simply," he said, taking a letter from his bosom, "to convey this letter to Señor Don Antonio Rálller, in the Calle Monterilla, and bring me back an answer."

"That is easy, excellency; if you will have the kindness to intrust the letter to me."

"Here it is, and four piastres for the journey."

The host bowed respectfully and immediately left the room.

"I fancy, Curumilla," the traveler then said to his companion, "that our affairs are going on well."

The other replied with a silent nod of assent. The travelers rose; in a twinkling when the landlord returned and removed all signs of supper, and then hid his guests behind an old-fashioned counter.

CHAPTER X.

The travelers had scarce time to conceal themselves ere several knocks on the door warned the landlord that the mysterious guests he expected were beginning to arrive.

The door was hardly ajar ere several men burst into the inn, thrusting each other aside in their haste, as if afraid of being followed. These men were seven or eight in number, and it was easy to see they were officers, in spite of the precaution of some among them who had put on civilian attire.

They laughed and jested loudly. The door of the rancho had been left ajar by the landlord, who probably thought it unnecessary to close it; the officers succeeded each other with great rapidity, and their number soon became so great that the room was completely filled.

As for No Luchacho, he continually prowled round the tables, watching everything with a corner of his eyes, and being careful not to serve the slightest article without receiving immediate payment. At length, one of the officers rose.

"Is Don Sirven here?"

"Yes, señor," a young man of twenty at the most answered as he rose.

"Assure yourself that no person is absent."

The young man bowed and began walking from one table to the other, exchanging two or three words in a low voice with each of the visitors. When Don Sirven had gone round the room, he went to the person who had addressed him and said with a respectful bow:

"Señor colonel, the meeting is complete and only one person is absent; but as he did not tell us certainly whether he would do us the honor of being present to-night, I—"

"That will do," the colonel interrupted; "remain outside, watch the environs and let no one approach without challenging him, but if you know who arrives introduce him immediately."

"You can trust me, colonel," the young man answered, and, after bowing to his superior officer, he left the room and closed the door behind him.

The officers then turned round on the benches and thus found themselves face to face with the colonel, who had stationed himself in the middle of the room. The letter waited a few minutes till per-

fect silence was established, and then spoke as follows:

"Let me, in the first place, thank you, caballeros, for the punctuality with which you have responded to the meeting I had the honor of arranging with you. I am delighted at the confidence it has pleased you to display in me, and, believe me, I shall show myself worthy of it; for it proves to me once again that you are really devoted to the interests of our country and that I may freely reckon on you in the hour of danger. You understand as well as I do that we can no longer bow our necks beneath our despotic government. The man who at this moment holds our destinies in his hands has shown himself unworthy of his mandate. The hour will soon strike for the man who has deceived us to be overthrown."

The colonel had made a start, and would probably have continued his plausible speech for a long time in an emphatic voice, had not one of his audience interrupted him:

"That is all very fine, colonel," he said, "we are all aware that we are gentlemen devoted, body and soul, to our country; but devotion must be paid for. What shall we get by this after all?"

The colonel was at first slightly embarrassed by this warm apostrophe; but he recovered himself at once, and turned with a smile to his interpreter:

"I was coming to it, my dear captain, at the very moment when you cut across my speech."

"Oh, that is different," the captain answered.

"In the first place," the colonel went on, "I have news for you which I feel assured you will heartily welcome. This is the last time we shall meet."

"Very good," said the practical captain.

The colonel saw that he could no longer dally with the matter, for all his hearers openly took part with their comrade. At the moment when he resolved to tell all he knew, the door of the inn was opened, and a man wrapped in a large cloak quickly entered the room preceded by the Alferes Don Sirven, who shouted in a loud voice:

"The general, Caballeros, the general."

At this announcement silence was re-established as if by enchantment. The person called the general stopped in the middle of the room, looked around him, and then took off his hat, let his cloak fall from his shoulders, and appeared in the full dress uniform of a general officer.

"Long live Gen. Guerrero," the officers shouted as they rose enthusiastically.

"Thanks, gentlemen, thanks," the general responded with numerous bows. "This warm feeling fills me with delight; but pray be silent, that we may properly settle the matter which has brought us here; moments are precious, and, in spite of the precautions we have taken, your presence at this inn may have been denounced. I will come at once to facts, without entering into idle speculations, which would cause us to waste valuable time. In a word, then, what is it we want? To overthrow the present government, and establish another more in conformity with our opinions, and, above all, our interests."

"Yes, yes," the officers exclaimed.

"In that case we are conspiring against the established authority, and are rebels in the eyes of the law," the general continued coolly and distinctly; "as such we stake our heads. If our attempt fails, we shall be pitilessly shot by the victor; but we shall not fail," he hastily added, "because we are resolutely playing a terrible game, and each of us knows that his fortune depends on winning."

"Yes, yes," the captain whose observations had, previous to the general's arrival, so greatly embarrassed the colonel, said, "all that is very fine; but we were promised something else in your name, excellency."

The general smiled.

"You are right, captain," he remarked; "but I intend to keep all promises—but not, as you might reasonably suppose, when our glorious enterprise has succeeded."

"When then, pray?" the captain asked, curiously.

"At once, señores," the general exclaimed.

Joy and astonishment so paralyzed his hearers that they were unable to utter a syllable. The general looked at them for a moment, and then, turning away with a mocking smile, he walked to the front door, which he opened. The officers eagerly watched his movements, and the general, after looking out coughed twice.

"Here I am, excellency," a voice said, issuing from the fog.

"Bring in the bags," Don Sebastian ordered, and then quietly returned to the middle of the room.

Almost immediately after a man entered, bearing a heavy leather saddlebag. It was Carnero. At a signal from his master he deposited his bundle and went out, but returned shortly after with another bag, which he placed by the side of the first one. Then, after bowing to his master he withdrew.

The general opened the bags, and a flood of gold poured in a trickling cascade on the table; the officers instinctively held out their quivering hands.

When all the gold had disappeared and the effervescence was beginning to subside, Don Sebastian, who, like the Angel of Hell, had looked on with a profoundly

mocking smile, slightly tapped the table to request silence.

"Señores," he said, "I have kept all my promises, and have acquired the right to count on you. We shall not meet again, but at a future day I will let you know my intentions. Still be ready to act at the first signal; in ten days is the anniversary festival of the Proclamation of Independence, and if nothing alters my plans I shall probably choose that day to try, with your assistance, to deliver the country from the tyrants who oppress it. However, I will be careful to have you warned. So now let us separate; the night is far advanced, and a longer stay at this spot might compromise the sacred interests for which we have sworn to die."

CHAPTER XI.

The Alameda of Mexico is one of the most beautiful in America. It is situated at one of the extremities of the city, and forms a long square, with a wall of circumscription bordered by a deep ditch, whose muddy, fetid waters, owing to the negligence of the government, exhale pestilential miasmas. At each corner of the promenade a gate offers admission to carriages, riders and pedestrians, who walk silently beneath a thick awning of verdure formed by willows, elms and poplars that border the principal road. These trees are selected with great tact, and are always green, for although the leaves are renewed, it takes place gradually and imperceptibly, so that the branches are never entirely stripped of their foliage.

It was evening, and, as usual, the Alameda was crowded; handsome carriages, brilliant riders and modest pedestrians were moving backward and forward, with cries, laughter and joyous calls, as they sought each other in the walks. By degrees, however, the promenaders went toward the Bucarelli; the carriages became scarcer, and by the time night had set in the Alameda was deserted.

A horseman, dressed in a rich Campesino costume and mounted on a magnificent horse, entered the Alameda along which he galloped for about twenty minutes examining the side walks the clumps of trees and the bushes; in a word he seemed to be looking for somebody or something.

At the moment when the traveler reached the Bucarelli the last carriages were leaving it and it was soon as deserted as the Alameda. He galloped up and down the promenade twice or thrice looking carefully down the side rides and at the end of his third turn a horseman, coming from the Alameda, passed on his right hand, giving him in a low voice the Mexican salute, "Santissima noche caballero!"

Although the sentence had nothing peculiar about it the horseman started, and immediately turning his horse round, started in pursuit. Within a minute the two horsemen were side by side; the first corner, so soon as he saw that he was followed, checked his horse's pace, as if with the intention of entering into direct communication.

"A fine night for a ride, señor," the first horseman said, politely raising his hand to his hat.

"It is," the second answered, "although it is beginning to grow late."

"The moment is only the better chosen for certain private conversation."

The second horseman looked around, and bending over to the speaker, said:

"I almost despaired of meeting you."

"Did I not let you know that I should come?"

"True; but I feared that some obstacle—"

"Nothing should impede an honest man from accomplishing a sacred duty," the first horseman said.

The other bowed with an air of satisfaction. "Then," he said, "I can count on you, No—"

"No names here, señor," the other sharply interrupted him. "Capita, an old wood ranger like you, a man who has long been a Tigreiro, ought to remember that the trees have ears and the leaves eyes."

"Yes, you are right. I do remember it, but permit me to remark that if it is not possible for us to talk here where can we do so?"

"Patience, señor, I wish to serve you, as you know, for you were recommended to me by a trusty man. Be guided by me, if you wish us to succeed in this affair."

"I ask nothing better; still you must tell me what I ought to do."

"For the present very little; merely follow me at a distance to the place where I purpose taking you."

(To be continued.)

Just a Boy.

"Hold on!" said the learned chemist. "Didn't I give you a bottle of my wonderful tonic that would make you look twenty years younger?"

"You did," replied the patient, "and I took it all. I was then 39 and now I am only 19."

"Well, then will you please settle this little bill you owe for the treatment?"

"Oh, no. As I am only 19 now, I am a minor and minors are not held responsible for the bills they incur. Good-day, sir."

Made Himself So.

Naybor—I called to see Nerve last night, but he wasn't at home.

Subbube—Oh, yes, he was.

Naybor—Not at all. I tell you—

Subbube—But I tell you he was, and very much at home. He monopolized the Morris chair in my den all evening.—Philadelphia Press.

Every day there drops into the coffers of the New York elevated railways 27,500 nickels, to say nothing of the other coins and bills.

HIS TRAILING.

"I thought you'd like him," said the man in the white waistcoat, with a disappointed air.

"I did—at first," said the man in the negligee shirt. "If I hadn't, I wouldn't have asked him out."

"He always seemed to me to be a good fellow," urged the man in the white waistcoat.

"I'm surprised to hear you say so," said the man in the negligee shirt. "I thought you were a judge of a good fellow. Oh, he may be all right in his way, but he strikes me as off-color. Just my opinion, you know."

"I've known him for close on twenty years," said the man in the white waistcoat. "I've known him for that long, anyway, and I never heard of his doing a mean trick."

"That may be. Mind you, I don't say that he would."

"And I've known of his doing some mighty fine things."

"I can quite believe that. But he needs watching."

"There's nothing stingy or mean about him."

"Probably not."

"On the contrary, he's liberal and big-hearted. He's fond of his family and he's public-spirited and he's good company—tells a good story. I'm sure he's as straight as a string."

"You needn't get worked up about it," said the man in the negligee shirt. "I don't deny it."

"Then what in thunder—"

"I'll tell you, Jim. Do you know, that fellow doesn't like strawberries—won't eat 'em, in fact?"

The man in the white waistcoat stared. Then he laughed.

"That's right," said the man in the negligee shirt. "I'm telling you the honest truth. I'm not joking, Jim. The evening he was out I had on the ice four quarts of the dandiest berries you ever set your eyes on or curled your thrice-blessed tongue around. They were scarlet as sin and too big for a well-bred man to take into his mouth all at once, and as to the fla-

vor! No, I can't tell you anything about the flavor. Nobody could describe that. I've been eating strawberries all my life, and I generally get about the best there are in the market, but I never had the luck to strike any like these. I knew exactly what they were, because there were six quarts of them originally, and I used up two boxes sampling them before my wife dragged me away by main force."

The man in the white waistcoat picked up the bill of fare and looked at it. "They weren't extra good here yesterday," he observed, "but I guess I'll have to try 'em again."

"I liked this chap, mind you," pursued the man in the negligee shirt. "I told you I liked him. My heart was warm to him. I wanted to confer ecstasies upon him. I yearned to see him smack his lips and roll his eyes heavenward in a fine frenzy of rapture. I thought the time had come as we sat out on the porch, and I nodded to my wife."

"She signaled the maid, and the strawberries came on in a lordly dish, accompanied by thick yellow cream and sugar white as snow and fine as flour. I smiled on him benignantly as my wife plied a liberal whack for him, and—"

"Thank you, but I don't eat strawberries," he says.

"What? I shouted.

"They really look very nice," he said, with a smile—a smile—but I never eat them."

"You're joking," I said.

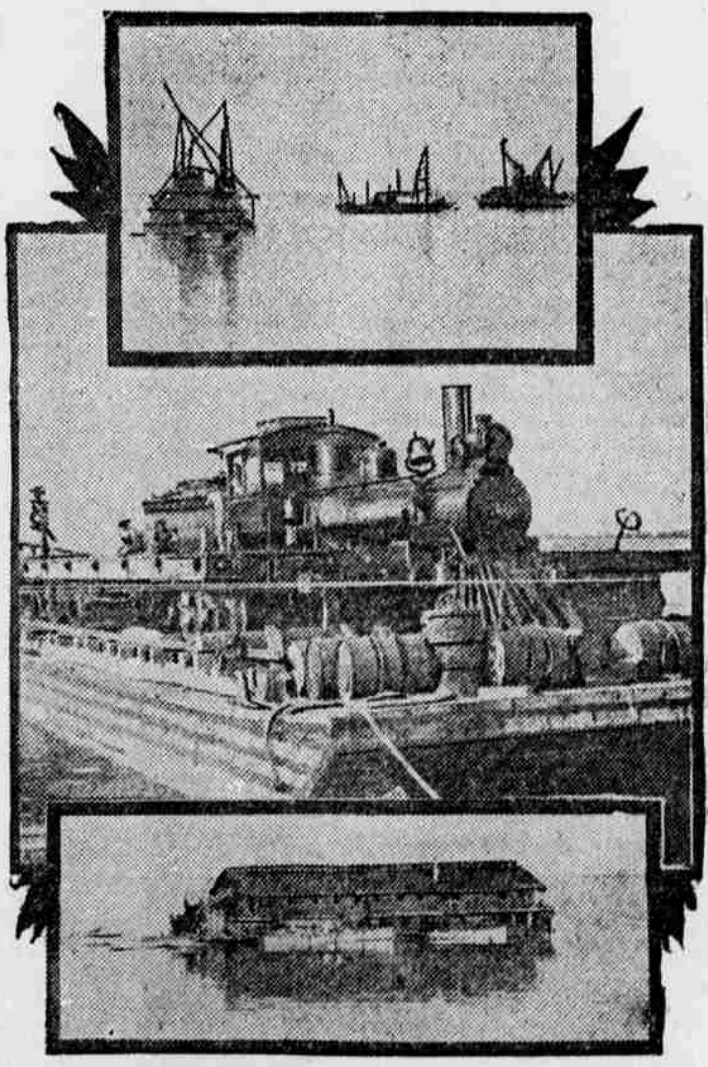
"No," he replied, "I'm not joking. I never learned to like 'em."

"Now, that's as true as I sit here. And he doesn't even like strawberry shortcake! Don't you think, now, that there must be something wrong with a man like that? Screw loose somewhere, eh?"

"Perhaps you're right," admitted the man in the white waistcoat.

"If it was anything else I wouldn't care," said the man in the negligee shirt. "But strawberries!"—Chicago Daily News.

OCEAN RAILROAD A WORLD WONDER.



The top picture shows where foundations are being laid in the ocean for viaduct; middle picture shows rolling stock on snow following viaduct construction. At bottom is hotel on a small key out in the ocean where engineers and workmen live close to their work.

SEA RAILWAY A MIRACLE.

Crosses 160 Miles of Ocean, and Will Cost \$32,000,000.

The railroad which Henry M. Flagler and his millionaire associates in the Standard Oil Company are building over the Atlantic ocean from the mainland to Key West, Fla., has made such progress that it is announced that the line will be completed by the summer of 1909.

This railway is the world's most extraordinary engineering project to-day, and engineers at least say that when completed it will be a wonder of the world. The railway will be 160 miles

long. All the way from mainland to Key West are small islands or keys, as they are called, some an acre or less in extent. The builders of the road are connecting these keys with immense viaducts, supported by huge abutments of solid concrete. At one point, two keys are three miles apart, but the engineers did not hesitate. They found the ocean only forty feet deep, and they proceeded at once to construct a great connecting bridge. Cofferdams were sunk and the bed of the ocean was dredged out in places to solid rock. Then the solid concrete foundations were laid. The engineers are confident that the worst ocean storms will not disturb their bridges.