THE RED TRAIL

By GUSTAVE AIMARD

CHAPTER XXI.—(Continued.)

"Have you learned any important news since our last interview?"

"Only one thing, but I think it is of the utmost gravity for you."

"Speak, my friend."

"What I have to tell you is short and gloomy, senores. The general, after a secret conversation with his man of business, ordered me to carry a letter to the Convent of the Bernardines."

"To the convent?" Don Martial exclaimed.

"Silence," said Valentine. "Do you know the contents of this letter?"

"Dona Anita gave it me to read. The general informs the abbess that he is resolved to finish the matter; that whether his ward be mad or not, he means to marry her, and that at sunrise on the day after to-morrow, a priest sent by him will present himself at the convent to arrange the ceremony."

"What is to be done?" the Tigrero exclaimed sadly.

"Silence," Valentine repeated. "Is that all, Carnero?"

"No; the general adds that he requests the abbess to prepare the young lady for this union, and that he will himself call at the convent to-morrow, in order to explain more fully his inexorable wishes."

"Very good, my friend, I thank you for this precious information; it is of the utmost importance that the general should be prevented from going to the convent before three o'clock."

"Do not be uneasy, my dear Valentine; the general shall not go to the convent before the hour you indicate."

"I count on your promise, my friend; and now good-by."

He offered him his hand, which the capataz pressed forcibly.

"My friends," Valentine then said, "we have now arrived at the moment for the final struggle which we have so long been preparing. We must not let ourselves be led away by hatred, but act like judges, not as men who are avenging themselves. Blood demands blood, it is true, according to the law of the desert, but remember, however culpable the man whom we have condemned may be, his death would be an indelible spot, a brand of infamy which would sully our honor."

"But this monster," the Tigrero exclaimed, "is beyond the pale of humanity."

"He may re-enter it to repent."

"Are we priests then, to practice forgetfulness of insults?" Don Martial asked with a fiendish grin.

"No, my friend; there are men in the grand and sublime acceptance of the term; men who have often been faulty themselves, and who, rendered better by the life of struggling they have led, and the grief which has frequently bowed them beneath its iron yoke, inflict a chastisement, but despise vengeance, which they leave to weak and pusillanimous minds. Who of you, my friends, would dare to say that he has suffered more than I? To him alone will I concede the right of imposing his will on me, and what he bids me do I will do."

"Forgive me, my friend," the Tigrero answered, "you are ever good, ever great. Heaven, in imposing on you a heavy task, endowed you at the same time with an energetic soul, and a heart which seems to expand in your bosom under the blast of adversity, instead of withering."

"Through my own sufferings, I can understand what yours are. I, too, often feel my heart bound with wrath and indignation; for, believe me, my friend, I have a constant struggle to wage against myself, not to let myself be led away to make a vengeance of what must only be a punishment. But enough on this head; time presses, and we must arrange our plans so as not to be foiled by our enemies. I went to-day to the Palace, where I had a secret conversation with the President of the Republic, whom, as you are aware, I have known for many years, and who honors me with a friendship of which I am far from believing myself worthy. At the end of our interview he handed me a paper, a species of blank signature, by the aid of which I can do what I think advisable for the success of our plans."

"Did you obtain such a paper?"

"I have it in my pocket. Now, listen to me. You will go at sunrise to-morrow to the house of Don Antonio Rallier; he will be informed of your coming, and you will follow his instructions."

"And you?"

"Do not be anxious about my movements, good friend, and only think of your own business, for, I repeat, the decisive moment is approaching. The day after to-morrow begins the feast of the anniversary of Mexican independence; that is to say, on that day we shall do battle with our enemy, and meet him face to face; and the combat will be a rude one, for this man has a will of iron, and a terrible energy. We shall be able to conquer him, but not to subdue him, and if we do not take care he will slip through our hands like a serpent; hence our personal affairs must be finished to-morrow. Though apparently absent, I shall be really near you, that is to say, I will help you with all my power. I trust that you have heard and understood me, my friend?"

"Yes, Don Valentine."

"And you will act as I recommend?"

"I promise it."

"Reflect that you are perhaps risking the loss of your future happiness."

"I will not forget your recommendation, I swear to you; I am risking too great a stake in this game, which must decide my future life, to let myself be induced to commit any act of violence."

"Good; I am happy to hear you speak thus; but have confidence, my friend, I feel certain that we shall succeed."

"May heaven hear you!"

"It always hears those who appeal to it with a pure heart and a lively faith. Hope, I tell you; and now, my dear Don Martial, permit me to say a few words to our worthy friend, Belhumeur."

"I will withdraw."

"What for? have I any secrets from you? You can hear what I am going to say to him."

"You have nothing to say to me, Valentine," the hunter said, with a shake of his head, "nothing but what I know already; I have no other interest in what is about to take place beyond the deep friendship that attached me to the count and now to you. You think that the recollection I have preserved of our unhappy friend cannot be sufficiently engraven on my heart for me to risk my life at your side in avenging him; but you are mistaken, Valentine, that's all. I will not abandon you in the hour of combat; I will remain at your side even should you order me to leave you. I tell you that I swear, and have taken an oath to that effect, to make a shield of my body to protect you, if it should be necessary. Now, give me your hand, and suppose we say no more about it?"

Valentine remained silent for a moment; a scalding tear ran down his bronzed cheek, and he took the hand of the honest, simple-minded Canadian, and merely uttered the words:

"Thank you, I accept."

They then rose and returned to their carriage, after Valentine had warned his faithful bodyguard, Curumilla, by a signal that he could leave his hiding place, as the interview was over. A quarter of an hour later the three gentlemen reached the house in the Calle de Tacuba, where Curumilla was already awaiting them.

CHAPTER XXII.

On the morrow Mexico awoke to a holiday; nothing extraordinary, in a country where the year is a perpetual holiday. This time the affair was serious, for the inhabitants wished to celebrate in a proper manner the anniversary of the Proclamation of Independence, of which the day to which we allude was the eve.

At sunrise a formidable bando issued from the government palace, and went through all the streets and squares of the city, announcing with a mighty clamour of bugles and drums, that on the next day there would be a bull fight with "Jamaica" and "Monte Parnasso" for the leperos, high mass celebrated in all the churches, theaters thrown open gratis, a review of the garrison, and of all the troops quartered sixty miles round, and fireworks and illuminations at night, with open-air balls and ferias.

Don Martial, in order to throw out the spies doubtless posted round Valentine's house, had left his friend in the middle of the night, and gone to his lodgings, and a few minutes before day proceeded to the house of M. Rallier.

"You are welcome," the Frenchman said cordially, on perceiving Don Martial; "I was busy with our affair. My brother Edward is just off to our quinta, whither my mother and my brother Auguste proceeded two days ago, so that we might find all in order on our arrival."

Although the Tigrero did not entirely understand what the banker said to him, he considered it unnecessary to show it, and hence bowed without answering.

"All is settled, then," M. Rallier continued, addressing his brother; "get everything ready, for we shall probably arrive before mid-day—that is to say, in time for lunch."

"Your country house is not far from the city?" the Tigrero asked, for the sake of saying something.

"Hardly five miles; it is at St. Angel; but in an excellent position for defense, in event of attack. You are aware that St. Angel is built on the side of an extinct volcano, and surrounded by lava and spongy scoria, which renders an approach very difficult."

"I must confess my ignorance of the fact."

"In a country like this, where the government is bound to think of its own defense before troubling itself about individuals, it is well to take one's precaution, and be always perfectly on guard. And now be off, my dear Edward, your weapons are all right, and two resolute peons will accompany you; besides the sun is now rising, and you will have a pleasant ride; so good-by till we meet again."

During this conversation the peons had put the horses in a close carriage.

"Get in," said M. Rallier.

"What!" Don Martial replied, "are we going to drive?"

"Do you think I would venture to go to the convent on horseback?"

"But this carriage will betray you."

"I admit it; but no one will know whom it contains when the shutters are drawn up, which I shall be careful to do before leaving the house. Come, get in."

The Tigrero placed himself by the Frenchman's side; the latter pulled up the shutters, and started at a gallop in a direction diametrically opposed to that which it should have followed, in order to reach the convent.

"Where are we going?" the Tigrero asked presently.

"To the Convent of the Bernardines."

"I fancy we are not going the right road."

"That is possible, but, at any rate, it is the safest."

"I humbly confess that I cannot understand it at all."

M. Rallier began laughing.

"My good fellow," he replied, "you will understand at the right time, so be easy. You need only know that in acting as I am now doing I am carrying out to the letter the instructions of Valentine, my friend and yours."

"I have no repugnance to obey you, Senor Don Antonio," the Tigrero answered. "The confidence our common friend places in you is a sure guarantee to me of your intentions. Hence dispose of me as you think proper, without fearing the slightest objection on my part."

"That is the way to talk," the banker said, with a laugh. "Now, to begin, my dear senor, you will do me the pleasure of changing your dress, for the one you wear is slightly too worldly for the place to which we are going."

"Change my dress?" the Tigrero exclaimed. "You ought to have told me so at your house."

"Unnecessary, my dear sir. I have all you require here."

"Here?"

"Well, you shall see," he said, as he took from one of the coach pockets a Franciscan's gown, while from the other he drew a pair of sandals and a cord. "Have you not worn this dress before?"

"I have."

"Well, you are going to put it on again, and for the following reasons: At the convent people believe (or pretend to believe, which comes to the same thing) that you are a Franciscan monk. For the sake, then, of the persons who are not in the secret, it is necessary that I should be accompanied by a monk, and more, that they may be able, if required, to take their oaths to the fact."

"I obey you. But will not your coachman be surprised at seeing a Franciscan emerge from the carriage into which he showed a caballero?"

"My coachman? Pardon me, but I do not think you looked at him."

"Indeed I did not. All these Indians are alike and equally hideous."

"That is true; however, look at him."

Don Martial bent forward and slightly lowered the shutter.

"Curumilla!" he cried, in amazement, as he drew back. "He, and so well disguised?"

"Do you now believe that he will be surprised?"

"I was wrong."

"No, bupt you did not take the trouble to reflect."

"Well, I will put on the gown, since I must. Still with your permission I will keep my weapons under it."

"Caspita! My permission? On the contrary, I order you to do so. But what are they?"

"You shall see. A machete, a knife, and a pair of pistols."

"That is first rate. If necessary, I shall be able to find you a rifle."

While talking thus, the Tigrero had changed his dress.

"There," the Frenchman continued, "you are a perfect monk."

"No; I want something more, something which is even indispensable."

"What's that?"

"The hat."

"That's true."

"That part of my costume I hardly know how we shall obtain."

"Man of little faith!" the Frenchman said with a smile, "see, and be confounded."

While speaking thus he raised the front cushion, opened the box it covered and pulled out the hat of a monk of St. Francis, which he gave the Tigrero.

"And now do you want anything else?"

"Indeed, no. Why, your carriage is a perfect locomotive shop."

The Frenchman opened the door, for the carriage had stopped in front of the Convent of the Bernardines. Two or three ill-looking fellows were prowling about; and, in spite of their affected indifference, it was easy to recognize them for spies. The Frenchman and his companion were not deceived. They got out with an indifference as well assumed as that of the spies, and approached the door slowly, which opened at their first knock, and closed again behind them with a speed that proved the slight confidence the sister porter placed in the individuals left outside.

"What do you desire, senores?" she asked, politely, after curtesying to the newcomers with a smile of recognition.

"My dear sister," the Frenchman answered, "be good enough to inform the holy mother abbess of our visit, and ask her to favor us with an interview for a few moments.

"It is still very early, brother," the nun answered, "and I do not know if holy mother can receive you at this moment."

"Merely mention my name to her, sister, and I feel convinced that she will make no difficulty about receiving us."

"I doubt it, brother, for, as I said before, it is very early. Still, I am willing to tell her, in order to prove to you my readiness to serve you."

"I feel deeply grateful to you for the kindness, sister."

(To be continued.)

Much Used Wedding Gift.

A Providence girl who has been married about six months had wedding cards a short time ago from an old school friend who had given her a wedding present which, of course, demanded one in return. Among her wedding presents the Providence girl had duplicates in the shape of two silver card trays, and in a spirit of economy she decided to give one of these to her friend. It was marked with her own initials, but it would be only a matter of a few minutes to have them removed and the proper monogram cut.

She took it to the jeweler and explained what was to be done. He picked up the tray, looked at it closely and smiled.

"Madame," said he, "it will be impossible. I have already changed the initials on this same tray five times and it has worn so thin that I can not do it again without cutting through the bottom.—Providence Journal.

Horses Increasing in Number.

During the last seven years the number of horses in the country has increased about 30 per cent, from 15,000,000 to 23,000,000 but value has increased about 112 per cent. The average price on the farm in 1900 is stated at $44.50. In 1907 it is $94.50—the highest price of which there is any official record.

Convenient.

"So you have three pairs of glasses, professor?"

"Yes. One pair to read with, another for nearsightedness and a third pair to look for the other two with."—Fliegende Blaetter.

Like Attracting Like.

"Do you see any good reason why a doctor should not be also a poet?"

"Certainly not; isn't poetry a drug in the market?"—Baltimore American.

BORAH IMPLICATED

Government Produces Letters Showing His Connection.

STEUNENBERG DEEPLY INVOLVED

Correspondence Is That of William Sweet, One of the Men Indicted for Fraud.

Boise, Sept. 28.—Half a score of letters which the government attorneys in the trial of Senator William E. Borah declare go to show the complicity of ex-Governor Steunenberg in the alleged timber land fraud conspiracy were introduced in evidence late yesterday and read to the jury. The letters were written by William Sweet, one of the indicted men, who, it is reported, will take the stand as a witness for the United States. The documents were produced by J. H. Richards, the local attorney, to whom they were written and who acted as legal adviser to Sweet.

Most of the letters were dated from New York and Boston and several of them were replies to letters or telegrams urging him to return to Idaho.

"I can't see why I should come back unless it is in regard to timber, and that is all in the governor's hands," wrote Sweet in one of his notes. Then he proceeded:

"As to the money coming to me, put it in the bank. I have absolute faith in the governor. He came to my assistance and helped me out of a mess I never ought to have got in. I don't know what I would have done if it had not been for the governor."

In another letter Sweet gave the amounts he was "in" on the timber deal. The total amount was about $29,000, including a $7,500 note signed by himself and Steunenberg. Shortly after this Sweet wrote to his attorney that he had read in the papers of a timber inspector being sent to Idaho.

Borah's name was drawn into the case for the first time just before adjournment, when Henry S. Worthman, another local attorney, took the stand and produced more letters from Sweet. In one letter to Worthman he wrote:

"Richards used his power of attorney to turn all my money, $10,000, over to Steunenberg, and it is like pulling a cat through a stocking to get it back. I wish you would see W. E. Borah about this and get him to make a little statement of the governor's obligation to me. He is the governnor's attorney, but is a first class gentleman and knows a little statement is only fair to me. Tell him I haven't the scratch of a pen from Steunenberg to show that he has $10,000 of my money. He said the copy of our agreement was lost."

INDICTS HARRIMAN LINES.

Federal Grand Jury at San Francisco Finds 124 Counts.

San Francisco, Sept. 28.—The Federal grand jury yesterday returned five indictments of 124 counts against the Southern Pacific company and the Pacific Mail Steamship company charging violations of the interstate commerce law. These indictments, if followed by convictions, are sufficient to render the corporations liable to fines aggregating from $124,000 to $2,480,000, the minimum fine prescribed by law on each count being $1,000 and the maximum fine $20,000.

The defendant corporations are accused of secretly cutting to $1 the published rate of $1.25 on through shipments of matting from Kobe, Japan, to San Francisco and thence through the United States. Two indictments of eight counts each were returned against the Pacific Mail Steamship company, which transported the cargo from Kobe to San Francisco, and one indictment of eight counts and two indictments of 50 counts each were returned against the Southern Pacific company for forwarding the cargo in broken lot shipments from this city eastward.

Decisive Victory for State.

Omaha, Sept. 28.—Judges T. C. Munger and W. H. Munger, in the United States court tonight denied the injunctions asked for by the railroads operating in Nebraska to prevent the state railroad commission from enforcing the laws reducing grain rates. The restraining order issued some time ago by Judge T. C. Munger was dissolved. This is regarded as a decisive victory for the state, although it is presumed the case will be appealed by the railroad companies to the Supreme court of the United States.

Oppose Breaking Contract.

Chicago, Sept. 28.—Three members of the national executive board of the Telegraphers' union declared today that they would vote against calling a strike of union operators employed in broker and newspaper offices, in which event, being a majority of the board, the request of the striking New York operators will be refused. No official action has been taken, for the reason that no communication has yet been received from the New York local.

Cruiser Colorado Arrives.

San Francisco, Sept. 28.—A wireless message from the armored cruiser Colorado, of Rear Admiral Dayton's squadron, received today at the naval training station in this harbor, reports that all on board were well and that the voyage from Honolulu had been uneventful. The vessel will arrive here tomorrow.

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