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THE BURNING ISLAND.

By CAMILLE DEBANS.

he did not wish to be seen by any one who could give the least indication as to the course he had taken.

What has been already related was necessary for the proper understanding of the tale, but the sad story begins from this point. Two days ago this man had seen his brother fall down dead under the influence of the most terrible poison in the world. Without having had time to lament him, he had listened to his own death sentence. He had suffered the most poignant anguish during the night that should have preceded his own execution. By his own presence of mind, in the midst of a thousand alarms, he had escaped an ignominious death. He was saved, and yet this was all as nothing compared with the alarm, the anguish and the torture which this unhappy man was about to encounter while making his escape. True, there did not seem much chance of his being retaken. He plunged into the forest as soon as he had skirted the village of Salem. The paths of the negroes and the Indians were familiar to him up to a certain distance. So far as he could judge, he directed his course toward the east. His intention was to get as far as possible from the seacoast, to cross the Amazon and then to come down to Para.

As Alfonso had been more than a year at Salem, he knew perfectly well that this was one of the virgin forests of the equator, and if he ventured himself into this wooded desert it was only because no other path was open to him. He walked vigorously forward till daylight by a track that he knew perfectly well. Still he was often obliged to stop and hide himself in a thicket or climb up a tree in order to allow a jaguar to pass him in pursuit of its prey, or to avoid some other wild beast.

At 6 o'clock the sun suddenly appeared above the horizon. Alfonso looked around him. The part of the for-

He was often obliged to climb up a tree.

est where he found himself was comparatively unknown to him, and he had already made a long stage of his journey. Fear had given him the speed and instinct of a wild beast, and so he found himself in safety and on the right road, for the rays of the sun, which shot obliquely here and there through the thick trees, showed him by their direction that he was constantly advancing toward the east.

Still he was nearly worn out. The wretched man had been already two days without sleep, yet sleep he must have in order to get strength to continue his journey. Two enormous cedars rose to an incredible height in the air, almost side by side. About 15 or 20 feet from the ground an entanglement of immense tropical bindweed had formed a sort of bridge, or, if you choose to call it so, a hammock, stretching from one tree to the other. The interlacing of the branches enabled him to climb easily enough up to this bindweed, and there he found a kind of bed, covered with balmy flowers and green leaves, on which he stretched himself luxuriously, invisible to all the world, except birds and squirrels, and at the very time when Don Luis Vagaert heard of his escape he was wrapped in the most profound and refreshing sleep.

CHAPTER III.

The fugitive had now penetrated far beyond that part of the forest ordinarily visited by the soldiers of Salem, and he was soon about to plunge into the depths of the virgin forest, which for several reasons ought to have a special description—in the first place, that some idea may be formed of the sufferings of this man when we know the obstacles he had to surmount, and also because these immense forests, which stretch from the Andes to the Atlantic, a space of 1,200 leagues, have hardly been described except by some poetical dreamers, who have drawn upon their imagination for the greater part of their facts.

The real virgin forest seen from the Amazon produces on the traveler the exact effect of a green wall. To penetrate it would seem to be as easy as to bury oneself in the perpendicular side of a granite mountain. The ax, in spite of what has been said to the contrary, is practically powerless to clear a path through the greenwood. There is a plan indeed by which a road may be made, and that is by fire, but this is a very dangerous plan, even when practicable.

If, under the guidance of an Indian, you can penetrate one of the forest paths, the sight presented to your eye is in the highest degree sublime. You look upon enormous trees, tropical bindweed closely interwoven, unknown flowers, sweet smelling shrubs, grass eight feet high, thickets of bramble and immense cactuses.

In the midst of all this you perceive that there exists a world of strange creatures, for every plant whose stalk is moving, every climber that is being bent down, every leaf that stirs, every crackling sound that makes itself heard—in a word, every movement is produced by some living being, charming or hideous, inoffensive or deadly, whether it be reptile, saurian, overgrown toad, bird, quadruped or all the intermediate species, the mere sight of which is often enough to make one shudder. But this spectacle, grand and seductive as it is, can only be found on the borders of the virgin forest after walking for an hour at most along the more chiefly frequented paths, for if necessity of chance leads you farther on all this is changed. The branches become so thick that you cannot pass them without having both face and hands terribly torn by the brambles, which grow to an incredible size. It is true, you are still in a path, but it is one along which only a tiger could crawl. The trunks of trees are continually piled up across the track to a considerable height, and between each trunk grows a good sized bush.

By degrees the thickness of the wood assumes a terrible aspect. The "impenetrabilis horror" of Virgil becomes an absolute truth. It is no longer the interlacing of climbing plants and of shrubs clinging or thorny. It has become a web of incredible density, of which giant trees form the woof.

Life in the interior of the forest has become a sort of low and incessant growl. To the right, to the left, before you, under your feet, above your head, everything is moving, leaping, singing, hissing, roaring. Myriads of birds of every size and every hue perch on the branches and cry out to each other. There are cardinal birds, screaming parrots and a thousand others, while a whole army of apes has taken possession of five or six cocoanut trees—that is, all except one whom a jaguar has just stretched dead with a stroke of his paw.

All along the trees, like living parasitical plants, glide in silence reptiles of every possible size, and a ray of the sun has found its way through the foliage to the ground, which glitters strangely beneath it. In fact, it is not the ground which is so brilliant. It is water, running water, for beneath this scaffolding of trees, living, upright, twisted, dead, one can see that a stream is ever flowing and all the more plainly perhaps because of the enormous jaws of a crocodile which has just come to the surface.

It is needless to say that Alfonso, as soon as he was thoroughly awake, took in all the horrors of the situation. He had at least 10 leagues to make under these conditions, and he could not count on doing them under four days at least, for in order to advance safely through this wall he was obliged to examine carefully every object on which he was going to place his foot, and he could not pass a tree without having first assured himself that there was no enemy lurking behind him, to say nothing of the Indians, who had not yet lost their taste for human flesh. And he must eat, too—what? Fruits? They were not easily met with, and he might possibly make a mistake and eat some poisonous ones. Fortunately for him, he found some birds' nests and ate the eggs in them. On his hammock of bindweed he found a dozen parrots' nests. He made quite a feast and washed it down with two or three mouthfuls of brandy, for he had brought his gourd with him. Still he was not altogether rested from his fatigue, and understanding that if he wished really to effect his escape he must have more strength than he possessed at present he determined to pass the night upon his bed of flowers. He had a good resting place there, plenty of eggs, and he was far enough from Salem to have no cause for fear. His notion, then, was one that even a philosopher could find no fault with. He employed the rest of the day in examining his surroundings, and he found that in case he should be suddenly obliged to take flight there was a passage by which, with some extra climbing, he could make a quarter of a league in half an hour.

The next morning Alfonso was awakened by the discharge of a gun. He jumped up, scarcely knowing what he was about, but reflection comes very quickly to a man whose life is in peril. With infinite care, and without causing the slightest oscillation in his bindweed hammock, he endeavored to turn round so as to see whence the sound came. A savage could not have made this movement better. It was done in a minute. Then, keeping himself well out of sight, slowly, gently, with a thousand precautions, he separated two or three of the stems and saw, some 20 feet below him, the half caste looking round attentively on all sides and lending his ear to the slightest sound, while the smoke of his gun mounted lazily up in the air.

Alfonso did not move. Then the Argentine carefully examined the ground of the track and seemed to reflect for a moment. He looked on the side where the bindweed was, but guessed nothing.

It was not difficult to understand what had taken place. The lieutenant governor of Salem was wrong in thinking that Bacas was beyond reach of capture, and that he might safely have offered a reward of 100,000 douros. When he named 20 douros, the eyes of the half caste assumed a look of cruel greed, and he said to himself, "They shall be mine tomorrow!" No doubt he felt that he was acting a part, for he only asked for four men to accompany him, averring that he would not return without the prisoner.

Don Luis Vagaert was on the point of refusing his request, but he did not wish to appear to hinder the due action of justice, and, moreover, he still had the hope that Bacas would be beyond the reach of capture. So he granted the four men to his sergeant and went off himself with the rest of the troop in another direction. The half caste, for his part, set out to explore the paths which led to the east of the forest, knowing well by experience that an intelligent man must think of flying toward the river.

After an hour's research he found traces freshly made, the grass trodden down, small branches broken and here and there a bush the foliage of which had been displaced. This was enough for him. Indeed it was more than enough for this man, who had the instinct of a bloodhound. He led his four soldiers along the road that Alfonso had taken, but fortunately night set in, and they were obliged to make their camp.

Before sunrise the half caste set off alone in the direction indicated by the traces, which became more and more visible, seeing that as the forest became more dense Alfonso, in order to make a passage for himself, had been obliged to break more shrubs and to beat down more of the high grass. Carried away by his ardor, the sergeant was far in advance of his men and reached the spot where Alfonso had stopped. Ah, if he had only known that the prey he was seeking was lying asleep 20 feet over his head! But the fugitive, in order to reach his hammock, had made a circuit of 80 to 100 yards over the trunks of fallen trees, on the bark of which he naturally left no traces, so that the half caste was stopped like a dog who has lost the scent, smelling, listening, looking, feeling sure that he whom he was seeking must be crouched somewhere near. Too well used to the virgin forest and to the strategems of the hunters to give himself the trouble to look for Alfonso's retreat, which might be anywhere, the sergeant thought his best plan would be to fire in the air, saying to himself that Bacas, even if he were a couple of hundred paces away, would fancy the gun was fired close to him on account of the extraordinary echo which exists in the woods.

His reasoning was perfectly good, especially as the fugitive, still asleep, woke up with a start and might, in the first moment of fright, have committed the imprudence of showing himself. But Bacas had understood the artful scheme of his wily pursuer and remained motionless. Still he must do something. The half caste could hardly be alone, and if his troop were to follow him it would not be two, but 10, perhaps 20, enemies that he would have to fight, for Alfonso did not know but that the whole garrison of Salem were upon his track.

He turned all this over in his mind while he was watching the Argentine, who seemed to have given up all hope of finding him, for he was leaning against the trunk of a tree and seemed on the point of loading his gun again. This was like a ray of light to the fugitive. He, too, had a charge in the gun with which he had mounted guard a minute before his escape, and the half caste, if he lost any time, would never be able to hit him. Taking, then, every precaution, placing his gun in his shoulder belt, Alfonso hung on to a strong branch, the leaves of which overshadowed his bed, and then, with the agility of a monkey, he swung himself from bough to bough till he reached the passage which he had explored the evening before.

We may be sure that all this was not accomplished without the silence of the woods being broken, even though it was ever so little. The ear of the half caste detected a slight sound among the foliage, so he looked up before loading his gun and glanced eagerly at the side whence the sound had come. He there distinctly saw Alfonso pass from one tree to the other and then disappear behind a sort of palisade formed by enormous bushes with gigantic thorns.

CHAPTER IV.

AT BAY.

Forward rushed the half caste in pursuit of the fugitive, and the better to come up with him, crafty savage that he was, he climbed up to the natural hammock of bindweed in order to follow the same route Bacas had taken rather than hurt himself against the impenetrable bushes which rose between him and his prey. However, he was agile enough, and in a moment, with a sure footedness which Alfonso did not possess, he had guessed at, found out and gone through the passage which Alfonso had prepared.

But here again he lost all trace of the fugitive. Only from time to time he heard on his right some crackling sounds, which indicated the presence of Alfonso. It was evident that he was trying to reach the river, that he might escape by swimming.

The half caste then quickly formed his resolution, which was to pursue Bacas along the upper level of the forest, since the lower one was impracticable. In fact, nothing could be easier than reaching a given point by passing from one branch to another. He first mounted an ebony tree and from that to the summit of a gigantic oak, and following the condemned man, whom he could not see, but whose flight he could hear, this desperate fellow, sure of ultimate success, came to the conclusion that the capture was now only a question of time.

Alfonso, on his part, becoming equally sharp, glided like a serpent from tree to tree, passing along only the thickest branches. In one hand he held his gun, ready for use against this tiger in human form who was hunting him.

All at once Bacas, who was thus taking flight along the upper part of the forest, could not refrain from uttering a cry of despair. He found himself in front of a clearing, not very wide, it is true, but it made a break in the continuity of the trees. The only thing possible was to make a circuit. He turned to the left and was hastening on when he found himself face to face with the half caste, who was standing 20 paces off on the trunk of an enormous tree. At the sight of the escaped prisoner, whose head first showed itself among the leaves, the Argentine broke out into a peal of laughter, which sounded like the howl of some wild beast. But this ferocious joy did not last very long, for on seeing Alfonso armed with a gun, which he had not suspected, the rascal, whose mind had all the baseness of a hired assassin, turned pale and began to tremble.

In his haste to pursue Alfonso he had neglected, as we have seen, to reload his gun, and the fugitive stood up, right on the broad branch of a tree, leaning against the trunk and covering the half caste with his musket. The latter made a hasty retreat and hid himself behind the tree. Alfonso felt a sudden impulse of generosity.

"Gregorio," he cried out to him, "give up this pursuit of me; let me escape, and I will give you your life. But if you will not at once pledge me your word of honor and swear that you will return to Salem, in one minute I will climb to the top of this oak, and from there I will shoot you down like a parrot the moment you leave your retreat."

There was a short pause. The half caste was reflecting.

"Will you swear?" cried Alfonso in a trembling voice.

"I will," replied Gregorio.

"On your honor?"

"Yes, on my honor."

"It is well; go your way," replied Alfonso.

The Argentine then came out of his hiding place and showed himself in the

"I will shoot you down like a parrot the moment you leave your retreat."

open before Alfonso, in whose word he knew that he could have perfect confidence.

These two men looked at each other curiously without saying a word, and indeed at any other time they could scarcely have recognized each other. With their faces and hands torn by the brambles, their clothes in shreds, their eyes burning with fierce fever, they were simply hideous. Alfonso found his legs almost naked. His breast was covered with small drops of bloodlike beads in every place where a thorn had pierced him. Horrible yellow and red mosquitoes as long as your finger buzzed round him and fastened on the open wounds, which they made 10 times more painful. His skin swelled terribly under their stings, and they only quitted the face of the wretched man to fasten on his hands or aching legs. His feet, almost bare, were absolutely covered with insects and showed little else than blood stained swellings. The half caste was nearly as bad, only having been more accustomed to the great woods he did not show so many wounds.

"Now, off with you," repeated Alfonso, "off at once!" and at the same time he raised his gun again to his shoulder.

Gregorio at length made up his mind.

"I was only carrying out the orders of the lieutenant governor," he said, "but now I have sworn, you may be perfectly satisfied. I'm off." And he began to move away.

"Whatever you do, don't hide yourself," Bacas called out after him. "I want to see you as far as I possibly can."

The half caste obeyed. He commenced his retreat, constantly showing himself and turning round from time to time in order to cast on Alfonso the look of a panther. At last he disappeared in the depth of the wood.

Up to now poor Alfonso, excited by fear and by the unspeakable emotion of this hunt in which he was the game, had not felt so much of the horrible suffering caused by the wounds and stings of the mosquitoes, but when he found himself alone—when, bathed in blood and sweat, he sank down upon the immense branch from which he had threatened Gregorio—hunger, thirst, insurmountable weariness and a terrible smarting which pervaded his whole body caused him such fearful suffering that he almost repented that he had not followed the half caste to go and die at Salem and was tempted to call him back that he might deliver himself up.

Added to this, it was now 11 o'clock in the day. The insupportable heat of the climate was on this particular day—Sept. 17—hotter than ever. Bacas felt the puffs of wind that reached him as hot as if they had passed through an actual furnace. He thought he was going to die. A last mouthful of brandy remained in his gourd. He put it eagerly to his lips. This revived him for a moment, and then he thought of eating, but under this heat his wounds became every moment more excruciatingly painful. He looked round to see if he could discover a citron tree. He fancied he saw one at the foot of the oak on which he was, and so came down; but, alas, it was only a delusion! For a circle of more than a hundred yards the wretched man was forced to search the wood on all sides without finding this tree, generally so common in those parts.

At length, at the foot of a mahogany tree, a thicket of orange and citron trees attracted him by the scent of the flowers and the brightness of the fruit. He ate one orange at a mouthful, then a second, then a third, then enough to quench his thirst. This was his most pressing need. Then only did he squeeze out the juice of a citron over his chest, hands, feet and face. It was as good as a bath to him. He felt that he was returning to life again. Some eggs taken from the parrots' nests as on the preceding evening furnished him with a breakfast, and he was preparing to sleep for awhile under the orange trees when he heard a crackling over his head.

CHAPTER V.

ON FIRE.

Whence came the sound? It was the half caste who was returning surreptitiously. The intention of this monster, when he promised to return to Salem, was to gain the necessary time for reloading his musket. This done, he set out again in pursuit of Alfonso.

It is quite impossible to express the rage which the Brazilian felt at the sight of Gregorio. He picked up his gun, glided quietly through the shrubs without losing sight of his enemy and began to climb a cedar, so as to find himself for this the last time in face of the half caste. It was necessary to put an end to this.

Still the heat became every instant more terrible and more intense. Thick black clouds rested on the tops of the high trees and darkened the forest to such a degree that you might have supposed that night had come suddenly on. Then the sun appeared again a moment afterward more burning than ever. On the heads of these two men the heavy atmosphere weighed like so much lead. Alfonso, perspiring at every pore, reached the top of his cedar without having been seen by the half caste, who cast his eyes over all the neighboring trees.

"Gregorio," he then cried out to him, "you need not look any farther. I am here. You are a perjurer and a coward. One of us two must die."

Hearing this voice, the sergeant began to take all prudent precaution. They were only 10 paces from each other, protected by the trunk of a tree, and each waiting for an imprudence on the part of his enemy to fire on him. Then Alfonso took his straw hat, put it on the end of the barrel of his gun, and trying to imitate the movement of a head cautiously put forward he gently pushed it out of a mass of foliage, taking good care to remain himself in the background. Gregorio was taken in. He quickly shouldered his rifle and fired. The hat, pierced by the ball, fell to the ground. A cry of triumph came from the throat of the pursuer, and he emerged into the open. At the same instant Alfonso discovered himself and cried out:

"This time you shall die. On your knees!"

A clap of thunder of unprecedented violence suddenly broke over their heads and shook the whole forest. The clouds gathered in less time than it takes to write it, and the storm broke out with inconceivable force. The forest became as dark as night. Alfonso understood that the first thing was to fly, and not caring to have another death on his conscience he left the half caste to himself and rushed as quickly as he could to the great river, which could not be very far off.

Gregorio, for his part, believing that Alfonso was only waiting for a flash of lightning to shoot him down, took advantage of the obscurity and fled in the opposite direction. Ten minutes later, although the clouds were thicker and blacker, the two enemies might have continued their duel, for the electric discharges succeeded each other with such rapidity that their lurid and continuous flashes actually supplied the place of sunlight.

Our European storms are but very poor displays by the side of equatorial hurricanes. It sounds as if there was a continual roll of artillery, accompanied by flashes of lightning, which cross and recross, gathering force at every fresh discharge and tenfold intensity every second. It is all the more dangerous because all the clouds pass rapidly over the trees without breaking, and the lightning strikes their tops 10 times a minute.

Gregorio, swift as a tiger, fled with all the speed he was capable of. His experience of such storms told him that at any moment the forest might be in flames. He knew, too—and this it was that kept up his courage—that tempests as furious as that which raged over his head were not of long duration. Still one flash of lightning succeeded another with more fury than ever. One moment he heard a clap of thunder, the noise of which deafened him, then another still more fearful, then another, and so on continuously. On all sides formidable sparks of electric light fell like a shower on this sea of foliage, accompanied with the crash of the sky. It seemed as if the heavens themselves were being broken up under the pressure of this tremendous force. Round the fugitive wild beasts rushed and serpents writhed along, seeking safety in flight.

Gregorio began to lose courage. A squirrel, struck with lightning, fell down dead two paces from him. Still not a drop of rain. By degrees, however, the claps of thunder became less violent. The sky became less black and the flashes of lightning less frequent. The half caste began to breathe again. A cloud commenced to break over the forest. A sheet of water fell like a deluge. But this only lasted a few moments, and then the sun appeared again. It was now about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. For one moment the savage Gregorio debated with himself whether he should take up again the pursuit of Alfonso. But this time he felt it would be impossible, as during the storm they had separated so far from one another. So he gave up the idea and set out to return to Salem.

But he had scarcely walked for 10 minutes when he heard a great noise behind him. It was that of two jaguars, who were seeking safety in flight, uttering plaintive howls. Gregorio did not pay much attention to them, breaking his way through brambles and clinging shrubs, pulling down the flexible branches so as to clear a way for himself. He was quite in his element and knew the way perfectly. However, a band of tiger cats, leaping from tree to tree, fell like an avalanche at his feet. He gave himself up for lost, but the creatures uttered terrible cries and howled with fear.

Along the soil of the forest the tall grass and stunted shrubs began to shake in a restless manner. All around there was a frightful stir. Gigantic boa constrictors showed for a moment their shining and glutinous heads and then disappeared toward the east; enormous lizards took flight in the same direction; clouds of birds passed above the forest. Everything, even down to the big ants of those parts, took the same road. One might have thought that all these monsters were going to some witches' meeting.

Gregorio began to be uneasy. The tiger cats uttering piercing cries, passed quickly over his head, either without seeing him or without deigning to take any notice of him. It was very strange. On the other hand, the migration of the reptiles and of every other living creature became more close and compact.

The grass bent down under the weight of such a crowd, and one might distinguish a troop of serpents gliding toward the stream, hissing as they went, while formidable toads, disturbed in their philosophical apathy, hastened in their sluggish fashion along the same road. Then came stags, wild boars, tapirs—an interminable caravan of animals.

Certainly something had happened, for a dull, dead sound began to make itself heard from the north. A crocodile in wild haste made a passage through the branches of a thorny shrub and passed quickly on. It could not then be an inundation. Gregorio mounted to the top of a tree, not daring yet to say to himself, "It must be a fire!"

There was no need to climb to the highest branches in order to distinguish an immense light which spread to the north and west. The whole forest was in flames. The lightning, falling perhaps some 500 times, had set fire to the dry branches and resinous trees; it very soon spread, and now there was a burning circle which was gradually contracting so as to hem in and destroy all within it.

Gregorio at once made up his mind what to do. He followed the tigers, the birds, the reptiles, and rushed toward the east, not for a moment quitting the direction taken by the denizens of the forest, for he knew very well that their unerring instinct would lead them toward the Amazon river.

Nor could he go too quickly. The fire before breaking out and wrapping the large trees in its embrace advanced rapidly along the ground of the forest, where the dead leaves and inflammable shrubs caught as if by magic, so that before running the risk of being burned alive there was danger of suffocation, for the smoke was already spreading under the sergeant's very feet and mounted in a thick column toward the vault of wood overhead. Gregorio, mad with fear, bounded from branch to branch without giving a thought to what he had to tear his way through, although at every step he left a shred either of his clothes or his skin.

A band of apes, wild with fear, passed near him, uttering cries of terror and making the most frightful grimaces. For more than a quarter of an hour he rivaled these creatures in agility and made as much way as they did.

What a day it was! It needed a man with a constitution of iron to have strength for flight after all that he had undergone during the last 12 hours. At length he felt a little freshness in the air. The river could not be very far off.

Nothing can be conceived more hideous than the aspect of this man at this moment, covered from head to foot with blood and mosquitoes. It would have been difficult for the most clever naturalist to have decided at a glance whether he was a man or an ape, and yet he overcame all obstacles as if he did not know what fatigue meant. His arms and legs were as pliant as if, instead of muscles, he had springs of steel.

At length the last oak of the forest stood before him, and he perceived the immense river, the strong current of which was already carrying down a thousand animals, who were seeking the opposite bank in their flight. At his feet was a sandy beach about 20 yards broad and extending a very considerable distance from one end to the other. But upon this beach, brought together as if for a new Noah's ark, were all the animals of those parts, wild with fear, leaping up, tearing each other to pieces, howling in a pitiable fashion, scratching up the soil with their claws and lifting their noses to the wind so as to catch the first scent of the coming conflagration. It was a fearful and grewsome sight.

To have gone down there in order to leap into the stream would have been simple madness. Between the paws of the jaguars, the apes and of all these creatures devoted to death might be seen an immmerable mulitude of reptiles crawling along, from the serpent as thin as a willow rod up to the enormous boa constrictor. All this crowd of creatures were seething, writhing, hissing, killing, and at intervals, urged forward by the instinct of self preservation, they threw themselves headlong into the stream, where they became an easy prey to the alligators.

CHAPTER VI.

A BURNING, FIERY FURNACE.

Gregorio trembled in every limb. All around him the tree tops were peopled with apes, scorpions, serpents and birds. These last, rendered furious by the smell of smoke, which had now reached them, were making a magnificent slaughter among the reptiles. And all around a cloud of mosquitoes, thickening every moment, threatened to intercept the light of the sun.

All at once the howling redoubled, the hissings became more shrill, a commotion took place in the whole of this mass; the squirrels leaped out into the empty space, the serpents bounded from one side to the other, the birds flew away, and the mosquitoes moved to the middle of the stream. The place was cleared. There was nothing left on the beach but the corpses of the victims of this witches' meeting. In an instant the Amazon was covered with 100,000 different animals, swimming, drowning, still tearing each other to pieces.

Gregorio believed himself saved, but the foot of the oak where he now was caught fire, and up to the edge of the river, where the water, reddened by the orgies of the alligators, was submerging the beach, all the brambles and dead leaves were burning.

The half caste, mad with despair and blinded by the smoke, endeavored for a moment to hold out against the stifling air, and short as that moment was it was long enough for the animals to clear away from the bank. Then, overcome by the heat, he let himself fall into the flames and rushed to the river, into which he threw himself, not caring for anything else. Any kind of death seemed to him preferable to that which he was escaping from.

In plunging into this fresh water the unhappy man, whose every pore was an open wound, felt a marvelous sensation of coolness and was conscious of returning strength. He swam like a shark, and with wonderful dexterity knew how to avoid the most dangerous companions of his flight. For fear of the alligators he made for the middle of the stream, the current of which, the strongest in the world, would carry him in some hours either to Para or to some island. He did not intend to swim to the opposite bank for several reasons. At this point the Amazon is four miles broad, and he would have had to struggle during a great part of the night against this invincible current. On the other hand, he had every reason to believe that the animals in their flight would reach the other side, which would not in that case be a desirable place for passing the night.

So he let himself go with the current. Some hundred yards down he felt himself seized by the hair, and some shaggy creature clung to his shoulders. It was a poor little monkey, very pretty, which was just on the point of being drowned, and so laid hold of anything it could. Gregorio tried to pull it off and throw it back into the water. But the animal dug its claws and teeth into the flesh of the half caste, and so he was forced to support and save this parasite.

He could still count upon three hours of daylight, and so he set to work to swim with all his might, still keeping his burden, which did not bite him any more, but held tightly on to his matted hair. The river suddenly widened, and the Argentine perceived the fortifications of Para. Alas, it was too far off

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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