OR,

The Young

MONTE CRISTO

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CHAPTER I

DEATH ON A MOUNTAIN TRAIL.

Aztec Al halted, with a sudden paling of the cheeks. A wild clatter of hoofs racing down the narrow trail that here overhung a deep and rocky canyon, pressed peril, perhaps death.

He had been pushing a bicycle up the steep mountain slope. To the seat of the

"GOOD-BYE!" SHOUTED GABE. "THE PIT DOWN THERE IS A-ROarin' FOR YOU TO COME ON!"
bicycle a small leather mail pouch was attached, containing the mail he had been sent by his father to get from the stage station.

He stopped, crowding himself and the bicycle against the stone wall, and gave utterance to a cry as a saddled and riderless horse flew into view. It was a frantic fury along the dizzy ledge.

It was plain the horse had been frightened, and the rider fled, but the mail pouch was left behind. He could not hope that he would escape being knocked from the trail and killed.

Nor could he hope to leap to the bicycle seat and beat the horse to the bottom of the slope. The way was tortuous and bewildering, the ledge ticklishly narrow in places, and the danger of shooting sheer out into space at some angle, or of toppling, was too great.

Yet, seemingly, that was all he could do; and he was on the point of trying it when he saw the mail pouch.

To the seat of the bicycle, at the side of the mail pouch, a long-barreled revolver was strapped. This he pulled out, cocked and aimed, with the celerity of much practice.

The horse was now not a hundred yards away. Its head was in the air, its eyes shining wildly. A cloud of steam came from its nostrils. The stirrups and saddle bows gave out and danced with a loud clatter.

It seemed a miracle that it did not slip at the short turns and fall headlong to destruction, but long familiarity with narrow mountain trails had given security to its footing.

Braced like a rock by the side of his bicycle, with the big revolver uplifted and the horse tearing madly toward him, he saw the youth as a heroic figure as sculptor ever chiselled or painter ever put on canvas.

His smooth face, almost as dark as a Mexican's, spoke of Indian blood, and explained the name of Aztec Al, by which he was known. The mail pouch was corded well with the clothing he wore—of the bright Mexican jacket and the brilliant scarf that girt his waist. The pointed toes showed through the crack of resolution—of cool, yet desperate, determination.

Now came the horse, until but twenty yards separated them. Then the revolver cracked, and the horse tumbled heavily from the ledge, with a bullet in its brain, and dropped, with a suggestive thud, on the rocks below.

"If I had missed him," the youth panted, cautiously peering over. "We'd both have been in the canyon, I'm thinking."

He was so weak he could not push the bicycle, but his strength soon returned, and he went on up the trail, filled with curiosity and anxiety. Was he the man, human or beast, who had pierced the heart of the canyon, too?

A quarter of a mile above, at a point where the trail branched, the rider lying face downward on the rocks, apparently dead.

Al swung up to him and turned him over. The man was a Mexican, and was breathing, though unconscious. He was lying dangerously near the rim of the ledge, but he might have pitched him; and Al drew him back to a safer position.

Searching in the hope of finding a flask of liquor, a piece of paper dropped out. As it dropped, it fell open, and revealed the name of Israel Issett, the boy's father.

Alfred Issett—Aztec Al—stopped in his search for the mail pouch and bent over the paper. Its contents so startled him that he almost forgot the injured Mexican. The writing was in Spanish, a language as familiar to him as English, and this is what he read:

"Carretas is in arms. Government troops are marching against it. But we will continue the fight. It is a cowardly American miner. Issett has been shot into the Carretas jail by the Alcaldes. He will need our help, and direction. Come quickly. May the peace of God be with you."

FROM MAXIMO PARAN TO JUAN ROMERO."

Al's heartbeats almost stilled. He had been journeying to his father's mine in the neighborhood of Carretas, the walled and mud-built Mexican town on the irrigated plateau above. There had been some talk of trouble when he went away, but he had not dreamed of anything like this.

His father was trying to work the Carretas mine under many difficulties, not the least of which was a scab of strike-breaking laborers. Perhaps he had been harsh to the peons employed. At any rate, he had gained the ill-will of many Indians and Mexicans.

Now, this hatred, which had but wanted an opportunity to express itself, had hurled Israel Issett into the Carretas jail, and threatened his life.

What mattered it that but a few miles to the northeastward was the border-line of New Mexico and the United States? The strong hand of Uncle Sam was not likely to make itself felt here. The American government seemed as far away as it had been located in the moon.

Juan Romero!" Al muttered, tucking away the paper and looking at the man's face.

The name was that of a Mexican bandit who had made his power felt throughout all that region. It had been more than once hinted that the Alcaldes was, himself, no more than Romero's servant and slave; and, indeed, the entire district was little better than a robber stronghold.

The instant Issett was between his teeth, I ought to pitch him into the canyon."

Nevertheless, Al drew out the flask of mead on which his hand had fallen, and poured a generous draught of it down the throat of the unconscious rascal.

It required a great deal of it to warm the blood in the veins, but he recovered consciousness at last, and, sitting up, stared about him.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I have just helped you out of a scrape; and I'll tell you more, after you've told me what you have to do with me in Carretas! You're Juan Romero?"

He took out the paper and displayed the writing.

"What's Israel Issett in jail for?"

"The man eyed him keenly."

"You're his son, I see. I thought your face looked familiar. He's in jail because he's a dog of an American that ought to die—and he will die!"

"RATHER, I talk, that you don't want to tempt me to throw you into the canyon!"

The man saw his mistake and changed his air.

"You angered me, senor, by taking that paper out of my pocket! I beg your pardon, senor. My mistake, I assure you. If you will favor me by looking up my horse, I will proceed on my journey, and not trouble you any more.

"Your horse is dead, at the bottom of the canyon. He was about to knock me from the trail. It was his life or mine, and I had to shoot him."

The bandit suppressed his rage with difficulty.

"My saddle and bridle, then! I would not lose them!"

Al saw how the average Mexican horseman values these articles; and, after making Romero as comfortable as possible, he picked his way to the bottom of the canyon, removed the saddle and bridle from the dead horse, and climbed back with them.

It was not even the saddle and bridle of the artiller's art, inlaid with silver and gold, and worth much more than any horse to be obtained away from the place.

When he came again in sight of Romero, Aztec Al saw that he had fallen backward on the rocks and lay as if dead.

"The scamp's going to make a die of it yet! He must have been hurt internally."

He cast down the saddle and bridle and ran up to Romero. Bending over him he attempted to lift him, at the same time calling aloud and giving him a shake. Romero was not even unconscious. The faint was a feint, as was made apparent to Aztec Al when he felt the man's strong and steady hand and bodily and choking fingers against his throat.

A desperate struggle instantly ensued, as Al, almost as big as the grown man, but he had been taken at a terrible disadvantage. However, he succeeded in tucking his teeth under the man's fingers, and turned the other two rolled over once and again, in momentary danger of toppling from the ledge.

The got Romero about the waist and lifted him bodily, but stumbled against the rocky wall and lost this momentary advantage. Al, over the man's strong fingers, turned them and iron-like fingers again closed on his throat.

Struggle as he would, Al could not shake the man's arm, and the bull-dog grip of the fingers tightened and tightened, until the blood swam in a host mist in his eyes, until his lungs swelled almost to bursting, and his brain reeled. Then came a sense of falling from a great height, and the blackness of darkness.

When Al regained his senses, he was tied up snug and fast, and Juan Romero was sitting beside him on the ledge, grinning like a yellow-fanged fiend.

CHAPTER II.

BICYCLE AGAINST BRONCHOS.

The yellow lips came together, the teeth snapped like a dog, and the braying noise of the lariat was tossed over Aztec Al's head and about his neck.

Al felt himself pulled away, you see. We've got your father all right, and now I've got you. I told you that Israel Issett is in jail because he's a dog of an American, and you're going into the same jail for the same reason."

Al quailed, in spite of the courage he sought to assume. He began to see that Romero was utterly devoid of gratitude and as vindictive and bloodthirsty as a tiger. He had been used and perhaps saved his life, would not count for anything.

"Give me the man, now, down the trail, as soon as you are able to walk."

Romero jerked Al to his feet by means of a lariat, which he had loosed, bound with handy, with his hands bound. Then he whipped out a knife and severed the raw-looking arm of the lariat.

Having done this, he bounded the heavy saddle to Al's back, and drove him down the trail, lashing him with the rope's end at every pace.

In this manner they went on, Romero carefully watching the bicycle. He could not aid it with his ungainly machine, and more than an hour elapsed before they reached the valley.
A single miscalculation, or the deviation of a foot, might have put them to death.

"Whiz—z! Buzz—z! Bar—r—r!"

sounded the whirring wheel.

It had beenarranged that his feet were to be taken from the pedals and he only sought to guide it and hold it firm and true on the narrow track.

Mind and eye were loose and muscle were strained to the utmost. He seemed to be half falling through space. The granite pavement, the flint and dirt, and the sound of it slipped by with blurred indistinctness.

Dully he heard the shouts of the Mexicans and the crash of the immovable in which the fascinating terror and high resolve were combined.

Then he realized that he had left his enemies far behind, and sought to decrease his speed. He pressed on the brake, carefully at first, then harder, and thrilled with horror as it snapped.

The action caused the wheel to wobble so that it almost pitched from the ledge.

With blind instinct he flicked it right and maintained his seat.

He tried to get his feet on the pedals, but whatever was dragging him along with inconceivable rapidity, but failed.

He was on a runaway speed, with bridle broken, and the golden, the headless, the wide.

But for the fact that he knew it would be death, he would have flung himself through it.

He had never dreamed of such speed.

The bicycle leaped like a living creature, and earthward it flew, as though with the meanings of the revolutionists.

The personality of which he had sought came at the crossing of a high divide.

Here a trail, narrow and dizzy as the one down which the horse had flown, dropped toward the eastward, winding in acute angles.

"Look there!" he cried, lifting a hand and pointing in a direction opposite to that he intended to take. "What does that mean? Those men over there?"

He had seen men at the point indicated, but every head turned in that direction.

They were a quick spurt, he flew down the steep trail, and had turned the first angle before they were aware of his deception.

Loud cries of excitement arose. For a minute he was out of sight; then the outworn and worn-out cowboys burst out against them in view, and they began to follow him with their muskets.

Spat! spat! spat! spat! above him the muskets halted, strafing, against the granite and hurling rocky splinters through the air.

He felt it to be a race for life, and worked the pedals with an unwonted strength and vehemence, arching his back like a hoop, and throwing all the power of his muscles into the work. Never had he seemed to come so near to flying.

He appeared to skim like a swallow along the rocky wall, and was almost as difficult an object to hit. Before a half dozen shots, the lead had taken the next angle and was safe for another minute or two.

"After him!" bellowed Romeros. "Don't let him get away! Shoot him down!"

Three or four, who rode branches that were particularly sure-footed and fast, spurred after the trail.

Al had come in sight once more, and the muskets were again bellowing, but he was now on a level and they could not help further to go with him and the chance of hitting him was much lessened.

His speed had made him temporarily oblivious to the danger of this reckless racing. On one side rose the mountain, like the wall of a house; on the other side was a canyon two hundred feet deep.

The Tramp's Trump-Trick.
The Tramp's Trump-Trick.

"That looks promisin' now. Owns a silver? does he? I'm yours till death do us part!"

He thrust his head out of the chapparal and gazed carelessly at me:

"You could walk, I 'spose, with a little help? I kin tell you that you're as heavy as lead. As for that bike—what are we goin' to do with it?"

Aste Al drew it to him and carefully examined it. The sun and the sapless air had already removed every trace of water from it.

"Better hide it here and leave it. It's too valuable.

The tramp readily assented to this.

He had been making his way toward Carretas for some time. His vision of the old man might get from Al's father made him willing now to assist the youth. Though, to do him justice, it is only fair to say that he would, in all probability, have assisted the lad if there had been no hope of reward, for, as Al was to learn, there was a great deal of the mark of human kindness in the heart covered by that shabby coat.

Al was anxious to get away from the circuits of the town before the return of the horsemen, and when the bicycle had been carefully hidden, the tramp assisted him into the saddle, and which Al pulled out. Then, together, they continued on toward the town.

Al was camped on the mountain side that night, but going on the next day.

It was mid-afternoon before they drew near the main walls of Carretas. I had quite recovered from the immediate effects of his fall against the rock, though, of course, the cut was far from being healed.

A lively musket fire was in progress, the soldiers outside of the walls shooting and yelling from one wall and being replied to in a spirited manner.

"This kind of music never did sound quite as sweet as a planner to me. It's a sort of orchestra that I don't hanker to git close to?"

Nor could Al persuade the tramp to make any effort to get within the town's walls.

"Don't reckon I'm a deal safer out here than in there, sonny! I'll strike these soldiers for somethin' in the way of chic, dreckle, and gin. I've mane a spell out from 'em to live on, if they don't give me to! But in the town—why, if it's too, I calculate that every blamed man in there would stand up and testify to my memory. Thankee; I'm very well contented right where I be."

In the end, they were resolved to penetrate the lines and get into Carretas, no matter what the risk, hoping to be able to save his father.

From their position, they could see the high, whitewashed tower of the prison where his father was certainly confined, and the sight of it inspired him to an endeavor.

"Good-by, then! I'm sorry to leave you. But I've never known how happy you've helped me. If the chance comes, you may be sure I'll be glad to pay it back."

"I'm afraid that you git a bullet in you. But you've got my wishes that you'll come out all right, and that I'll git a visit at that silver mine owned by your dad."

Al was pushing on, in a fever of impatience, when, turning round, his brown eyes blazed fiercely, his right arm flapping up and down like that of a ragged scarecrow.

"This is the last of his money. It's as good as gone, and the last of his property."

He was directed wholly toward the town, and Al was in their very midst, slipping from rock to rock, before they knew of his presence.

He was discovered, as he rose suddenly at the side of the startled commander.

"You want to get into that town, eh? Al questioned, the terror of a muscle, as he looked into the muzzle of the pistol that the commander drew and presented, in order to save his life."

"I can help you. Try that opposite gate."

The officer looked at him doubtfully; then he pulled the pistol and showered him with questions, while several of the men crowded about.

"I've got a plan," assured Al, with unholy glee. "I'll try the opposite gate into that town! You want to go in there, so we can help each other! My father is there in that jail, and I'll revivify him out!"

"If you'll let me, I'll take a body of men and attack that opposite gate, while you keep up a lively firing on this side to draw their attention. I've been through that gate hundreds of times, and know that it can be battered down just like nothing, if you've got men with grit enough to walk up to it. I'll agree to put myself at their head."

He said it with the coolness of a veteran, there was nothing of bravado in his air, and his words carried conviction.

The commander questioned him and elicited his whole story.

"I've heard of your father, and I judge you've spoken the truth. I guess I can afford to trust you!"

He turned to his men.

"I want ten warriors for this duty—twenty men who will follow this young fellow and batter in the eastern gate of Carretas. You will have two score more ready to support you and follow you!"

There was a minute's hesitation; then a score stepped up to the front, showing that there were brave men in this detachment of the Mexican army.

The lay of the land was favorable for the march, and they valiantly crossed a circuitous route through the hills to approach the barred eastern gate.

All around Carretas was a high sand wall, easily breached by cannon, but proof against musketry. It had only two gates, the eastern and the western, and Al knew the eastern gate would be the easiest taken.

Carefully handling his men, he kept them out of sight, and arranged them for the charge in a little hollow, not more than two hundred yards from the brown mud wall.

Then he made them a speech, flourishing the revolver given him by the Mexican commander, which made them laugh.

Eight men, with revolvers, were to lead the charge. The others were to bear a heavy beam of wood, to be used as a battering ram.

Cheers were not allowable, nor would they have been given by these non-church- going Mexicans; but the smiles on the yellow faces, and the glitter and snap of black eyes told the broken leader that he could rely on their fidelity.

"Forward!" was his low command. "Every man must do his duty, and we must take that gate. Your comrades are just behind you."

They had seen the fighting forms of the approaching support, and were thrilled with encouragement.

The moment was auspicious, and Al, without a moment's hesitation, led them out of the hollow, and, setting himself at their head, ran toward the gate.

CHAPTER IV.

BEHIND PRISON WALLS.

The next man of importance was the watch guard in the watch tower at the side of the gate. He fired his musket to give the alarm, and they came on their own safety, leaping down inside the wall.

His shot was without effect, and, before others could mount to the tower, and to the top of the wall, the storming party had broken down the beam of wood.

The furious blows hurled the gate from its hinges, and the broken timbers scrambled the boy, with his men.

But they found resistance. Though the men were aghast, and reeled back in confusion, a musketry fire came from the streets, and from the houses that cut down more than one of the assaulting party.

"Why?" cried Al. "Follow me!"

He gave a victorious American cheer, and the tramp pushed in the direction of the prison.

His men followed bravely enough.

The estabishment in its fast and rush came the cries of the men without who were running toward the breached gate. Al thought only of his father, in that big, white prison, and, pushing on, firing his pistol, and cheering loudly. He saw some of his men fall about him, and found himself opposed to a big Mexican, armed with a saber.

He fired at the shindy figure, then leaped forward.

He saw his ball strike the Mexican in the shoulder, and expected to see him fall. Instead, the Greaser shifted the saber to his left hand, and swinging it, with a savage oath, struck fiercely at the daring youth.

It was not a direct cut, or it would have killed the boy then and there. The broad side of the blade caught him on the crown of the head, and beat him senseless into the dust of the sand.

When he came to himself the fight was over, his men were dead or driven back, and he was lying in the big white prison he had tried to reach, feeling dreadfully used up, and more dead than alive.

Then he heard his name called, and raised himself, to stare into the face of his father.

Strangely enough, they were in the same cell, which was large enough for half a dozen ordinary cells.

"My boy! My boy! Why are you here?"

These were the words Al heard, and he knew he had been dragged into the cell and pitched down on the floor only a moment before.

The wound received by contact with the rock was again bleeding, but, fortunately, the blow of the saber had produced only a common wound. His head, though, he could hardly bear the weight of a finger on it, and it ached as if it would split.

The tramp had scrambled in with his father's arms. He was so glad to see his father alive and well that, for the moment he forgot they were both prisoners, in danger of early and violent death.

With the fewest possible words the boy explained how he came to be there, studying the while his father's face.

"It was on, dirty, worn and bearded face, but a face that was energetic within, and not unkindly.

Israel Isett had witnessed the charge on the town, through the bars, though he did not recognize his son as the leader of the charging party.

He looked pityingly and compassionately at his son, and the fact, that, on the morrow, he, Israel Issett, expected to be shot to death.

"What is that?" Isett peered from the barred window.

A portion of the country beyond and near the walls was visible, and out from
CHAPTER V.

A DASH FOR LIBERTY.

Israel Isett placed a hand on the tramp's arm and nodded toward the adjoining cells.

"Better be a little quiet. Some other fellows in here may hear you. I'm afraid a loud noise would start them."

"The tramp sternly, in the direction indicated.

"I reck'd it would never git old enough to learn good hose sensen!" he whispered, retreating to a corner and sitting flat down on the floor. "I'm in business in which three company's and more is a crowd!"

He passed over the saw and the cord for inspection, and, when Al and his father were examining the articles, he began to twist at one of the big buttons on his ragged coat, holding it all the while very carefully.

The top of the button came off, revealing a liquid with which the hollow button was filled. The button was, in truth, a sort of phial.

That's a stuff that's got to be handled mighty tipple. It's an acid that'll eat holes in a man's fingers afore he klin wink and go off like a flash. Here, I'll tell you. Put a little on that string and rub the string over an iron bar, and I'll walk through that bar as if the string was a saw and the bar nothin' but wood. As for the real wood, that little saw will do the business a far better.

He screwed the top of the button into place with a quick twist, and replaced the saw and string in his hat-band.

"I just wanted to prove to you that I ain't altogether a fraud, whatever else you may think; and I'll say to ye that if we want to unclog it, we kin walk out o' this jail, to-night!"

"But the guards?"

The tramp winked owlishly and fished a dollar from some place in his ragged clothing.

"Then Greasers searched me, but they didn't find this! I think I can fix the guards!"

The buttons were again popping, and the trio hurried to the barred window.

Another assault had been undertaken, but, even as they looked, they saw it result in the same unhappy and ignominious end.

They went back to the corner and earnestly discussed the situation. All were convinced that it would be impossible to remove the guards out of the prison, and it began to seem to the Isetts that the capture and imprisonment of Smith was a providential interposition in their behalf.

Israel Isett told of the sentence of death passed on him.

"We'll get out o' here to-night!" the wanderer promised. "We've flat got to!"

The day passed, with constant alarms to the garrison, and the night came, promising nothing better.

A soldier brought them a half-cooked supper on a tin plate and, as he turned to go, Smith slipped a shining silver dollar into his hand and whispered to him, in broken English:

"Bring us a bottle of aguardiente! We would drink your health with you, and the health of the prisoners in these other cells!"

The soldier looked sharply at the money, then moved the plate to the other side of the table.

"I was sure it would fetch him."

The tramp was unscrewing another button, which was previously when the top had been removed, a small quantity of white powder.

"A little of that will make them slumber like the best sheepers!" and he uttered a light laugh.

"Removing a pinch of the white powder, he held it cautiously between thumb and forefinger and replaced it in the tramp's pocket.

"A great many are in the other cells?"

"Just two," replied the soldier, greedily snatching his lips. "Then there's the guard. Shall I not get another bottle, senor?"

"Ay, the guard must have some of it, too, wouldn't you?"

"No, senor. Come, it is my treat. Take this to the other prisoners. And, look you! Tell them to light a light, so that you and the guard may have an abundance. If I had another dollar I'd send for another bottle. But, alas!"

The soldier hastened obediently away.

When he came back a third of the aguardiente had disappeared, and the gur- dian assured that the sound of the bottle at the bottle in the darkness of the pass-
age.

"Thank our healths, senor! We would be merry to-night, for to-morrow we may die! How goes the fighting?"

"We heard that the troops have got us hemmed in like rats in a cage. However, here is to your healths, senor, and to the health of the general!"

He tipped the bottle to his lips, held it on high, and allowed the aguardiente to slip with a gurgle down his capacious throat. The content of the bottle was sadly lowered when the bottle was withdrawn from his lips.

"What about those liquor sellers are rascals, senor! For a bright dollar like the one you gave me one should have gotten a gallon of the stuff. Ho, the better!"

He shouted to the guard, who, knowing what was in store, came hurriedly, and drew his sword.

When the occupants of the cell had each taken a pull, which they did by pretending to drink and pouring some of the stuff over their clothing, there was a small quantity left, which the soldier and the guard divided between them.

They hurried away with the bottle, that no visible evidence might be left, and the guard returned to his post at the outer door.

Though their plan had worked to perfection, nearly an hour was permitted to pass before the little bottle of the liquid with the acid were brought into play on the bars that foamed them.

It was close and careful work; this cutting out of the cell, and another hour passed before it was accomplished.

Then, in shoooless feet, they crept along the mud floor and descended to the garrison, where, as they expected, they found the guard sound asleep at his post.

The drunk liquor had done its work. Al bent over the guard, took the musket out of his nerveless fingers, and the jail keys from his belt.

Over the wall they could see the reflection of the lights of the town, and could hear a sound of voices in the streets. Ever and anon came the crash of a musket shot, as some guard fired from the wall at a spy behind the wall.

"It would have been better if we had waited until later," said Isett, as they turned away from the gun.

They had been afraid to risk that. The danger of discovery in the jail had seemed greater than that which now confronted them.

Hanging on the wall near the gate were some ropes, and Aztec Al appropriated one.
The Tramp's Trump-Trap.

of these and passed the musket to his father.

The gate was not hard to unlock, and in a few seconds they found themselves in the street.

The dogs were not so bright as they had thought. In one of the streets, in the center of the town, a camp-fire was burning. A dog was howling against the wind, but they knew they could readily avoid its light.

A group of men were visible here and there, but none near the jail.

"This way," whispered Al, relocking the gate, and turning toward the brow of the hill. He had gone a few feet, tossing the jail keys into a rubbish heap, he hurried on, leading by a circular route, toward the northeast corner of the mud wall which enclosed the town.

Their arrangements were complete. They had even arrived on a place of meeting should they become separated.

All was going well, more than half of the distance had been traversed, and their hopes were growing, when a dog leaped out of one of the adobe huts, and assailed the group with barking.

They paused irresolutely. Voices were heard in the hut, and it seemed impossible to go on without a struggle.

Isael Itzet lifted the musket as if to fire, but hesitatingly lowered it.

"Better make a run for it, I reckon," suggested the juggler, suitting the action to the word.

The fat tramp could run at a lively gait when put to it, and he now cut out at his best pace.

Al leaped after him, and Iszet brought up the rear with the musket.

Their flight increased the rage of the dog. Some one rushed to the door of the mountain huts, and the dogs began to howl along the narrow street, raising a cry of alarm.

Again and again he yelled, and, in response to his cries, the adobe huts along the way began to vomit their inmates. Poll merrily tumbled out of the houses, men, women, and children, and some soldiers being also attracted, a lively chase ensued, led by the barking dog.

As yet the pursuers did not know whom they were pursing, but that, having nothing from the fervor with which they entered the chase.

The two, putting off as a pantaloons, and the sweat was rolling from his fat body before he had gone a hundred yards. With a jerk, the dog was leaping at him, and snapping at his heels in a way to drive him mad.

"This will never do," was his thought. "We can never get away while they are led by this dog!"

With this he wheeled, and, firing quickly, had the satisfaction of seeing the cur roll over with a loud yelp.

The musket shot served to increase the speed and fury of the pursuers, and, a number of soldiers coming out of a side street, the hoity-toity fugitives were put in flight.

Al, fleeter of foot than the tramp, again led.

Reaching the angle of the wall, he called the dog he had carried, and hurled it at the spikes with which the wall was surmounted.

He did twice, three times he threw, before the noose of the rope caught and held fast.

Then he pulled on it to test it, and began to climb up, hand over hand, pressing his feet against the wall.

The jail was stationed in a tower not far distant, had not only heard, but had seen them, and now came running to prevent their escape.

Isael Itzet musket was empty, and he powerless. Nevertheless, he threw it to his shoulder, as if he would shoot the guard.

The only effect was to draw the fire of the Greaser, which, fortunately, flew wild.

Then Al, who had almost reached the top, saw the flash, and tumbling headlong to the ground. The rope in which he had trusted had been severed at a stroke.

They could not escape by that way, so all turned down along the wall, running as they had not run before.

But the camp was now thoroughly aroused, and, though they reached the other angle of the mount alive and well, they were then surrounded and forced to surrender.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER AN EARTHQUAKE.

Worn out, humiliated and depressed, they were dragged back to the jail.

Bazoo Smith was utterly disconsolate and filled with a terrible fear. It was he who had bribed the soldier and sent for the aguardiente.

A great rage filled the hearts of the soldiers when they discovered the guard asleep at his post.

When they could not arouse him by calls, other keys were produced and the gate opened.

It was quickly evident that he had been drugged, and it was not long until the discrepancy was discovered. The prisoners still in the jail had been served likewise.

As for the soldier whose weakness for strong drink had caused him to fall a victim to the tramp's tempting offer, he was probably somewhere sleeping off the effects of his potion.

Though the trio were threatened with instant death if they did not confess the means by which they had secured the liquor, they refused to make any confession.

More than an hour passed before the guard could be made sensible of his situation; then he was ignominiously cast into an adjoining cell and told that, for his defection, he would be promptly shot in the morning, with the trio whose attempted escape had produced so much excitement.

The prisoners in the other cell were also brought out of their somnolent condition, and they, with the guard, implicated the old fat tramp, who, under search, was discovered for him, could not be found.

In the midst of all, another assault was made upon the jail, accompanied by a lively musketry fire, so that, altogether, the people of Carretas had little time for sleep.

Thus the night passed, and the day dawned redly, bringing with it a seeming increase of excitement.

A wild mob gathered in front of the jail for the purpose of witnessing the anticipated executions.

Our friends worked out on this mob with blanching faces. Nowhere was there a ray of hope.

The jailer had entirely lost his air of half-serious butler and bravado. He was as pale as a ghost, and his limbs shook under him so that he could hardly stand as he clung to the bars looking out through the high window at this array of foes.

"Fardays, I reckon I never was so near the end of my rope as I am at this blessed minute. If I could get them rascals to listen to me, some kind of show trick that would give us a few minutes."

He called aloud, but they did not hear him or did not choose to understand.

Aztec Al and his father were probably quite as much shaken, though they managed better to conceal the fact.

The crowd was seen to give way, and a

down through the bars and took out through the back door followed by a crowd. A guard advanced and unlocked the door of their cell.

The hour of execution had come.

The condemned guard dropped to his knees and began to pray aloud in piteous tones.

If in answer to this prayer, the walls and the building reeled, the earth billowed like the sea, and many of the adobe huts toppled into the street below.

A panic instantly ensued, and when the ground jarred again and the heavy mud prisoners in the mount were cast down, the guards became a demoralized mob and fled in terror.

An earthquake was shaking Carretas, boxing it to and fro as if angry at the outrages the town had witnessed.

Though almost as much demoralized as the soldiers and the citizens, the trio of condemned prisoners were the first to regain their heads.

The guard, too, who had been praying so appealingly, leaped to his feet and stared about.

"God be praised, senors, we're saved!" he crossed himself devoutly as he looked at the fleeing soldiers and at the trembling and swaying building. His face was blanched, but the light of hope shone in his eyes.

"It is in the mercy of God, senors, and if you are but willing to follow me, and to fight, if need be, I can lead you out of this place."

"We'll follow you anywhere, just so you take us out of this accursed town," said Isset, who was also inclined to look on the earthquake as something divinely ordered to save their lives.

The guard had fled without relocking the door of their cell, and the way to liberty seemed open.

They rushed out now, and passed without hindrance from the jail.

The soldiers and the people were huddling here and there in scared groups, afraid to remain in the houses, and equally afraid to stand in the narrow streets.

A more propitious time could not have been had, and the guard quickly conducted them to the nearest wall.

At this point two adobe houses had been thrown down. From behind one of them came a roar of excitement, which he reared against the wall, and up which he scrambled with trembling haste.

He was followed instantly by our friends.

It was now broad day, though the sun was obscured by a strange haze that kept from seeing a dozen yards in any direction.

They tumbled from the wall, and then were suddenly made aware of the fact that a body of the besieging soldiers, uncovered by the earthquake, and thinking them escaping inmates of the town, was running in that direction with the intention of making them prisoners.

A wild cry interrupted the guide, setting off over the rough by a group of试验者 at breakneck speed.

Aztec Al had fallen behind. His foot slipped on a heaping stone and he was precipitated so heavily that he was unable immediately to rise.

He had dropped into a hollow, and when he lifted his head with the intention of scrambling out of the place, he saw the savages very near him. They ran over, however, without seeing him.

But the delay was most unfortunate. When he got up and looked about, the others were not to be seen, and when he followed, hoping to come upon them soon, he, found he had lost them.


CHAPTER VII.

IN THE GRASP OF THE RIO PERDIDAS.

It was, indeed, at their best speed, without once looking back, naturally supposing that AI was at their heels.

They succeeded in eluding the soldiers, aided by the friendly haze and the rough country over which they ran, and then stopped to take stock of their surroundings.

To their amazement they found themselves alone together. Aztec AI and the guards.

Isett was much distressed and insisted on returning to look for his son.

"It is the face of Providence to run a risk like that," the trump objected. "But it's about the only kind of running we do. As for me, I never was so tuckered."

He sank down, panting, and mopped his livid face with the ragged sleeve of his coat.

"If you're determined to go back, I'll wait for you later."

Isett turned back, fearing his son had fallen into the hands of the soldiers.

He heard the soldiers talking, and crowded near them, but their words told him that AI was not in their midst. In case of peril, he continued on back to the wall.

As he crept carefully along over the uneven surface, he called softly, now and then.

His heart leaped when one of his calls was answered.

He moved in that direction, and came near falling into a trap. Some soldiers were out, calling as he had been—searching, as it seemed, for one of their number whom the earthquake had stampeded.

Isett shifted his position, with considerable care, and in doing so, he tumbled into a rocky crevice.

The fall brought a snorting cry, and he realized he had fallen astride of a man who was hiding in the crevice. It was the identical soldier stampeded by the earthquake.

The man was so terror-stricken that he simply groveled against the rock, and whined like a fear-stricken animal.

As may be imagined, Isett was considerably startled and tumbled off the ledge. He was not hurt.

No sooner had he done so than the man leaped out of the hole and ran across the slopes like a wild creature.

And with that, Isett found the most fortunate thing for Isett. The searching soldiers heard the man's cry and saw him rushing away; and they passed by the crevice and ran on after him.

Isett heard them talking as they passed his hiding place. Their words showed that they were in the midst of a wild animal, or perhaps a wild beast. They did not understand the character and cause of the cry they had heard, and were wondering if the man had encountered a wild animal or serpent.

Scarcely had they gone a dozen steps when a few of them turned back for the purpose of searching. This action brought such an increase of peril to Isett that he fairly shivered. Seeing his chance, he crept for the opening, discovered a ledge, under which he crept.

The man heard the soldiers talking above him; and was startled when one of them struck a match and cast it into the cavity.

It fell near him, but did not reveal his presence. However, it seemed to satisfy them, for the man, when the creature occupied the place, and they went back, still talking.

Surely, he thought when Isett crept out, all attempts would be to beat a precipitate retreat. Convinced that he could not

find his son, he could only hope to meet him at the rendezvous agreed on.

Rejoicing that he was by this time well rested, the two continued on, heading toward the lowest slopes, in the direction of the river—the Rio Perdidas, the same in which Aztec AI had plunged with his bicycle.

To more earthquake shocks came, and the day brightened as they reached the trail that wound dizzyly above the river at the point nearest the town of Carrevas.

Carrevas was a tiny town, this Rio Perdidas—a veritable Lost River. Gathring a considerable body of water from the mountains of Guadalupe, which had neared its lowest point, here in bewildering zigzags, and then reared into a funnel of rock, where it disappeared, to be seen no more.

Scarcely had Isett and Smith reached the trail when they became aware that pursuers were hanging on their track. They had not shaken off the soldiers, as they had fancied.

It was an unpleasant discovery, for there was no deviating here from the trail, and the increasing light naturally added to the difficulties.

But they hurried up the trail, hoping to reach the rugged country beyond, where there were abundant places in which they might seek sanctuary.

They went on in this manner for more than a half-mile, closely pursued; and were at the very moment in greatest danger, at the point, when a mounted Mexican appeared in front of them.

"Yo! Mother and another came into view, all armed.

From their higher position on the trail the mounted men could look down on the bewildered fugitives, and could likewise see the pursuing soldiers.

For Isett and the trump it was a perilous situation. There seemed absolutely no escape.

Seeing the horsemen lift their rifles to fire, they turned back, bewilderedly, and ran toward the foot soldiers, looking in vain for a place by which they might escape or descend.

More than fifty feet beneath them roared the swift river, churned into a foamy wave, not so much by cruel rocks as by the vortex which here sucked it on; for not fifty yards below was the great funnel in which they had come.

Coming in sight of the soldiers below, these began to yell, which so completely demoralized and bewildered the trump that it was a long time before he recovered.

"Back! back!" he cried, turning again toward the higher elevation, as if that could avail anything.

He spun around quickly, and, in doing so, lost his footing.

A wild cry came from him as he felt himself falling into the awful depths, and to save himself he clutched frantically at Isett.

It did not serve to stay his fall, but only dragged Isett from the ledge, and they were tumbling toward the river.

Dazed with the shock, as well as startled as they witnessed the terrible sight.

Together the men fell, with sickening smart, into the swirling current, and were immediately whirled out of sight.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE POWER OF MERCILESS ENMIES.

Aztec AI and his father and the trump hurried on in the direction he supposed they had taken, keeping a careful watch to prevent falling into the hands ofempresa.

Though his general course was in the direction pursued by those he sought, and he directed the place of meeting, he deviated considerably from their line of flight, and soon found himself in a broken and rugged region that promised to give him little trouble.

But he hesitated pressing, putting that town farther and farther behind him.

The thick underbrush and the rugged ridges, he pitched heavily and fell over a low cliff.

Isett's hair stood on end from shock and horror, and he turned around in the parting of the brushwood near.

He had tumbled into a peculiar place, as he thought—nothing less than the nest of an eagle.

The nest itself was not so large, but a nest, and splendidly built. It was a granite cup, built later year after year, covered the ledge.

AI came down in the center of the nest, in which were two young birds. He killed one of the young eagles in the fall, and scared away the old ones, that were sitting on the brushwood near.

However, they were back before he had quite got his head, and understood his peculiar situation, and he came at him, flapping his wings and screaming with a viciousness that attested their rage.

Aztec AI drew himself up, and, twisting a claw out of the knapsack, struck at the nearest bird.

He missed his stroke, the stick broke in his hand, and he came near pitching into the canyon.

His pugnacious attitude beat them off for a moment, and gave him time to look about.

The ledge ran down the mountain side, overlooking a canyon, and the view he had of it convinced him he could descend it in safety if the enraged eagles were not there to interfere.

They were back again, flapping and screaming, and striking at him with beak and talon. He twisted another stick out of the knapsack, and struck at the nest, before, hitting one a vicious clip on the wing.

Then the fight grew desperate. Their courage and anger increased as they began to feel he could not injure them. Again and again they came at him, almost hurling him from the ledge.

Finding that the sticks were not of sufficient size to be effective weapons, he followed deeper and brought up a bowlder.

Steadying himself, as they again dashed down, he hurled the stone, with true aim, at the female, which was the largest bird and the fiercest fighter.

It struck her fairly on the left wing, and knocked her flitting down the canyon, and her mate, startled by this unexpected disaster, flew, screaming, away.

Given time to recover, AI found himself in a panting and exhausted state, and so trembling he could hardly stand.

He sought another bowlder, fearing the return of the male; then sank down in the cool, too tired to remain longer on his feet. Hardly had he done so, when his head voices on the ledge below, and the men were approaching toward the point he occupied, driven by the noise of the conflict just ended.

"Bowlder where you are, as he saw them. He knew them well. Both were bitter enemies of himself and his father."

Playing with them, Cabe Munson, had while in drink, at Isett's mine, brutally attacked AI, not a month before, and had been disarmed and discharged by Isett for the offense.

The other, who was known as Thistia Jim, and who, was possibly, a greater enemy, Cabe Munson, had been caught stealing articles from the mine office, and had been jailed for two years. Isett being the proprietor.

The youth could not have encountered
The Tramp's Trump-Trick.

The roar of the river came up distinctly when they had proceeded halfway down the slope.

They descended to the stream, at its nearest point, which, as it changed, was about a furlong of a mile above the terrible vortex.

Here was a pile of drift, with some sawed logs. Babu had been cut for a cabin, and had floated down to that point.

Bunton removed from about his waist a large riata, which his sash had partially hidden.

"Into that hole you go!" he cried, with a terrible shout. "You thought we were foolin', but we wasn't. Your dad went down there, and you're to follow him. I'd feel like shit if I was left to light of a fire before settin' you adrift, only that would spoil the pleasure of the thing."

"You and your dad didn't calculate that Gabe Bunton would ever have ye by the heels when you was lording it over him up there at the mines. But every dog has his day. Sonny. That was your day, an' this is our'n."

He worked himself into a fit of vindictive rage. His cheeks shrank, and his teeth glistened like the cruel fangs of an animal.

Aztec Al saw there was no hope, and he struggled wildly to remove the cords from his wrists, but the only result was to add to the pain of the man, who looked on and laughed at his frantic efforts.

Bunton pushed two of the logs into the water and tied them together with the riata, in the shape of a V; and then he and the other villain seized Aztec Al, tore a piece from the lining of his jacket and bound him to the logs. And then, his main strength pushed him into the water and tied him between the logs.

"Good-bye," he thrust the novel craft away from the shore and set it afloat. "The pit, down there, is a warnin' for you to come out!"

CHAPTER IX.

WITHIN THE JAWS OF DEATH.

Aztec Al's terror grew as he felt himself adrift on the terrible Rio Perdidas, about which he heard nothing. Each side rose the mountain walls, and below was the deadly vortex, into which the stream poured with a sound like thunder.

A situation more terrible cannot be conceived, for there was no chance of escape. No human being was near, except the two callous scoundrels, who roared with laughter as they saw him floating away, as if they thought the thing an exquisite joke.

The odd craft moved out into the center of the stream, as if emboldened by the presence of Aztec Al, a frightened man floating about, as if it thought the thing an exquisite joke.

Once it swung near the opposite shore, struck and rebounded from a rocky projection, and then began to whirl slowly round and round. A very frenzy seized him as he drew near the opening into which the stream rushed, a black tunnel, almost filled by the swirling current.

He had no doubt he was going to his death. He thought the Rio Perdidas never reappeared after making that terrible plunge. The story that it was sucked into a big hole that had formed in the bed of the earth oppressed him awfully.

Faster and faster he descended. Then he was in the midst of the sump, tossed like a cork, and pushed on in front down the ledge, clenching by the shoulder and holding the revolving in readiness.

The thing was so strange he was at first unable to credit his eyes.

As he was whirled about, it disappeared, but when he again faced down the stream he was much nearer the star-like object, and he could not doubt its reality.

Then he made the happy discovery that the dashing waves had partially washed the man off his face, and he could look up. It had dropped down a little, with only its upper edge across his lips.

So exulted in the knowledge, which, with that other wonderful discovery, was of so hopeful a character, that he shouted and screamed in voices unprecedented.

The echoes told him there were rocky walls on each side, that did not crowd close up to the stream, which grew brighter and brighter, and quickly he perceived it must emanate from a camp-fire. It was too large for a lantern or ordinary torch.

Aztec Al called again and again as he swept toward it. At first he saw nothing but the fire, though it suggested the presence of human beings. Then he heeded rocky walls back of it, and, joy of joys, he saw something dart between himself and the light that bore a strong resemblance to a man.

"Call again," a full instant a head blotted all this from sight, to reveal it more clearly the next.

The camp-fire glowed plainly, the rocks were clearly revealed, and two men, hearing his outcry, came running toward him from the banks of the river.

The two men were Israel Issett and Baxo Smith; and Al, when he recognized them, thought he was so bewildered he could not think clearly, relived with insane delight.

"This way!" he screeched. "This way! Oh joy! Oh joy! Here I am! It's me—Al! Al! Issett! Aztec Al! Hurry up! Hurry up!"

They came running along the rocky margin, drawn by his shrill voice, and pressed toward him all this time, it was not long till they were near together.

The light of the fire shed around the scene, and Israel Issett leaped into the water and swam out to where his son floated.

"What does this mean?" they demand.

"What does it all mean?" was his counter-question. "How does it come that you're alive?"

The place they were in seemed a huge cavern. As to its size, they could only
They had not been in it long enough to make any exploration. But guessing from the look of the place, Isett said to me, "Let's have a look around, and see what we can find."

We started off down the narrow corridor, and for a time everything was quiet, except for a faint noise of water. But then we heard a loud commotion ahead, and we turned to see what it was.

It was a large room, filled with what looked like treasure. There were gold and silver bars, diamonds and rubies, all piled up in great heaps. Isett and I looked at each other in amazement, and we started to explore the room.

"This must be the treasure room," Isett said.

"Yes," I agreed. "But how did they get here?"

We listened for any signs of life, but there was nothing. We decided to search the rest of the mansion for more treasures.

As we continued our search, we came across a large vault. It was locked, but Isett had brought along a pickaxe, and he managed to break it open.

Inside, we found a chest filled with gold coins. Isett counted them, and we were both amazed at the amount. We decided to take some of the coins with us, but we left most of them in the vault.

We continued our search, and we found more treasures in various rooms. We came across a large painting of a ship, and we wondered if it was the ship that brought the treasure to the island.

"I don't know," Isett said. "It could be a map." 

We decided to leave the painting and continue our search.

As we searched the mansion, we came across a large telescope. Isett picked it up, and he focused it on the horizon.

"I see something," Isett said.

We followed his gaze, and we saw a ship coming our way. It was a large, white ship, and it had a flag flying from its mast.

"It's a pirate ship," Isett said.

We decided to hide, and we sat in the shadows, watching the pirate ship approach. It was a large ship, and it had many cannons on its deck.

"We're going to have a problem," Isett said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, we can't fight them," Isett said. "We don't have any weapons." 

"I know," I said. "But we have to think of some way to get away from them." 

We decided to hide in the dungeon, and we waited for the pirates to pass by. We were able to escape without any problems, and we left the mansion.

We decided to travel to the nearby town, and we sought out the pirate leader. We were able to negotiate a deal with him, and we were able to return the treasure to its rightful owner.

We were hailed as heroes, and we were given a large sum of money as compensation. Isett and I were able to start a new life, and we were never seen by the pirates again.

The end.
The Tramp's Trump-Trick.

After this he drew open his mouth to show that it was empty; then reached down and pulled the pebble out of his ankle.

It was but a slight-hand trick, but to the eyes of some it was marvelous exhibition of magic. Their amazement was staring and unfigured.

The tramp purpled with pleasure and hope.

"Gents and ladies, when you got hold of me you didn't know that I was the high-muck-a-muckas! If you'd like an exhibition of my power, why, I'm at your service.

"And I understand, ladies and gent, that this is not mere legere- main, but a power conferred on me by occult forces. My father was an East Indian mahatma, and my mother—"

They were gaping at him, not understanding a word.

"Stow your English!" cut in Isett.

"What's the use of givin' em that kind of a song?"

Seeing Bazoo hesitate, Isett lifted his voice in Spanish, like a crier.

"This is the great medicine man of the American mud-house with him. He can work wonders, perform miracles, heal the sick—"

The magical was swallowing another pebble, which he pulled out of his ear.

Then he put a pebble in at one ear and drew it out at the other, leaning forward, drove a pebble into an Indian's head and drew it out of the Indian's mouth.

The captors fell back apace, and Bazoo, much encouraged, tackled some of his best tricks.

He combed a whole handful of pebbles and sand out of an Indian's hair, and then, to the astonishment of all and to the fright of many, he opened his mouth and began to spout fire.

Not even his friends had seen him twist off the top of one of the buttons and crowd a portion of the stuff that was in it into his mouth.

Following the fire, he reeled out a dozen yards of fine white ribbon, which, after it came out, he gravely passed to the nearest Indian for examination.

Bazoo watched him curiously, and continued to call out his wonder-working powers and to point dramatically to the present remarkable miracle.

A number of runners were hurried away, and then, to the surprise of the whites, the Indians sat down in groups around their captors, and a general discussion of the performance of the Indians, including Isett's tricks, filled the air. They were not given much time for speculation, as the Indians gathered about, with cries of anger and exclamation, and conducted them toward the rude adobe town in the heart of the valley.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRAMP'S SLEIGHT-OF-HAND.

Suddenly the tramp coughed very loud and succeeded in drawing attention to himself.

It was apparent that many of the Indians had never before seen white men, and this was true of most of the women and children, who were hurrying out of the town in considerable numbers.

They crowded up a pebble with a quick sweep of the hand, held it on high and made many violent gestures.

They would crowed closer, but the tramp motioned them back.

Then he again coughed loudly, held up the pebble and thrust it into his mouth.

It was a very large pebble, and he writhed and choked, and pressed down his hand; but, the crook, until it seemed to have passed into his stomach.
The Tramp's Trump-Trick

from one valley into another.

The days did not pass without bringing many plans of escape. To remain in that valley, the prisoners of those Indians, was no longer to be thought of. But how were they to get away?

Two parties formed among the Indians— one party favoring the whites and the other opposed to them and demanding their death.

The first party was led by those believed in the miraculous powers of the juggler; the other by the adherents of certain priests, disbelieving and jealous of the homage and consideration shown the white medicine-man.

Unfortunately the woman accused of witchcraft and her son, rescued from death by Al and Bazoo, had been snatched from priests opposed to the whites.

"At the清水 like the outlook," Israel Isett declared.

They were in the room assigned to Bazoo. Al had made a mistake, foolishly wearing the necklace of pearls.

"Though these Indians are Tahayumas and their customs and every change of emotion, they have still men among them who have gone sense enough to know that you must play a game. But of those priests, for the most part, must be of it, for they are in the habit of putting up little miracle tricks themselves, to increase their power.

"What heard one Indian say to another while ago made me afraid that our days of grace are up. They are planning to kill us, kill all of us, to murder us, likely, and then cause the woman to be burnt, if they can force into submission the opposition.

"The information was very disquieting.

That Isett's fears had a strong basis of fact was shown to Al almost as soon as darkness had fallen, for he had been taken by hand, put into his possession a bag of gold, and drew him hastily away from the hut.

At a corner she left him for a moment, and when she returned to conduct him on, she threw another string of pearls about his neck.

She could not say a word that he could understand, but her actions and evident anxiety, combined with what he had heard from his father, made him know that some peril threatened, of which she was informed.

Taking him to the house of the juggler, she pointed to the mountains and by signs urged him to fly from the place and from the valley.

Then she glided away and disappeared.

"We've lost the trail," said Al, and Bazoo avowed, "There's deviltry afoot. But how we're to get out of this valley is what worries me most.

"There may be a pass! We haven't made a search, you know. We're judging only by what we've seen and heard.

Al's hopeful view was adopted as possible, and the only one that offered hope, and they began to discuss how they might carry out this purpose. With only a crawling sound drew their attention.

From within the room they could see out into the dinky street, while themselves unseen, and now they beheld three dark figures creeping slowly in their direction.

That these were assassins slipping up to murder them admitted of no doubt, for closer looking revealed the gleam of knives held in the teeth of these men.

The imperiled prisoners were absolutely weaponless, except for a club that Al had picked up on the way.

"Make a dash for it!" Al whispered, with his customary quickness. "If they corner us in here, we're gone. And, see! There's more of them.

Behind the three armed Indians came four more, advancing in the same stealthy manner.

The crawling villains were now within three or four yards of the entrance.

To delay longer invited death.

With a rush the three prisoners dashed through the opening, Aztec Al leading the way.

Before the Indians knew that their presence was known, the whites were out of the room and beyond immediate danger.

Instantly the attitude of the Indians altered from that of stealthy, would-be murderers to open enemies and alarmists.

While the situation had miscarried, there was now placed in their grasp a most formidable weapon.

They had only to make known to the village that the prisoners were trying to escape to turn near by nearly all of the villagers against the three men.

That the fugitives could get away they did not believe. They knew the impassable chasms and wounds of the mountains, but was one route out of the valley which unskilled men could track. That was a route known only to the leading priests and estuah worshipers.

Al swung his club and knocked down an Indian who attempted to oppose him in a narrow street; and all three, running like the deer out of the town and headed toward the mountains at the lower end of the valley.

They stopped an instant to pant out, then when the town was cleared:

"We must stick together, this time! There may be a gap in the fence where the river goes through, and we'll hunt for that, first. If that fails, we'll look for a pass!"

The town was being aroused. Cries rang out shrilly, shouts resounded, and signal fires began to flare.

They then chose a guide to direct them.

They ran straight down its left bank, glowering through the irrigated fields, and wading to their knees in the muddy ditches.

These people had needed rain only for the pasturage of their flocks and herds. The river furnished all the water required for crops.

The tramp stumbled blindly over a row of Irish potatoes.

"If we only had time to dig some of these, we'd be all right. Do you know, fellers, we're starved! I can't see nothing eat!" Bazoo always thought first of his stomach, and, in this instance, it was a very pressing matter.

The noise in the direction of the village noise now told that pursuit had commenced.

"We shall be here in less than an hour," said Al, "and we won't give our friends to the mountain wall, at the point where the river flowed out. But no gorge was found leading from the valley. The river again dived into a tunnel!"

They stood surveying the place as well as they could in the darkness. The roar of the water almost deafened them.

"Shall we risk it again?" Isett queried.

"We can't take us into another valley and another trap either!"

Smith shook his head.

Partners, I've had enough of that kind of a plunge bath!"

Convinced that it was useless to look further here, they began to search along the high mountain wall that curved back toward the village.

The search only confirmed their previous belief that the wide valley was nothing more than the bottom of a big canyon, rimmed in by walls that were practically insurmountable, through long familiarity with the place, might be able to get in and out, but no hope was offered any one else.

Their peril was so extreme, however, that they made the search very thorough.

Leaving the river, they continued on around and around the wall until they gained the upper end of the valley near the point where they had been brought out of the cavern.

"If we can't do anything else, we can go in there and hide and baffle them for a time!"

This suggestion, made by Al, was not at all a pleasant one, and Isett and the tramp both declared that they would al-fall in line of the Indians as to trust themselves again in those winding passages.

There was gold in unlimited quantities back there, but darkness did not attract them in the least.

Finding a cleft in the rocky wall, they began an intense listening for sounds of pursuit, and, as they thus listened, they began to debate the feasibility of swimming across and trying their luck on the opposite side.

CHAPTER XV.

A FIGHT ON THE LEDGE.

Juan Romero, the bandit and insurgent leader, stood in the rocky country. Just in front, the walls of Carretas, quaking and listening.
He was a fugitive, with a price on his head.

His attempt to subvert the lawful govern-
ment of the province had ended in dis-
malm failure. The government had tri-
much of the country, and many of them
death, and others were prisoners, with
their lives hanging by the thinnest threads.
He had been captured and imprisoned
but for the earthquake. That had terri-
fied his people, and had scattered the walls
on which the murderers relied for defense.
"They have not got me yet!" he gasped,
looking back toward the town. "Ay, and
they never will get me! I will kill my
self first!"

In his sash were a knife and pistol, and
over his shoulders was slung a heavy can-
vas bag filled with gold. This gold he had
snatched in his haste as he fled.
He had eluded his foes by reason of the
darkness. Now the day had dawned, and
he knew that pursuit would not long be
delayed.

Turning about, he strode toward the
mountains, muttering as he walked, and
cursing the fate that made him a fugitive
wherever he went.

At times he ran, for he realized the
value of every moment.

These men, who would soon be on his
tail, would be expert, long-winded, merci-
less! Yes, the moments were more
precious than the gold on his shoulders:

The bag of gold clinked within the
hank of the water and laved his heated face.

Then he continued on down its bank to
the foot of the ledge that lay above it, the
side of the mountain.

He had ascended less than halfway up
the incline when he started, suddenly,

Glancing around, with hammering heart,
he was hailed in a familiar voice, and
saw coming toward him the two villains
who had been described—Gabe Bunton and
his conceivably pard.

Since they had sent Al into the pit of the
Perdidas, they had remained in that
vicinity, hoping for an opportunity to rob
some wealthy traveler or fugitive.

They felt that the opportunity had come,
and they were not disposed to hesitate be-
cause the intended victim had, in better
days, been their leader.

"You've heard of the fall of Carretas?" he
asked. "If you are wise you will go with
me, so that we may all be far
hence. We will leave the
blood bounds of the government will go
everywhere, and none who were friendly to
Jim will be missed and caught."

They beheld the bag on his shoulders,
and their villainous instincts informed
them that their creator had been captured.
They knew Romero would not leave Car-
retas without treasure.

"Ay, we will go with you!" Bunton de-
cided, advancing with a smile and a pre-
tense of friendly interest.

The other, who was known as Thistle
Jim, came close behind him, striving to
vail his murderous inclinations by averting
his gaze.

He doubted them, but did not deem it
wise to voice the doubt, and continued to
talk of what had occurred in Carretas.

"I never knew Bunton was unfeeling."

"Something to eat on the way. I would
not start without food."

"How long have I got to live?" cried Bun-
ton, hurrying himself on Romero with sudden
fury.

Romero dropped a hand to his knife,
which he tried to draw.

He might have succeeded had not Bun-
ton's comrade dashed in and knocked the
knife from the other's hand.

But Romero was strong and agile, and,
though there were two against one, it was
not a match, and in a few minutes which would
win the victory.
The Tramp’s Trump-Track

Thistle Jim hurled himself into the river and attempted to bathe, but a bullet grazed and wounded, and sank from sight before he was halfway across. Juan Romero turned down stream, fearing a similar misfortune, and paddled slowly and hedged in a hundred yards below, where he stood at bay, like a stag ringed in by description.

The fight that took place here was savage beyond description. Romero had not been struggling for his life, and with the reeking knife in his hand, he fought the Indians that crowded against him back, one at a time, until half a dozen lay dead or dying at his feet.

As for the friends, though they had been bound and made helpless by these men, they could not but admire and pity Romero when they saw him making such a valiant stand against overwhelming odds. But it was all over in a little while. Romero fell, covered with wounds; Thistle Jim was shot and drowned in mid-stream, and Gabe Bunton, pierced through and through by an arrow, lay stretched on the rocks, with his stiffening fingers the strings of pearls.

CHAPTER XVII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

The prisoners expected only instant death. The Indians were enraged beyond measure, and they were not particular regarding the lives of enemies.

Having disposed of the strangers, they now gathered about Aztec Al and the others, and bandishing their weapons in a manner that was most threatening and alarming. Isaett spoke aloud, calling for the interpreter.

However, no interpreter came, but some one who seemed to be a chief, waved the threatening Indians back.

Then their bonds were cast off and they were placed on their feet.

About them an escort gathered and pushed them in the direction of the town. This did not discourage them; however, as the attitude of the Indians was that of suppressed wrath, which would soon seek to wreak itself on their helpless heads.

Al looked about, seeking some way of escape, and grew almost hopeless.

Scores of angry eyes were filled with wrath; wrinkled and scowled, and murderous hands frenziedly shook weapons in his direction.

It was plain that their enemies were in complete control and that death was the only thing to be expected.

"I am afraid it is all up with us," said Isaett, in a low tone. "You can’t think of any way out of this muddle, can you, Bunton? None of your tricks wouldn’t work now, I reckon."

The tramp was in a state of physical and mental agony.

However, at Isaett’s suggestion, he called out, to draw further attention to himself, and sought to subject an object out of the hair of the nearest Indian.

But his tricks seemed to have lost their potency. He was dashed down, with a screech, and a knife was thrusting wildly as if with the intention of plunging it in his breast.

"We’re going to hound, his knees seeming to sink under him. "That was a trick that never went back on me before."

The angry glance crescendoed, apparently, as they drew near to the village, which was in an uproar.

The inhabitants remaining behind—consisting chiefly of children and women—poured out, and, surrounding the party, vented their rage in such a babel of wild cries as a live thing could not come from human throats.

Into the principal street went the prisoners.

Then Al beheld something that puzzled him, and at the same time gave him hope. On the flat roof of the estuia was his girl; she was looking toward him and making mysterious signs, but emitting no cries.

She was fear-stricken and anguish, yet determined.

He understood her, fortunately; under her circumstances she had learned to do without the fear of the fear-stricken, and anguish, and yet determined.

He understood her, fortunately; under her circumstances she had learned to do without the fear of the fear-stricken, and anguish, yet determined.

When she later knew, he did not understand all.

She waved a bow and arrow, when she saw that he observed her, and again pointed to the only opening into the estuia.

"Do you see that?" he asked, speaking to his father, in English. "That old woman wants us to come up here. Shall we try it? Can we do it?"

Isaett was in a desperate mood.

"Well, try anything! We’ll be killed, anyway, if we don’t make a try. Don’t look at her. Give me a minute to think."

He cautiously took his knife sheath from his belt and stretched out his hand, the act of which they were made aware by smart blows across their shoulders.

Al leaped under the blow given him, which, fortunately, set the Indians in a roar of delight, and thus served, in a measure, to appease the desires of the Indians.

Isaett was not wasting his time. Running his keen eyes over those nearest him he observed that most of them were armed with knives in belts at their waists.

He hurriedly communicated this discovery to Al and Basoo and acquainted them with his plan.

In two or three minutes more we will be back by the council-house. When we get near the ladder and I give you a whistle, each one of you grab a knife.

Then we’ll all break for the ladder together and try to get up to the roof where the old woman is. She wants us to take refuge in the council-house, that’s clear. I suppose it will only prolong things a while, but I’m not going to die without making an effort.

The Indians heard his words and again lashed him, and would have speared him, no doubt, if they had known what he was about.

The details of the plan were hardly firmly fixed in their minds, when they found them at the foot of the chumney ladder that led to the estuia’s deck, and which was built so as to allow the Indians to reach it from the roof directly above.

Isaett’s whistle arose in a startling blast, and, snatching a knife from the belt of the nearest Indian, he dashed upon it, fiercely back against his fellows, throwing them into confusion, and broke for the ladder.

Aztec Al and the tramp imitated his example, as well as they could, and followed in his rear.

Only a few bounds were needed, and then they were climbing up the ladder.

The two had halfway up before the Indians had recovered themselves and knew what the prisoners were trying to do.

Out cries then resounded and there was a flight of arrows.

Fortunately none of the arrows inflicted any serious wounds, and they were recovered from their astonishment the three were on the estuia.

The old woman screamed like a foal as she mounted, brandishing her bow, and now, as Al, who came last, tumbled off the ladder, she threw it backward from her arm and shot it up through the slats of the deck, where the Indians who were essaying to mount.

"Into the estuia!" she cried, in her native tongue, as she pointed her arrow, shooting exactly in the center of the flat roof.
There was a ladder here also, down which they almost fell.
Again the wind whistled and sang and the Indians yelled.
She dashed after the white men, but through the lamp, the instant of setting foot on the ladder.
Then she fell headlong into the estufa, her eyes closed in agonies of pain.
Al lifted her up, but she was dead before he reached her.
She had been but an Indian woman, ignorant and cruel, but she had been faithful unto death, and the tears came into his eyes as he thought of her great sacrifice.
Isett snatched up the bow and arrows that had dropped from her hand, and looked up at the opening. Utter darkness reigned in the estufa, with the exception of the light that came in through this hole.
I didn't know why she wanted us in here, unless it's the best place in town to make a fight! That must have been her idea. The rascals can't burn the thing, and we can hold them back a while.
All felt, though, that there could be but one way to proceed. The preparations for the attack were surrounded by scores of savage foes and were without food or water.

CHAPTER XVIII.
A BONANZA STRIKE.
An Indian daringly showed his head in the opening.
Isett quickly fitted an arrow, the bow-string twanged, and the Indian sprang backward with a scream.
They could tell from the trampling of feet on the roof that a number of Indians had ascended the ladder.
Isett fitted another arrow and narrowly watched the opening.
Aztec Al and the tram stood near him in silent excitement.
Suddenly a flaming ball flew through the opening, fell at their feet, and illuminate the estufa's interior. Its coming was unexpected and demoralizing.
A half dozen spears and as many arrows came through the hole, and the tram fell back with a scared cry.
An arrow was sticking in his shoulder, and at first glance it seemed to be seriously hurt, but, when Al ran up to him and sought to draw the arrow out, he said it didn't hurt, and his clothes were perforated and the coat, and had not trod the shoulder at all.
"A narrow squeak!" the tram panted, Marshal in his hand.
Recognizing the danger from the burning ball, Isett kicked it back out of range of the arrows, and stamped it out. It seemed to be made of cloth or fiber, soaked in some fatty substance.
Scarcely was it extinguished, when another came through sputtering and dancing, followed by another shower of arrows and spears.
"Hop back, and they can't hit you!" Isett cried, looking from the flaming ball to the opening above.
He had not a foot in readiness, and was firmly resolved to kill the first Indian who attempted to descend.
In spite of the peril, Al made a dash and dodged but the foot of the ladder, causing the ladder to fall within the enclosure.
At almost the same instant Smith uttered a yell of surprise, and they turned and saw what so excited the tram. The walls of the estufa were quivering and rattling. There were rugs and blankets of various designs, feathered prayer-sticks, feathers, rattles, dresses of the friar and lances, and dozens of other articles.

In addition—and this more than all else—there were two large strings of pearls as fine as those given the American boy by the old woman, and there were other strings of gems that looked to be diamonds, rubies and emeralds.
Isett had seized one of the long lances hurled into the estufa, and with its point he had drawn them toward him, while he now stampeded with its feet.
Dense darkness followed.
That she had not time to snatch Mr. Knute's respira, which they sorely needed.
Outside they could hear the excited cries of the Indians, and the cloven-footed thud of their feet.
Another of the Indians quickly came through, landing close to Isett's feet, and by its light he saw the bows and arrows betwixt them.
"Arm yourselves!" he commanded. "If we can't save our lives, we can send some of these rascals ahead of us!"
He was desperately determined. He had worked furiously, and in that close, hot hole, the sweat was streaming from every pore.
Add to this clesness the odor and the gas from the fire balls, and the place was little less than suffocating.
"Do all the damage you can! They'll smoke us out pretty soon, and then the jig's up!"
He fired again, as he spoke, and the imminent and the boy also sent arrows in the same direcution.
Al's arrow, like his father's, passed through the hole, but the other's went swiftly, and stuck quivering in the mud wall opposite.
A flight of arrows was the reply, and one of them went into the flasty part of Aztec Al's arm.
He drew it out, with unblanching lip, and stuck the flow of blood as well, as he could with a piece torn from the lining of his coat.
Again the arrows flew, and one passed through the crown of the juggler's hat, where it hung, with feathered end upward, like the famous ornament of Yankee Doodle.
The fire balls were fairly rained into the estufa, the idea of the Indians being, apparently, to another and choke out these enemies, if they could not otherwise be overcome.
Isett was a host in himself. He was an expert with the bow, and so accurate in aim that seldom was a head or body shown not to have been arrowed.
The result was that, though the fire balls continued to rain, and the lances and arrows to pour, they came into the estufa without direction.
The smoke was increasing, but, at the same time, the interior of the queer place was made fairly visible.
A shout broke from the lad's lips.
"A way out! Way out!"
The words electrified his companions.
He rushed to the north side of the es- tufa—they had been standing all the time at the south, and pointed out a black aperture near the ground.
"The old woman wanted us to come in here to save us! She knew of this!"
"Not so fast!" warned Isett. "Better know what you've found first! Bazoo, watch the hole above!"
Al was drawn on his hands and knees exploring the opening.
It was in form a small tunnel, leading no one could have discovered, as at the turn they turned and saw what so excited the tram. The walls of the estufa were quivering and rattling. There were rugs and blankets of various designs, feathered prayer-sticks, feathers, rattles, dresses of the friar and lances, and dozens of other articles.
In addition—and this more than all else—there were two large strings of pearls as fine as those given the American boy by the old woman, and with the wonderful declaration that it seemed to have no end.
The Indians were not becoming bolder, and Isett again stationed himself to drive them back with the arrows, of which there was abundance on the floor and on the walls.
"Load yourselves down with those jewels, and come out! We mean business!" Isett called. "I'll reach you in the place! We'll try that tunnel. We can't be any worse off in there, and it may lead us out of the soup!"
The tram and the boy hastened to obey the order. From the walls they pulled the pearls that were looped on strings, and the other objects that were held in cloth-like meshes, which kept them secure and at the same time revealed their beauty and value.
They found no food, however, which, just at that time, would have been more precious than gem.
They worked hurriedly, while Isett, with his arrows, kept back the Indians.
In addition to the gems, they armed themselves with bows and arrows.
When this was done, Al took up one of the much-famed Tommy guns, and Bazoo another.
"All ready!" the boy called.
Then he crawled into the tunnel in advance of the tram, leaving his father to bring up and protect its rear.

CHAPTER XIX.
THE FLIGHT THROUGH THE TUNNEL.
As the little party plunged into the dark of the cramped tunnel, they felt as if they were going into a trap, but they hurried on, nevertheless, crawling, at first, their way lighted by the torches' flare.
A rod or so boy, at the entrance the tunnel so expanded as to admit of their standing erect.
Isett had barely reached this point, when the sounds behind them warned that the Indians were growing bold and suspicious, and that some of them were on the point of leaping into the council-house, if the leap had not already been made.
An arrow whizzed by the head of Isett.
"Out with the lights!" was his order, and he extinguished his torch.
Al did likewise, and then they stumbled on through the passage.
Other arrows flew dangerously near, and the cries and calls of Indians told that the place was invaded and that pursuit was commenced.
All, therefore, hurried on, sure that whatever might be in front, death followed close behind.
Fortunately, there were boulders in the underground passage, and, while they stumbled heavily against the walls at these points, the angles gave them security from the arrows that were being flung.
Once, when Al halted for an instant, he heard a light patter of feet.
Isett also stopped, and, quickly drawing an arrow to the head, he sent it spinning.
A yell succeeded, and he knew that the arrow had found the Indian target.
As they continued on, the tunnel showed no signs of a termination, they felt that the passage led to the outside world—that it was, in truth, the one passage by which the world lying beyond the vault could be reached.
On they continued on, at length, they were brought to a halt by the appearance of torches and men in front.
A few shots were fired, and they were off, coming toward them, and the impression was that, by some short cut, the Indians had got in ahead and blocked the way.
"We'll charge 'em!" Isett fearlessly growled. "I'll blast as well die right here as anywhere."
Hardly had he said the words, when
Yells arose behind, showing that the pursuing reds had also caught sight of the waviering torches in a bend of the tunnel, and the Indians were yelling to tell the Creeks that the Indians ahead knew nothing of the flight and pursuit.

Fortunately, they were a considerable distance to the rear. The warning of one of their number by the arrow had kept them from over boldness.

Our friends, not knowing what else to do, leaped ahead, with the intention of arresting the Indians coming from the other direction, but they had hardly run ten yards when they beheld a wide crack in one of the walls—there were many such—and the character of the yells behind still showing that the Indians in front were not posted as to what was occurring, they crept slyly into this crevice for concealment.

The savages in front were coming on rapidly, waving torches, and an escape, except by hiding, would have been out of the question.

The fugitives almost held their breath as these Indians drew near. The torches so lighted the tunnel that concealment seemed impossible. There were nearly twenty of these redskins, laden with various articles brought from their cabins, and they were in a hurry.

Looking straight ahead, in the direction of their friends, who were coming up rapidly, they passed the concealed whites. They were not ten paces beyond the crevice, when Issett dropped out of the fissure, whispering to the others to do the same, and the flight was resumed.

The yells behind increased, and, five minutes later, they could tell that the two parties had met, that explanations had been made, and that the pursuit had been recommenced.

It was a desperate race, with everything seemingly, in favor of the savages. But there was one thing which told in behalf of the pursued men, and that was the possession of the bow and arrows by Issett and his shown ability to use them with effect.

For more than an hour the race was kept up. But no other Indians appeared in front, and the work of the two most exhausted trod emerged from that wonderful tunnel, on a hillside.

No one was in sight, indicating human occupation, leaving the dimly lighted tablerand stretched away toward the horizon.

Fortunately, there were many hiding places alongside this hillside, with canyons and deiles which offered shelter, and, by means of these, they gave the pursuing Indians the slip.

Sold in New York, the pearls, emeralds and rubies taken from the estuara brought immense prices, thus enriching the adventurers beyond their expectations.

Benjamin Smith abandoned the voyage, either of a juggler-tramp, rehersing with pride his Mexican hair-breadth episodes and triumphs.

Israel Issett never returned to work his mine in the neighborhood of Caracas, not daring to bet the trouble and expense necessary to bring it to a paying basis.

Two years after the escape from the tunnel, the young Moro chief urged more by a spirit of adventure than anything else, tried to re-enter the Encantadaed Valley, as he had named it with a party of friends, but the effort was unsuccessful. When they endeavored to pass through the tunnel they found it completely blocked.

Whether this was the work of an earthquake, or of the Indians, who feared an invasion of treasure seekers, could not be determined, but sufficient time and energy were spent in making the Creel and the tunnel was absolutely impeneetrable.

No one cared to risk the perils of the "pit" of the Rio Perdidas, and the Encantadoed Valley, with its treasures and its queer people, still hidden from the eyes of civilized men.

THE END.