THE MOTOR SCOUT

Title: The Motor Scout
A Story of Adventure in South America

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Release Date: June 15, 2013 [eBook #42953]

Language: English

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE MOTOR SCOUT ***

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THE GOBERNADOR RIDES

THE MOTOR SCOUT

A STORY OF ADVENTURE IN SOUTH AMERICA

BY

HERBERT STRANG

ILLUSTRATED BY CYRUS CUNEO

LONDON
HENRY FROWDE
HODDER AND STOUGHTON
1913

RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,
BRUNSWICK STREET, STAMFORD STREET, S.E.,
AND BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.

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BOMBASTES FURIOSO

One hot sultry afternoon in June, the population of the little town of San Rosario in the Peruvian Andes was struck with sudden amazement at the sight of a motor-bicycle clattering its way through the main street with some risk to the dogs, poultry, and small boys who had been lazily disporting themselves there. It was not the bicycle itself that evoked their wonder: that was an object familiar enough. Nor was it the youth seated in the saddle, and steering it deftly past all obstacles. It was a second figure, mounted uneasily on the carrier behind: a rotund and portly figure, which shook and quivered with the vibration of the machine as it jolted over the ill-paved road, maintaining its equilibrium with obvious difficulty. Children and women shrieked; the men leaning against the walls took their cigars from their lips and gasped; and the noise of the engine was almost smothered by the mingled din of barking dogs and screaming fowls. It was the figure of the gobernador himself: land-owner, chief magistrate, and father of a

family.

The wondering populace might have supposed that the gentleman had taken leave of his senses–for surely no one of his mature years and serious responsibilities would have risked so much if he had been sane–had it not been plain to them that he was in desperate distress. His head was bare; his swarthy cheeks were shining with perspiration; his eyes rolled with fright; and his fat hands were clasped about the waist of the boy in the saddle with the convulsive grip of a man clinging for dear life. The face of the boy was, on the contrary, beaming with delight. His lips were parted in a wide smile; his blue eyes were dancing; and his mop of tow-coloured hair waved joyously in the breeze that the motion of the vehicle created.

The street filled, and soon there was a mingled crowd pouring in full cry behind the bicycle. There were young fellows in black coats and spotless collars–the well-to-do Peruvian is something of a dandy; men in white ducks and Panama hats; ladies in mantillas; Indians in bright-coloured ponchos; rough-clad muleteers; bare-legged Indian children. The rider waved his hand and grinned at a stripling who ran, pen in hand, from an office, to see the cause of the uproar, and smilingly watched the bicycle as it bowled along over the cobbles of the plaza, with much clamorous outcry from the hooter, finally coming to rest before a large house there. The perspiring passenger having descended from his uneasy perch, the rider dismounted and offered his arm as a support to the magistrate, whose legs, cramped by their unwonted strain, moved very stiffly as he approached his door.

Young Tim O'Hagan and his motor-bicycle had been for some time the talk of San Rosario. Tim was sixteen, but he was called "Young Tim" to distinguish him from his father, and also, perhaps, in the spirit of kindly tolerance with which elders sometimes regard their high-spirited juniors. Young Tim had always been what his father's English friends called a "pickle," and old Biddy Flanagan, the family maidservant, a "broth of a boy." As a small boy he had been in frequent scrapes, and a cause of bewilderment and trouble to the grave householders of the town. More than once they had politely complained to Mr. O'Hagan of his escapades: scrambling over their roofs, hunting for lost balls in their gardens without much regard for their carefully tended flower-beds, and engaging in many other nimble exercises which are natural enough to an English–or Irish–boy, but are rare with the less active Latins. Thrashings and admonitions were equally ineffective; he would promise not to repeat a certain offence, and keep his word, but only to break out in a new direction. Mr. O'Hagan at last despaired of further correction, and yielded to his wife's advice, to leave Tim to the sobering hand of time.

As he grew older Tim became less mischievous, without losing his wild

spirits and love of frolic. To see him coast down the hills on his free-wheel bicycle with no hold upon the handle-bar filled the Peruvian boys with fear and amazement. And when, on his sixteenth birthday, his father surrendered to his importunities, and presented him with a motor-bicycle, there were not wanting many who foretold that young Tim would sooner or later break his neck. Tim laughed at them. He had come through his most daring exploits without any hurt more serious than scratches and bruises; and being very clear-headed and possessed of iron nerves he was accustomed to scoff at the warnings of timid people.

In spite of his prankishness, there was no more popular person in San Rosario. Nobody could dislike the boy with his fair Irish face, his honest eyes twinkling with fun, and the shaggy head that scorned hats and defied sunstroke. The Peruvian ladies would have made a pet of him if he would have allowed them; and their husbands, in a country where everybody, man, woman, and child, smokes, often made him presents of cigars, which he accepted gratefully, and dutifully handed over to his father.

His was the only motor-bicycle in the province, an object of a fearful awe to the young Peruvians. A crowd of these would surround him as he prepared to mount, and scatter with shrieks when they heard the clatter of the engine. Elderly ladies crossed themselves and drew their mantillas closer as they saw him flashing by, and the authorities of San Rosario were thinking of framing a bye-law for the protection of the inhabitants from furious driving. But they were slow to move; to-morrow would do; and Biddy Flanagan declared that no action would be taken until the gossoon had killed somebody dead.

On this June day, Tim had left home early in the afternoon for a twenty-mile trip into the hills. He was returning, and had just run down a steep and winding declivity which joined the highroad to San Juan, the provincial capital, when he caught sight of the gobernador, Señor José Fagasta, ambling ahead on his mule in the homeward direction. In half a minute he overtook the magistrate, and being always very sociably inclined, and having a certain liking for the large good-tempered gentleman, he stopped his machine, dismounted, and after a salutation in Spanish stepped on beside the rider, not finding it easy to keep pace with the mule's rapid march.

The gobernador was returning from the capital to his own little township, and it was not long before he confided to the boy the object and result of his visit.

"Brigands, my young friend," he said amiably.

"Are they caught, señor?" asked Tim.

"No, no; but they soon will be, the rascals!"

Tim pricked up his ears. Of late the so-called brigands had been very troublesome. They swept down from their unknown lairs in the mountains, falling

unawares on some remote hacienda, and waylaying the trains of pack-mules on the roads. Tim, like many another honest boy, felt a sneaking admiration for these lawless adventurers, and was not wholly displeased that they had hitherto defied all attempts to track them and bring them to book. Besides, they were "against the government"; and there were many good Peruvians who had reason to abhor the officials under whose exactions they were then suffering.

"What is going to be done, señor?" he asked.

"What am *I* going to do, you should have said," replied the magistrate. "You will see, my boy. They sent for me to-day at San Juan, and I have had a long consultation with his excellency the Prefect. 'Señor Doctor,' said he, 'you are the man to catch these ruffians. I leave it to you.'"

There was an accent of pride in the gobernador's tone, and he looked at Tim with the air of a man demanding admiration.

"Why do they call you doctor, señor?" asked Tim. "You don't attend us."

"No, my son. I am a Doctor of Laws of San Marcos University. Yes, they have confidence in me," he continued. "And the brigands will soon have me to reckon with." He touched significantly the butt of his revolver. "I will hunt them down; I will catch them; I shall have no mercy on them, and they will find that such villainy is not to be allowed to go unpunished within twenty miles of Señor Doctor José Fagasta. I am a man of peace; nobody could be more mild and humane; but when I see the beneficent laws of our republic transgressed and defied, then I remember that I am chief magistrate; I become severe; I may even be called terrible."

"What will you do with them?" asked Tim, impressed by the gobernador's vigorous words, and fascinated by the shining weapon that peeped out of his pocket, and the long sword that dangled from his belt.

"They shall be shot, my boy. Not without trial, no; we shall be just even to the most villainous desperado. We shall catch them, and bring them in irons to the town. We shall give them a fair trial, and condemn them: that goes without saying; then we shall place them blindfolded in the plaza, and—-"

"Shoot them!" added Tim, as the magistrate paused mysteriously.

Señor José nodded with official gravity, and for a little there was silence between the two, Tim conjuring up the anticipated scene, and wondering what the sensations of a man about to be shot must be.

[image]

CAPTURED BY BRIGANDS

Suddenly, from behind a cluster of rocks at their left hand, there sprang into the road four men, who without a moment's warning flung themselves on the travellers. Two seized Tim, the other two dragged the gobernador from his mule, and in a trice had him on the ground at their feet. The attack was so sudden and unexpected that there had not been time even to cry out; but now the gobernador raised his voice in horrified protest, and Tim regained his wits and took stock of the situation. The men were attired in ragged tunics and breeches, with sashes about their waists, and feathered hats of varied hue. They were swarthy wild-eyed fellows; mestizos–men of mixed Spanish and Indian blood; and Tim knew at a glance that they must be members of the very gang of outlaws whom the magistrate had so valorously undertaken to extirpate. They began to talk to one another rapidly in a jargon which Tim, familiar as he was with Spanish, could not understand. But the upshot of their consultation was seen in a minute. One of the men who held the lad brought his face close to his, and said:

"You go home! We have nothing to do with you. Take your machine and go."

Tim glanced at the gobernador, who lay motionless in the hands of his captors, mingling protests, threats, and offers of money. The brigand cursed, and declared that the boy had better take his chance of escaping before they changed their mind. It was clear that nothing could be done for the gobernador; the brigands had him at their mercy; and Tim considered that there was nothing to be gained by remaining. Indeed, it must be confessed that he was a good deal afraid of these ferocious-looking fellows, and desired nothing better than to escape from their clutches. So he caught the handle-bar, ran a few feet with his bicycle, then sprang to the saddle, and in a few seconds was riding at full speed along the road.

At first he was conscious of nothing but relief and joy at his own lucky escape. But he had not ridden far before he began to think of the gobernador. His conscience pricked him. He felt like a deserter. He owed nothing, it was true, to Señor Fagasta, who, while genial enough in private life, had always struck Tim as a ridiculous, pompous kind of person in his public capacity. But it seemed rather mean to ride away and leave the magistrate to his fate. There was not time to reach the town and bring back help; he could not himself do anything for the gobernador; and he began to wonder what the brigands would do with him. Perhaps they would rob him of what valuables he had, and let him go. Surely they would not hurt him! But when Tim remembered stories of the lengths to which these outlaws sometimes went he grew more and more uneasy.

After a few minutes he slowed down, considered for a little, then dismounted and pushed his bicycle into a thick clump of bushes, where it was well hidden. He durst not ride back, for though his machine was furnished with a

silencer, it did not run so quietly as not to be heard. He had made up his mind to retrace his path on foot, and see for himself what had happened. It was a long tramp uphill in the heat, and it took him nearly an hour to walk the distance which on the cycle he had covered in six or seven minutes. Fortunately the track wound so frequently that he ran no risk of being seen by the brigands.

As he approached the spot, he moved slowly and warily, peeping from behind bushes along straight stretches of the track, and glancing up into the hills to right and left. On reaching the scene of the capture he found that it was deserted. Nobody was in sight. He looked this way and that, and stooped to the ground to see if he could discover by their footmarks the direction in which the brigands had gone. But the ground was hard; he could scarcely discern the tracks of his own tyres. A trained scout might perhaps have noticed some slight indication, but Tim had had no such training.

"They've hauled him away," he thought, and there flashed into his mind recollections of fairy stories, in which ogres had carried human beings to their dens to make a meal of them. Tim had a vivid imagination.

He was on the point of returning when a sudden loud buzzing struck his ear. He listened: it was like the sound made by swarms of insects in the forest. And yet it was different–hoarser, less musical. Somehow it reminded Tim of the gobernador's speeches on great occasions in the plaza, He left the path, still on his guard, and scouted to the right among the trees, from which the humming seemed to come. And guiding himself by the sound, he presently started back when he saw Señor Fagasta himself, bound upright to a trunk, bare-headed, his mouth gagged.

The humming became very violent when Tim appeared. He noticed that the gobernador had managed to shift the gag a little. None of the brigands being in sight, he ran to the tree, removed the gag altogether, slit the cords about the señor's limbs, and was immediately embarrassed by two stout arms flung around him, and two hot lips pressing kisses on one cheek after the other.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed, wriggling. "Steady on, señor."

"Ah, my dear friend! My preserver! my deliverer!" Here there was another hug, but Tim evaded the kiss. "Tell me!" whispered the gobernador, "have those wretches gone away?"

"Indeed they have," said Tim. "You had better come away too."

"But they have taken my mule! I am not accustomed to walking. I shall faint: I shall be seized with apoplexy."

"I have left my cycle two or three miles away, señor. If you can manage to walk to that you can mount behind me, and we'll be home in no time."

"Yes, I will do so. Assist me with your arm. I am on thorns until I am on the machine; till then I am not safe. Hasten, my son. I have not walked a mile

for twenty years, though in my youth–but no matter: I will do my best."

They set off, Tim linking arms with the gobernador, who marched down the track with the rolling gait of a sailor. Every now and then he stopped to rest and recover breath, and as at these moments he showed signs of repeating his embraces, Tim edged away until he was ready to start again.

"Ah, my preserver!" said the gobernador once, "you have laid a debt upon me which a lifetime of gratitude will not liquidate."

"Indeed it's nothing at all," said Tim. "You would have done the same for me."

"That is true; I certainly would; the blood of a long line of hidalgos runs in my veins. In Spain I might call myself Don José de Fagasta; in republics, alas! there is no aristocracy. But hasten, my son; I am not safe until I reach the machine."

Tim thought from the gobernador's manner that the current of noble blood must by this time have become a pretty thin trickle. But he kept that reflection to himself.

Señor Fagasta mounted behind Tim, proclaiming himself safe. But the rapid motion of the cycle down the steep and rugged track filled him with alarms of another kind. In vain he implored Tim to drive more slowly the boy replied that he would not be secure until he reached the town, and terrified him with apprehension of sunstroke. It must be confessed that the spirit of mischief was now fully awake in Tim. Every sigh, every ejaculation of the stout gentleman behind him gave him a thrill of joy. As they approached the town the gobernador, mindful of his dignity, begged Tim to stop and let him finish the journey on foot. But Tim could not resist the temptation to career through the street and set the magistrate down at his own door; he relished the idea of the wonder and excitement he would create.

"It's hardly worth while to set you down now, señor," he said. "You'll be home in less than a minute. Hold tight!"

As Señor Fagasta entered his house, he turned to Tim.

"My son," he said in a confidential tone, "no doubt you will be asked to explain this strange occurrence. Do not reveal the cause. I do not command you as gobernador of this town; I ask as one gentleman of another."

"I must tell my father, señor," said Tim.

"Certainly; your father's discretion is perfect. Not a word to any one else, then?"

"Very well, señor. But won't people ask you too?"

"Undoubtedly. The doings of their magistrate are intensely interesting to the citizens of San Rosario. I shall explain to them that I felt an urgent need, a positive passion, to try for myself the qualities and speed–yes, I may say speed–of

your motor-bicycle."

"And your hat blew off in the wind. I see, señor," said Tim with twinkling eyes. "And now, of course, you will send the police after the brigands."

"I shall never forget that I am gobernador of San Rosario. Good-bye, my son."

CHAPTER II
COMINGS AND GOINGS

Tim rode on through the town, soon left the last house behind him, and came into the open country. A rough track led northward to Mr. O'Hagan's hacienda, three miles away. Several years before, Mr. O'Hagan had bought his estate, consisting of some thousands of acres, at a very low price, and planted it partly with coffee, partly with sugar. His workers were Cholos (the native Indians) and Japanese. The cost of living and of labour being low, and the soil very fertile, the plantations had in a short time brought him wealth. The chief drawback was difficulty of transport. San Rosario was in a remote province between the Andes and the forests, far from railways and from good roads. There were steep hills almost all round the town, crossed only by rough paths over which goods were carried on the backs of mules. Some of the planters had tried to introduce wheeled vehicles; but the customs of the country proved too strong for them, and the arriero or muleteer, dirty, cheerful, hard-working and incorrigibly unpunctual, remained the common carrier.

On first leaving the gobernador, Tim was glowing with pleasure and pride in his feat. But as he neared his home, his spirits gradually sank. He did not much relish the coming explanations with his father. Mr. O'Hagan was by no means strict with his only son as a general rule, but he was apt to look darkly on escapades which involved the townsfolk. By the time Tim came to the house he was in quite a sober frame of mind.

The dwelling was a long, one-storied building of adobe and wood, constructed in Peruvian style. The entrance hall led into a patio–a sort of courtyard open to the sky, with palms and boxes of flowers around the walls. To the right of this were the drawing-room and study. Beyond was another patio with a well in the centre, and a veranda looking on the garden. On the other side were the dining-room and bedrooms, and a small room used by Mr. O'Hagan as an office.

Then came the servants' patio, the kitchen and servants' bedrooms, and at the end of the house a large enclosure, part vegetable garden, part poultry run.

Tim placed his bicycle in its shed behind the house, and entered, resolved to "get it over." He hoped to see his mother in the patio; she was often a very convenient buffer between him and his father; but she was not there, and he remembered that this was the time of her afternoon nap. He went on until he reached the office, where Mr. O'Hagan and a Peruvian clerk were at work.

Mr. O'Hagan threw a rapid glance at the boy as he entered, and was relieved to see no cuts, bruises, or other signs of accident.

"Had a good ride, Tim?" he said.

"Pretty good," replied Tim somewhat gloomily. "I saved Señor Fagasta's life."

"What's that you say? I suppose you overtook him and didn't run him down, eh?"

"It wasn't exactly that," said Tim. "I did overtake him on his mule; he'd been to San Juan; but we were pounced on by four rough-looking fellows he called brigands. They let me off, and I walked back and found the gobernador tied to a tree. I brought him in on my machine."

"You don't tell me so! This is very vexing; I wish it hadn't happened."

"But, Father, you wouldn't have left the old gentleman to die!"

"How do you know he'd have died?" said Mr. O'Hagan testily. "The fellows probably only wanted to squeeze a ransom out of him. Upon my word, Tim, you're a great trouble to me, with your machine. You know how careful I am to keep out of local squabbles, and yet you've run head-first into one."

"Really, I couldn't help it, Father."

"I suppose you couldn't, but it's a pity. You've made an enemy of the Mollendists, and in this country they may be our governors next week. You'll cost me a pretty penny. Still, you couldn't help it; only don't let it occur again."

Tim heaved a sigh of relief.

"You'd have laughed if you'd seen him," he said. "We came through the street in fine style. He was perched on the carrier, clinging on for dear life, and all the people shouting like anything."

"You don't mean to say you brought him right through the street?"

"Indeed I did."

"Why on earth did you do that?"

"It was such fun, Father. I really couldn't help it."

"And don't you know you must never be funny with a Peruvian? He has no sense of fun, especially when the fun is at his expense. You're terribly thoughtless. You ought to have dropped the gobernador before you came to the town. However!"

Mr. O'Hagan did not continue his rebuke. In his mind's eye he saw the recent scene, and remembered the time when he himself might have yielded to the temptation to which Tim had succumbed. Years before, when quite a young man, just arrived from home, he had thrown himself with Irish impetuosity into the struggle between Peru and Chile; and having been a lieutenant of volunteers when living in London, he had made use of his military knowledge in his new domicile. He had been given a commission in the Peruvian cavalry, and had led many a daring sortie, many a gallant charge. With those reckless feats still clear in his memory, he could not bear hardly on the boy who so much resembled him. "You can't put old heads on young shoulders," he thought; "but I was a fool to buy him that motor-cycle."

The conversation between father and son had, of course, been carried on in English. The Peruvian clerk, bending over his books, listened attentively, but could understand only a word or two here and there. What little he picked up whetted his curiosity, and by and by, when he found an opportunity of speaking to Tim alone, he tried to pump him. But Tim did not like Miguel Pardo. He could scarcely have told why; it was an instinctive feeling which did not need explanation. When the young Peruvian began to ply him with questions in Spanish, perfectly polite, but yet, as Tim thought, rather too pressing, he gave short and vague answers. Pardo saw that he was being fenced with, and presently desisted, breaking off the conversation with a smile.

A little later, when the O'Hagans were having tea in the patio, Pardo spent the last few minutes before closing work for the day in writing a letter. Then, locking up his books, he left the house by the servants' entrance and, instead of going to the huts half a mile away, in which Mr. O'Hagan's employees lodged, he set off for the town.

He had not gone far when he was met-by Nicolas Romaña, the young Peruvian who was storekeeper and general factotum of the estate. The two men were always so excessively polite to each other that Mr. O'Hagan shrewdly guessed them to be hostile at heart. They never quarrelled; but it was impossible to be in their company long without feeling that at any moment sparks might fly.

"Ah, señor," said Romaña, on meeting Pardo, "you are about to take the air? Let me give you a friendly warning: beware of a storm. I just now heard rumblings of thunder."

"Many thanks, señor," replied Pardo. "I shall not go far afield. Perhaps to the town. San Rosario is not Lima, unluckily. There I should have a friend's house at every few yards to give me shelter."

This, as Romaña very well knew, was a mere boast, an assumption of superiority: every Peruvian wishes to be regarded as a native of Lima.

"How strange we never met there!" he said politely. "I myself was born at

Lima, and lived there fully twenty years."

"What a loss to me!" said Pardo. "I bid you good-evening."

He swept off his hat and passed on.

Romaña stood looking after him in some surprise. It was an unusually abrupt ending of the conversation. Ordinarily the bandying of words would have been kept up for several minutes. What was the reason of Pardo's haste? He was walking very quickly, too, as if he had an errand of importance.

A man who has weighty secrets himself is very apt to suspect others of harbouring secrets also. This may perhaps explain why Romaña, instead of proceeding on his way to the hacienda, turned about, and dogged Pardo to the outskirts of the town. There the clerk entered a small house–a chacara belonging to one of the Indian agriculturists of the neighbourhood. In a few minutes he returned, passed unsuspiciously the clump of bush behind which Romaña was spying, and retraced the road homeward.

Romaña remained on the watch. Presently an Indian came out of the house, went to his corral hard by, caught and saddled a horse, and rode off, not towards San Rosario, but along a bridle-path that ran westward and led into the high road to San Juan.

The watcher felt that he had not come in vain. Instead of returning to the hacienda, he walked rapidly into the town, and showed signs of pleasure on meeting, near the plaza, a thin, wiry man of about sixty years of age, with whom he entered into earnest conversation. A few minutes later this man might have been seen riding quickly out of the town, on the same road as that which the Indian had struck perhaps half an hour before.

Next morning, when the workers were busy about the plantation, and Mr. O'Hagan was engaged with Pardo in the office, Romaña strolled to an orange orchard a quarter of a mile southward from the house. After waiting there impatiently for nearly an hour, he was joined by the man with whom he had conversed in San Rosario on the previous evening.

"Well, caballero?" said Romaña eagerly.

"I followed him, señor, into San Juan."

"Where did he go?"

"To the Prefect's house."

"Good!" said Romaña with satisfaction. "Is there any news?"

"None, señor. The gobernador gives out that he very much enjoyed his ride."

Romaña smiled.

"Very well, caballero. Go back and keep eyes and ears open."

They parted, and Romaña returned to his work.

CHAPTER III
BENEVOLENCES

Señor José Fagasta was seated in a deep chair on the balcony of his house overlooking the plaza. It was a hot afternoon, and he had exchanged his black coat for a loose jacket of white alpaca. An awning and his broad-brimmed Panama hat gave shelter from the sun. At his side was a small table, with a glass and a decanter. Between his lips there was a long cigar. It had gone out: the gobernador was asleep.

He was suddenly roused by the sound of cheering up the street. Rubbing his eyes, and taking automatically a pull at his extinguished cigar, he let out a smothered ejaculation, struggled to his feet, and hastened into the house. The cause of these abrupt movements was the appearance of a party of horsemen trotting into the plaza at the upper end–the Prefect of the province, accompanied by a small escort.

The gobernador hurried to his dressing-room, threw off his jacket, and was struggling into his frock coat when he was summoned to attend the Prefect below. He durst not delay. He held the Prefect in awe, as was only natural, seeing that it was the Prefect who had appointed him to his office, at the cost of a very considerable fee. In his haste and perturbation he forgot that he wore a Panama, and was only reminded of it when the Prefect, who was just entering the hall as Señor Fagasta came to the foot of the staircase, looked with stern disapproval over his head.

"A thousand pardons, señor," said the confused gobernador. "I was taking a brief siesta, and did not expect to be honoured by a visit from your excellency."

He swept off his hat, bowed his head before his superior, and politely invited him to a seat in the patio.

The Prefect, a tall sharp-featured man of about forty years, with keen black eyes over which bushy eyebrows met, and a heavy moustache twisted into long points, accepted the chair, laying his three-cornered hat on a table. His manner made the gobernador uneasy.

"An extraordinary rumour has reached me, señor doctor," said the Prefect, "that you were seen yesterday in a very undignified position, unworthy of your

office, riding on a motor-cycle behind the young Inglés."

"It is true, señor," said the gobernador. "I had never experienced that novel mode of locomotion, and I assure your excellency that I shall never try it again."

"Such conduct, señor, is calculated to bring your responsible office into contempt. It cannot be overlooked: you are dismissed."

For a moment the gobernador's emotion rendered him speechless. He thought of the many good English sovereigns with which he had bought his office, and the terrible eclipse of all his importance in the town. Then he pulled himself together: perhaps if the Prefect knew all he would have mercy.

"Your excellency," he said humbly, "I admit that my conduct may seem wanting in dignity; but I beg that you will hear my explanation. I was returning from my interview with you, full of zeal for the duty with which you had entrusted me, when I was seized by four villainous brigands in the hills. They bound me to a tree, and but for the courageous intervention of the young Inglés, who mounted me on his machine and brought me home, I should probably either not be alive to-day, or be a much poorer man than I am. Not that I am rich," he added hastily. "In these circumstances I trust that your excellency will have the goodness to overlook my unintentional delinquency."

"That is impossible, señor. Your dismissal is registered. It cannot be rescinded. Still, as a special act of grace, in consideration of your zeal, I may authorise your reappointment."

"Your kindness overwhelms me, señor," said the grateful gobernador, unaware how truly he spoke.

"But there is a condition, señor," the Prefect continued. "I am hard pressed for funds to carry on my campaign against the brigands. Your zeal is such that you will not refuse to make a small contribution on behalf of the cause–say £500. I shall then have the greatest pleasure in reinstating you as gobernador of this town."

Señor Fagasta writhed. He knew that protest was useless. He must pay, or be disgraced. How much of his contribution would go to support the cause, and how much into the Prefect's own pocket, he could only suspect. The interview soon came to an end, and the Prefect left the house richer by £500.

The idlers who had gathered outside cheered him again as he remounted. They expected to see him ride back to San Juan. To their surprise he struck into the rough track northward, which led only to the hacienda of Mr. O'Hagan, to another that lay some few miles beyond, and then to the hills. Evidently the Prefect's visit was of more than usual importance.

Half an hour later the Prefect reined up at the door of Mr. O'Hagan's house. The family were at tea in the patio. On seeing his visitor through the open door, Mr. O'Hagan rose with a muttered exclamation of annoyance, and went to greet

[image]

Map

him. He was forestalled by Pardo, who had run from the office and was holding the horseman's stirrup. Mr. O'Hagan felt that he could do no other than invite the Prefect to drink a cup of tea, and that gentleman was soon seated in the patio, stirring his cup, and talking to Mrs. O'Hagan in the charming manner for which he had a name among ladies.

"I wish to thank your son, señor and señora," he said presently, "on behalf of the government, for his spirited action yesterday in the cause of law and order. There, my boy," he went on, taking a sol–equivalent to a florin–from his pocket, "accept that as a token of my high consideration."

Tim looked at his father.

"Pardon me, señor," said Mr. O'Hagan, swallowing his irritation, "your generosity is quite unnecessary. My son needs no reward."

"That is very high-minded," said the Prefect, pocketing the coin. "He will allow me to shake him by the hand and compliment him on his courage and resource?"

Tim gave him a limp hand: it was not so bad as the gobernador's hug and kiss.

"I am glad to be able to number you and your family, señor," the Prefect continued, "among my declared adherents."

"Don't make a mistake, señor," said Mr. O'Hagan quickly. "My son had no political motive in his action. It was a mere impulse of humanity."

"The cause of the government is the cause of humanity," said the Prefect impressively. "The brigands represent anarchy. Brigandage is chaos. I am determined to stamp it out. My action is in the true interests of all law-abiding citizens, and especially of such enterprises as yours, which depend on the reign of law for their prosperity."

At this point, after an almost imperceptible sign from Mr. O'Hagan, his wife rose and went with Tim into the drawing-room. The Prefect gallantly opened the door for her, and bowed with extreme deference: he was the pink of politeness. Then he returned to his chair. Mr. O'Hagan guessed what was coming. A few years before this, the Prefect, by bribery and intrigue, had ousted his predecessor in office, one Señor Mollendo, and had since maintained his position by corruption, and by levying forced loans on such of the wealthy men as had not the courage to resist him. The public taxes were already sufficiently

heavy; but the province was so remote from Lima that its prefect was practically a dictator, and appeals to the central government would have been fruitless.

Señor Mollendo, knowing that his life was hardly safe, had taken refuge in the hilly district in the heart of the province, and was there joined by his partisans, who grew gradually in number as the Prefect's exactions increased. These Mollendists were what we should call a political party in opposition: in Peru the government termed them brigands. It was natural enough that they should include among their number many lawless irreconcilables of the true brigand type; and opposition which would in England take the form of public meetings and demonstrations found expression here in raids and robberies. Mr. O'Hagan had been several times approached indirectly for contributions to the Prefect's war fund, but he had always refused to comply.

"As I was saying, señor," the Prefect resumed, lighting the cigar Mr. O'Hagan offered, "your security depends on the supremacy of law. That being the case, and my treasury being in temporary need of funds, I have every confidence in inviting you to subscribe a small sum–say £1000–to a loan for the more active prosecution of the work of suppressing the brigands which we all have at heart."

"I am a man of few words, señor," said Mr. O'Hagan. "I have bought my land; I pay my legal taxes, which are heavy enough; and I am entitled to the protection of government. My people are contented; I have had no trouble with them; the people you call brigands have not molested me; if they do I shall claim your protection, but I don't anticipate anything of the kind. I must therefore decline your invitation."

"I beg you not to be hasty, señor. Your security may yet be rudely shocked: no man can call himself safe while the brigands are at large; and I should be very much distressed if you were to suffer loss through the unfortunate penury of the government. A contribution of £1000–merely by way of loan–would probably prevent a much greater loss."

"Not one peseta, señor," said Mr. O'Hagan bluntly. "I must beg you to believe that that is final."

The Prefect smiled blandly.

"Ah! you Inglésas!" he said.

"I'm an Irishman, señor: that's worse."

"Well, señor, I must thank you for your hospitality and take my leave. I wish you every success, and a large share of the sunlight of prosperity. I only regret that by your reluctance to support me you are helping to let loose the forces of lawlessness and giving hostages to brigandage–in fact, breeding worms that will eat into the tissues of industrial enterprise. I bid you good-day, señor."

Mr. O'Hagan was not impressed by the Prefect's picturesque language.

Tall talk is the foible of Peruvians. But after he had seen the last of his visitor, he returned to the house in a state of intense irritation. His wife was awaiting him in the patio.

"He wants to bleed me," he said angrily: "demanded a trifle of £1000. This country is a hot-bed of corruption. And I wish that motor-cycle were at the bottom of the sea."

"Why, dear," said Mrs. O'Hagan placably, "what has that to do with it?"

"It gives the fellow an excuse for saying that I'm on the side of the Mollendists. Why do you let me spoil that boy, Rose?"

Mrs. O'Hagan smiled, remembering that she had begged her husband to wait until Tim was a little older before giving him the motor-cycle. Wisely she did not remind him of that, but simply said:

"Don't worry, dear. Things mayn't be so bad as you think.... And Tim is not *really* spoilt, you know."

CHAPTER IV
GAS

Next day Tim went into the town on an errand for his mother. He was looking at the window of the only book-shop, when he felt a touch on his sleeve. Looking round, he saw Alfonso, the gobernador's son, a sallow, weedy boy of about his own age, whom he had often vainly tried to induce to have a game at cricket in a field behind Mr. O'Hagan's house. He did not think much of Alfonso, who always called him señor!

"Follow me, señor," said the boy mysteriously, "but don't let people know."

He moved off at once. Tim might have thought that he was being enticed away for a practical joke of some kind, only he remembered that the Peruvians never played practical jokes except in carnival time. "I may as well go," he said to himself; so, pushing his hands into his pockets, he sauntered after Alfonso Fagasta. Several persons gave him pleasant greetings, and he stopped once or twice to exchange a word, always keeping his eye on Alfonso.

The Peruvian boy walked past the church in the plaza, and turned into a narrow street, or rather lane, bounded on one side by the wall of the presbytery, on the other by a high wall enclosing a garden. Tim knew the place well; indeed, in days gone by he had sometimes scaled the garden wall in quest of ripe plums

or peaches. He followed Alfonso for some distance, until he came to the rear of the enclosure, where there was a dense plantation extending up the slope of a hill. Here Alfonso made signs to him to wait, and disappeared through a wicket gate into his father's garden.

"Why couldn't he tell me where to come?" thought Tim impatiently. "What's the silly secret?"

He climbed a tree by way of passing the time, and presently, from his leafy bower, he saw the gobernador open the wicket gate, glance cautiously round, and then come swiftly towards the plantation. He looked this way and that, and gave a jump when Tim called out, just above his head:

"Here I am, señor doctor."

"Ha! my young friend, come down," said the gobernador.

Tim dropped at his feet.

"I have something to say to you," continued the gobernador hurriedly. "Pardon me for not receiving you in my house with the respect due to my preserver, but there are reasons...." He nodded with an air of mystery. Then he went on in nervous haste: "Tell your good father to be on his guard to-night. See that everything is secure. He must be careful not to arouse suspicion among his staff. Few are to be trusted in these disturbed times. If he sleeps at all, let him sleep with one eye open."

"What's going to happen, señor?" asked Tim.

"I say no more. Perhaps I have said too much. But I owe you so much gratitude—-"

"Don't mention it, señor," said Tim, backing. "Thanks for your warning."

"Do not breathe my name to any one but your father," said the gobernador anxiously. "I must go. Next time I see you I hope it will be at my front door, with open arms."

"I hope it won't," thought Tim. He shook hands with the flurried gentleman, who, with another cautious look around, returned to the gate and slipped through into his garden.

Tim was very thoughtful as he walked home. Such a warning in Spanish America was not to be disregarded, and he could not help connecting it with the Prefect's visit, the object of which he had learnt from his mother. He had a lively imagination. Such a man as the Prefect was not likely to accept amiably the snub administered by Mr. O'Hagan. He might use other means than persuasion to enforce his will.

He wanted money. To-morrow was pay-day at the hacienda, and there was a large sum in the safe. San Rosario had no bank. The branch of a Lima bank at San Juan had shut its doors on the accession of the present Prefect to office: the managers feared that their floating assets would be attached by the new official,

ostensibly for public purposes. Since then the employers of labour had had to be their own bankers, drawing cash at intervals from Lima by well-armed convoys. There could be little doubt that the gobernador had somehow got wind of a plot to rob Mr. O'Hagan on the coming night.

Tim wondered what his father would do to defeat the attempt. How would the burglars go to work? The safe was kept in the office. The key was on Mr. O'Hagan's bunch. To reach the office the robbers would have to pass through one or other of the patios. The middle patio had French doors opening on the garden. They were always locked and bolted at night, like the main door and the servants' entrance. It would be difficult to enter without making a noise, unless the servants were in league with the burglars. Tim thought of each of them in turn, and felt sure that all were trustworthy.

All at once a brilliant idea struck him. His father was rather vexed with him–or with the motor-cycle, which amounted to the same thing; what a score it would be if he could deal with this matter himself, without his father knowing anything about it! He chuckled with delight as he imagined himself telling at the breakfast-table, as calmly as though it were an everyday matter, how he had defeated an attempted burglary. But how was it to be done? Mr. O'Hagan was a light sleeper; a slight noise would disturb him, and Tim was at a loss for any means of routing the burglars silently.

He thought of wire entanglements; but he could not erect them without his father's knowledge. He thought of a booby-trap; but that was bound to make a noise. He had almost reached home before a plan occurred to him; it pleased him so much that he laughed. There was a large quantity of ammonia solution in the house, kept for household purposes and for use with the refrigerator which was a domestic necessity in this tropical climate. Tim had only recently left school in England, so that his knowledge of chemistry had not yet evaporated. If he heated some of this liquid, and led the vapour into the patio at the critical moment, the fumes would be obnoxious enough, he thought, to choke off any rash intruders.

As soon as he got home, he took into consultation an old mestizo named Andrea, who was gardener and odd man, a family servant of many years' standing. Andrea was rather troubled, and advised that the warning should be given to Mr. O'Hagan; but few could resist Tim's persuasiveness, and the old man at length consented to assist his young master.

Tim's bedroom was next to the office. At the bottom of the wall next to the patio there was a grating which could be removed. That night, when all the rest had retired, Andrea brought to Tim's room a large oil-can with a narrow neck, containing a quantity of the ammonia solution. Tim had already provided himself with a short length of garden hose, with a nozzle at the end. Drawing the rubber tubing over the neck of the can, he placed the nozzle end in the hole

from which the grating had been removed, in such a way that when the cock was turned it would allow the fumes to enter the patio within a few inches of the office door. Having lighted a large spirit-lamp beneath the oil-can, he set a chair against the door, on which he could mount to reach a ventilator above, opening on to the patio, and sat down on his bed, quivering with excitement, to wait for the expected attack.

Hours passed, and he grew fidgety. Every now and then he got on the chair, and peeped through the ventilator. All was dark and silent.

"I don't believe they're coming," he whispered disconsolately to Andrea.

"So much the better, señorito," said the old man.

But Tim did not agree with that; he did not want to be disappointed of his fun.

At last he heard a slight sound from without. Jumping on the chair, he peered through the ventilator. He could see nothing, but he guessed by the sounds that the putty was being scraped from one of the glass panes of the French door. Presently he dimly saw several dark, shadowy forms pass from side to side. The men were removing the pane. One after another the intruders stepped quietly across the patio towards the office door. Just as they reached it Tim slipped off the chair, stooped to the floor, and noiselessly turned on the cock of the nozzle.

For a few seconds there was no effect. He heard the slight click of a key as it was inserted in the lock of the office door. But then, as the ammonia fumes began to diffuse, there was a sniff, a stifled cough, and a whispered exclamation. Presently there were louder coughs, long-drawn gasps, and the men, in the effort to repress these fatal sounds, choked and spluttered violently, until, half-blinded, half-suffocated, they turned away, cursing with what breath was left to them, and tumbled over one another in a rush for the door.

At the same moment the door of Mr. O'Hagan's room was flung violently open, and that gentleman, roused by the noise, rushed into the patio in his pyjamas, a gun in his hand. Seeing that the pane was removed, he ran to the door, and sent a charge of duck-shot after the dark figures scampering over the garden-beds. The sound of firing roused all the household, and the affrighted servants came flocking into the patio.

"What's this confounded smell?" gasped Mr. O'Hagan, turning when the marauders had vanished into the night. There was a chorus of coughs from the servants.

Tim had turned off the stream of gas, and now opened his door; he felt very much annoyed with the burglars; why had they made such a silly row?

"One of your tricks, Tim?" said Mr. O'Hagan. He gasped again. "Ammonia, begore!"

"It is, Father," said Tim meekly.

"What on earth do you mean by disturbing the whole household in this way? ... Get back to bed," he cried in Spanish to the servants; "all's well now.... Now, sir, just explain this tomfoolery."

"May I come into your room?" asked Tim, anxious that old Andrea should not get into trouble.

"You may, and apologise to your poor mother for disturbing her rest. Now, what have you to say for yourself? Were those fellows outside friends of yours, in the plot too? If so, you're responsible for the murder or maiming of some of them."

"Indeed they're not. They are burglars, and I spoilt their game with ammonia."

"Burglars, eh? But how did you know they were coming? You must have made preparations?"

"I did. Old Fagasta told me to look out for them to-night, and I did so."

"Indeed now! What did the gobernador know about it, then?"

"He didn't tell me. He only asked me to tell you to be on your guard to-night."

"Why didn't you do so, then?"

"I thought I would make them scoot myself, and not disturb you. Who could know the donkeys would make such a silly row!"

Mr. O'Hagan's mouth twitched at his son's indignant tone.

"Well, Tim," he said, "sure 'twas very considerate of you, but next time you are asked to give me a message, give it. And no more tricks of this kind, mind ye. We don't wish to be blown up one night."

"I dished them, anyway."

"I don't deny it. But 'twas lucky the noise woke me; for a few pellets in their carcasses will be a more enduring lesson than a stink. Now, to bed!"

When Tim had gone, Mr. O'Hagan said to his wife:

"The Prefect has made his first move, Rose."

"Tim was quite upset, poor boy!" replied Mrs. O'Hagan.

CHAPTER V
PARDO DISMISSES HIMSELF

"I am going into the town," said Mr. O'Hagan at breakfast next morning. "Last

night's affair must not be passed over. I shall lay a formal complaint before Señor Fagasta. It won't be any good, but it would never do to take no notice. When Pardo comes, Tim, tell him that he must get the ledger posted to-day; he is rather behind. And if any of the people are curious about the shots last night–they must have heard them–don't answer any questions. I have already told the servants to hold their tongues."

Setting off on horseback, he rode straight to the gobernador's house. He noticed that the magistrate greeted him nervously. When the usual civilities had been exchanged, he said:

"I have to report, señor, that an attempt was made last night to break into my house, and to ask that you will do what you can to discover the villains and bring them to justice."

"This is very distressing, señor," said the gobernador. "It will give the town a bad name, especially as it happened the day after the visit of our illustrious Prefect."

"Yes, that is decidedly unfortunate," remarked Mr. O'Hagan ironically.

"I will of course do what I can with the few police at my disposal," the gobernador continued. "Had it happened on the night before, I should have been better able to deal with the matter, for the Prefect left a few of his escort of gendarmes behind. They were quartered on me; but they departed yesterday evening. Perhaps you will give me full particulars, which I will draw up in proper form."

Mr. O'Hagan related the circumstances, which the gobernador wrote down with great deliberateness and solemnity. While he was doing this, Mr. O'Hagan had time to put two and two together. He had little doubt that the attack had been made by men left behind for that purpose by the Prefect, and guessed that the gobernador had learnt or suspected their design from something they had let fall while quartered in his house.

The report having been drawn up, Señor Fagasta gravely stamped it with the official seal, and said:

"Be assured I will do what I can, señor. I trust that the señora and your excellent son are well?"

"Quite, señor, thank you," said Mr. O'Hagan.

Neither had mentioned the incident of the bicycle or the warning given by the gobernador, from whose manner Mr. O'Hagan judged that he did not wish those matters to be alluded to. On his side, he felt that it would be indiscreet and probably useless to press the magistrate for particulars of what he knew or suspected. He had done a good turn in giving the warning, no doubt risking the vengeance of the Prefect if his action should come to that worthy's knowledge.

Taking leave of the gobernador, Mr. O'Hagan rode home and went straight to the office. It was empty. He called to Tim, who was practising with an air-gun

at a target set up at the end of the lawn.

"Where's Pardo?" he asked.

"He hasn't turned up, Father. He sent a kid over to say that he's grieved to the heart at not being able to attend to his duties, owing to a painful attack of lumbago. I don't like the chap, Father."

"Because he's got lumbago?"

"No; because I think he's a bit of a fraud. Last time he stayed away it was a sore heel, you remember; but I happened to see him picking oranges in the evening when the men had gone home, and he walked well enough."

"You didn't mention it to me."

"Well, his heel might have been sore, and I didn't want to meddle, especially as you think a good deal of him, Father."

"I do. He's the best book-keeper I ever had. I'll get your mother to send him some turpentine: that'll put him to rights."

In the course of the day Romaña was despatched by Mrs. O'Hagan with a bottle of turpentine for the sick man. Pardo was not to be seen. The old half-breed woman who looked after him told Romaña that her master had not risen that day, complaining of pains and stiffness in his back.

"Has he sent for the doctor?" he asked.

"Not yet. He says it is a chill, and will soon pass."

"The mistress has sent some stuff to cure him. The instruction is to rub it into the skin very thoroughly. Take it to Señor Pardo, and ask if I can do anything for him."

The old woman went off with the bottle. Romaña had noticed Pardo's coat lying over the back of a chair. As soon as he was alone, he lifted the coat, cast a rapid but searching glance over it, and laid it on the chair again.

"Many thanks, señor," came Pardo's voice from the inner room. "Thank the gracious lady for me, and say that I hope to return to my beloved duty in a day or two."

"Is the pain very severe, señor?" asked Romaña sympathetically.

"Not so severe as the stiffness, señor. Take care that you don't take a chill."

"Thanks, my friend. I myself am always careful of the night air. Good-day; I will give the mistress your message."

Romaña hurried back to the house, and sought his master in the office.

"Well, how is the invalid?" asked Mr. O'Hagan. "Did you see him?"

"No, señor: he was keeping his bed. I would suggest that you should send your own doctor to him."

"That's not necessary, surely. A good rubbing is all that he needs for lumbago."

"If it is lumbago!" said the man. "Will you give me a moment, señor?"

"Of course," replied Mr. O'Hagan, laying down his pen. "What is it?"

He leant back in his chair, frowning a little. A most unsuspicious man himself, he was annoyed at Romaña's suggestion of malingering, coming on top of the doubts hinted by Tim.

"On the day when the señor gobernador rode on the bicycle," said Romaña, "Señor Pardo sent a letter to his excellency the Prefect."

"What of that? and how do you know?" asked Mr. O'Hagan sharply.

"I saw his Cholo messenger ride away with it to San Juan, señor, and a friend reported to me that the Cholo took it to the Prefect's house. As you know, the Prefect came to San Rosario two days after, and visited the gobernador. He then rode here. Señor Pardo held his stirrup while he dismounted. He returned to San Juan, but left some of his gendarmes behind. Then came the matter of last night. To-day Señor Pardo is not to be seen."

"What are you driving at?" asked Mr. O'Hagan irritably.

"Have patience, señor. I have been ten years in your service, and you have no complaint against me?"

"That is true, but I don't like this air of mystery and suspicion. Say plainly what you have in your mind."

"I have just seen Señor Pardo's coat–the one he was wearing yesterday: there were several little black holes in the back. I think if you send your doctor to him, you will find that he suffers not from lumbago but from shot wounds."

Mr. O'Hagan stared in amazement.

"You suggest that he was among those villains who tried to break in last night?" he asked.

"I do, señor."

"And that the Prefect was concerned in it?"

"The Prefect's gendarmes, señor. As for the Prefect himself!..."

He shrugged expressively.

"And that Señor Pardo is in the Prefect's pay?"

"That is my belief, señor."

"Romaña, are you a spy?"

"Señor, I am a Mollendist," replied the man with dignity.

Mr. O'Hagan was much perturbed. He was loth to believe that Pardo was a traitor, but the chain of events as linked together by Romaña was unpleasantly consistent. Perhaps what troubled him most of all was the discovery that, careful as he had been to hold aloof from local dissensions, two of his servants were mixed up in them, on opposite sides. It was now easier to understand the mutual antagonism between the two men, of which, though veiled by the outward forms of civility, he had always been conscious.

"You have told no one else what you suspect?" he said, after a few moments'

deliberation.

"Nobody, señor."

"Then take care not to do so. I believe that you mean well, but I hope to find you mistaken. We shall see."

When Romaña had gone, Mr. O'Hagan sought his wife and told her everything.

"I have never liked Pardo," she said, "though I can't say why. Perhaps it would be as well to ask Dr. Pereira to see him."

"I prefer not to. I shall put it to the fellow direct when he comes back to work. One thing is certain: Romaña must go. I can't have a Mollendist about the place. If it became known, the Prefect would make it another reason for worrying me, or worse."

"Won't you write to the British consul at Lima?"

"I'm afraid that would be useless. He's too far away to be able to do anything. We're in a desperately awkward position, Rose. The Prefect will have his knife in me, and young Tim has certainly offended the Mollendists by releasing the gobernador. Whatever they meant to do with him, they will be furious at being baulked by a youngster. When I send my next convoy to the capital, I think you and the boy had better go too. You'll be out of harm's way there."

"Indeed I will do nothing of the kind, Tim. I will not leave you. And I can't believe that there's any danger to a British subject here. Write to the consul at once, dear; it's just as well to be beforehand with trouble."

"I will do so. Say nothing to Tim, by the way. He'd only worry."

Three days afterwards Pardo returned. He looked rather pale, and after greeting his employer launched out into a voluble description of his sufferings.

"But the gracious lady's lotion worked wonders, señor," he said.

"Rather painful, isn't it?" said Mr. O'Hagan, noticing with misgiving that the man wore a new coat.

"Not at all, señor. Its application was most soothing. It is a most excellent remedy."

Mr. O'Hagan remembered how, when suffering from lumbago himself, the friction with turpentine had left his back sore and smarting for days.

"Sit down, Pardo," he said. "I've something to say to you."

The man sat down awkwardly on his chair, smiling amiably.

"You remember the night of the attempted robbery," Mr. O'Hagan went on. "No doubt my shots disturbed you."

"Not at all, señor. I slept the sleep of the just."

"How often do you correspond with the Prefect?"

The sudden question obviously took Pardo aback. He looked uncomfortable, but recovered himself in a moment, and said with a feeble smile:

"A humble clerk and book-keeper does not correspond with so important a person as his excellency, señor."

"Nevertheless, you sent a letter to his excellency a few days ago. He visited me two days after, and left a party of his gendarmes in the town when he returned to San Juan. I have reason to suspect that they were concerned in the attempt to rob me. How did they know that at that precise moment I had a large sum of money in my safe?"

"These are very strange questions, señor," said Pardo. His manner was quiet and restrained, but Mr. O'Hagan, intently watching him, noticed a look of fear in his eyes.

"They are," he said. "Here's another: where is your old coat? I mean the coat you were wearing last time you were here. It was nearly new."

Pardo started to his feet.

"Señor, this is intolerable," he cried. "I don't know what you mean, but your questions are an insult to a perfect gentleman." (Every Peruvian is a perfect gentleman.) "You will please to accept my resignation."

"Very well, Pardo: perhaps it is best." He handed him his week's wages.

"And let me tell you this, Señor Inglés," cried the man furiously as he pocketed the money: "a Peruvian gentleman does not take lightly such insults to his honour. You will repent this. You will feel the weight of my just anger. You treat me like a dog: dogs can bite. I will not accept your money."

He took it from his pocket and threw it on the floor. "You shall learn what it is to insult a perfect gentleman."

Snatching up his hat, he swept it round in ironical salutation, and flung out of the room.

CHAPTER VI
TIM IS HELD TO RANSOM

Tim had many acquaintances but few friends among the youth of San Rosario and the neighbourhood. He often felt the lack of a chum of his own age, and looked forward eagerly to the time, now drawing very near, when he would return to England and enter an engineering college. His most intimate friend in Peru was a young fellow, two or three years older than himself, named Felipe Durand, who lived on his father's hacienda, about twelve miles north of the town.

Durand had been educated in England, and being a very fair batsman, he sometimes joined Tim in getting up a cricket match between elevens of the Japanese workers.

On the day after Pardo's dismissal, Tim rode out to Durand's house to arrange for a match in the following week. The path was only a rough track; it was indeed not a public thoroughfare at all, but was maintained by Señor Durand and Mr. O'Hagan for their own convenience. Much of it ran through woods, and on each side the ground rose gradually to a considerable height.

Tim met nobody on the way, but within a few miles of the hacienda he noticed a group of men at the edge of the wood some little distance from the path. Thinking that they were peons of Señor Durand he gave them only a fleeting glance and passed by. He reached his friend's house about twenty minutes after starting, and discussed the proposed match in a little summer-house, over a dish of fruit and a glass of lemonade.

"I say, O'Hagan," said young Durand, after arrangements had been made, "I wish I had seen your performance with the gobernador. It must have been great sport."

The two boys always used English when together.

"Indeed, it was good fun," said Tim. "The pater was in a bit of a fizz: he thinks the Mollendists won't like it."

"I dare say not. He should do as my governor does."

"What's that?"

"Pay up. My father gives them a regular subscription."

"That's rather dangerous, isn't it? The Prefect would drop on him if he knew."

"The Prefect has dropped on him as it is. He has borrowed a good deal that he'll never pay back. My father grumbles, of course; but he likes a quiet life, and would rather pay than be worried. He subscribes to the Mollendists' funds for the same reason; they leave him alone. He says that old Mollendo will get the better of the Prefect one of these days, and as the old chap is fairly honest he won't be sorry. Your pater had better do the same."

"I'm sure he won't. He says corruption is the curse of this country, and he won't have anything to do with either of the parties."

"That's very honourable and British, but it won't pay.... Have those robbers been caught yet?"

"They have not. D'you know, I believe our man Pardo had a hand with them; the pater gave him the sack yesterday. He resigned, but only to avoid a sacking. I'm not sorry.... Well, you'll come over on Monday, then. It's a holiday, so we'll make a day of it."

Tim had ridden only a few miles on his homeward way when he was

brought to a sudden check. The path was blocked by a tree which had apparently fallen since he passed a couple of hours before. He dismounted, resting his bicycle against the trunk. The tree was obviously too heavy to be lifted, and he was looking for a way round it when a number of men rushed at him from the bushes on each side of the track, and in a few seconds he was a prisoner. Among his captors he saw one of the brigands who had snapped up the gobernador.

"You will not get away this time, Señor Inglés," said the man, laughing. "You will please to come with us."

Tim was helpless. He could only put the best face on it. The men led him along the track northward, in the direction of Durand's house, two following with the bicycle. As they neared the house, they struck into the woods on the left, not returning to the track until they were some distance beyond, at a wooden bridge over a ravine. The district to the north had a bad name. It was the immemorial haunt of outlaws, whether revolutionist or criminal. The outlawed criminal was invariably a revolutionist; though among the revolutionists there were many, like their leader, Mollendo himself, who were quite respectable members of society.

After a few miles the country became very wild and rugged. The men in charge of the bicycle grumbled at their laborious task; they were not used to wheeling so heavy and cumbersome an object, and in the rougher places it was difficult to balance. Every minute Tim expected to see the machine escape from their hands, topple over, and dash itself to pieces on the rocky declivity.

The track became steeper and steeper. It wound this way and that, a rough wall of rock rising high on the left hand; on the right long slopes and sheer descents, crossed by yawning gullies, stretching downwards for hundreds of feet. Now and then white gull-like mountain birds flew screaming in front of the party; hundreds of squirrels were disporting on the rocky ramparts, darting among the trees that clothed the ravines when they saw the intruders upon their solitudes. They marched on for hours, covering, perhaps, a mile and a half an hour, until night threw its purple shade upon the hills. Then they halted in a narrow glen. The leader of the party gave Tim the option of being tied up or passing his word not to attempt escape.

"You are Inglés," he said. "I can trust your word."

Tim did not appreciate the compliment; but since it was quite clear that he could not escape with his bicycle, he gave his word, looking as pleasant as he could. The men bivouacked, making a supper of parched maize, which they took from their wallets, and weak spirits from their flasks. They offered Tim a share of their provisions; he accepted the maize, but declined the spirits, longing for a draught of water.

He spent a very uncomfortable night. The rocky ground cut into his light summer clothes, which afforded but a poor defence against the cold of this upland

region. He slept fitfully, wondering in the wakeful intervals what was going to happen to him, and thinking of the distress his parents must suffer at his absence. "Durand was right," he thought. "When I get free I'll ask Father to give these Mollendists a subscription. But I bet he won't."

The march was resumed in the morning. The track still ascended, until it reached a ridge, from which Tim caught glimpses on the other side of a river meandering far below between wooded banks. In front the ridge rose gradually. In about three hours the party, passing between two tall rocks like gate-pillars on either side of the track, found themselves suddenly in an encampment of considerable size. Two or three hundred men were assembled in a sort of courtyard surrounded by tumble-down buildings of unworked stone. Tim knew at a glance that he was in the ruins of an ancient Inca fortification, castle, or observation plaza, built by that vanished race on a hill-top which had probably been flattened artificially. The men were encamped on two sides of the enclosure; on the other two sides a number of horses were hobbled.

Tim had no time to take in more details of the scene. The arrival of his captors was hailed with shouts, and he was led through the excited throng to an angle of the courtyard, where, in a little recess, a Peruvian between fifty and sixty years of age, and of benevolent aspect, was reclining on rugs before a slab that served as a table.

"Señor," said the leader of the party, "this is the young Inglés who released the man Fagasta."

Señor Mollendo rose and made a courtly salutation.

"Good-morning, Señor Inglés," he said. "I have heard of you and your respected father. It gives me the greatest pain to see you in your present unhappy plight."

"You can relieve your pain at once by releasing me, señor," said Tim boldly.

Mollendo gave him an indulgent smile.

"I have to consider the claims of justice, my young friend. See how the case stands. You were taken with the man Fagasta, the hireling of the usurping Prefect. You were released, but with rank ingratitude returned and set free the gobernador, the agent of the odious dictator, the man who had been heard to boast of his intention to root out the friends of liberty from this oppressed region. Your offence could scarcely be more serious. It is dangerous for a foreigner to interfere in our domestic affairs; especially is it unbecoming in an Englishman, a citizen of that glorious land of freedom, a lover of liberty and of equal laws, to associate himself with the agents of a corrupt and shameless tyranny. It is necessary to signalise the abhorrence with which such action must be viewed by all right-thinking men. You shall be a recipient of such poor hospitality as I can extend to you until your unworthy conduct is redeemed by the payment of £250, and

the engine by means of which you effected your reprehensible intervention on behalf of the oppressor will be confiscated to the use of the patriots."

Tim was quite unused to having such eloquence hurled at him. His head master had contented himself with a few sharp words and half a dozen swishes– infinitely preferable to such a lot of "jaw." He felt overwhelmed, and had nothing to say. "Jolly cheek!" he thought, "asking £250. I wish he may get it."

His parole was demanded again, and he was strictly forbidden to stray beyond the limits of the enclosure. He was given a dinner consisting of mutton boiled with vegetables, and toasted maize, with water from a stream, almost dried up by the summer heat, that flowed into the broader river below. Mollendo offered him a Manilla cigar, which he put in his pocket.

He was allowed to roam about the encampment. So well placed that one might approach within a few yards without discovering it, it overlooked the surrounding country for hundreds of square miles. On the east he could see the track by which he had come, winding east and south-east through the hills. On the west a few steps cut in the rock led to what had once been an Inca road, running into the path that led southward to the highway to San Juan. Southward flowed the hill-stream, through a rough and precipitous gully. To the north the ground rose steeply to inaccessible snow-capped peaks.

Tim passed a restless and unhappy day. He supposed that Mollendo had sent one of his men to demand the ransom from his father; but no information was given him. The only mitigation of his captivity was afforded by the brigands' experiments with the motor-cycle. None of them was able to ride it; few were anxious to try. They were good horsemen, no doubt; but Tim soon came to the conclusion that they would never make motor-cyclists. He watched with amusement their first attempts in the middle of the courtyard. One man tried to mount the bicycle when stationary, and became violently angry at each failure to maintain his balance. Then he got two of his comrades to support him, one on each side, and thrust at the handles. No movement resulting, his supporters pushed the machine for a few yards, then let it go. It toppled over, and the rider's leg being crushed between the cycle and the ground, he swore bitterly, and retired to digest his discomfiture.

Señor Mollendo looked on at all this with much disappointment. The confiscated machine, apparently, was not to be so valuable an acquisition as he had supposed. He smiled with pleasure, however, when the machine was set in motion by a series of accidents. While one man was in the saddle; held up on both sides, another happened to discover the petrol tap, and turned it on. The supporters pushed the bicycle for a few feet, the engine began to fire, and the rider chancing to move the throttle switch, the machine started forward with a suddenness that caused the two men at the sides to lose their grip. There were shouts of

delight from the onlookers; but the rider was so much amazed at his own inadvertent skill that he lost his head, and could neither stop nor steer his unmanageable steed. Only by sprinting across the courtyard at full speed did Tim save man and cycle from being dashed disastrously against the stone wall.

After this the machine was left severely alone, until Tim, weary for want of something to do, offered to instruct the men in its manipulation. This won Señor Mollendo's warm approval, and Tim spent several hours of that day and the next in teaching the younger members of the party how to ride. They had no personal feeling against him; and with the prospect of their lean treasury being increased by £250 on his account, they began to regard him with even more kindliness than his willingness and good temper had already won.

On the third day the messenger sent by Señor Mollendo to claim the ransom, returned, bringing with him not merely the money, but a rumour of the manner in which the midnight raiders had been received at Mr. O'Hagan's house. That they were part of the Prefect's escort was an open secret. Mollendo called Tim to him and asked if the story was true. Tim saw no reason to conceal anything, and gave a full description of what had happened, only suppressing the fact that his information had come from the gobernador.

"You showed remarkable ingenuity, my young friend," said Mollendo, greatly tickled by the picture of the spluttering crew stumbling out into the darkness. "I quite understand why your good father should consider you worth £250. He has sent the money; you are free. And as a mark of my appreciation of your service to the cause of liberty by discommoding the usurper's minions, I have much pleasure in returning"–("How much?" wondered Tim in excitement)–"your motor-cycle. Four of my supporters will assist you to the path below. When you meet your father, convey to him my salutations, and assure him that the money will be put to a good use in upholding the flag of freedom."

He shook hands warmly, bowed with his hat to his breast, and with a polite *a reveder*, the Spanish equivalent of *au revoir*, he ended Tim's captivity.

CHAPTER VII
THE PREFECT MOVES

Tim's adventure caused Mr. O'Hagan to change his mind about dismissing Romaña. To do so might be a new cause of offence to the sensitive patriots.

"You have already proved a very dear son," he said, with a humorous twinkle that disguised his real feeling.

"Durand says that his pater gives old Mollendo a regular subscription to keep him quiet," said Tim.

"Blackmail! He will soon get tired of that."

"I don't suppose what he has paid comes to £250."

"Ah! but he hasn't given his boy a motor-cycle! Young Durand came over to-day to play cricket, and seemed vastly tickled when I told him where you were."

"I could have boxed his ears," said Mrs. O'Hagan indignantly. "It was no laughing matter to me."

"Will I challenge him, Mother?" said Tim quizzingly. "I am going to ride over to-morrow to tell him all about it, and if you like—-"

"Don't tease your mother," Mr. O'Hagan interposed. "She insisted on my sending the money at once, or I declare I would have been inclined to let you have a week of it."

The kidnapping of the young Inglés created much indignation and resentment among the people of San Rosario. The majority of them, having little to lose, were staunch supporters of the Prefect, and when next day they saw a dozen gendarmes ride into the town, they supposed them to be only the advanced guard of a force sent from the capital to begin the long-expected operations against the brigands. Some, however, viewed the soldiers with alarm. To the substantial citizens, a visit of the Prefect's gendarmes usually spelt trouble. Every man whose secret sympathies were with the Mollendists trembled in his shoes; even those who were conscious of innocence shivered if their worldly substance was large enough to be worth the attention of the Prefect and his harpies. Many, among them the gobernador, were greatly relieved when the gendarmes, instead of dismounting, halted only to refresh themselves in the saddle at one of the albergos, then rode through the town and along the track leading to Mr. O'Hagan's house.

Arriving there, the leader sprang from his horse, and strode with clanking spurs to the door, which stood open. The others formed up in line along the front of the house. To the servant who came in answer to the officer's summons, he explained that he wished to see the señor haciendado. Mr. O'Hagan left the office, where he had been alone, and invited his visitor into the patio.

"I regret, señor," said the officer, declining to be seated, "that I have come on a very disagreeable errand." He took a paper from his pocket. "You see here a warrant, signed by his excellency the Prefect, and sealed with the provincial seal, authorising the arrest of yourself and your son."

"On what charge, señor?" asked Mr. O'Hagan quietly.

"On the charge of furthering and abetting the treasonable designs of one

Carlos Mollendo, who is stirring up sedition. It is useless to resist, señor; I have a sufficient body of troopers outside. I demand that you surrender yourself and your son to justice."

"I will come with you," said Mr. O'Hagan, "under protest. You will please to note that I am a British citizen. My son is not at home."

"Where is he?"

"That I must leave you to find out."

The officer at once called in a man to search the house, himself keeping guard over Mr. O'Hagan in the patio. The gendarme found Mrs. O'Hagan coming from the servants' quarters. He bowed respectfully, and asked her to go to the drawing-room and remain there.

"I am going to the patio, to my husband," replied the lady stoutly. "Stand out of my way, please."

The man tugged his moustache, stood aside, and then went on to complete his search. The half-minute's delay had allowed Romaña, whom his mistress had just quitted, to slip out of the house and into a shrubbery, whence he made his way swiftly in the direction of Señor Durand's estate.

He met Tim returning, half-way between Durand's house and the cross-roads.

"Stop, señorito," he called; "I have a message from the gracious lady."

"What is it?" asked Tim, jumping off his machine.

"The señora bids you come with me," said Romaña. "Gendarmes have ridden to arrest the señor and you, and the mistress sent me to take you to a place of safety."

"I won't go. I will join Father," said Tim at once, preparing to ride off. Romaña detained him.

"I beg you to do as the señora wishes," he said. "What is the use of your going to prison, too? There is more chance for every one if you are free. You will do better to remain in hiding until we see what is intended towards the señor. I have friends in San Rosario and the capital; we Mollendists have our spies, like the Prefect. The señor will no doubt be taken to San Juan. Nothing will be done immediately. The Prefect is always very careful to cloak his misdeeds under the forms of law."

"I'll go back to Señor Durand's, then."

"That is unwise, señorito. The gendarmes may come there to look for you, and then Señor Durand himself will be in danger. I know a better place, and if you will come with me—-"

"Very well, then; but I don't like it. What is to become of Mother?"

"The señora will be quite safe: the Prefect is always very polite to the ladies," said Romaña.

Romaña mounted behind Tim, and they rode back to the cross-roads, then turned to the right into a track that was fairly level for some distance, then ascended gradually. Nearly nine miles from the cross-roads it wound round a steep cliff. On one side a sheer wall of rock rose to a great height; on the other a wooded precipice fell away to an equal depth. A small waterfall plunged from the heights above, forming a stream across the path, and flowing as a second waterfall over the edge of the precipice. At this point the hill-side was covered with scrub, amid which one large tree formed a conspicuous object. Stepping-stones were laid across the stream, and a few large slabs were let into the steep bank above the path on the farther side.

Here they dismounted and made their way along the bed of the stream towards the waterfall. Then they turned to the right, and proceeded over more large flat slabs leading into the scrub, Romaña remarking that their footsteps would leave no traces on the stones. On reaching the large tree before mentioned, they found themselves at the mouth of a cavern concealed by the foliage and the scrub. A projection of the cliff on the right hid the entrance of the cavern from observation by any one on the upper portion of the path.

It had been a task of no little difficulty to haul the cycle up the stream, and both were very hot and tired when they reached the cave. Drawing aside the screen of foliage, Romaña whispered the word Libertad. There was no answer. He led Tim inside.

"That is our password," he said with a smile. "If I had failed to give it I might have been shot. But there is no one here now. Only three men know of this place. Here you will be quite safe. You are now a Mollendist," he added, chuckling.

"Have you set a trap for me, Romaña?" said Tim indignantly.

"No, no; all that I mean is that now the señor your father is a prisoner he must be a Mollendist. All the Prefect's enemies are."

While speaking he had lit a lamp, by whose light Tim saw an earthen roof, walls, and floor; two or three stools; a three-legged table; a large cupboard in which were kept, as Romaña told him, food that would not spoil, and a few mugs; a large can for holding water, and two long boxes containing rugs which might serve on occasion as beds.

"Is there no other entrance?" Tim asked.

"Come and see."

Romaña led him for some distance into the cave, which bent away to the left. The air was very damp and mouldy, and Tim felt that he would not care to make too long a stay in so fusty a place. Presently he heard a gurgle and splash of water, and the light of the lamp which Romaña carried fell on an oblong slab of stone standing upright before them, about three feet in height. Romaña took hold of the upper part of it, and lowered the stone to the ground. Then Tim

saw the waterfall within two or three feet of them. They were slightly above the bottom of it; about twelve feet of the cliff face separated them from the spot where the waterfall became a stream. Romaña explained that the other entrance of the cavern was some forty yards away.

"Now, señorito, you will remain here until I discover what is to be done. You are not afraid?"

"What is there to be afraid of? Only the damp, so far as I can see. It may give me lumbago!"

"That is better than duck-shot," said Romaña, smiling. "I shall not have time to explain to my comrades, but if any one comes, he will give the password, and you will answer Salvatore. You may trust any follower of Señor Mollendo. The path is open to you; none uses it except our own people; but do not stray far in case you are seen by an enemy. I will return as soon as may be."

"Can't your people make a raid and rescue my father?" asked Tim. "They ought to do something for the money they have got out of him."

"I fear we are not strong enough at the present time," answered Romaña. "But be assured that Señor Mollendo will do anything that is possible. He holds the señor in high respect."

Tim grunted. He did not think much of a respect that bled a man to the extent of £250.

CHAPTER VIII
SUSPENSE

Romaña did not return to Mr. O'Hagan's house. He guessed that every member of the household would be under suspicion; and though his part with the Mollendists was not known, Pardo, if he came on the scene, would not hesitate to trump up a charge against him. So he hung about until nightfall, and then slipped into the town and took shelter with Pedro Galdos, the agent who had dogged Pardo's messenger to San Juan.

Galdos was a strange illustration of the irony of circumstances in Spanish America. At one time, under another name, he had been sub-prefect of a provincial town; but he lost his office with a change of government, and drifted into poverty. He now earned a scanty livelihood by selling lottery tickets and doing any odd jobs that came his way. No one in San Rosario had known him in

his official career; none would have suspected that the thin, shabby, down-at-heel old man who haunted the street-corners, pestering folks to buy his grimy lottery tickets, had formerly held a post of authority. As agent and spy of the Mollendists he was quite trustworthy. Since his dismissal he was always against the government; and his services were at the disposal of any opponent of the present prefect, whether Mollendo or another.

He lived alone in a little two-roomed mud cottage at the east end of the town. Here Romaña sought a temporary lodging. Galdos already had some news for him. Mr. O'Hagan had not been taken to the capital, but was imprisoned in the town jail.

"I will tell you why, señor," said the old man. "The Prefect wishes to manage things quietly. There is too much sunlight in San Juan! The Señor Inglés has many friends and a few compatriots there, and they would agitate if the thing were known. The Prefect's own party would be uneasy, for it is no light matter to oppress an Inglés; the British Government would say hard things at Lima, and the Prefect might find himself in hot water. He is a hotheaded, reckless imbecile; but some of his supporters are more prudent, and they would hesitate to provoke the anger of the government. But here, in this out-of-the-way town, many things can be done without making a noise. The Prefect has many creatures who will do just as he bids them. He needs much money; his troops are clamouring for arrears of pay, and he lacks arms and ammunition for the campaign he is meditating against our party. The Señor Inglés is known to be wealthy; that is his crime."

"What will the Prefect do with him?" asked Romaña.

"Who knows?" replied Galdos with a shrug. "We shall see. There was trouble at the hacienda to-day. When the Japanese workers heard that the caballero was arrested, they marched to the house and threatened mischief to the gendarmes. It was only the intervention of the señora that prevented a fight. She pled with the people to go back to their work for the señor's sake. The Inglésa is a clever woman. Where is the boy?"

"He is in a safe place, where he will remain until we know what is to be done. If the worst happens he must take refuge with Señor Mollendo until we can convey him and his mother to Lima. I shall go back to him to-morrow."

Meanwhile Tim had eaten his supper–a tin of beans which he found in the cupboard–and made himself as snug as possible among the rugs in one of the box beds. He was not frightened, but he would not have denied that he felt miserable. For a long time he lay wakeful, wondering how far the Prefect's tyranny might go, and taking a good deal of unnecessary blame to himself for having wished for a motor-bicycle. The machine, of course, was no more the cause of

recent events than a ball of worsted is the cause of a kitten's playfulness. Just as a kitten's native energy makes the ball the occasion of leaps and gambols; so the Prefect had seized on Tim's adventure with the gobernador as a pretext for squeezing the gobernador himself, and for venting his spite on the man who would not be squeezed.

Romaña came back on the following afternoon. The news he brought was not calculated to lighten Tim's heaviness. Mr. O'Hagan was closely confined; gendarmes were flocking into the town, to overawe any who might be disaffected, Romaña supposed. He left again at dusk, begging Tim to be patient.

Next day his information was even more serious. The Prefect had arrived, accompanied by a number of officers, and it was rumoured that the prisoner was to be tried by court-martial. The ordinary process of law was evidently too slow for the dictator; it left, perhaps, too many loopholes for escape. With a court composed of his own particular tools he might depend on the proceedings being short and swift.

"But it is utterly illegal to try a civilian by court-martial in time of peace," Tim protested.

"The Prefect makes his own law," said Romaña. "He has proclaimed martial law in the town."

"He means Father to be condemned; what will the sentence be? A big fine?"

"Probably, with a term of imprisonment also," replied Romaña. In his heart of hearts he expected a much more terrible punishment. The Prefect would not be satisfied with a fine, however large; nor with a term of imprisonment, however long. Nor would he even stop at confiscating Mr. O'Hagan's property, and let him go. There is only one safe way in which tyranny can walk, and that is a road stained with blood. But Romaña did not impart his anticipations to Tim; there was no need to wring his young heart before the time.

He durst not go into the town next day, but waited in the wood for Galdos to bring him news of the trial. It confirmed his gloomiest forebodings. Pardo was the principal witness against his master. He repeated authentic fragments of Mr. O'Hagan's talk, which, harmless enough in themselves, might be construed as treasonable by prejudiced minds. He swore, falsely, that he had heard his master declare that he would not pay the taxes, which were mere extortion. He declared that the £250 which Mr. O'Hagan had sent to Mollendo was not a ransom, but a contribution to the brigands' funds. Similar testimony was given by two former servants of the prisoner. Mr. O'Hagan's denials were scouted. He was not allowed to employ counsel, and in two hours the sorry farce was over. He was found guilty, condemned to forfeit his estate and to be shot in the plaza, three days later.

Romaña shrank from conveying this heavy tidings to the boy awaiting his

return in the cavern. But there was no help for it. He walked back slowly, and broke the news as gently as he could.

Tim was at first utterly overwhelmed. In his most despondent moments he had never looked for anything so bad as this. When his stupor passed, he cried out that he must go to his mother; that he would himself seek the Prefect, and plead with him to annul the sentence; that he must and would do something, he knew not what.

"It would be useless, señorito," said Romaña sadly. "You would yourself be arrested; you might suffer the same fate; then the gracious lady would be doubly bereaved, left without a protector, and that would embitter your father's last moments."

"But I can't sit still and do nothing," cried Tim, walking up and down in his misery. "Suppose it were your father! Won't your Mollendists do something? There's a lot of them; wouldn't Señor Mollendo lead them to the town if I begged and prayed him?"

"He is not strong enough," answered Romaña. "The town is full of gendarmes. I don't know the caballero's plans, but he cannot alter them for a foreigner."

"He will only send his men to pounce on solitary travellers like the gobernador," said Tim bitterly.

"Remember, señorito, that he is himself outlawed, in hiding. The men you saw in his camp are not numerous enough; they are ill-armed. There are a crowd of gendarmes and several troops of mercenaries already in the town, and another thousand men can be summoned from San Juan, and would arrive within a few hours."

"But I could get our Japs to join. They would fight like demons for my father."

"What arms have they?" said Romaña patiently. "It is useless, señorito. But there are three days. Perhaps the Prefect will think better of it. No doubt he is uneasy at not having captured you; he will never feel safe while you are at large; and he may delay the extreme step. We must hope for the best."

As he became calmer Tim recognised the force of all that Romaña had said, and his own helplessness. He could but wait and hope.

Very early next morning they were standing near the mouth of the cavern. Romaña was about to go again into the wood a few miles nearer the town, to receive any further information that Galdos might have for him.

"Ask him to go to my mother, and bring word how she is," Tim was saying.

"Look, señorito; what is that?" said Romaña suddenly, pointing down the track in the direction of the town. A mounted party of four was approaching, too far off for the individuals of which it was composed to be distinguished.

[image]

HORSEMEN ON THE TRACK

"They are after me!" said Tim at once.

"Back, señorito!" cried Romaña, drawing him behind the screen of foliage, through which they peered anxiously at the advancing party.

"There is a lady!" said Romaña presently. "They are riding very fast."

"Is it Mother?" said Tim. "I believe it is! And, Romaña, look; I believe it's Father too! Isn't it? Isn't it?"

"For Dios, señorito!" exclaimed Romaña, "you are right! It is the señor himself. He has escaped! Praise to our Lady and Sant Iago! Come! Let us meet them."

CHAPTER IX
FLIGHT TO THE HILLS

Tim could hardly contain himself. He raced along the bed of the stream, leapt across the stepping-stones, and bounded down the rocky track with small concern for his limbs. When he came in sight of the party he snatched off his hat and waved it wildly in the air. Romaña followed less swiftly and with more circumspection. He was smiling at his thoughts.

"First the son, then the father–both Mollendists!"

That was the happy consummation to which he flattered himself events were leading.

"Ah, Tim!" said Mr. O'Hagan as they met. "We were one too many for the Prefect, you see. Your mother was the one, bless her! But she must tell you all about it herself by and by. The first thing is to secure ourselves. Many thanks, Romaña. Now, are we going right for that camp of yours?"

"Straight on, señor," said Romaña. "You will presently come to the river. The path runs alongside it for several miles; then it diverges to the right, and meets the path that goes past Señor Durand's hacienda. The two paths become one. Keep straight on. The señor capitan will welcome you."

"But aren't you coming too, to make the introductions?"

"The señorito and I will follow. We must fetch the machine."

"I can't leave Tim," said Mrs. O'Hagan.

"What's the path like?" cried Tim. "Can I ride, Romaña?"

"For some distance, yes. There are steep places after the paths join."

"There are indeed," said Tim. "That's where the brigands–your friends, I mean–had to haul the cycle. A very stiff job too. Mother, ride on with Father. I'll catch you in no time. I'll mount Romaña behind me: he's lighter than the gobernador!"

"You're quite sure you'll catch us?" said Mrs. O'Hagan anxiously.

"Quite, so don't worry. Oh! you don't know how jolly glad I am to see you."

The other two members of the party, Andrea and another house servant, rode on with their master and mistress, while Tim and Romaña returned to the cave for the cycle. They had a good deal of difficulty in hoisting it up from the bed of the stream on to the path, but when they were once there, they soon made up on the riders, and went on all together at a rapid pace.

"Shall we run ahead and warn Señor Mollendo?" asked Tim presently.

"No: stay with us," said Mrs. O'Hagan. "I don't want to lose sight of you."

"Better not, señorito," added Romaña. "We must be careful as we approach the place where the paths join. If the escape has been discovered, and they are pursuing, they will come by the other path: it is shorter. Why did you choose this one, señor?"

"It was recommended to us by that ragged old man who sells lottery tickets. Is he a friend of yours?"

"He is a caballero, señor," replied Romaña with dignity. "Señor Galdos was once a sub-prefect."

"Was he indeed? He has been a very good friend to us, and I hope we may be able to reward him some day. How much farther is it? The path is becoming very rough."

"It is several miles, señor; but if all is well when we come to the junction of paths, there will be no need to hurry for the rest of the way."

Soon after this the path diverged from the stream, which wound away to the westward. Romaña now recommended that the party should ride slowly, while he himself scouted ahead on foot. The track here was too rough for the motor-cycle to gain anything in point of speed.

"When you come to a large stone, señor, which I will place in the middle of the track," said Romaña, "then halt. It will be no more than a mile from the forked path, and you will do better to go no farther until I return to you, lest the clatter of hoofs should be heard."

He went on and disappeared. About two miles farther on the riders came to

the arranged signal. They halted, the men dismounted, and Tim, leaning against the flank of his mother's horse, and clasping her hand, begged her to tell him how the escape had been contrived.

"You had heard the result of the trial?" she asked.

Tim nodded.

"Were you there, Mother?"

"I was not. I thought it best for your father's sake to keep out of the town. Yesterday afternoon that wretch Pardo came and took possession of our house. He showed me a document authorising him to work the estate on behalf of the government—-"

"Which means the Prefect, of course," Mr. O'Hagan put in.

"Then the wretched creature politely turned me out. I told him that he was in rather too much of a hurry; he might at least have had the decency to wait until all was over. But of course I didn't squabble with the worthless fellow. I packed up a few things, got my horse–he allowed me that!–and rode with Andrea and Juan into the town. Dr. Pereira was brave enough to take me in. No doubt the Prefect will make him pay for it."

"Was the Prefect still in the town?" asked Tim.

"He had gone back to San Juan, leaving Captain Pierola to carry out the sentence. I had made up my mind to see your father for the last time, and when it was dark Señora Pereira lent me a dress and a mantilla, and the doctor escorted me to the gobernador's house. Of course, his permission had to be got. He was very much distressed, poor man; he is terribly afraid of the Prefect: but he promised to admit me to the prison for a quarter of an hour to-morrow night. I asked him whether he couldn't let my husband escape, but he went nearly frantic at the idea.

"I was very much upset, as you may imagine. On the way back Dr. Pereira noticed a man following us. At first he paid no attention, but by and by got angry, and turned round upon the man, and asked him what he meant by it. 'Go on, señor doctor,' said the man. 'Do not notice me, but let me quietly into your house presently.' We went on, and I had only just taken off my borrowed things when the doctor brought the man to my room. It was the little old man who sells lottery tickets. He told me that if I would give him £200 he would set your father free. 'How?' I said. 'It will be better to ask no questions,' he said. I had no money—-"

"The gendarmes stripped the safe when they arrested me," said Mr. O'Hagan.

"But I had brought my jewel-case," his wife went on. "I suppose I showed my doubts in my face, for the old man said, 'The señora can trust me,' and, looking at him, I felt that I could. I put my jewel-case in his hands and told him to

take what was necessary, quite expecting that he would take everything. But he examined the things as if he knew something about them, and selected my pearl necklace and two bracelets. 'The señora will not like parting with them,' he said, 'but there is no other way.' I told him he might have everything if he would save my husband, and he seemed quite hurt. Then he told me that I must not go to bed, but be ready to leave the house at any moment. He kissed my hand in the most courtly way and was gone.

"About two o'clock he came again. 'All is ready,' he said: 'come with me.' You may imagine what a state I was in. I followed him through the dark streets until we came out into the country, and there I found your father and the two men waiting for me with a spare horse. The old man told us the way to come, and here we are. I love that dear old man."

"He bribed the jailers, I suppose–jolly old soul!" said Tim.

"The Prefect's own methods," said Mr. O'Hagan. "I'm afraid the gobernador will have a bad time of it. He was responsible for me."

"And won't the jailers suffer, too?" asked Tim.

"They decamped at once, you may be sure," replied his father. "But here's Romaña back again. He's in a hurry."

Romaña was running down the path.

"We cannot go on, señor," he said. "I crept as close as I dared to the fork, and caught sight of some men among the trees beyond. I don't know who they are, but it is not safe to proceed."

"What are we to do, then?"

"We must go back until we come to the river. The water is very low, and we can walk up along the sand at the edge. Presently we shall come to a stream that flows down the hill-side from near Señor Mollendo's camp. We can climb up there. It is very steep and rocky, but it is the only way."

"Very well: lead on."

On reaching the river, the party scrambled down the bank to the bottom. In times of rain the torrent had deposited large quantities of sand in the bed, which the shrinking of the channel in the summer had left bare and dry. On this firm floor, level as a billiard table, but ascending in a gentle plane, progress was easy; but when they reached the stream of which Romaña had spoken, and had to strike up the hill-side, they found themselves in difficulties. They had to dismount and lead the horses over great ledges of quartz, polished to a dangerous slipperiness by the action of sand and water, and round huge boulders, that offered, at first sight, insuperable obstacles. Difficult as the way was for the horses, it was doubly so for the motorcycle, which had to be carried for many yards at a time, and hauled up and over sharp-edged rocks that threatened damage to its tyres. Many times they had to stop and rest. It was now midday, and very

hot, and Mr. O'Hagan's party, having had no food since the night before, were hungry as well as tired.

"Plucky little woman!" said Mr. O'Hagan at one of these halts, to his wife who sat beside him on a ledge of rock.

"Just think of Tim spending nights by himself in a cave!" said Mrs. O'Hagan. "How horrid for him!"

"Boys like that sort of thing," returned her husband with a smile. "Don't they, Tim?"

"If there's another fellow with them," said Tim. "There's no fun in camping-out alone. I wish I'd thought to bring some grub. Mother must be famished!"

"I confess I hope Señor Mollendo will have *something* for us," said Mrs. O'Hagan. "Going long without food is bad for a growing boy."

"I can eat anything," said Tim, "but I'm afraid you won't like their grub."

"My dear boy, I would rather eat parched peas with Señor Mollendo than sit down to a banquet with the Prefect.... Hark! What's that?"

She clutched her husband's arm at the sound of rifle-shots far to the east.

"We had better get on, I think," said Mr. O'Hagan, rising. "Where's Romaña?"

"He has gone ahead to warn Señor Mollendo of our coming," said Andrea. "He will come back to help with the machine."

An hour later the whole party, hot, exhausted, and hungry, entered the enclosure which Tim had described to his parents. The assembled Mollendists greeted them with loud vivas, and Señor Mollendo's face beamed as he came forward, hat in hand, to meet them.

"Welcome to my little castle, señor, señora," he said, with the air of a potentate. "I rejoice in the circumstances which have given me the honour of entertaining such distinguished guests."

"I don't," said Mr. O'Hagan bluntly, "though I thank you for your hospitality, señor. Do you know what is the dearest wish of my heart at the present moment?"

"If it is anything I can do—-"

"A glass of wine for my wife, and then dinner, señor. Your guests, I should think, never reach you without an appetite."

CHAPTER X
CINCINNATUS O'HAGAN

"I have an apology to make to you, señor," said Mollendo, as they sat at dinner in his own little four-square apartment. "I perceive that I was under a misapprehension when I ordered the arrest of your son. I can never sufficiently lament my indiscretion, and beg that you will accept the expression of my profound regret."

"I quite understand, señor," said Mr. O'Hagan, reflecting that the indiscretion had cost him £250. "You party men find it difficult to understand that an action may be dictated by other than party considerations. My son helped Señor Fagasta because he's a man, not because he's gobernador."

"His action does honour to his humanity as well as his courage," said the courtly host. "In these circumstances I feel that it is inconsistent with the honour of a caballero to take advantage of a mistake, and I beg therefore that you will accept restitution of the sum of money which I demanded of you, but to which I had no just claim."

"Your suggestion is only what I should have expected from a caballero of your reputation, señor," said Mr. O'Hagan, politely adopting Mollendo's formality of speech. Mollendo bowed. "But in the circumstances I cannot do better than leave the money in your hands. And let me say that I thoroughly approve of the use to which you will put it."

"My dear!" ejaculated Mrs. O'Hagan in English.

"I am going the whole hog now," replied her husband quietly.

She pressed her lips together, and listened nervously as the conversation was resumed.

"I have made up my mind definitely to take sides with you," continued Mr. O'Hagan. "Hitherto I have held aloof, as you know; but I have always sympathised with your aims. You stand for political honesty and good government. That is a motive that appeals to me as a citizen. Personally, I have a strong inducement to support you; the Prefect has stripped me of my estate. If you succeed, I shall retrieve my fortunes; and in assisting you I shall not only consult my own interests, but do something, I believe, for the good of the country in which I have lived for so many years."

"A thousand thanks, señor," said Mollendo, his eyes beaming as he clasped Mr. O'Hagan's hand. "I rejoice in your generosity, and hail the approaching triumph of our cause. I remember how, in the brave days of old, the Roman Cincinnatus was called from his farm to assume command of the national forces; and how, within the space of sixteen days, he put the enemy to utter rout and confusion. You, señor, shall be our Cincinnatus. Caballeros," he cried, rising and addressing the motley throng in the courtyard, "the Señor Inglés is one of us. He espouses the cause of liberty; he will strike with us against the tyrant. I call upon you to acclaim our honoured guest with hearty vivas, and to drain your copitas to the caballero who will lead us to success."

Thundering cheers broke from the men, and they were only too eager to fill their cups and drink the health of the Señor Inglés and confusion to the dictator. Romaña smiled as he sat with Andrea and Juan at a little distance from his master. What he had hoped had come to pass; the señor was now a Mollendist. Tim also smiled, for a different reason.

"How do you like Cincinnatus O'Hagan?" he whispered slily in his mother's ear.

But Mrs. O'Hagan's sense of humour was at the present moment clouded by anxiety and misgiving.

"'Tis perfectly horrid," she said.

Mollendo had, in fact, jumped eagerly at the chance of securing Mr. O'Hagan as an active associate. He was himself well advanced in years; and though very popular with his followers, on whom he exercised a magnetic influence by his personal courage and his oratorical gifts, he had no military qualities or experience, and was conscious of his own defects as a leader. Mr. O'Hagan, on the other hand, as he well knew, had won a great repute as a soldier in the stormy days of the Chilian war. His advice in matters of strategy and tactics would be invaluable. He would bring to the cause just those factors of success in which hitherto it had been lacking, and for the first time Mollendo saw the gleam of coming triumph. Mrs. O'Hagan suffered many pangs as the conversation proceeded. The two men were settling the basis of their alliance. Mollendo was to retain the nominal command; the practical control of the movements of his little force was to be in the hands of Mr. O'Hagan. The good lady saw that her husband was back in the days of his youth. He always threw himself heart and soul into whatsoever he took up, and he discussed matters now with all the fire and eager enthusiasm of a boy. His wife was troubled; and when she noticed with what rapt attention Tim followed the talk, she made up her mind to drop a word of caution later.

In the midst of the conversation a man came hurriedly into the courtyard, and walking straight up to his leader saluted and said:

"Señor, I have news."

"What is it, Cristobal?"

"We were watching on the hills, señor, when we saw two parties drawing near, the larger on the eastern track, the smaller on the western. We hastened down to the fork, intending to give battle to them both; but suddenly we saw the smaller party halt; from it a man came forward, but presently hastened back again, and all his company retreated and disappeared. At the fork we met the others, and gave them so warm a reception that they withdrew towards the town. We followed them, but they did not halt, so we returned to the fork, and there our people are still posted."

"That is well, my son. The smaller party consisted of the Señor Inglés and his family whom you see here. They are now supporters of our cause. Carry that news to our men; it will encourage them. The señor was a great captain in the army of Peru years ago.... Will the señora excuse us for a few moments?" he asked, when the man had gone.

"You want to talk secrets, I suppose," said Mrs. O'Hagan; "but unless my husband objects, I should prefer to know all your arrangements. Tim," she added in English, "I am not to be kept in the dark. I do not like your turning yourself into a brigand, but I see your mind is made up. Only don't do anything without telling me."

"Señor, my wife and I have no secrets," said Mr. O'Hagan. "You may speak quite freely."

"What I had to say concerns the señora herself," said Mollendo. "This is no place for a lady; nor should she be subjected to the fatigues and dangers that we shall have to encounter. My wife lives peacefully in a remote corner of the country some fifty miles from here in the hills, and if the señora will deign to accept her hospitality—-"

"Not at all, señor; I remain with my husband and son," said Mrs. O'Hagan firmly.

"Perhaps the señor will command otherwise," suggested Mollendo, who was not accustomed to domestic opposition.

From that moment Mrs. O'Hagan was his determined enemy. Mr. O'Hagan hurriedly explained that he would discuss the matter with his wife in private. He found an opportunity of doing so later in the day, when a corner of the ruins had been prepared for their accommodation. He pointed out that she would be unable to make the long and rapid marches which irregular warfare entailed. Her presence, and the necessity of protecting her, would be a source of weakness, possibly of disaster. Mrs. O'Hagan recognised this, and after a time reluctantly agreed to accept Señora Mollendo's hospitality.

"But I must take Tim with me," she said.

Mr. O'Hagan stroked his chin.

"The boy won't like that," he remarked.

"It will be for his good," she replied. "Surely you admit that fighting with these desperadoes is not fit work for a boy of his age."

"As to that, there are many here no older. Age doesn't count in these matters. He is perfectly healthy; he may be very useful to me, and the experience will be invaluable to him."

"Am I to lose both of you?" cried the lady, much troubled. "If it were for our own country I might endure it, like many another poor woman; but to think of you throwing away your lives for this miserable country–oh! it is too much."

Mr. O'Hagan was inclined to yield the point; but while he was still hesitating, his wife, dashing the tears from her eyes, suddenly forestalled him.

"I am an idiot," she said. "Of course the boy would eat his heart out away from you. I mustn't look on the black side. But do take care of him, won't you, Tim?"

And so it was settled that young Tim should remain with his father.

Next day Señor Mollendo provided an escort of half a dozen men, with whom Mrs. O'Hagan set off for the long ride into the hills. Mr. O'Hagan and Tim on horseback, each having a carbine, accompanied the party, having decided to go half the way. They left the camp at its northern side, and followed the track downward for several miles until it crossed the river by a narrow stone bridge. Then their course led to the north-west, the path rising steadily as it approached the spurs of the Andes. Progress was very slow; the day was already far advanced when they reached a little hut on the hill-side, about halfway to their destination, where Señor Mollendo was accustomed to break his journey when going to and fro between the camp and his home. Here they passed the night. In the morning Mrs. O'Hagan took leave of her husband and son, who watched her party until it disappeared along the winding track, then silently sprang to their saddles and rode in the opposite direction.

They had come within a few miles of the stone bridge over the river when they caught sight simultaneously of a number of horsemen strung out along the path far ahead, and riding towards them. Mr. O'Hagan felt the lack of one of the prime necessities of a soldier–a field-glass.

"We must hide up until we see who they are," he said to Tim. "They don't know how to order a march, at any rate."

The hill-side provided many convenient nooks for hiding and taking a lookout. But only a few minutes had passed when Tim, from behind his rock, called:

"It's old Mollendo, Father."

"Take care you don't call him that in the hearing of his men. It would be a deadly insult. Better call him 'excellency.' I wonder what has happened."

They returned to the track, and trotted downhill to meet the horsemen. There was about them an air of depression which did not escape Mr. O'Hagan. The explanation confirmed his foreboding.

"Good-day, señor," said Mollendo, with a graceful salutation as they met. "I grieve to say that you behold me a fugitive."

"What, excellency! Has the usurper taken the field at last?"

"It seems so, señor general." (Tim grinned as these complimentary titles passed.) "We were surprised at dawn by large numbers of the enemy who had advanced along the route by which you came to my camp. My sentries were, I fear, overcome by somnolence. The attack was so sudden that I had no time to

form my ranks; but in the half light some of us were able to make our escape–some on horseback, others on foot. We are scattered to the four winds; all our stores are lost; it is a sad inauguration of our new alliance."

"Courage, excellency!" said Mr. O'Hagan. "We must consider how to retrieve this mishap. Are you pursued?"

"Not for the last five miles, señor."

"Then we will halt here, and wait for our men to rejoin us. No doubt some of them will come dropping in by and by. Let us ride forward, excellency, and choose a position."

Meanwhile Tim, seeing Romaña among the score of men who accompanied Mollendo, rode up to him with an eager question.

"Where is my cycle?"

"There was not time to bring it, señorito; but I managed to hide it under a heap of brushwood collected for the fires."

"They'll find it!" said Tim, his face falling.

"Perhaps we shall recapture the camp first. It was all I could do."

Tim thanked him, but felt that the chance of recovering his cycle was small indeed.

CHAPTER XI
THE MOTOR-CYCLE

Mr. O'Hagan was surprised at the rapidity with which this offensive movement had been executed. It was a bold stroke on the part of the enemy to make their way across the hills during the hours of darkness, and showed that they had among them a vigorous and enterprising leader. Its effect upon the fortunes of the Mollendists was likely to be serious. The success of their cause depended on the extent to which they could enlist active support among the disaffected. They had many sympathisers in San Rosario and the capital, but the most of these were too timid or too cautious to carry their sympathy into action. A great success would no doubt bring an influx of recruits; but a set-back such as this would not only discourage recruiting, but also dishearten those who had already taken up arms. Defeat breeds desertion.

The outlook was very gloomy. But Mr. O'Hagan was a man whose energies were stimulated by adversity. He had been wont to say that his plantation was

too successful: he was growing soft. The present situation was a challenge to the qualities that had lain dormant in him since he hung up his sword at the close of the Chilian war.

Mollendo expected that some of the fugitives from the camp would in course of time make their way to the hut in the hills which Mr. O'Hagan had just left. There he always kept a small supply of provisions. It was therefore decided to return thither. Several mounted men joined them on the march, and within a few hours after reaching the hut the party was augmented by about two score, several of them wounded. These were attended by a medical student who had thrown in his lot with the Mollendists. There was great despondency among the little force. Some were disposed to continue their flight and even to abandon the cause; but Mr. O'Hagan set himself to rally them, appealing to their courage as caballeros and hidalgos, a compliment which especially flattered the mestizos among them.

Mr. O'Hagan was too old a campaigner to run any risks with a small force demoralised by their recent reverse. His first concern was to restore their morale. The great difficulty was provisions. The small supply in the hut would soon be exhausted, and in the inhospitable hills there was no chance of obtaining any food except wild fruit from the bushes. The river swarmed with fish, however, and Mr. O'Hagan, to give the men employment, set some of them to weave a seine net out of the creeping plants that flourished along the banks. With this primitive implement they caught a good number of fish.

Meanwhile he sent out half a dozen men to bring in any more fugitives whom they might meet, and Romaña with another man to discover what the enemy were doing. When these scouts returned late at night, they reported that the main body of the enemy had withdrawn southward, either to San Rosario or to San Juan. They were partly gendarmes, the mounted police of the province, partly the irregular troops which the Prefect attached to his cause by the hope of plunder. The camp was still occupied, but Romaña had not been able to ascertain by how many.

One of the last comers among the fugitives declared that he had seen the Prefect himself in the action. This seemed doubtful to Mr. O'Hagan, but Mollendo assured him that it was not at all improbable. The Prefect was a man of great, if spasmodic, energy, and of much personal courage and resource. In Spanish America no man could arrive at his position of virtual dictator without such qualities. He must have guessed that his escaped prisoner had taken refuge in the Mollendist camp, and having so much at stake had himself led the attack upon it, instead of leaving it to the gobernador, of whose prowess he had a mean opinion, by no means unjustified. Indeed, Señor Fagasta was in disgrace. The Prefect had accused him of conniving at the prisoner's escape, and put him under arrest in

his own house–a prelude to another demand for money.

It seemed strange that the greater part of the Prefect's force should have been withdrawn so soon after the capture of the camp. Mollendo suggested that he was anxious not to be absent too long from San Juan. He had many enemies there, secret if not active; and if he allowed himself to be lured into the wilds he might return from a successful campaign only to find himself, as it were, locked out of his own house. No doubt he reckoned on the demoralising effect of his sudden swoop to break up the Mollendist party, and had left a portion of his force to harry the remnant at their leisure.

The position was discussed between Mollendo and Mr. O'Hagan in the hut. Tim was close at hand, giving eager attention to all that his elders said.

"I am much to blame for allowing the enemy to surprise me," said Mollendo bitterly. "I ought to have guarded my back door more diligently, but I was relying on the gobernador's known want of enterprise. He boasts of what he is going to do, but I have never known him to do anything."

"Don't take it to heart, excellency," said Mr. O'Hagan. "You were not to know that the Prefect would take matters into his own hands, nor would he have done so, I suspect, but for me. It is therefore incumbent on me, as the cause of your misfortune, to do what I can to retrieve it."

"And I trust much in your valour and skill, general."

"I thank you, excellency. Our most urgent need is food; the next is arms and ammunition; the next, men. That is the order in which our fortunes must be built up. And I confess that at the moment I am rather at a loss as to what steps to advise."

"We could get a certain amount of food at our own place," suggested Tim. "There can be no harm in robbing what we have been robbed of."

"That is all very well, but Pardo is in possession, no doubt with gendarmes to support him; and the enemy lie between us and home. It is very necessary to keep a careful watch on their movements, and I propose, with your consent, excellency, to send two scouts forward to-night to see what they are doing."

"Let me be one, Father," said Tim eagerly.

"You are rather too young," said Mr. O'Hagan, remembering his wife's injunctions. "Many of his excellency's men are no doubt experienced in such work."

"Let the boy go, general," said Mollendo. "I have already formed a high opinion of his courage. Such a task would give him invaluable experience. And if you send Nicolas Romaña as the second scout, you need have no fear; the boy will be safe with Romaña, one of the most active and trustworthy of my adherents."

Mr. O'Hagan felt himself in a difficulty. It would certainly weaken his own position with Mollendo if he refused to let his boy take a share in the operations. After so direct a proposal he could hardly hesitate to employ Tim when he would

employ any one else. After a brief inward conflict he said:

"Very well, excellency; the boy must win his spurs; he shall go."

Tim was delighted, Romaña scarcely less; he felt much flattered by his chief's praises. Soon after dark, therefore, the two set off on horseback. It was a cold night; a biting wind blew down from the mountains; and the scouts were not sorry when, arriving within a few miles of the camp, they had to dismount and proceed on foot. They led their horses some distance from the track, and tethered them in a clump of trees, placing on their return three large boulders at the side of the path to mark the place. If they should have to hurry back in the darkness, without such signposts they might very well overshoot the spot. Then, keeping on the hill-side above the track, they crept along, listening for sounds from the enemy's outposts.

They were within half a mile of the camp when they had the first indication of the enemy's presence. They heard the sound of horses champing their bits in the distance, and a low murmur of voices. Moving stealthily forward, they found that two or three men were posted on the track. As far as they could tell, this was the only precaution taken by the enemy against surprise from this quarter.

The scouts wormed their way foot by foot towards the camp. Their course was difficult. They durst not advance along the track itself; and the hill-side above was rugged and broken, littered with loose stones which had been removed at some time from the Inca buildings. Their route brought them presently to a spot from which they saw a slight glow ahead. It evidently came from a camp fire; but the fire itself was hidden from them by the ruined wall. Skirting the enclosure, they made their way to the side where, as they knew by the sounds, the horses were tethered. Here they caught the footfalls of a sentry moving to and fro outside the wall. They stole past him to a point where the hill fell away steeply, crawled up the slope until they gained the foot of the wall, and clambering up its ruined face, peered over into the interior of the courtyard. The horses just beneath them snorted with alarm; their movements, quiet as they were, or their scent, had disturbed the sensitive beasts. The sentry close by stopped; but after a silent pause of a few moments resumed his beat.

The scouts clung to the wall, their eyes just above its top. They saw three fires in the courtyard; all were dying down. Around each lay a number of men, wrapped in their cloaks. They could not count them; indeed, only when the breeze stirred the embers could they distinguish the forms at all. But it was easier to count the horses, ranged in a close rank with their heads towards the wall. There were ninety. A similar line stood against the adjacent wall at right angles. Altogether there must be at least a hundred and eighty animals.

There seemed to be no chance of making any more discoveries, and the twain were about to move away, when a sudden gust of wind stirred the nearest

of the dull fires to a momentary flame. By its light Tim caught a glimpse of his motor-cycle resting against the wall on the far side of the enclosure. He nudged Romaña's elbow to draw his attention to it. Neither dared to speak.

They remained thus for a few seconds; then, by a second nudge, Tim intimated his intention to retire. They let themselves down silently, and crept up the hill-side. When they were out of earshot from the camp, Tim said in a whisper:

"Romaña, I am going to get my bike."

CHAPTER XII
FREE WHEEL

Romaña gasped when Tim declared his intention.

"It is madness," he said. "Your father charged me to have care of you. I must forbid it."

"I don't care what you say. I am going to get my bike. Do you know that it cost £60 in London? Besides, I am not going to let the Prefect's fellows have it."

"But consider," said Romaña anxiously. "I don't deny you may steal in and get it; they are keeping very poor watch; but what then? You would have to bring it out—-"

"I'd manage that."

"And then how get it to our camp? The track is very difficult, for miles too rough for you to ride. There are sure to be sentries at the eastern entrance; and as for the gully by which we came, you know how hard our task was in daylight: we could not possibly carry the machine down in the darkness."

"All that's perfectly true, but I am not going to leave it with these rascals, so we've just got to think it out."

He had to admit that the gully and the western track, by which they had just come, were impossible. The only other route was the path which he had travelled when first brought by his captors to the camp, and when he had returned home after being ransomed. The entrance, as Romaña had said, would undoubtedly be guarded; and judging by the position of the outposts whom they had passed on the way up, there would be a corresponding picket on the path below.

The path itself was difficult enough. For more than a quarter of a mile from the camp it was a steep descent. Then for about two miles it dropped more gradually, becoming from that point onward a sort of switchback with a generally

downward trend until it reached the level not far from Durand's house. Having twice travelled along the path, Tim knew it well enough to feel sure that he could ride along it even in the darkness without much risk. The difficulty was threefold: to secure the bicycle unnoticed; to pass the sentry at the entrance; and to evade the picket at the foot of the hill. Romaña, who knew the weaknesses of his countrymen, admitted that the sentry in all probability would be asleep; but the members of the picket would certainly be awake: among two or three there would be conversation.

"Well then," said Tim, "if the sentry is asleep I'll chance the rest. But you won't be in it. We came out to scout, and you must get back and tell them what we have learnt: it isn't much."

"Your father will blame me severely if I return without you," said Romaña.

"You can tell him you protested. Besides, I'll very likely be back before you. If I get away safely I'll make a round to the river, and when I get there I can go so fast that I may overtake you somewhere up the road–provided the petrol lasts out. It must be getting low; I'd forgotten that; and we've no more. After this the machine will be useless."

"Then why not leave it, señorito? It will be useless to the enemy also."

"Don't go over it all again! I mean to have the bike; that's settled. You get back. I'll allow time for you to reach the horses before I do anything. You had better start at once."

Romaña knew that further expostulation would be useless. He had had much experience of his young master's firmness. Reluctantly he took his leave, and crept back over the hill-side. Tim listened for his footsteps, and hearing nothing he felt much encouraged. If Romaña could move silently, so could he. But for assurance' sake he took off his boots and slung them round his neck by their laces.

He waited a long time. The sky was moonless, a deep indigo blue, so dark that the starlight did not enable him to read the face of his watch. It was essential he should not start upon his own hazardous adventure until Romaña was out of danger, and he had waited probably twice as long as was necessary before he ventured to move. There were no sounds from the enclosure except the occasional stamp of a horse's hoof or the rattle of a chain. Even the sentry on his right had apparently ceased to trudge his monotonous beat. The other sentry, if there was one, at the entrance to his left, had not moved. Once or twice he thought he heard slight sounds from down the path: the fact that outposts were stationed below rendered it probable that the sentry above would not consider it necessary to be on the alert. Perhaps, thought Tim with a gush of hope, there was no sentry there at all!

At last, having heard no alarm from the direction in which Romaña had

gone, he decided to start. He stole cautiously along and down the hill-side until he came to one of the tall rocks that stood at the entrance. Here he paused a moment to listen. There was no sound. Creeping round the rock, at two more strides he was within the enclosure. The breeze no longer woke fitful flames from the embers of the camp fires.

It was pitch dark: otherwise he might have seen the form of a sentry dozing on a ruined buttress near the entrance. In the absence of light, the only means of finding the cycle was to steal along by the wall until he came to it. Luckily he had to pass no horses: the animals would have been more easily disturbed than the men.

He moved as quickly and quietly as possible, but his heart was in his mouth more than once as he made the round. It was perilous work, picking his way in the darkness among the sleeping men. They were placed irregularly, some close to the wall, some at a little distance from it, some actually touching it. One man murmured in his sleep as Tim passed; another, flinging out an arm with a dreamer's sudden violence, struck it against Tim's leg, and growled an imprecation. But, no doubt supposing that he had hit a comrade, he suspected nothing, and rolled over. At the blow Tim felt an impulse to shout aloud and run; but he kept a tight rein upon his nerves, and went on without further alarm.

At last he reached the bicycle. There was no sleeper within a few yards of it. He passed his hand over it rapidly to make sure that it was complete. Then, bracing himself for the ordeal, he wheeled it between several of the men towards the centre of the courtyard. At this tense moment he had reason to be glad of the care which he had always spent in keeping the machine well oiled. This, and the fact that it was a free-engine model, made it noiseless.

Looking now eastward, he was just able to discern the two pillars of rock that stood high above the level of the adjacent wall at the entrance. Guided by them, he pushed the machine straight across the courtyard, skirting one of the dead fires. He passed between the rocks: he was now on the track: and the heedless sentry slumbered on.

Tim was breathing hard in his excitement. The first danger was past: what was he now to do? He stood beneath one of the tall rocks, thinking. Should he try to creep past the outpost stationed, as he suspected, at the foot of this, the steepest part of the track? Or should he mount and run the gauntlet? The men were probably not asleep: whether awake or not they would hear his machine approaching. It seemed perhaps the safer course to wheel the bicycle down at the side of the track, and not mount until he was within a few yards of them, when he might hope to dash past before they were ready to deal with him.

He was moving slowly downhill when an accident caused a change of plan. A loose piece of rock, displaced by the front wheel, bumped and rattled down

the track, making what seemed a terribly loud noise in the still night air. The slumbering sentry awoke and let out a shout. There were faint answering shouts from below. It was Hobson's choice for Tim now. He vaulted into the saddle, and the cycle sped down the steep descent. He did not switch on the engine; indeed, he had some trouble in keeping the machine in hand with the brake. At renewed sounds of alarm ahead he allowed the speed to increase. It was a gamble with fate. If the outpost, deliberately or unawares, blocked the track at the foot of the hill, nothing could save either Tim or any person or thing he might strike. If the space was clear, nothing could arrest his course but a shot, so long as he retained control of the machine. Favoured by the darkness he might escape, even should the men fire at him.

Down he flew, steering by guesswork. He heard shouts and the plunging of horses ahead; then saw dimly several dark forms. They appeared to stretch across the track. He could not have checked now if he had wished to. He dashed on, as it were into their midst. On the left he grazed a man about to mount; on the right passed within a few inches of a horse; and while he was still in the throes of nervous anxiety and even terror, the machine had borne him safely through the outpost. He could hardly believe in his good fortune. But there was no doubt about it. He had now to face only the dangers of the track ahead.

These were formidable enough. It was a mad ride at the best: a boulder of any size, and there were many, would hurl him to destruction. Fortunately the track here was fairly straight. At one slight bend he narrowly shaved a tree; a little farther on the machine bumped into a transverse depression, probably the dry channel of a rivulet, and he just averted a side slip. His fortune held good. As he drew farther from the enemy he reduced his speed, and when the downward incline became less steep, and almost insensibly merged in a rise, he jumped off, lighted his lamp, and for the first time started the engine.

The men of the outpost, meanwhile, were scarcely aware of what had happened. The sentry's shout had alarmed them, but they knew not what to be prepared for. There was no firing, so that the Mollendists could not be attempting a surprise. While they were mounting, they were vaguely conscious that something had approached and passed them, swiftly, with scarcely a rustle. Only when the ghostly object was already two or three hundred yards down the track did it flash into the mind of one of them that this must be the machine which he had seen hauled out from under a heap of brushwood in the camp. None of his comrades could ride: it must have been purloined by an audacious Mollendist. Then the pursuit began. But the horsemen had to pick their way carefully in the darkness. Even before Tim gained the switchback portion of the track he had hopelessly distanced them. And having now his lamp to guide him, he was able to avoid obstacles, and dashed up and down the slopes at a great speed.

Presently he came to the forking of the paths, and turned to the right, intending to ride on to the river, and make his way up the channel until he was several miles west of the camp. He had ridden only a few yards along this path, however, when it suddenly struck him that the tracks of his wheels would be clearly visible in daylight, and would guide the enemy to the situation of his friends. Instantly he slowed down, wheeled round and, returning to the fork, ran some little distance along the path in the direction of San Rosario. Then, dismounting, he walked the cycle a little farther; this would have the effect of making the wheel tracks more shallow. On reaching a particularly hard stretch of the path, he lifted the machine on to the rocky ground at the side, and partly wheeling, partly carrying, made his way slowly back towards the cross path leading to the river.

Here he listened for sounds of pursuit. There were none. The horsemen had given it up. He debated whether to try to obliterate the few traces he had made before the necessity of hiding his trail occurred to him. But he reflected that in the deceptive light of the lamp he might leave still more compromising signs, whereas the obvious retracing of his course might suffice to lead the enemy off the scent. Accordingly he let the wheel marks remain, and, carrying or pushing the bicycle over many yards of the sloping ground above the track, he again mounted, and hastened on to the river bank. There he turned to the left in the direction of San Rosario, but after riding a short distance he stopped, wheeled the machine down the sloping bank between the bushes, and then started upstream through shallow water. When he had thus covered about a mile, he pulled on his boots, remounted, and set off along the sandy foreshore.

Remembering suddenly that the river was in full view from the ridge on his right hand, which led directly to the captured camp, he put out his light. He wished he had done so as soon as he turned northward, and felt very uneasy lest the enemy should have seen the lamp from above, and hurried down the gully to intercept him. The sandy bed being whitish, he was able to ride rapidly without a light. A stream trickling into the river from the right indicated the gully. He dashed past, half expecting to be assailed with shots; but there was no sign of an enemy, and he felt that, except for some unforeseen contingency, his dangers were over.

He kept to the river bed for several miles after leaving the vicinity of the camp. Then, however, he had to mount the bank and take the track leading to Mollendo's hut. By this time he was very tired, and the necessity of dismounting frequently, to push the machine up the steeper and more rugged stretches of the path, taxed his strength severely. To make matters worse, the petrol gave out, and riding, even in level places, was no longer possible. But he pressed on doggedly at a snail's pace. At last, when the sky behind him was beginning to lighten with

the dawn, he saw three figures emerging from the gloom on the track ahead. In a few minutes Romaña and two other men met him, and relieved him of his burdensome machine. Soon after, exhausted but very happy, he dragged himself into the hut, greeted his father and Señor Mollendo with a smile, and, dropping on to an extended rug, fell instantly asleep.

CHAPTER XIII
A COMMISSION

It was high noon when Tim awoke. A breakfast was ready for him; so was his father.

"I am very glad your mother is not with us," said Mr. O'Hagan. "She would have been out of her mind with anxiety about you. Don't you know that a soldier's first duty is to obey? You were sent to scout: you exceeded your instructions, and I am not pleased with you."

"But, Father," said Tim, with his mouth full of beans, "I have often heard you say that a soldier ought to think for himself. Don't you remember saying that a man who has to be told everything isn't much good?"

"That's all very well," said Mr. O'Hagan, feeling himself on slippery ground. "I was referring to officers, as you are perfectly aware. If every private were to think and act for himself it would end in disaster."

"Am I a private?" asked Tim innocently.

"You are a raw recruit, with everything to learn. You are under discipline: remember that."

"I don't think it's fair," said Tim. "Señor Mollendo calls you general; I don't see why I shouldn't be an officer too! You might make me your aide-de-camp, Father."

"You are talking rubbish, sir. Understand me: you must do what you are told, and not go larking about on risky adventures like an irresponsible schoolboy."

Mr. O'Hagan spoke rather warmly. He had passed an anxious night. Secretly he was delighted with Tim's pluck and resourcefulness; but his pleasure was qualified by misgiving as to future dangers into which the boy's love of adventure might lead him. Besides, for his wife's sake he felt it his duty to assume a sternness that was not quite genuine.

"Aren't you glad I got the bike?" said Tim.

"Well, yes, I suppose I am," replied his father. "How did you manage it?"

Here Señor Mollendo entered, and Tim gave the story in Spanish for his benefit.

"I congratulate you, my boy," said the leader warmly, "and you too, señor, on possessing a son who unites courage with ingenuity, and caution with daring. He has twice proved himself more than a match for the enemy, and in recognition of his signal merits and as a mark of my approval I appoint him a lieutenant in the army of liberty."

Father and son glanced at each other. This, coming after their recent conversation, was almost too much for their gravity; they could hardly refrain from laughter. The contrast between Mollendo's lofty manner and his low fortunes was very comical.

"I thank you, excellency," said Mr. O'Hagan, as gravely as he could. "I hope my son will continue to merit your approbation–and mine."

The two men consulted together. The continued presence of the enemy at the Inca camp was disconcerting. By covering the roads to San Rosario and the capital, and restricting the Mollendists to the hills, they put an effectual bar upon recruiting. The northward region, sparsely settled and largely unexplored, was favourable ground for refuge, but for nothing else. A few more stragglers had rejoined their leader; but the recent reverse discouraged any large reinforcement. So long as the little band, now numbering about seventy, was cooped up in the hills, the cause was at a standstill. They might as well give up the struggle.

To approach the town with their present numbers would be madness. They would be opposed by vastly superior forces, and their retreat would be cut off by the Prefect's men at the Inca camp, who themselves outnumbered them by three to one. Yet the only chance of bringing about a general rising against the Prefect was to gain a brilliant success.

The situation of the Mollendists seemed desperate. There was scarcely any food left, either for men or horses, and little ammunition. Only fifty of the men had rifles; the remainder were armed with revolvers and steel weapons of various kinds, most of them rusty. Their attire was equally diversified. Some were clad in the ordinary costume of civil life; a few in the somewhat flashy habiliments affected by professional brigands; some had the parti-coloured ponchos worn by Cholos. There were at least a dozen different styles of hat. They were certainly what Cromwell would have called a "ragged regiment." Mr. O'Hagan felt that in casting in his lot with them he had sprung from the frying-pan into the fire. But he reflected that he had had no alternative; and having accepted the responsibility of organising the paltry army he was bound to make the best of it.

The necessity of securing provisions must be dealt with at once. Señor

Mollendo could not offer a practicable suggestion: Mr. O'Hagan recalled Tim's notion of running off with supplies from his own estate, only to dismiss it as impossible of achievement. But Tim here made another proposal.

"Have you got any money, Father?" he asked.

"Not a peseta."

"I have £250," said Mollendo, with a conscious look.

"Let Romaña and me go down to his cave in the cliff," said Tim, "and see if we can't get into communication with Galdos. With your money, excellency, he might purchase stores secretly in the town."

"Both Romaña and you are marked men," said Mr. O'Hagan. "Anybody else would have a better chance."

"I am sorry to differ from my generalissimo," said Mollendo. "On the contrary, I consider that the excellent qualities already displayed by Lieutenant O'Hagan and Romaña are guarantees of success. I give my vote cordially in favour of this admirable proposal."

Tim could not help smiling. He took a mischievous joy in the overriding of his father's views. Mr. O'Hagan might be Cincinnatus, but he was certainly not dictator.

"Galdos will have no difficulty, of course, in buying provisions," he said; "the difficulty will be to convey them to us."

"It is the duty of my adherents to triumph over difficulties," returned Mollendo. "For £30 Galdos will be able to purchase provisions for three days. They will form a comfortable load for two pack-mules. As for the means by which he may secure their safety on the march, that must be left to the caballero's discretion."

"We shall have to do the same thing again in three days," said Mr. O'Hagan.

"Unless, señor general, we should by that time have won a signal victory, which is what I anticipate from your military genius."

"And that will lick old Cincinnatus hollow," thought Tim.

Mr. O'Hagan saw that to oppose the suggestion further would be to risk a loss of the harmony which ought to exist between the civil and military leaders of a community. He therefore yielded gracefully, and bent his mind on the details of the plan. He determined to send out one or two small parties to scout in the neighbourhood of the camp while Tim and Romaña went down the river. It was possible that the Prefect's men, having failed in what was no doubt their chief object, the recapture of the prisoner, might leave their present somewhat bleak quarters, and return to San Rosario or San Juan. If it were discovered that such was the case, it would be necessary to advise Tim of it, so that he might beware of stumbling among the retreating enemy. Mr. O'Hagan arranged to do this by lighting a beacon on a prominent hill-top, which could be seen from many miles

around. One fire would indicate that the retirement was by the eastern road,–that by which Tim had first been brought to the camp; two fires, some distance apart, that the western road had been chosen. No definite instructions could be given for the guidance of the two scouts: they must act according to circumstances and their own discretion.

There was a whimsical smile on Mr. O'Hagan's face as Mollendo took from a leather case notes to the value of £30, and handed them to Tim. A strange turn of Fortune's wheel, indeed!

Tim left the cave to find Romaña, and arrange with him for their expedition. They agreed that they had better not start until evening; they were both tired after the work of the previous night; and an afternoon's sleep would be the best preparation for the task before them.

"I will choose two of the best horses," said Romaña.

"We shan't need them," replied Tim. "You can ride behind me on the bicycle."

"But you have no petrol!"

"That is no matter. It is downhill all the way, and if you hold on behind me we shall go more quickly and more quietly than on horseback."

"There is the coming back," Romaña objected. "We cannot ride back without petrol."

"True. Your friend Señor Galdos has got to get some petrol. That's part of his job."

"I don't believe there is any in the town."

"Well, if there isn't we must lay up the cycle in your cave until we can get some from San Juan or elsewhere. The machine is no good up here in the hills. We might just as well make what use of it we can."

Romaña said no more. Argument was never effective with Tim when he had made up his mind. They slept through the afternoon, and started about an hour before dusk, watched with much curiosity by the motley crew of Señor Mollendo's adherents. As Tim had said, the track ran generally downhill, switchbacking here and there, but most of the ascents being too short to necessitate their dismounting. Occasionally there was a long stretch upwards, where they had to push the machine. On reaching the river they descended the bank and pursued their way along the hard sand. The incline, though slight, was sufficient to keep the wheels rolling, and their progress was so silent that nobody beyond a dozen yards could have detected their presence by the ear.

On approaching the western end of the gully that led up to the camp they kept a wary look-out in the gathering darkness. At this hour it was unlikely that the enemy would be abroad unless they had some definite object in view. They had hitherto shown no evidence of enterprise. The departure of the Prefect

seemed to have robbed them of initiative. There was some slight risk of their having discovered the wheel marks of the cycle in the sand if any parties had been prowling in the course of the day. But when the scouts had passed the junction of the river with the cross track in safety, they felt secure. A few miles farther down they left the river and returned to the track. The only danger now was that they might meet some one coming from San Rosario to the camp; but the ringing sound of hoofs on the hard track could be heard for a long distance in the silence of the night, and they would have warning in time to hide somewhere before the riders drew near. In any case it was unlikely that horsemen from the town would choose the longer route.

They had now an easy run down to the spot where the little hill stream cut across the track. Tim could not venture to light his lamp; but the sky was not so dark as on the previous night, and he had no difficulty in dodging the loose rocks which lay upon the track here and there. On arriving at the stream, they dismounted and carried the machine to the cavern. This was the most toilsome portion of their journey; the rest of it had been accomplished almost without exertion.

Romaña lit his lamp, and brought out from the cupboard a tin of biscuits and some potted beef. The waterfall gave them drink. As they ate their supper they discussed their plans.

"I will walk into the town to-night, señorito," said Romaña, "see my friend, and commission him to buy the provisions. I shall tell him to purchase only a small quantity at any one shop, so as not to awaken suspicion. To-morrow I shall remain secluded in his cottage, and return here with the mules in the evening."

"That's all very well, but what am I to do?" said Tim.

"You will remain here, señorito," said Romaña.

"Why should I? I had enough of this cave before. If that's all I'm to do I might just as well have remained in the hills. We were both sent on this job, remember."

"But there would be great danger in your going into the town. It is a needless risk. True, you speak our language perfectly; but your appearance, your complexion, your hair, señorito, are not those of a Peruvian. You would certainly be recognised—-"

"So will you."

"Not certainly. In the dark I shall be like any other townsman; and though everybody knows me—-"

"Look here, Romaña: old Moll–I mean his excellency–made me a lieutenant this morning, and if I choose to say I'll go, and order you to stay here, you'll have to obey."

Romaña blinked. But he was very patient with Tim, whom he had known

ever since he was a two-years' toddler. He repeated his arguments, and Tim was not so pig-headed as to deny their force, disgusted though he was at the prospect of kicking his heels for a whole day while Romaña was doing the work.

"I tell you what," he said at length. "I'll agree to what you propose if you'll try to get me some petrol."

"How can I do that, señorito?"

"You won't leave the town till dusk. Slip up to our place and bring a can from the outhouse. Here's the key. Nobody will be about at that time, and you can come back through the sugar-canes."

"The cans are heavy."

"Well, I'll meet you where the path joins the road to Señor Durand's. There are plenty of trees to hide amongst. I won't leave here until it's getting dark, and I'll keep a good look-out. Between us we can carry a can or two easily."

Romaña was not unwilling to make the attempt. He knew the ground thoroughly; it would not be difficult to thread his way secretly through the plantations to the shed, fifty yards in the rear of the house, where the petrol was stored; the sugar-canes grew so high that he could pass among them without any risk of being espied. He agreed to the suggestion, only impressing on Tim the necessity for caution. Then, pulling his hat well down over his eyes, and gathering his cloak around him, he took his leave, and set off on the fifteen-mile walk to the town.

CHAPTER XIV
HIS FATHER'S HOUSE

Tim was not remarkable for patience. The morning and afternoon of the next day passed too slowly for him. In the cave there was nothing to do; outside, his activity was circumscribed. He gave himself a bath in the pool below the waterfall, then returned to the cave for his breakfast. The empty meat tin tempted him to set it up at one end of the cave as a target, and practise revolver-shooting. But recollecting that the shape of this hiding-place might set up tell-tale reverberations, he abandoned the idea, kicked the tin away, and by way of doing something went for another bathe.

While he was still disporting in the water he heard footsteps in the direction of the path, and scampered back lightly to the shelter of the leafy screen. Peering

out somewhat anxiously, he saw an old Indian woman filling a pitcher from the brook. She carried it across the track among the brushwood on the other side, and disappeared. Tim guessed that she was one of the workers on Señor Durand's estate, which extended for several miles between the two paths from San Rosario. Some hours later a Cholo youth walked up the track, carrying a fishing-net and basket; he, no doubt, was going to the river to catch the family dinner. Except for these two, Tim saw no human being during the day. A number of waterfowl settled on the stream when the sun was high, and he caught glimpses of gaudy parrots occasionally; these were all the signs of life.

He had promised Romaña not to start too soon, and meant to keep his promise. It was twelve miles to the spot where they had arranged to meet, a walk of less than three or more than four hours according to the pace. Tim reasoned that by taking the longer period he would have more opportunities for scouting, and could make up for any time lost if he should have to conceal himself from passers-by. Accordingly he started, a full hour before he need have done. When once upon the path he forgot his intention to go slowly. He kept up a good swinging pace, though neglecting no precaution. In the plantations on his left hand he saw the distant forms of several of Señor Durand's workers, but he met nobody on the path, and nobody overtook him.

When he arrived at the place agreed upon, it wanted still nearly two hours of sunset. Romaña could not reach him for at least three hours, perhaps four or five if he brought petrol. Tim began to wish that he had not been in such a hurry. The spot was a cross-road–the junction of the path by which he had come with the track running northwards to Señor Durand's estate, with that running eastwards to his own home, and with another going southwards and emerging into the main road from San Rosario to San Juan. There were trees all around, and Tim decided to climb into one that gave him a partial view of all the tracks.

He had not been long settled in his perch when he heard on his left the sound of a horse trotting. Peering out through the foliage he presently caught sight of young Felipe Durand, riding alone towards the town. Tim, as we know, was impulsive; he often acted hastily, and sometimes repented afterwards, though not so frequently as might have been expected. When his friend was within a few yards of him, he hailed him cautiously. Durand reined up with a start, and looked wonderingly about him.

"Where are you?" he said, in a tone little above a whisper.

"Here, up a tree," replied Tim.

"You *are* up a tree!" said Durand.

"Don't be an ass. Ride in and tie your horse up. I'm coming down to talk to you. There's no one in sight."

Durand dismounted and led his horse some distance into the copse. There

Tim joined him.

"You are pretty mad," said Durand, "to come so close to the town. What on earth are you up to?"

"Romaña has gone into the town to get some grub. We're very short up yonder."

"You'll be shot if you're caught. The Prefect is raging at your father's escape. He led the raid on Mollendo's camp, thinking to catch you and your father there."

"He'd better go on raging," said Tim, with a grin. "What is happening, Durand?"

"He has sacked the gobernador, fined him £1000 and put him under arrest. He has promised £500 to the man who captures you or your father."

"My price has doubled, then! Where is he now?"

"He has gone back to San Juan. It's rumoured that as soon as he has made things secure there he's going to lead an expedition into the hills. He has sworn to smash the Mollendists, and he'll have no mercy on Mollendo or your father when he catches them."

"He should say 'if.' 'Ifs and ans are pots and pans; 'there's a big difference between 'if' and 'when'–and 'now' and 'never.' What do they say in the town?"

"A good many people sympathise with you, but the Prefect has a strong party, as you know; otherwise he wouldn't have left only a hundred men behind. There's a big crowd in Mollendo's old camp."

"I know, and a very poor lot they are. What is happening at home?"

"Pardo is playing the tyrant. It's rather fun. He cleared out all your old servants, except the Irishwoman. Old Biddy flatly refused to go, and I suppose he's afraid of being a laughing-stock in the town if he sends the gendarmes in with her."

"He has got gendarmes, then?"

"A dozen or so. He needs them. He has cut down wages all round, forbidden any of the workpeople to go into the town, and generally played the fool. There was a row this morning. The Japs refused to go to work except on the old terms. The foreman went to see Pardo at the house, Pardo was insulting, and the Jap flew at his throat. Of course he had no chance with the gendarmes there. They collared him and marched him into the town, and he'll have a bad time when the Prefect comes back. Pardo's a fool. The Japs will bolt in a body if he isn't careful. They'll easily get work elsewhere, and he'll find it hard to run the plantations without them. But what are you doing here?"

"I'm waiting for Romaña. He's coming out after dark."

"Well, take my advice and don't run any risks. By the way, how is your mother? My mater was talking about her this morning."

"She's all right–out of harm's way. Old Mollendo is a funny old chap. He has made Father a general, and me a lieutenant."

"You don't mean to say that you have really joined his party?"

"Indeed we have."

"That's a mistake. The Prefect has got a real handle against you now. He'd be justified in shooting you."

"He must catch us first. You'll see something startling one of these days."

"I'm afraid I shall. Well, good-bye. I shan't say I've seen you, of course. I'm going to dine with Dr. Pereira."

"You can tell him. He's a good sort. Good-bye; glad I met you."

Durand rode on, and Tim went back to his tree. But he had not sat there more than a few minutes before a sudden impulse seized him to go himself to the house. It was only three miles away; he would have plenty of time to go there and back before Romaña arrived. He might get some petrol himself. Romaña had the key of the outhouse; but Tim knew of a couple of loose boards at the back which he could easily remove and so gain entrance. He threw a glance along each of the paths; nobody was in sight. Then he slipped down and hastened into the broken country that lay between him and the cultivated ground. The hour was drawing near for the cessation of work on the plantations. He might reach the neighbourhood of the house without meeting any of the labourers. Even if he did meet them, what Durand had said assured him that he need have no fear of betrayal.

He made all possible haste. No fence separated the waste land from the coffee plantations. In this region the coffee plants grew to an unusual height, and he could safely make his way through them without having to go farther northward to the equally tall sugar-canes.

He met no one. In less than an hour he came to the rear of the private grounds. A thick shrubbery enclosed the field on which he was accustomed to play cricket and lawn-tennis. To the left was the petrol shed. Between the field and the house were the kitchen garden and an orchard.

Tim made his way to the back of the shed. It was an easy matter to pull out the loose boards. He entered, took a can, and returning with it to the shrubbery, hid it among the dense foliage near the spot where he had emerged from the plantation. In the course of half an hour he had four cans ready for removal. By this time dusk had fallen. He heard the clatter of crockery from the house. It was dinner time. An uncontrollable desire seized him to look in upon Pardo at the meal. Carefully replacing the boards taken from the wall of the shed, he slipped quietly round by the shrubbery towards the end of the house remote from the servants' quarters. There was now a light in the dining-room. He stole through the intervening orchard, crept to the wall of the house; then, going down on

hands and knees, peeped over the window-sill.

The table was laid profusely; evidently, he thought, Pardo was "doing himself well." The ex-bookkeeper had the head of the table; there were two guests, one of them the Captain Pierola who was to have superintended the execution of Mr. O'Hagan, the other Señor Fagasta's secretary. The men were on good terms with their fare and each other. They were chatting in high good temper, and Tim felt a flush of anger as he saw how free they were making with his father's Burgundy. It was a good wine, used but sparingly by its owner; these Peruvians had already emptied one bottle, and two more stood at Pardo's elbow.

Tim watched them for some minutes, conscious of a mad longing to rush in and break the bottles on their heads. But the night was deepening; it was time to get back; and he pictured Romaña's surprise when he met him, as he expected to do, coming through the plantation. Retracing his steps as stealthily as he had approached, he returned to the shrubbery, took up one of the cans, and set off with it towards the rendezvous.

He had taken only a few steps, however, when he heard a sudden commotion from the front of the house. Men's voices were raised in angry cries. He halted, wondering what was happening. After a moment's hesitation, he ran back, dropped the can in the shrubbery, and again hastened noiselessly to the house. Looking into the dining-room, he saw that it was now empty; but the door leading into the patio was open, and through it he caught sight of a group of gendarmes. At the same moment he heard the crack of a whip, then a cry of pain, followed by howls of rage and the crash of breaking glass.

The patio was brightly lit, but Tim's view of what was proceeding there was intercepted by the backs of the gendarmes. Throbbing with excitement, he ran to the side of the one-storeyed house, scrambled up the wall by means of holes which he had once made when climbing for a lost ball, and got upon the roof. A few steps more brought him to the edge of the open patio. Peeping over, he took in at a rapid glance a dramatic situation. In the centre of the floor lay a Japanese workman, held down by two gendarmes, while Pardo belaboured him with a raw-hide whip. In the veranda and on the lawn beyond there was a swarm of the Japanese labourers, howling with rage, brandishing bill-hooks, and pressing forward to the patio, the glass door of which had just been shattered by the men nearest it. Within stood more gendarmes with fixed bayonets, and just as Tim arrived, Captain Pierola stepped forward and fired his revolver into the midst of the crowd. A man fell back among his comrades, shot to the heart. The cries were stilled; the throng drew away out of the light; and Pardo went on with his thrashing.

Tim's first feeling was utter shame and indignant wrath. Then he had a sudden inspiration. Rushing back to the wall, he shinned down with the speed of

a squirrel, ran round to the front, and dashing among the crowd of Japanese, who were standing in the darkness, enraged but irresolute, he called on them to follow him. They recognised him, hailed him with a shout of delight, and next moment the whole eighty were following him in a yelling horde back to the house.

He kept out of the light from the patio, until, as he expected, the gendarmes fired a scattered volley. Then springing on to the veranda, he discharged his revolver point-blank at Captain Pierola, and brought him to the ground. The fall of their officer took the gendarmes aback. Before they could recover themselves, the Japanese burst into the patio with a shout of triumph. The Peruvians did not await the cold steel of their flashing bill-hooks. Pardo had already dropped his whip and fled. The gendarmes flocked after him, across the patio, through the corridor and out at the main door towards the road to San Rosario. Not all escaped. The rearmost were swooped upon by the exultant Japanese, who took an ample vengeance for the death of their comrade and the brutal treatment of their foreman.

"Glory be!" said a voice from the rear of the patio, and Biddy Flanagan came hastily to greet Tim. "Is the master after coming back?"

"He is not, Biddy, but he and Mother are quite safe."

He turned to ask explanations of the recent scene. It appeared that the acting foreman had come to Pardo with an ultimatum from the whole body of Japanese, that unless he procured the instant release of the man imprisoned in the town they would at once quit the hacienda. Pardo, having drunk more than was good for him, forgot that he was not dealing with the timid, spiritless Indians of the Peruvian Amazon. He ordered in the gendarmes, and proceeded to flog the man, in full view of the crowd watching through the door of the patio. No doubt the Japanese would have had the courage to storm the house even without Tim; but his opportune arrival had quickened them with enthusiasm; they had the confidence of men fighting in a cause doubly just.

CHAPTER XV
THE RAID ON SAN ROSARIO

Tim was flushed with elation at his victory. With boyish impetuosity he had flung himself into the affair without a thought of consequences. He had driven away the interloper and regained possession of his father's house: a feat of which

he was inclined to be proud. As to the future his mind was blank.

He was helping himself to some of the dainties on the table in the dining-room when Romaña rushed into the house.

"I'm here first, you see," said Tim, with a laugh. "Pardo has run away."

"Por Dios, señorito! are you mad?" cried the man. "We shall have the Prefect's men from the town upon us in little more than an hour. Come away at once. We can take horses and ride into the hills before they catch us."

"Wait a little," said Tim, sobered in a moment as he realised for the first time what his impulsive action involved. "I can't run away and leave the Japs to face it. It was all my fault."

"They must take their chance. They can hide in the plantations to-night and make off to-morrow. There will be no more work for them here."

"But they can't get away in such a terrific hurry with their families and belongings. The Prefect's men would hunt them down and serve them as they've sometimes served the Indians. I'm responsible for them."

"This is folly!" cried Romaña, who was much agitated. "You can do nothing for them. There are not enough horses to carry them with us to the hills, even if they could ride, and they would be overtaken if they came on foot. Come, señorito, there is no time to lose."

"Don't talk: let me think," said Tim, leaning forward with his elbows on the table and his head between his hands.

He was fully enlightened now. He saw what his rash act had led to. These eighty Japanese labourers were not merely mutinous "hands"; they would be regarded as rebels commanded by an acknowledged Mollendist. He was responsible for them, and he knew enough about the Prefect's temper to be sure that they would meet with no mercy at his hands. What could he do for them? As soon as Pardo reached the town and told his story there, without doubt a company of gendarmes and troopers would ride out intent on vengeance. The situation seemed desperate.

Gone was now all feeling of triumph. Tim was simply miserable. It would be useless to bring the Japanese into the house and attempt to defend it. Even if they could maintain their position for a time they could not beat off the enemy with bill-hooks against rifles, and before long hundreds more would be summoned from San Juan. And then he started up at a sudden recollection. Durand had told him that there were but a hundred of the Prefect's men in San Rosario. The others were divided between San Juan and the camp in the hills. Was it possible to lead the Japanese into the town, swoop down upon the garrison, diminished by the despatch of troopers to the hacienda, and at least arm his men? It would be a desperate adventure, one not to be undertaken in cold blood; but the men were seething with excitement and jubilant at their success; and while

they were in this temper they might be capable of actions which at another time would appal them.

He jumped up and looked round for Romaña. Seeing that he was not in the room, he ran out into the patio and called for him. Romaña hurried in from the dark.

"I have two horses at the door, señorito," he said.

"Where are the Japs?" asked Tim.

"Out on the lawn. They are mad with joy. Come, señorito."

"I am going to lead them to the town," cried Tim, brushing past him and going out through the shattered door. Romaña stood for a moment paralysed with amazement, then followed Tim, who was hurrying towards the crowd. He heard him tell them what he intended to do; he heard them shout with enthusiasm; then he rushed back to the house, sprang on one of the horses, and galloped away into the darkness.

Tim explained to the men in detail, as quickly as the points occurred to him, what course he proposed to take. He would march rapidly to the town, enter by the east end, the quietest quarter, and lead them to the barracks. Only a few men were there; and if the attackers moved quietly, they might hope to surprise the garrison, seize the building, and supply themselves with arms from the armoury. He knew that some of the workers had pistols. These he sent to their huts to fetch their weapons, bidding them run all the way there and back. There was not a moment to lose; it was now a quarter of an hour since Pardo fled; by this time he was probably a third of the way to the town.

Impressing on the men that haste and silence were essential, Tim returned to the house in search of Romaña. But Romaña was not to be found. Seeing one horse where there had been two just before, Tim leapt to the conclusion that the man had taken fright and made good his own escape. His lip curled with disdain of his cowardice. He found Biddy Flanagan, told her to keep the servants quiet and attend to Captain Pierola, who lay wounded on the floor of the patio, then picked up the rifles which the gendarmes had cast aside in their hasty flight, and carried them out to the men. A few minutes afterwards he put himself at the head of the column, now increased by a score of Cholos, eager to share in the adventure, and set off at a rapid pace along the track to San Rosario.

He had spoken boldly and cheerfully to the men, but his mind was dark with misgiving. He could not be charged with lack of forethought now. As he marched his brain was busy. Nobody in San Rosario would dream of the audacious movement he was leading; no special guard would be maintained at the barracks; with the advantage of surprise he felt that a sudden swift onslaught might win the place. But what then? In a day or two at the most he would be besieged by an overwhelming force, and, unless aided by a popular rising against

the Prefect, his little band of untrained men must be annihilated. The one consolation was that by a preliminary success he would certainly gain time; and recollecting that the Japanese, if they had remained on the plantation, or fled over the open country, would have been at the mercy of pursuing cavalry, he felt that the course he had chosen was the wisest in the circumstances.

After marching for nearly a mile along the track, he struck off to the left, over a marshy wilderness that lay between it and the highroad east of the town. By this time, no doubt, a detachment of mounted men was already riding out to deal with the mutiny. Pardo would have seen to that. They would follow the direct path; it was essential that they should neither see nor hear the body of men hastening in the opposite direction.

Ten minutes after he had quitted the track, he heard the thud of hoofs and the clinking of metal in the distance. He instantly called a halt, waited until the sounds had dwindled away behind him, then hurried on still more rapidly than before. The diminution of the garrison would render his task easier; but it was important that he should accomplish it before the horsemen, finding that the birds were flown, had time to return to the town. Luckily he knew every yard of the ground, and chose his route unerringly even before the distant lights of San Rosario came into view to give him guidance.

Fifty minutes after starting he reached the eastern outskirts of the town. This was the best quarter. A few substantial houses were scattered irregularly, surrounded by their gardens, and separated by crooked streets and lanes which all debouched upon the plaza. It was in one of these streets, on the opposite side of the plaza from the gobernador's house, that the barracks were situated–a large two-storey building, once a mansion, but now reserved for the accommodation of the gendarmes and the irregular troops of the Prefect whenever great occasions brought them from San Juan. The outlying streets were strangely quiet, though a murmurous hum came from the direction of the plaza. Choosing the narrowest and least frequented lane, Tim led his silent force to the end of the street of the barracks.

Meanwhile the centre of the town was in a ferment of excitement. The arrival of the fugitives with news of the revolt led by the outlawed Inglés, the attack on the house, the murder (thus it was exaggerated) of Captain Pierola, was like the coming of a whirlwind. The wildest rumours flew through the town, and the whole populace flocked into the plaza to discuss them. One of the two lieutenants in the barracks immediately set off with a troop for the hacienda; the other, summoned from the house where he had been dining, sent a second troop into the plaza to keep order and check any revolutionary demonstration to which the news of the outbreak might give rise. Thus all things conspired to favour the bold plan which Tim had conceived.

The barracks occupied almost the whole of one side of the short street. Wide gates gave entrance to an open porch that cut the building in two. It was flanked on both sides by the lower floor, devoted to stores. Staircases led to the upper floor, in which were, on one side the quarters of the men, on the other the guardroom and armoury. Both right and left a palisaded balcony overlooked the porch. Beyond this was a long rectangular patio, bounded on three sides by the stables. The patio was surrounded by a high wall abutting on the gardens of the surrounding villas.

During the daytime the front gates were constantly open, and a sentry marched up and down the porch between the street and the patio. At night they were shut, and the sentry occupied his box just within. Tim had debated on the way whether to scale the rear wall or to rush the front entrance, and decided that the latter course had the better promise of success. The wall was spiked; if they safely surmounted it, to descend on the stable roof would cause a commotion among the horses, and before they could reach the main building they would have to cross the whole width of the patio, perhaps in the face of a hot fire. If the front gates were shut, the wicket would no doubt be opened in answer to a knock. Then his plan was to seize and silence the sentry, and send his men up the stairs, if possible before the alarm was given.

He halted at the end of the street, which was not overlooked by houses, and glanced up it towards the plaza. To his surprise and joy he saw a bar of light across the roadway at the position of the gates. They were open: evidently the surprising events of the evening had led to a modification or the neglect of the usual arrangements. The street was empty. Passing word along the line that the men were to follow at his heels as quickly as possible, he rushed along towards the open gates.

Within the porch the sentry at his box was talking to two of his comrades who, with their coats loosened, were leaning over the railing of the balcony on the guardroom side. The attackers had come within a few yards of the gates before the sound of their hurrying feet was audible above the hum of the excited crowd in the plaza. It awakened no alarm or suspicion; but the sentry moved leisurely to the street to see what was happening. He had just reached the gates when, before he could cry out, he was hurled to the ground, and a crowd of men dashed past and over him into the porch. The two men above stared in bewilderment for a moment; then, partially realising the situation, they ran back into the guardroom shouting with alarm.

By this time Tim was half-way up the stairs on that side. Some of his men followed closely; others were springing up the opposite staircase. As yet not a shot had been fired. But as Tim reached the balcony half a dozen mestizo soldiers of the Prefect came tumbling out of the guardroom, some loading their

rifles, some hastily flinging on their bandoliers. Tim shouted to them to surrender, emphasising the demand with a shot from his revolver. At such close quarters they could not fire their rifles. The suddenness of the attack, and the sight of the swarm of Japanese and Cholos pressing on with billhooks, struck them with panic. All but two threw down their arms at once; one struck at Tim with his clubbed rifle; Tim dodged the blow, and throwing out his left foot behind his opponent, flung himself with all his weight against the man and hurled him backwards to the floor. The sixth man ran to the window opening on the patio, and sprang out, falling with a crash. It was afterwards discovered that his arm was broken.

On the other side, meanwhile, a brisk fight was in progress. There were a dozen men in quarters, including the second lieutenant. All the rest were in the plaza or had gone to Mr. O'Hagan's hacienda. Roused by the noise, they seized their arms and rushed to the balcony. The officer reached the head of the staircase at the same moment as the first of the Japanese, and instantly dropped him with a revolver shot. This momentarily checked the assailants, giving time to the troopers to come forward to the lieutenant's support. When Tim, after his bloodless victory, ran back to the balcony, he saw on the opposite side a confused mass of men in hand-to-hand fight, hacking at each other with rifles, swords and billhooks. He could not fire for fear of hitting one of his own party. Leaping down the staircase, he dashed across the porch, up the other stairs, and flinging himself into the midst of the mêlée, brought the butt of his revolver down heavily on the officer's head, at the same time crying to the Peruvians that all was lost. They were already hard pressed; seeing their officer fall, and more Japanese and Cholos mounting behind the lad with the ruddy cheeks and fair hair, they gave up the unequal contest.

Locking them in their rooms, Tim hurried down to the porch. He ordered some of his men to close and bar the gates, and led another party up to find the armoury beyond the guardroom. The door of it was locked, but he burst the lock with a shot from his revolver, and, ordering the men to go in and help themselves, he ran back, recalled by a clamour at the gates.

On reaching the balcony, he found his men at grips with a number of the enemy who had been patrolling the plaza on horseback, and hearing the shots had galloped down the street to discover their cause. The greater number of Tim's party being on the floor above, the Peruvians had been strong enough to prevent the closing of the gates, and some had already penetrated into the porch. Tim sang out to the men behind him in the guardroom and armoury to line the balcony, and fired down among the enemy. He was soon joined by a dozen eager Japanese. At his order they poured a volley into the crowd below, taking care not to hit their comrades, who were partially sheltered behind the half-open gates.

The horsemen, thrown into confusion by this deadly attack from above, tried to wheel their horses and ride back into the street. This made the confusion worse than before. The horses plunged with fright and pain; several of the riders reeled from their saddles; in a few seconds the survivors fled in hopeless rout. The moment the last had gone the gates were slammed behind them and barred.

Running to a window overlooking the street, Tim saw more horsemen galloping from the plaza, followed by a shouting mob. He called his newly-armed men to his side, and ordered them to fire as soon as the troopers reached the barracks. One volley was enough. The horsemen reined up, wheeled about, and rode back in disorder, driving the shrieking crowd before them. The barracks were won.

CHAPTER XVI
A SIEGE AND A SORTIE

Tim had learnt his lesson against premature exultation. He did not at the barracks, as at the hacienda, allow his wits to be lulled by the heady incense of success. The flight of the troopers, the secure barring of the gates, gave him a breathing space in which he envisaged very clearly the dangers of his situation.

He was not much troubled about the men whom he had just defeated. They would probably take no further action until rejoined by the strong party who had ridden out to the hacienda. How long would that be? Nobody at the house would tell them in what direction the insurgents had marched. The Peruvian officer might suppose that they had fled to the hills, and if he pursued, it would be many hours before he could return with his troopers to San Rosario. But it was not unlikely that they had heard the sounds of firing, which would travel far across the open country in the night. In that case the party would gallop back at once. No doubt a messenger had already ridden from the town to acquaint them with what had happened, so that in all probability they would return within two hours. It was now nearly nine o'clock; by eleven the combined force, outnumbering Tim's band, would for their own credit's sake try to recapture the barracks. Behind walls Tim felt that he had a fair chance against them.

But this was only the first and the least of the dangers he had to anticipate. There were two hundred or more men in Mollendo's old camp in the hills: the news of the outbreak at the hacienda might already have been conveyed to

them, with a summons to ride back to the town. If they started as soon as the call reached them, they might arrive by six or seven o'clock; but Tim hoped that with Spanish procrastination they would put off their departure until the morning. There was a much more pressing peril. San Juan was only thirty miles away–ten miles nearer than the Inca camp. The Prefect was there! Doubtless he was possessed of full information, flashed to him from San Rosario by telegraph. Spanish though he was by blood and habit, he was prompt and vigorous in action; and with his present authority and future security at stake he would surely set off within a little of receiving the news–perhaps was already hurrying across the hills. The road was bad; a march by night could not be fast; but even at the worst, by five o'clock an overwhelming force might be pouring into the town.

Tim wished that he had had the forethought to send a man to cut the telegraph wire. That would have gained five hours at the least. But he could not think of everything; he was as yet a novice in things military; and he had had no one with whom to take counsel. He reflected bitterly on Romaña's desertion. Romaña was not a soldier; but he was twice Tim's age; he had had some experience with the Mollendists, and was shrewd and far-seeing. Tim was surprised and angry to find that the man was apparently a coward.

Thrown upon his sole resources, Tim tried to think of some means of meeting the threatening dangers. His case would be hopeless as soon as the Prefect arrived with his main body of troops, unless–Tim grasped eagerly at an idea that had flashed upon him. If he could send a message to his father, the Mollendists, though ill-equipped and weak in numbers, might push down from the hills by way of the river bed and reach San Rosario in time to give him help. But they were twenty miles beyond the Inca camp, and could not arrive before the Prefect unless the approach of the force from San Juan could be hindered. That was not impossible. A few men posted on the hill road just above the place where the Mollendists had snapped up the gobernador could hold in check a much larger number in the darkness, and gain a few precious hours. Tim resolved to attempt both–to despatch a messenger to his father, and a little band to the defile on the high road to San Juan.

He had just risen from his seat in the guardroom to select men for these tasks when there was a commotion below–a shout of alarm, followed by a moment's silence, then a cheer. He looked over the balcony, and saw Romaña pushing his way from the patio through the crowd of Japanese and Cholos to the foot of the staircase.

"You are safe, señorito?" Romaña called, seeing Tim looking down at him.

Tim did not reply: he felt hurt and indignant.

"You come when the fight is over," he said, when Romaña joined him. "I thought I could trust you."

"Caramba, señorito, what do you mean?" cried Romaña, his usual forbearance giving way under a rush of hot blood. "Do you take me for a coward? I have saved you from making a thorough mess of your own hasty scheme. You did not think of the telegraph wire: I did. That is all."

"You have cut it?"

"Yes. I galloped straight to the road. I hope I cut the wire before Pardo reached the town."

"Forgive me, Nicolas," said Tim penitently, grasping his hand. "I am an ass. I ought to have known you had not deserted me."

"Say no more, señorito," said Romaña, cooling at once. "I am rejoiced at your success. But there is still much to do."

"How did you get in?"

"I climbed the wall and got over the stable roof. That must be guarded, señorito. When the men come from the hacienda they will certainly try to get in. The Prefect will hang them if they do not recapture the place."

"It shall be done: I ought to have seen to it before, but I have been thinking of other things."

He went on to tell Romaña his recent decisions.

"I thought of both, señorito," said the man. "I debated whether to ride at once from the road to Señor O'Hagan; it would have gained much time; but I felt that I must first see what had become of you. The duty is mine: I know the way: no one else does. Give me a dozen men; we will sally out on horseback down the street and get away before the men in the plaza are ready to pursue us. Galdos has my horse in the wood half a mile away, but I need a fresh one."

"What about the supplies?" asked Tim, remembering the errand on which they had come.

"I took out two laden mules to the place where we had arranged to meet. Finding that you were not there, I tied them up in the wood and went to the house to fetch petrol, as I promised. Little did I imagine what I should see there!"

"I got tired of waiting and went myself. There are several petrol cans in the shrubbery. Of course I had no intention of fighting; but I simply couldn't stand Pardo thrashing Asumi, and when the other Japs began to attack I saw a chance. It was a mad thing to do: I didn't look ahead."

"It may turn out to be the best thing that could possibly have happened. But I must go, señorito; time is precious."

They went down to the stables together, and chose twelve of the best horses. Then they selected eleven of the Cholos, who were quite at home on horseback. Tim explained the nature of the service required of them. They were eager to start. The lamp in the entrance was extinguished. Tim kept watch on the street from the window of the guardroom, with several men armed with rifles.

The bars were quickly removed; the gates were thrown open; and the twelve men sallied out, turned to the right, and galloped at full speed down the street. There was instantly a rush from the plaza. But a volley from the windows checked the oncomers, and they fell back. Tim knew that before they could ride through the plaza, and down a side street in pursuit, the fugitives would have a start of at least half a mile. The gates were again closed and barred, and silence fell once more upon the scene.

Tim had little anxiety about Romaña. On reaching the outskirts of the town, he would follow a track parallel with a stream–the same which flowed past Romaña's cave–cross it a few miles to the west, then proceed across open country until he came to a wooden bridge over the river. He would then take to the high road, and in the course of little more than two hours arrive at the defile where Señor Fagasta had been captured. There posting the men, he would return to the river, and ride more rapidly upon the hard sand at the edge of the channel. In five or six hours he should reach the Mollendist camp. With nearly sixty miles to march, Mr. O'Hagan could not reach San Rosario before late on the next afternoon, even if he started with his mounted men only. But if the men posted at the defile were successful in delaying the Prefect's advance, the time gained might be enough to allow the Mollendists to secure the town.

Romaña's forethought in cutting the wire had diminished the most serious of Tim's anxieties. The telegraphist at San Rosario, of course, would soon have discovered the damage by the failure of response from San Juan, and after a certain delay no doubt a mounted courier had been despatched to convey the news–possibly a considerable party, for protection against enemies along the road. In all probability news of the affair at the hacienda had only just reached the Prefect, who might reasonably regard it as a trumpery disturbance that could be left to his subordinates. It would be some hours yet before he learnt of the attack on the barracks, and even if he then started immediately, Romaña would have placed his men on the defile before the force from San Juan could arrive.

When the gates had been secured, Tim had the lamp relit and called a parade of his men in the patio. His losses had been slight. Of the eighty-two left to him, seventy-five were still fit for service. All but eight were now armed with rifles; for the eight there were swords, bayonets, and lances, if they wished for other weapons than their own bill-hooks. A large proportion of the Japanese, having served in their national army, were expert with the rifle; and as there was plenty of ammunition in the armoury, and food in the stores on the ground floor, Tim felt himself very well situated, whether to withstand a siege or to repel an attack.

After parading the men, he told off a number of them to hold the roof of the stables on three sides of the patio. The rest were posted at all the windows

overlooking the street. The rooms were left in darkness.

About an hour after Romaña's departure the sounds from the plaza, which had died down into a dull murmur, suddenly revived. Shouts and cheers mingled with the clatter of hoofs and the jingle of accoutrements. The party from the hacienda had returned. Tim sent word to the men on the stables to be on the alert.

Some time passed. The plaza had again relapsed into silence. Tim guessed that the enemy were organising an attack. He wondered whether they would attempt an assault on the gates, or trust to escalading the patio walls. The gates were of hard wood studded with iron; the bars were stout; it would not be easy to break them down. If the enemy once forced their way in and made good their position, they would have command of the stores, for Tim could not risk a hand-to-hand fight in the entrance porch. The party from the hacienda, combined with those who had been patrolling the plaza and probably with a certain number of the Prefect's supporters in the town, would outnumber his own men by at least three to one. Tim thought his best plan in the event of an inroad was to hold the balconies and staircases, and keep the enemy at bay until they were forced to retire by exhaustion of their ammunition.

He soon found that the danger was to be faced both in front and rear. Warning came first from the stables. The silence was broken by a sudden clamour. From the surrounding gardens men were attempting to scale the wall on all sides–an impossible feat in face of the forty men at their posts of vantage on the stable roof. But this attack was only designed as a means of occupying the defenders while the main assault was proceeding in front. Looking up the street, Tim saw a number of dark shapes rushing from the plaza along the opposite side. He had ordered his men to hold their fire until the enemy were well in view. But the attackers did not come far down the street. They suddenly turned to their left, and disappeared within a doorway. Their object was soon evident. In a few minutes there was a burst of flame from the houses exactly opposite the barracks, and bullets flew through the open windows at which Tim and his men had posted themselves. At the same moment a much larger body of men, all on foot, came dashing along from the plaza, keeping on the near side of the street. It was plain that under cover of the rifle fire opposite a determined attempt was to be made to break in the gates.

Tim ordered half his men, taking what cover was possible, to reply to the fire across the street, and the other half to be ready to shoot down upon the enemy below. He saw at once that at the windows his second party would be at a great disadvantage, because they could not fire effectively without exposing themselves. So he sent them up a wooden ladder to the roof, where they would be in less danger themselves, while better placed for dealing with the assailants.

Soon both patio and street were ringing with the noise of battle. At the rear and sides the troopers who tried to mount the walls, some on ladders, some by clambering up the stonework, were hurled down by the men above them. In the front, bullets rang across the street in opposite directions, and poured from the roof upon the dense mass now at the gates. Tim heard a resounding crash below; the enemy had brought with them a heavy beam which they were using as a battering ram. In the almost total darkness it was impossible to discover the effect of the fire from the roof. That it was comparatively ineffectual was soon proved. Three times the thundering blows rang on the gates; at the third one of the wings gave way, and with a yell of triumph men began to pour into the porch.

Tim at once called his men from the windows and posted them on the balconies overlooking the entrance, whence they fired on the crowd surging in. Some of the men on the stable roof, seeing by the light of the lamp what had occurred, began to shoot across the patio. Taken thus between two fires, the front ranks of the enemy lost heart and tried to push back to the street. They were checked by their comrades still pressing forward, and for a minute or two the porch was filled with a solid mass of men, into which the Japanese poured their shot as fast as they could load. The enemy were thrown into utter confusion and panic. With yells of rage and pain they struggled among themselves, fighting each other in their desperate efforts to get through the half-open gate into the street. But for the steady shooting of the men on the roof, which cleared the ground opposite the entrance, not one would have issued forth alive. An advance of their comrades had been checked. The pressure relaxed; the way was open; and in five minutes after the gate was broken the survivors of the fight were rushing headlong back to the plaza, driving the mob before them, and pursued by shots from the men on the roof.

Tim ran downstairs and across the patio to learn how his men were faring there. The assailants had been beaten back all along the wall, and were slinking away through the gardens to rejoin their friends. There had been much commotion among the horses in the stables, and a good deal of damage done by their heels when they lashed out in terror of the shots. On looking in at the quivering animals Tim was seized with an idea: why not keep the discomfited enemy on the run? They had had two rather sharp lessons: a charge on horseback might have at least the effect of discouraging another attack on the barracks. By starting at once he might even yet overtake the fugitives before they all reached the plaza.

He called up the twenty Cholos he had left; in half a minute they had led all the remaining horses into the patio, and without waiting to saddle, sprang upon their backs and followed Tim to the gate. As they came to the street, Tim

saw that fortune favoured him. The men who had been firing from the opposite houses were at that moment issuing from the doorway some distance away, and moving off towards the plaza. With a wild whoop Tim led the charge. The enemy instantly picked up their heels and dashed for safety. Their comrades in the plaza were gloomily discussing their defeat. Only a few men who had been patrolling the square were mounted; the horses of the rest were ranged in a long line opposite the gobernador's house. At the sound of Tim's party galloping and the cries of the fugitives the whole body made a rush for their horses; but before they could cross the plaza the pursuers were upon them.

[image]

TIM LEADS A CHARGE

The place was ill lighted; the Prefect's men, even if they had not been flustered and disheartened, could scarcely have seen how small was the band clattering across the cobbles. The noise made by Tim's men, indeed, was worthy of a regiment, and being mingled with shouts and screams from the people who had been pushed back to the openings of the streets, the coolest of soldiers might have been deceived. These hirelings were not cool. One or two succeeded in mounting; the rest took panic and ran in all directions. Their horses caught the infection, and galloped riderless across the plaza, dashing in blind fear among the shrieking people. Men and animals fled helter-skelter into the dark streets and out into the open country. In a few minutes the whole garrison of San Rosario as a mounted force had ceased to exist.

Tim was prudent enough not to leave the plaza. He did not yet appreciate the full extent of his success. When the square was clear of the enemy, he hastened back to the barracks, blocked up the damaged gateway as well as he could, and then, feeling that he was safe for the rest of the night, sent his men to find a supper.

CHAPTER XVII
IN POSSESSION

Felipe Durand was enjoying an after-dinner cigar with Dr. Pereira when they

heard the first commotion in the town consequent upon Pardo's arrival from the hacienda. Regarding it as nothing more than a street brawl they went to a window overlooking the plaza, and watched the crowd gathering, and the gendarmes come from the direction of the barracks to keep order. After a few minutes they returned to their chairs.

Presently a servant entered, and reported what was being said in the town. A wild and exaggerated rumour had spread that the Mollendists had swooped in vast numbers on Mr. O'Hagan's hacienda; the Prefect's troops had been sent to drive them out.

"Young Tim did not tell me that anything of that sort was in contemplation," said Durand.

"It is a mad proceeding," said the doctor. "By all accounts the Mollendists are a very small party, and badly provided. I am surprised at O'Hagan."

"Perhaps it is a move of Tim's," suggested Durand. "He's mad enough for anything at times."

"That boy has as many lives as a cat. It's a marvel that he hasn't broken his neck long before this."

"He was just the same at school. If he fell from a tree he never seemed to hurt himself. I remember once at rugger–a sort of football, you know–he had a terrible collision with a forward twice his size, and we thought he was killed for a certainty. But he got up after a minute and rubbed his shins and chaffed the other fellow about his fat. 'Soft as a cushion,' he said, 'lucky for me.'"

They sat smoking and talking until a renewed uproar drew them again to the window. There they watched what ensued upon Tim's capture of the barracks. They came to the conclusion, surprising as it was, that the Mollendists had attacked in force. The rumours brought from below stairs magnified every detail. The numbers of the assailants were greatly multiplied; Dr. Pereira was inclined to believe that Mr. O'Hagan, of whose exploits in the Chilian war he knew, had himself organised a dashing descent on the town. It was only later, when Tim led the charge into the plaza, that the two onlookers had an inkling of the truth.

"It's Tim after all, the young demon!" exclaimed Durand.

"But he must be backed up," said the doctor. "He would never attempt such a foolhardy exploit unless he could rely on support from his father."

"You don't know Tim so well as I do, señor," said Durand.

"You must stay the night, Felipe. We can't tell what may be happening on the road, and you mustn't risk being shot. The affair is evidently much more serious than I thought. In the morning we shall learn the truth of it."

A little while after the plaza had been cleared and the excited populace had melted away, two of the principal men in the town, both strong opponents of

the Prefect, came to see Dr. Pereira. They pointed out that the town was now without responsible authorities. No gobernador had yet been appointed in place of Señor Fagasta, still under arrest; Captain Pierola, in command of the garrison, was reported killed; and next day the place would be in anarchy. They therefore begged the doctor to proclaim himself provisional gobernador, and to authorise the enrolment of special constables to keep order until matters developed.

"I don't think I can do that," said the doctor. "The town is now practically in the possession of the Mollendists. Any such action on my part would be resented by them, unless indeed I issued a proclamation in the name of Señor Mollendo. Do you suggest that I should do that?"

His visitors, one of whom was the principal lawyer in the town, hesitated. They recognised that to take such a step would be a burning of their boats. The Prefect was still to be reckoned with.

"My idea was to remain neutral between the two parties, señor doctor," said the lawyer, "and set up a provisional administration in the interests of the general order."

"That cannot be done without the consent of the gentleman now in military occupation," replied Dr. Pereira.

"But he is not in effective occupation, señor," the lawyer persisted. "He has withdrawn his men to the barracks."

"The Prefect's men are not in occupation, at any rate," said the doctor, dryly. "They have abandoned the town. The utmost that we can do is to send a deputation to the Mollendist leader, and ask him to authorise measures for the protection of the life and property of the civil population. I am willing to form one of such a deputation, and I suggest that you accompany me, señores."

"Let me come too, señor," said Durand eagerly.

"You had better remain here, Felipe," replied the doctor. "This is a matter for grave and reverend signors."

His eyes twinkled. He suspected that his visitors were as yet unaware of the identity of the "Mollendist leader," and relished the anticipated scene of Tim receiving the deputation. In a few minutes the three gentlemen set forth, the doctor bearing a note which Durand had hastily scribbled.

Meantime Tim, while his men were at supper, had been taking mental stock of the position. It did not occur to him that he was master of the town. No boy of his years and limited experience could suppose that by a single charge at the head of twenty men he had swept away all effective opposition. He did not know that the enemy had scattered in all directions over the surrounding country; and while he felt that they would probably not attack again during the night, he expected that they would rally and at any rate keep him closely invested pending the arrival of the Prefect. Consequently, after arranging for the efficient guard-

ing of the barracks during the remaining hours of darkness, he threw himself on Captain Pierola's bed to snatch a rest in preparation for the anticipated work of the day.

He was called up about midnight by one of the sentries, who reported that three men were approaching from the plaza under a flag of truce. He hurried to the gate, and was surprised to hear Dr. Pereira's voice in answer to the question he asked through the wicket.

"We come as a deputation on behalf of the citizens," said the doctor.

Tim threw open the wicket, and the three gentlemen entered. The lawyer and his friend stared when they recognised in the "Mollendist leader" the boy whom they regarded as a harum-scarum young giddy-pate. Tim's surprise equalled theirs when the doctor, who thoroughly enjoyed the situation, explained the object of their visit.

"We have come to you, as the gentleman in military possession of the town," said the doctor, "to request that you will take measures for the maintenance of civil order. The official garrison has withdrawn; the gobernador is unable to act; and we fear that disturbances may arise among the populace. We offer no opinion and take no sides in the dissensions which presumably have led to the present circumstances; we approach you merely in the interests of the general good."

The doctor's words were grave and formal, but Tim caught the humorous twinkle of his eyes. He knew that Dr. Pereira was no friend to the Prefect. Maintaining equal gravity, he tried to adjust his thoughts to the new situation. If the doctor had been alone, he would have spoken to him freely, and asked his advice. The presence of the other two Peruvians, whom he knew only slightly, imposed a reserve. Quick-witted as he was, for a moment he found himself at a loss. But when he realised the full import of Dr. Pereira's words, he pulled himself together, and said:

"I am honoured by your visit, señores. I will at once send men to patrol the plaza." A sudden idea struck him. "Perhaps it would be in order if I issued a proclamation."

"That is the usual formality, señor," said the lawyer, with professional approval.

"Then will you be good enough to draw it up for me, señor? You will employ the correct forms. Announce that I hold the town in the name of Señor Mollendo, and that it is under martial law until the civil government is re-established. You will find paper and ink in the guardroom upstairs."

The lawyer and his friend having departed to draw up the document, Tim was left alone with his old friend.

"Bravo, Tim!" said the doctor. "You have carried it off well."

"But is it true?" asked Tim eagerly. "Are we in possession of the town?"

"Without a doubt. You have only to act boldly. Toujours l'audace! The garrison have bolted; without good leadership they won't rally, and Captain Pierola is dead, I hear."

"He is only wounded," said Tim.

"He is not here, at any rate. The Mollendists have a strong party in the town, and if you put a bold face on it the Prefect's adherents will not dare to rise. Of course your father is near?"

"I hope so, señor. I have sent a messenger for him."

"You don't mean to say that you have done this on your own account, unsupported?"

"We *have* been rather lucky," said Tim with a smile.

The doctor uttered an ejaculation of amazement.

"You must tell me all about it presently," he said, as the lawyer reappeared with the proclamation. Tim, with an ingenuous blush, scrawled his signature at the foot: "Timothy O'Hagan, Lieutenant;" and with grave salutations the three gentlemen withdrew. At the moment of parting, Dr. Pereira put into Tim's hand the note written by Durand. Opening it, he read:

"Good old Tim! I wish I had been in the scrum. I am going to ask my pater if I may join you."

CHAPTER XVIII
THE ORDER OF THE NASTURTIUM

Tim sent twenty of the Japanese to patrol the plaza, to be relieved after two hours. Then he returned to bed, feeling immensely elated at the astonishing turn of affairs.

Early in the morning, a group of men were seen approaching under a flag of truce from the end of the street remote from the plaza. Some were leading horses. Their leader was alone admitted through the gate, while a party of Japanese with loaded rifles kept watch on the others from the windows of the guardroom. The man announced that he had come with his companions, all members of the Prefect's mercenary army, to offer their services to the Señor Inglés. They had been for weeks without pay; they had served the Prefect from necessity rather than

choice; and were ready to strike a blow for freedom.

Tim had a natural prejudice against turncoats. But he reflected that in this kind of warfare a wholesale change of sides was not uncommon. His father had expected that any Mollendist success would immediately result in a large accession of recruits, and he decided to accept the men's offer. When, however, later in the day, after his proclamation had been read in the plaza, more men came in, civilians of San Rosario as well as troopers of the Prefect's, he felt somewhat embarrassed. To admit more than a hundred to the barracks seemed to him rather hazardous. Such volatile soldiers of fortune might change sides again at any moment, and turn their arms against him. He therefore resolved to take no more than fifty into the barracks, bidding the rest to remain in their own homes, and hold themselves ready to take the field when summoned. If he could have been quite sure of their loyalty he would have despatched them to reinforce the party at the defile, but he felt that he must not run any risks for the present, hoping that ere long his father would arrive to take over his responsibilities, which were beginning to weigh upon him.

Just before midday a messenger arrived from Romaña. He reported that early in the morning he had had a brush with a small advance body of the enemy, who had retired after the exchange of a few shots. Romaña himself had only reached the spot a few minutes before the enemy appeared. He had ridden to the Mollendist camp with the news of Tim's movements, and Mr. O'Hagan, after a momentary outburst of anger, had promised to march at once for the town. But his progress would necessarily be slow, owing to the fact that more than half his men were unmounted, and to the need for care in slipping past the enemy in the Inca camp.

It seemed to Tim that the most serious element in the situation was the danger of an advance in force along the San Juan road. The men who had been checked by Romaña were probably few in number; the passage of a really strong detachment could not long be seriously disputed by so small a party. It must be reinforced at once. Here Tim was in a difficulty. He could not part with his own men; on the other hand, his new recruits had as yet given no proof of their loyalty. He saw that he must take risks to avoid greater risks, and decided to send a hundred men up the road to support Romaña. He arranged also for relays of mounted men to post themselves on the road and bring him early news of any fresh attack on the defile. To guard against danger from the Inca camp he despatched a few mounted men along the road in that direction, to keep watch and get in touch with the Mollendists as they approached. The rest of his little force he kept under arms in the barracks, ready to launch them in whatever quarter their support might be required.

In San Juan, meanwhile, the news of the successive disasters suffered by

the official troops had struck the Prefect like thunder-claps. He had been busily organising his forces for a decisive blow against the Mollendists, and was finding it necessary, much against the grain, to part with a large portion of the money he had recently obtained from the gobernador and from Mr. O'Hagan's safe, in making up arrears of pay for his unruly mercenaries. The messengers and fugitives who had got through from San Rosario carried with them so startling a story of the vast numbers who had attacked the town that he hesitated to move out until he had made careful arrangements for securing his position at the capital. He had contented himself with sending a single troop along the road to San Rosario, to feel for the enemy and discover what the position really was. The speedy return of these men, with report of having been ambuscaded at the defile, filled him with as much uneasiness as dismay. Knowing how precarious was his hold upon the loyalty of his forces, he sought to attach them to him by lavish promises and considerable advance sums as earnest of his sincerity. As soon as day dawned he pushed on his preparations with feverish activity.

At San Rosario the day passed without incident. There was great excitement in the town, but no breach of order. Everybody knew by this time that the attack overnight had been led by the young foreigner, and he was so popular a person that the majority of the citizens were not at all displeased with his proclamation. The gendarmes who had held the gobernador captive in his house having fled, Señor Fagasta came forth into the plaza, and made an attempt to assert his authority. But being assured by Dr. Pereira that the reins of power were now definitely in other hands, he retired to his patio, exchanged his official dress for his old alpaca coat and a Panama hat, and solaced himself with strong cigars and many copitas of brandy for his compulsory withdrawal from public life. During the day sundry groups of Peruvian youths and other idlers ventured timorously along the street from the country end, and gazed open-mouthed at the gates of the barracks and at the smiling Japanese posted at the windows; but after a time Tim thought it advisable to keep the street clear, and posted a couple of his men at the end to keep off intruders.

Early next morning word was brought from his advanced scouts that the Mollendist army had been sighted far up the western track. Every few minutes further reports arrived. Tim, all tingling with excitement, paced up and down the guardroom, wondering whether he ought to remain at his post, or whether he might ride out to meet his father. Presently he heard that a crowd of the townsfolk were pouring out into the country to hail the Liberator. At this news boyish impetuosity prevailed over all considerations of form. Rushing to the stables, Tim sprang on a horse and galloped out, down the street, and through the rabble.

He met the ragged company a mile from the cross-roads, marching, horse

and foot, at the heels of Mollendo and Mr. O'Hagan.

"Hallo, Father!" Tim shouted as he dashed up.

"You young scamp!" cried Mr. O'Hagan, who was nevertheless delighted with the scamp. He had begun to think that Tim's action in forcing his hand was going to bear good fruit: he had picked up several recruits on the way.

"Thank God you're safe!" he continued, clasping the boy's hand. "It was terribly rash of you, my boy: what your poor mother would say I don't know: I don't like to think about it. You have fairly taken the wind out of my sails; *you* ought to be generalissimo, bedad! Seriously, you have set the ball rolling to some purpose. Mollendo is in ecstasies."

Mollendo had tactfully ridden on, so that the meeting of father and son might be private. And being met at this point by some of his chief supporters in the town, he went forward with them, leaving word that he wished Lieutenant O'Hagan to follow him to the gobernador's house.

"You had better cut off and get a wash, my boy," said Mr. O'Hagan. "You're as black as a sweep."

"I don't wonder. I haven't had time to wash; but I'll ride back to the barracks and soon follow you. Old Moll looks considerably bucked."

"He is. A word of advice: don't call him Old Moll in the hearing of the men, and don't laugh when he addresses you."

"I don't mind so long as he doesn't kiss me," said Tim, and rode away.

Half an hour afterwards he rode into the plaza, blushing at the *vivas* that burst from the throats of the rag-tag and bobtail who were assembled at the sides, kept back by the armed Japanese. He found Mollendo in the official chamber, with Mr. O'Hagan, Dr. Pereira, the lawyer, and other notables of the town. Mollendo rose from his chair, advanced to meet Tim, and before the boy could draw back kissed him on both cheeks.

"I cannot sufficiently express my delight and gratitude, Señor Lieutenant O'Hagan," he said. "I heard some particulars of your noble conduct from Nicolas Romaña; the señor doctor has related your magnificent defence of the barracks; you have displayed the transcendent military aptitude of your race, and proved yourself a compeer of the illustrious Wellington, who so heroically defended the liberties of the land of my forefathers against the tyranny of the Corsican. I feel that I can best signalise this great occasion by promoting you to a colonelcy in the army of liberation. Viva Colonel O'Hagan!"

Tim had often laughed at the perfervid orations he had heard delivered by Peruvians, but he felt more abashed than amused now.

"Old gasser!" he thought. "Why can't he talk sense!" But his reply was very polite. "Thank you, excellency," he said; "you are very good, but if you don't mind I will remain as I am for the present. It was all a sort of accident; there wasn't

really much of a fight, and–and—-"

Mr. O'Hagan interposed as Tim found words fail him.

"Take my thanks also, excellency, for the honour you propose to confer on my son; but he is very young, and I think he should earn his promotion gradually."

"I defer to you, my dear general. I am charmed by your son's modesty–a virtue that is ever the attribute of great men. But I intend to establish an order of merit for distinguished service under the new republic"–here every one started–"it shall be styled the Order of the Nasturtium; and your son shall be the first recipient of the insignia."

This announcement fell rather flat after the startling declaration of Mollendo's intentions, made so casually. Mollendo had in fact determined to form a republic, independent of Peru, which had always failed to exercise efficient sovereignty in this remote province east of the Andes. The audacity of his scheme appealed to the imagination of the Peruvians present. After the first moments of surprise they hailed Mollendo as Don Carlos, the first President, and the lawyer asked eagerly that his excellency would allow him to draw up a proclamation. That historic document, when it appeared, bore many traces of Mollendo's own inspiration. He was nothing if not eloquent, and the sounding phrases which he dictated were calculated to impress a people peculiarly susceptible to fine language. The proclamation was taken to the only printing-press which San Rosario could boast, and within a few hours of Mollendo's arrival the pink leaflets were distributed broadcast.

There resulted a further rush of recruits. The people were captivated by the idea of an independent republic. Before evening the President's army had swollen to nearly five hundred men. This gave Mr. O'Hagan more pleasure than flamboyant proclamations and the founding of orders, which he regarded as premature and theatrical. He took up his quarters with Tim in the barracks, and pleased the boy intensely by discussing the military position with him. The important matter was to hold the Prefect in check, and at the same time prevent a junction of his forces from San Juan with the men in the Inca camp. These latter were probably now on the move, though they, like the Prefect, might be holding back through alarm at the exaggerated reports brought to them by any fugitives who had retreated in that direction. To save their face, runaways always overstate the numbers of the force that has discomfited them.

The fortunes of the Mollendists were decidedly in the ascendant. Their numbers, it was true, were still much inferior to those at the Prefect's disposal; but a few hours had already worked wonders, and time was in their favour–if the time were not too long drawn out. Recruits would no doubt continue to flock in: Mollendo's would be regarded as the winning side; but it was necessary to keep the machine in motion. If once the impetus due to the recent successes was lost,

there would be a tendency to run back in the opposite direction.

Mr. O'Hagan decided to hold the crossroads, three miles west of his own house, with a force sufficient to prevent the advance of the enemy from the Inca camp, and to employ the greater part of his troops in defending the defile on the San Juan road.

"You will take command at the crossroads, Tim," he said. "Keep watch on those fellows from the north; if they try to force a passage, either this way or to San Juan, prevent them. But sit tight; don't go adventuring, and don't force an action if the enemy are quiet. I may need you at any moment to reinforce me against the Prefect. We have the advantage at present. The Prefect's two forces are separated by fifty miles of hills; we hold the only practicable routes; to effect a junction they'll have to make a detour of a hundred miles or more. You and I will be within touch, and can work together. My plan is to beat the enemy in detail–just as you have done, my boy."

"Inherited instinct, Father," said Tim with a sly look.

Mr. O'Hagan laughed.

"I don't know what your mother would say," he remarked. "Mollendo is sure to send his wife word of his new dignity. You'd better write a note for your mother to go with mine and the President's. Don't say too much: all that she really wants to know is that you are safe. The rest won't interest her."

"I'm not so sure of that," Tim thought.

CHAPTER XIX
PARDO SCORES A TRICK

Before putting his plans in action, Mr. O'Hagan went to the gobernador's house (now styled the Palace of Liberty) to lay them before Señor Mollendo. He supposed that the President, preoccupied with the administrative business of the infant republic, would cease to concern himself with the details of the campaign. A surprise awaited him. Mollendo approved his plans, but said that he would himself accompany the main force. His presence and his eloquence were, he thought, indispensable to success.

"Moreover, general," he said blandly, "since your son, with commendable modesty, has declined the colonel's commission which I offered him, it will be necessary for form's sake to appoint an officer of that rank to command the sec-

ond army. I recommend for that honourable post Señor Zegarra, a gentleman of proved loyalty, upon whom I have just conferred a colonel's commission."

Mr. O'Hagan was annoyed. Señor Zegarra, the second of the trio who had formed the deputation to Tim, was a retired architect, with no military experience. Still, he was an amiable man, and Mr. O'Hagan hoped by a little judicious and tactful handling to prevent any interference with his plans.

Tim laughed heartily when his father returned and told him of the President's action.

"Old Moll means to be boss," he said.

"Old meddler!" grumbled Mr. O'Hagan. "However, it can't be helped. I'll get Zegarra to make you chief of staff, and if you go gently with him you can see that he doesn't upset the apple-cart."

Tim was secretly not ill-pleased at the change. It would give him, he hoped, greater freedom of action. As commander of the force he would have been tied to it. He could not leave his men. And since he had already made up his mind to fetch the petrol cans which he had concealed in the shrubbery, and make use of the motor-bicycle again, he needed no consolation for being superseded.

Mr. O'Hagan made a point of seeking out old Pedro Galdos, and thanking him for arranging his escape from prison. Knowing that the caballero, poor as he was, would disdain a pecuniary reward, Mr. O'Hagan had hit upon a more excellent way. He asked him to accept the appointment of commissary-general to the forces, taking care to couch the offer in the flowery terms that a Peruvian loves. Galdos accepted with dignity, straightened his shrunken old frame, and went off to harass all the provision dealers in the town.

In the afternoon the two forces rode out, Mr. O'Hagan and the President at the head of about 350 men, Tim and Señor Zegarra with 150, including his Japanese. These were on foot; all the rest were mounted. Mr. O'Hagan marched towards San Juan, Tim to the cross-roads north of the town. On reaching his post, carrying out his father's instructions, he set his men to throw up a light earthwork at the intersection, and rendered the woods on each side impassable by an abattis. He sent a number of horsemen forward for several miles on both the eastern and western tracks, to watch for the enemy and give timely warning if they should approach from the Inca camp.

Señor Zegarra was, as Mr. O'Hagan had said, a very amiable gentleman; and when Tim, after the bivouac had settled down, announced that he wished to fetch his motor-bicycle, which might be useful in scouting, the new-made colonel gave a gracious approval. Tim was rather perplexed as to the best way to set about it. To begin with, he had no petrol; but that difficulty was easily solved. He picked out four of his most trusty Japanese, explained to them clearly where they would find the cans he had hidden, and sent them through his father's plantations

to bring them in. They would also report what they could discover about the state of affairs at the house: he thought it scarcely likely that Pardo had ventured back again. It was probably deserted.

But, having the petrol, how could he bring back the motor-cycle? To walk to the cave would be a long and wearisome job: to ride seemed to mean that on returning he must leave the horse behind. He could not ride both horse and cycle. He might, of course, take horsemen with him, and leave his own steed with them; but the existence of the cave was known only to Romaña and two others, and he thought it would be as well to keep the secret which was not his own. But before the Japanese returned laden with the petrol cans he had solved the problem. He would ride out on horseback, carrying just enough petrol to last for the run, leave the horse with one of his vedettes some distance from the cave, and go on alone for the cycle. The horse could be brought back at leisure.

When the petrol arrived, he filled two flasks and slung them on his saddle-bow. The messengers reported that all was quiet at the house. It appeared to be locked up and uninhabited. Tim suspected that Pardo had been among the men who had fled from the town, and had very likely gone to San Juan to stir up the Prefect. The loss of the hacienda would be a stinging blow to him. Tim wondered what had become of old Biddy and the other servants, and made up his mind to take the first opportunity of finding out.

He set off, rode along his chain of vedettes, and halting at the man nearest the cave on the San Rosario side, dismounted and proceeded on foot. In a few minutes he returned on the cycle, much to the surprise of the vedette. Colonel Zegarra smiled paternally when he rode into the camp, and made a laughing allusion to the gobernador's ludicrous appearance on that historic occasion a few days before. To Tim it seemed to have happened weeks ago.

The little force was not provided with tents. Men and officers slept on saddle cloths, spread in glades among the trees. The situation was far from pleasant. The low ground was infested with mosquitoes and other insects, whose pertinacious attentions kept awake many more than those who were on sentry duty.

During the night Tim resolved to make a circular reconnaissance next morning, if there was no warning of the enemy's advance. On his cycle he could cover the ground much more rapidly than on horseback, and, with the zeal of a novice, he was eager to examine the paths minutely from a strategical point of view. He would go by the western and return by the eastern path, trusting to the speed of his machine if he came in touch with the enemy and were pursued.

Colonel Zegarra raised no objection when Tim diplomatically suggested the importance of obtaining a thorough knowledge of the ground. The nominal commander was in fact a figure-head, conscious of his own ignorance, and quite content to leave everything to his chief of staff, and to reap the credit of the

successes which he hoped that energetic young man would gain.

Tim rode off immediately after breakfast. On the way he passed the vedettes strung out at intervals of about three miles, and leaving the last vedette behind, near the cave, sped on beside the river. The only serious risk he had to guard against until he reached the cross-track leading to the eastern path was the possibility of meeting a party of the enemy approaching from round a bend. In such a case he might have scant time to turn his machine; indeed, in many places he would have to dismount to do so, owing to the narrowness of the track. If this occurred on a rising gradient, he might be overtaken before he could get away. But he had all his wits about him, and reflected that after all the enemy, if they moved, would probably follow the more direct road past Durand's house.

He arrived at the spot where his father's party had halted while Romaña scouted along the cross-track. Turning to the right, he rode for some little distance along this track, then suddenly made up his mind to return to the river, approach a little nearer to the camp, and leaving the machine well hidden, climb up to the ridge and try to see what the enemy were doing. From the top there was an uninterrupted view for many miles. The climb proved an even stiffer business than he expected, and on gaining the summit, hot, out of breath, and with trembling legs, he was disgusted to find that the Inca camp was too distant for him to distinguish anything very clearly without the aid of field-glasses. He saw figures moving about in the enclosure, but there was no sign, on the track or in the camp itself, of any general movement. It was quite possible that the events of the past two days were still unknown there. The fugitives from the town would naturally have turned towards San Juan, which was nearer than the Inca camp, and much more easily accessible. But the lack of communication between the camp and San Rosario struck Tim, raw hand though he was, as evidence of astonishing neglect of ordinary military precautions.

Returning to his machine, Tim rode along the cross-track, reversing the direction of his night escape, which already seemed ancient history. He was careful to profit by the screen of trees on his left hand, and so keep out of sight from the spot where Mollendo's scouts had been posted; and he approached the fork warily. There was no one in sight, either up or down the eastern track. He wheeled to the right, and rode on towards his own camp at the cross-roads.

Only once before had he travelled this part of the track on his cycle–when he returned home after being ransomed. He remembered how difficult he had found it, both when riding down, and when marching up with his captors. It was uneven, tortuous, and with many gradients. Its general tendency was downhill, but here and there it rose so steeply that, in spite of the power of his engine, he had to alight and push the machine. At similar descents he had some trouble in holding it in with his brakes, and where the track twisted and ran downhill at

the same time, for safety's sake he dismounted again, and found that wheeling down was even more difficult than pushing up. But the worst was over when he arrived within about three miles of Durand's house. From this point the track ran almost uninterruptedly downhill, and was fairly smooth, and he sped along gaily at the rate of sixty miles an hour.

A downward run of about a mile brought him to the wooden footbridge spanning a deep fissure that cut across the track. For two hundred yards above the bridge the machine was quite beyond control; even a slight rise in the last fifty yards failed to check his speed appreciably. He dashed on to the rough timbers at a force that made him tremble for the framework of the cycle, and not until he was fifty yards up the gentle gradient on the farther side was he able to reduce his speed to a reasonable rate.

"I must have been going a tremendous lick that time," he thought, after these breathless moments. "Wonder I didn't come a cropper!"

When he reached Durand's house he decided to call and ask whether Felipe had obtained his father's consent to join the President's forces. He came away with what is colloquially termed "a flea in his ear." Señor Durand met him at the door, refused to let him see Felipe, and bundled him off as if he were a tramp. The gentleman acted very conscientiously on the old maxim that you go safest in the middle. He had subscribed to the funds of both factions impartially, and having no faith in the power of either to maintain a permanent superiority he bluntly declined to allow his son to take any part in the struggle. Tim, as he turned away, caught sight of his friend looking at him disconsolately from a window, and with a grimace which meant "Rotten bad luck, old man!" he resumed his ride.

It was early afternoon when he arrived in camp. He made a formal report to his amiable chief, whose wife and daughters had come out to admire him in his new role. Several other townspeople were chatting with their friends. Tim was very hungry after his long outing, and extricating himself from the flattering attentions of the ladies, he went away to get something to eat. Everything had been quiet during his absence. Galdos had brought a fresh supply of provisions. No news had been received from Mr. O'Hagan.

After a good meal Tim, finding that there was nothing to do except talk to the ladies, whom he thought quite out of place in a military camp, decided to ride over to his house, see for himself what his messengers had reported on the previous evening, and get a much-needed change of clothes. It was only three miles away. Leaving the cycle to be cleaned by one of the Japanese, he mounted a horse and set off. He found the house apparently deserted. The garden was trampled; the place had already taken on the signs of neglect; doors and windows were closed, and the shattered glass of the patio entrance had been replaced by boards.

Tim wondered what had become of the household. The mestizo servants had possibly taken, shelter with friends in the town; perhaps old Biddy Flanagan had sought a refuge with Señora Pereira. He tied his horse to a post and tried the front door. It was locked. Going round to the back, he found that the window of his bedroom had not been fastened. He opened it and climbed in. As he passed through the room into the patio he fancied he heard a slight sound somewhere in the house: but after listening for a moment decided that he was mistaken. All the same he moved on tiptoe, feeling an unaccountable nervousness.

He went from the patio into the corridor, glancing through the open doors into the rooms as he passed. They appeared to be just as they were left, except that the table in the dining-room was cleared. He came to the office. The door was shut, but not locked. He opened it and went in. The first thing that caught his eye was the safe, open and empty. Then he noticed a hole in the floor. The matting had been taken up, and two or three of the boards removed. At the edge of the hole lay a quantity of plate, some silver ornaments from the dining-room, the ormolu clock from the drawing-room, several porcelain vases, and other articles of more or less value.

All this he took in at a glance. Before he had time even to guess at the explanation of the strange scene there was a rush from behind the door, and he found himself grasped from the rear by two men. He tried to wrench himself away, dragging his captors about the room. It was useless to cry for help; he wished he had brought somebody with him. He managed to get one of his arms free, and twisting himself round, hit out at the man now in front of him, whom he did not recognise. There was some satisfaction in knowing that the fellow would have a black eye. But at this moment the other man flung a cloak over his head. With his one free hand he tried to tear it away, but it was drawn tighter and tighter across his mouth. His arm was caught again; he gasped for breath; his struggles became feebler; and by and by he lost consciousness.

When he came to himself, with a racking pain in his head, he found himself on the floor, gagged and securely bound. Pardo, now alone, was bundling the valuables together. Tim watched him as he corded them in a strip of canvas. In a moment Pardo glanced at him, and seeing his eyes open, smiled, and began to talk, while still going on with his occupation.

[image]

THE HOLE IN THE FLOOR

"Buenos dias, señor capitan," he said with a sarcastic intonation. "This is a

little surprise, is it not? Not very pleasant; no. But strange as it may seem to you at this moment, I bear you no ill will personally. Your brigand father, to be sure, has treated me abominably. He has insulted the honour of a Peruvian gentleman, and that is an offence which, as you know, is frequently, and justly, avenged with blood. But you!–you are just a foolish boy; your impulses run away with you, and one is naturally lenient to the indiscretions of youth."

He paused while straining at the cord, then resumed:

"But one has to consider the public interest; and in fulfilment of my public duty I have felt it necessary to put a check upon your personal freedom. Having already had experience of similar restraint, you will no doubt be able to take your present condition with philosophic equanimity. If I am not mistaken, you owed your release on the former occasion to the payment of a ransom. Well, events sometimes repeat themselves. That lies in the discretion of his excellency the Prefect, whom I am about to join; he shall decide what to do with his prisoner."

Here he tied the last knot and stood erect, looking down at Tim with a sardonic grin that made his blood boil.

"But it would be inconvenient to take you with me," Pardo went on. "We might meet some of your bandit friends, who would probably jump to rash conclusions. Having a careful regard for your safety, I must leave you here, but I trust your solitude will not be protracted. In the public interest I ought perhaps to shoot you; but perhaps your market price now exceeds £250; you may be more valuable alive than dead. That thought will console you during your enforced seclusion. There is one little difficulty which it would be wrong not to mention. If any misadventure should befall me on my way to the Prefect, the secret of your hiding-place will be lost. That would be very regrettable, but I must ask you to consider that the responsibility will lie with your friends the brigands."

At this moment the second man entered.

"Is all ready?" asked Pardo.

"Yes; I have secured the horse."

"Very well. Oblige me by pulling up another board."

The man wrenched up the plank. Then the two lifted Tim, and bundled him into the cavity like a sack.

"*A reveder*, señor capitan," Pardo called through the hole.

The boards were replaced. Tim was in darkness. For some minutes he heard the men moving about above him, and the faint sound of laughter. Then their feet dragged heavily on the floor: no doubt they were removing the bundle. The footsteps died away; and Tim was left in solitude and silence.

The cavity into which Tim had been thrown had been excavated for the sake of keeping the rooms above dry, and extended beneath the house from end to end. It was not a pleasant place. The ground was damp; the atmosphere was

stuffy; air could enter only by one narrow grating. Its humidity and the subtropical heat favoured the multiplication of innumerable insects, and Tim had not been there many minutes before the voracious creatures discovered him and began to make the most of their opportunity and their victim's helplessness. They crawled over his hands, up his sleeves, upon his face, into his hair. He did his best by shaking his head and twitching his features to rid himself of the tormenting pests; but they pricked and stung with great determination and vigour, and he was soon in pain and distress.

If only he could have removed the gag he would not have felt so utterly helpless. Not that shouting would have been of any use in an empty house, but the power to groan would have seemed a luxury. And when by and by he fancied that he heard shuffling footsteps about the house, he struggled in his bonds until he felt bruised and lacerated. All was in vain. His head began to ache; ideas the most incongruous jostled in his feverish brain. He tried to collect himself and keep his mind fixed; but he could not control his thoughts. Recollections of the Black Hole of history came to harass him, and in alarm and terror lest he should wholly lose his wits he strained his muscles to the uttermost. The effort exhausted him, and presently he fell into a dull stupor, in which he was conscious of nothing.

CHAPTER XX
PARDO LOSES A TRICK

At a late hour that night a rather weary horseman rode into the Prefect's camp, a few miles beyond the defile which Mr. O'Hagan was holding with his 400 men. News of the Mollendist extravagances in San Rosario having reached San Juan, the Prefect with a sudden burst of energy moved out with a motley force of 1500, and established himself on the hills in readiness to force the passage next day. The horseman sought out the Prefect's quarters, in a sheltered glade some distance from the track, and was checked every few yards by sentries demanding the countersign. The Prefect was always very careful that all proper precautions were taken for the safeguard of his person.

Pardo was rather annoyed by these frequent interruptions. He was very tired. The roundabout route which he had been forced to take by the presence of the enemy across the road had kept him for many hours in the saddle. He had

hidden the loot from his late master's house; but, like all traitors, he did not trust the man who had assisted him, and almost wished that he had not left the spoils and his friend behind. But, knowing the kind of men who formed the bulk of the Prefect's army, he had prudently decided not to bring valuables within their reach and expose them to temptation.

He came to the last of the chain of sentries, and requested an interview with the Prefect.

"His excellency is asleep, señor," said the man dubiously. "It is very late."

"Tell his excellency that Señor Miguel Pardo desires to see him," returned Pardo with impatience.

The man durst not leave his post, but summoned a comrade, who conveyed the message.

"His excellency cursed and declined to see you until the morning, señor," said the man on his return.

Now, so far as Pardo knew, there was no need for haste. He had taken great care to gag and bind Tim very thoroughly. He had left the house locked up and the windows fastened, and even if anybody should break in, it was unlikely that the hiding-place beneath the floor of the office would be suspected and the prisoner discovered. But Pardo was eager to conclude a scheme which he had ingeniously concocted. He had also a rather exaggerated notion of his importance. So he sent the messenger back again, to say that he had something of great moment to communicate, and begged the Prefect to see him at once.

After a little delay he was admitted to his excellency, whom he found reclining on a camp bed in the open air; tents were not required in this rainless region.

"What is this important matter that justifies the disturbance of my rest?" asked the Prefect, rather haughtily.

"I regret the necessity, excellency," said Pardo, "but I think when you have heard me you will consider me justified."

"Well, say on."

"Your excellency would no doubt be glad to be rid of the man O'Hagan and his boy?"

"Caramba! I agree with you. Without them the brigands would be easily dealt with, and this ridiculous republic would tumble like a house of cards. You have some plan?"

"I have, excellency; but I beg you not to demand particulars. I have means of getting rid of them both. It has cost me a great deal of labour and not a little danger."

"Name your price," said the Prefect impatiently. "And I warn you to be moderate, for this expedition is draining me."

"It will not cost you a peseta, excellency. All that I ask is that you will bestow on me, free of taxes, the full ownership of O'Hagan's hacienda."

"Por Dios! That is your idea of moderation! The hacienda produces several thousand pounds a year. Not cost me a peseta, indeed! You are presumptuous, señor."

"What I shall do is worth the price, excellency. O'Hagan has great military capacity. The Mollendist cause is gaining ground. A single reverse will break up your army, and even if you win you will have endless trouble while the Inglés is at large."

The Prefect reflected. He had reckoned on making a large income out of Mr. O'Hagan's estate. He might still do so, even if he acceded to Pardo's terms. What he gave he could also take away. When the insurrection had been scotched, he could squeeze Pardo until he became troublesome, and then confiscate the property a second time. After a show of hesitation he agreed to the proposal, and did not demur when Pardo asked him to sign his name to a paper with which the man with admirable forethought had come provided.

Pardo took his leave. He might now have thought himself justified in seeking repose, but impatient greed still urged him on. He mounted his horse, rode through the lines, and did not halt until he had reached the Mollendist outposts, whom he approached under a flag of truce. It was perhaps fortunate that they were not Mr. O'Hagan's Japanese workmen. It was fortunate, too, that he did not encounter Romaña. He was taken to Mr. O'Hagan, who lacked the luxury of a camp bed: his couch was a bundle of straw.

"It's you, is it?" said Mr. O'Hagan dryly, as he recognised his visitor. "Going to turn traitor again?"

Pardo bit his lips; there was a dangerous gleam in his eyes. But he curbed his anger: he was a man of policy.

"I have the honour to inform you, señor," he said coldly, "that your son is a prisoner."

Mr. O'Hagan went pale. This was an unexpected blow. But he said nothing.

"The Prefect is, as you are aware, not so complaisant as the brigand Mollendo," Pardo continued. "He will not release the boy for a paltry £250. He will not accept any sum as ransom for so mischievous a rebel."

He paused, as a cat releases a mouse for a moment, for the pleasure, it would seem, of prolonging its victim's agony.

"What have you come here for?" cried Mr. O'Hagan impetuously. "Merely to harass me, you—-"

He checked himself. It was no good abusing the man.

"I come to make a proposal," said Pardo. "Your son is at present my prisoner; it rests with you whether I hand him over to the Prefect, and then!..." He expressed

his meaning by a gesture. "Or whether he is released, and allowed to rejoin you. My terms are quite simple, but absolutely unconditional. They are not open to discussion. You will make a formal assignment of your estate to me; you will then leave the country. Your son's life depends on your prompt acceptance."

Mr. O'Hagan sprang up.

"What is to prevent me from shooting you, you villain?" he cried, overmastered by his rage.

Pardo shrank from him. He felt a chill run down his spine like a trickle of cold water. But he recovered himself in a moment.

"The honour of an Englishman will prevent you," he said with an air of assurance. "Besides, if I die, your son dies. Nobody but myself and one other knows where he is. He will starve!"

Mr. O'Hagan shivered. Pardo quailed before his blazing eyes. For a moment there was silence; then Mr. O'Hagan, putting a restraint upon himself, said:

"If I assign my estate to you—-"

"Discussion is mere waste of time," Pardo interposed. "The conditions are peremptory. You must not only assign your estate to me but leave the country. That is final."

"Go away," said Mr. O'Hagan.

"I cannot go without an answer."

"I will send for you–presently, when I have made up my mind–in a few minutes."

Pardo withdrew, lit a cigarette, and strolled up and down. He felt very confident, and flattered himself on his astuteness. He was by no means so sure of the success of the Prefect's arms as he had professed in his interview with that gentleman, even if Mr. O'Hagan were out of the way. The Mollendists were growing in number; Mollendo had made a clever move in declaring for a republic, and the loyalty of the Prefect's troops hung by a very slender thread. Pardo had schemed to secure possession of the estate in any event. But it was necessary to get rid of Mr. O'Hagan. Mollendo, if he gained the upper hand, might in O'Hagan's absence respect the assignment. He was a stickler for law. But the Prefect would certainly not do so unless his enemy were removed. Pardo considered that he had played his cards well.

Mr. O'Hagan was in a cruel predicament. He could not doubt Pardo's story. He would willingly have given up his estate to save Tim's life, but could he also desert the cause which he had taken up? His honour was engaged. He paced up and down the bare space in front of his couch: the sight of the red end of Pardo's cigarette a few yards away filled him with bitter anger. He knew that he must yield. With Tim's life and his own honour in the balance, there was no doubt which would outweigh the other. He was too proud to consult Señor Mollendo.

The dilemma must be solved by himself alone. He could only make up his mind, go to the President, and confess that every other consideration–wealth, success, honour–must give way before the danger of his only son.

Out of the darkness Romaña came up to him.

"A despatch from Colonel Zegarra, señor," he said. "The courier waits for a reply."

Pardo saw Romaña, flung his cigarette away, and effaced himself among the trees. Mr. O'Hagan took the envelope, and tearing it open mechanically, read the few lines it contained. And then Romaña was amazed to find his hand grasped and shaken vigorously.

"He's safe, Nicolas!" said Mr. O'Hagan, working his arm up and down like a pump-handle. "My boy's safe!"

"Señor!"

"Go and kick that villain out," cried Mr. O'Hagan, recollecting himself.

"Señor, I don't understand!"

"Pardo! He's over there. Bring him to me."

Romaña followed the indication of his outstretched hand, and came back with Pardo, who, watching the scene, had been invaded by a vague uneasiness.

"Go and hang yourself; that's my answer," said Mr. O'Hagan, turning his back on the startled man. "See him safe out," he called over his shoulder to Romaña. "If the Japs get hold of him they'll throttle him."

And Pardo, feeling with a sinking heart that something had gone amiss, was escorted by Romaña to the outskirts of the camp.

Mr. O'Hagan read again the brief despatch. It was in Colonel Zegarra's writing.

SEÑOR,

I have the honour to report that the enemy has made no movement. A reconnaissance has been admirably carried out by Lieutenant O'Hagan alone, and I hope to report to you to-morrow the measures which I propose to take for our greater security.

I have the honour to be, señor, **Yours in the service of the Republic,** P.
ZEGARRA,
Colonel.

And there was a postscript in Tim's hand:

Pardo has been playing tricks. Will write to-morrow, as I'm very tired. All well.

TIM, Lieutenant and chief of staff.

At the second reading Mr. O'Hagan could smile at the odd subscription. He saw Tim's eyes twinkling as he wrote.

Unknown equally to Tim and to Pardo, the house was not deserted, as they supposed. Biddy Flanagan, the old Irish maid-servant, had stuck to it when all the other domestics fled, just as Puss will linger forlorn in an empty house. She shut herself in her room, and only ventured out to forage. She had thus sallied forth to make a cup of tea when she saw Pardo and his companion coming from the direction of the town. She at once slipped out at the back, locking the kitchen door and taking the key with her, and hid herself in the shrubbery. Thus she did not see Tim's arrival, though she heard the hoof-beats, and supposed that Pardo had been joined by another friend. When, after some time, she heard the thud of hoofs again, and guessed that the intruders had gone away, she let herself into the house, put the kettle on, and while she waited for the water to boil, went through the house to see what the spalpeens had been after.

"They've took the gold clock," she muttered, standing with arms folded at the drawing-room door; "and I wouldn't wonder if it did be after striking in the bundle, and maybe get them rogues into trouble. And the mistress's best chainey: faith, 'tis a mercy she took all her jools along with her, or there'd be none of um left at all." She went on to the dining-room. "The like of it! Sorra a silver spoon to be seen, nor the silver jug; I never heard tell of the way them villains have the place stripped, and that Pardo the master's man and all."

She made a mental inventory of the missing articles and proceeded to the office.

"What did they be after doing here?" she grunted, as she noticed, with the quick eye of one accustomed to superintend the cleaning operations, signs of disturbance about the matting. She stooped to straighten it, and discovered the loosened boards. "I wouldn't wonder but they did be hiding the things," she said, raising the planks one after another; "and mighty foolish will they look when they come back, if so be I can get myself down through the hole and back again. There! the kettle's on the boil; I'll just be wetting the tea, and fetch a candle for this same."

The daylight streaming in through the gap had roused Tim from his stupor, and seeing Biddy above he tried to shout, but could not utter a sound through

the gag. Biddy soon returned with a candle and a kitchen chair. The latter she lowered into the hole, stepped on to it, carrying the candle, and so reached the ground. She stooped, to search for the stolen articles, and started back in a hurry.

"Holy St. Patrick!" she exclaimed; "but 'tis a man, sure. Is it murder they were after?"

Recovering herself, she held the candle lower.

"Mercy! 'Tis master Tim!" she cried, "and beasties crawling all over on the poor face of um. The like of it! Divil such a state ever I seen as the poor boy do be in."

She bent over him, whipped out a pair of scissors and snapped the cords, and whisked the insects from his spotted and swollen face with her apron.

"The poor lamb!" she said, lifting him. "Sure the life's fair bitten out of um."

Tim could neither speak nor use his numbed limbs. The old woman took him in her arms, climbed up through the hole, and carried him to the kitchen, where she made him swallow a cup of tea, and bathed his face with warm water, speaking her mind freely on the iniquities of Pardo.

He told her what had happened, and what Pardo had said.

"And is it pay that the master will be giving for a prisoner that is free!" cried the old woman. "Sure now, cannot ye telegraph to um?"

"I wish I could; we ought to have repaired the wire. But the Colonel will be sending a despatch to Father, and his courier will get there before Pardo."

"He might," said Biddy. "Faith, I hope the master will shoot the wretch; he has all the silver stolen, and I don't know what all. And what did ye be after, coming into this den of lions?"

"Just a change of clothes, Biddy. I suppose they haven't taken them."

"Not them. They're not clean inside or out. I will get ye the bits of things, my dear, and do ye rub this butter on your face. 'Tis the good thing for them bites."

In an hour or so Tim felt able to return to the camp.

"You had better go into the town, Biddy," he said as he set off.

"What for would I be doing that?" she rejoined. "I do not be in dread of the likes of them villains, and if so be they come back, I wouldn't say but I tell um what I think of um."

CHAPTER XXI
RUN TO EARTH

Young Tim was at an age when boys are a trifle sensitive about their personal appearance. He was glad that on returning to camp his ravaged complexion was obscured in the dark. Nobody seemed at all concerned about his protracted absence. Colonel Zegarra was playing at cards with a friend from the town; the other officers and the men were amusing themselves after their fancy. Tim made a round of the camp, and was almost surprised to find that sentries were properly posted. The vedettes along the roads had been changed at the intervals arranged; military routine had been observed. The only departure from custom, perhaps, was Colonel Zegarra's allowing Tim to append a postscript to his nightly despatch. Tim had intended to say nothing of his recent adventure; but reflecting that Pardo might visit his father for the purpose of extorting a ransom, he thought it just as well to certify his safety.

During the night, when his turn for guard duty came, he pondered the general situation. With a zeal natural in a young officer, he wanted to "do something": inactivity was boring; he wished the sluggish enemy would wake up. He wondered by which route they would march when the movement did at last begin: by the eastern track or by the western? In thinking over the probabilities, it suddenly struck him that by destroying the wooden bridge a few miles beyond Durand's house he could render the eastern road–the more likely one–impassable. The ravine was about thirty feet wide. The one other spot at which it could be crossed was several miles to the east, approachable only over very rough country. By preventing the passage of the enemy by the bridge he would compel them to return to the cross-track and come by the western route, at a loss of many hours.

To destroy the bridge would be a very simple matter. It wanted only a good charge of powder. But Tim reflected that it would be a pity to blow it up prematurely, in case the enemy elected to come by the other route after all. The bridge might be useful to his own side. So he decided to ask Colonel Zegarra's permission to mine it, to clear of all cover a space on each side of the ravine, and to leave a small detachment of his own Japanese at some distance on the south side with orders to fire the mine at the critical moment. One of the mounted vedettes might be posted at the top of the long incline beyond, to ride at full speed to the bridge as soon as he should discover signs of an approach in force. Such a headlong gallop would be dangerous in the dark, so Tim thought of replacing him at night by an infantry outpost of four men. He would station them say a hundred yards north of the bridge, and theirs would be the duty to fall back and blow it up if danger threatened.

He was explaining the scheme next morning to his complacent colonel when news arrived through his chain of vedettes that small parties of the enemy had been seen moving down from the Inca camp towards the upper junction of

the paths. There was no indication of a general forward movement. They were merely feeling their way, having apparently discovered, perhaps by the want of news from the town, that something unusual was afoot. The wooden bridge being only a little more than five miles from Colonel Zegarra's position, there would probably be time to make all preparations for the explosion before the real advance of the enemy began. The colonel agreed to the suggestion. Tim was surprised at his extraordinary complaisance, his perfect contentment with the state of figure-head. Afterwards, with more knowledge, he felt considerable respect for President Mollendo's tact. Zegarra had been appointed to the command merely for the sake of appearances–to avoid any discontent among the Peruvians at being led by a foreigner. His compliance with every proposal of Tim's had been prearranged.

Tim chose the men for the work, took them out, and explained to them on the spot what he wished them to do. Then he left them. He had resolved to ride up the western road again, and see for himself what the enemy were about. Being convinced that their advance would be made along the eastern road, he intended to scout as far as the cross-track, and perhaps to ride some distance along it, till he came to a spot where any movement from the Inca camp would be visible to him.

His cycle had been well cleaned by one of the Japanese. He overhauled it finally himself, tested the sparking and the brakes, assured himself that the engine worked with the least possible noise, and that there was plenty of petrol. Having filled the chambers of his revolver, and put on a well-stocked bandolier, he took leave of the colonel and set off.

He felt safe for at least a dozen miles. There were four mounted vedettes along the track, the last of them being posted about a mile beyond Romaña's cave. If the enemy was moving on this route also, the fact would already have been reported.

The day was still young, and Tim, none the worse for his trouble of the previous afternoon, rode on in high spirits. Though continually rising, the track was not really steep for the first fifteen or twenty miles. He kept up a good speed, stopping every three miles to exchange a word with the vedettes, and had just reached the spot where he expected to find the last of them, when he was startled at seeing a man lying in a curiously huddled fashion at the side of the track a few yards ahead. He was slowing down, intending to stop and look more closely at the prone form; but suddenly there was a shot, and a bullet whistled past his head.

Instantly he clapped on the brakes, brought the cycle to a standstill, sprang off–for the track was too narrow to turn while riding–and wheeling it round, ran a few yards, remounted, and set off at full speed down the incline, bending over

the handle-bar. There was a volley behind him: the bullets pattered on the cliff at his right hand; and as he wondered whether his pace would carry him out of danger, he heard the clatter of hoofs and the shouts of men at his back.

He had no doubt of being able to distance the pursuers. The cycle could leave the swiftest horse standing. They had ceased to fire, which he thought foolish. But his assurance was rudely dashed in a few seconds. A few hundred yards below the stream that crossed the track near Romaña's cavern, three men stood with levelled rifles, covering him. They were plainly waiting for him to come close enough to make certain of their aim.

It was a desperate situation. On the one side a high cliff; on the other a steep precipice; behind, an unknown number of galloping horsemen; before, the waiting marksmen. If he dashed on, the three men could scarcely fail to hit him; if he stopped, he would be quickly overtaken by the men behind.

In that critical dilemma, when a moment's hesitation would have been fatal, he remembered the cave, some little distance on his right towards the waterfall. He brought his machine up with a jerk, sprang off, pushed it into a bush–there was no time to attempt to hide it, still less to haul it with him–and dived among the scrub and saplings that fringed the banks of the little stream. Bending double he raced up the watercourse towards the beacon tree, tore aside the leafy screen at the entrance to the cave, and plunged breathless into the darkness. He was like a fox that has run to earth.

The cave must be discovered in a few minutes. He had no protection but the darkness and his weapons. Could he block up the entrance? Hurrying to the wall, he dragged the box-beds over the floor, and placed them across the gap, just within the threshold. The legs of the table were so deeply imbedded in the ground that he could not move that; but he set the stools on the boxes, thus forming a rough and very insecure barricade. It was the best that he could devise; and, posting himself in the dark a little to the left of the entrance, he hoped to be able to hold the enemy at bay for some time with his revolver.

But it was a ticklish situation. As yet he did not know with how many men he had to deal; there were probably enough to block up the track completely in either direction. The vedettes whom he had passed did not expect him to return by the same route; he would not be missed for a considerable time, unless they should have happened to hear the shots. This was unlikely. The wind was blowing from them to him; the windings of the track and the height of the hills did not favour the travel of sound. It seemed that the utmost he could hope was to be able to keep the enemy off until nightfall, and then try to steal past them in the darkness. They were probably, he thought, merely a scouting party, not an advanced guard of the main body. Evidently they had fallen upon his vedette unawares, killed him, and then divided. Seeing the motor bicycle approach, the

three men scouting down the track had hidden until he had passed, knowing that he would be trapped between them and their comrades higher up.

When he had made his flimsy barricade, Tim stole to the entrance, pulled the foliage aside, and looked out. On the track he saw eleven men gathered, holding their horses. They were talking excitedly; one man pointed to the motor-bicycle, another in the direction of the cave. They must have realised that they had their quarry safe, if they could get at him. There was no way up the hill-side. He must be concealed somewhere in the patch of scrub between them and the hill. To escape he would have to come down to the track within a space of about a hundred yards above and below the stream. By thoroughly beating the scrub they supposed they could drive him out.

The discussion soon came to an end. They tied up their horses; then, leaving one man to guard the motor-cycle, so that if Tim ran from cover he could not escape them, they scattered, and began to advance. They might have been hunters stalking a tiger through jungle. They moved warily, and only now and then were visible to the anxious watcher at the cave. With a rifle he could have picked them off; the revolver was useless until they came to close quarters. He had a fleeting hope that they might pass the entrance to the cave without discovering it, and as they drew nearer he slipped back out of sight. His nerves tingled; minute after minute went by, and he had almost concluded that the men must have overshot the hiding-place when the curtain of foliage was bent aside, letting in a gleam of light. The entrance was discovered!

The screen was dropped again. No doubt the men were discussing what they should do. The opening was narrow. To attempt to carry such a place by assault might give the boldest pause. Some one must go first, and that man, if the defender was resolved to fight, was certain to be shot. The men were not particularly courageous; but there was a price on the Inglés boy, and even timorous folk will pluck up their courage when there is a reward in view.

[image]

A CHECK AT THE CAVE

When some minutes had elapsed, Tim ventured to draw near to the entrance and peep out through the leaves. The men were grouped some little distance away at the brink of the stream; he heard the murmur of their voices. In a few moments they separated, and spread out to right and left of the cave, keeping as much as possible under cover. One climbed into the tree, and concealed himself amid the foliage. Tim guessed what was coming, and slipped away to

the side of the cave. He was not a moment too soon. The enemy opened fire, and their shots, coming in different directions, flew criss-cross into the entrance. Fortunately the walls were soft, and the bullets dug into them instead of ricochetting or splintering. One fragment grazed Tim's wrist, a warning to retreat still farther.

After two or three volleys the firing ceased. The enemy supposed, no doubt, that some of their shots had taken effect, or had at any rate driven their quarry from the entrance. Tim rushed back to his former post, just in time to fire his revolver as the assailants, shouting to encourage one another, came with a dash through the foliage. At the threshold they were checked by the unexpected obstacle of Tim's barrier. For a few moments they stood there, trying to throw it down, cursing, yelling with pain as Tim, invisible in the inner darkness, slowly and deliberately emptied his revolver. This was too hot for them. They broke away, and Tim, running to the entrance, saw them hurrying down the slope to find cover. They were carrying one of their comrades; another lay across the threshold.

They returned to the track. There was another consultation among them; then four of them leapt on their horses and rode away northward. Three went on foot down the track, doubtless to guard against surprise in that direction; one man still remained in charge of the bicycle, the last held the horses. Clearly they had not abandoned their purpose. Tim wondered what their next move was to be. Surely the horsemen had not ridden back to the Inca camp for help! It was more than twenty miles distant. There and back the journey would take several hours. They would hardly spend so much time with the risk of assistance coming up from the Mollendists. The vedette who had been killed must be relieved ere long, and for all they knew there might be a numerous detachment of their enemy within reach.

Tim was not long left in doubt. In half an hour he saw the mounted men returning, and recognised the explanation of their absence. One of them carried an oblong object which revealed itself in a few moments as a sheet of corrugated iron. Tim wondered where they could have got it, until he remembered that some distance up the hill there was a deserted hut, which had probably been at some time occupied by a Cholo shepherd. He jumped to the use to which the iron was to be put. It was to serve as a shield against his bullets.

The riders dismounted at the stream, gave their horses to the man guarding the cycle, and disappeared into the scrub. Some time passed. When they emerged again Tim saw that they had surrounded the iron with a kind of wicker cage. It could now be carried in front of the bearer without his exposing himself in any way to Tim's fire. Wicker and iron together would be impervious to a revolver bullet.

Tim had a few moments to make up his mind how to meet this ingenious device. He slipped across the cave to the opposite side to that at which he had formerly been posted. The enemy would probably expect attack from the same quarter as before, and would turn their shield in that direction. He had just taken up his new position when bullets began to fly crosswise through the entrance. After this preparatory move the enemy made a determined rush. The first man, bearing the shield, came in and faced to the right, turning his back upon Tim, who had a momentary qualm about firing from the rear. That moment allowed the two next men time to pull away the stools. He felt that hesitation would be fatal, and fired. The first man dropped with a groan, and the shield fell clattering upon the long box. Before Tim could fire a second shot, two men had scrambled across on all fours, and the entrance was darkened by their comrades pressing behind.

One of those who had entered sprang to his feet and discharged his revolver at random in the direction of Tim, whom he was as yet unable to see, having come suddenly out of brilliant sunshine into gloom. Tim slipped back quickly along the wall until he was in complete darkness, then ran on tiptoe across the cave. Turning when he reached the wall, he fired his barrels one after another, slipped more cartridges into the chambers, and crossed again. By this manoeuvre he bewildered the enemy, who were now, however, all in the cave, and protected almost as much as himself by the darkness.

He did not fire again, lest the flashes revealed his whereabouts. All that he could hope to do was to find some defensible position in the interior and sell his life dearly. There was not even a chance of dodging his enemy and slipping out, for one man had been left near the entrance. He was determined not to surrender. Even if the men now hunting him did not butcher him on the spot to avenge their fallen comrades, the Prefect would have no mercy on his prisoner. He must defend himself to the last. Perhaps when it came to the final stand he might have an opportunity of dealing with the four men singly.

He retreated slowly along the wall, listening for the enemy, whom he was quite unable to see. All at once he remembered the opening at the farther end which Romaña had shown him. A last hope flashed into his mind. If he could slip out there, replace the turning stone before his exit was discovered, and pass through the waterfall into the open, there was a bare chance of escape. It was true that he might be discovered by the man with the cycle, or by the others on the watch down the track. But it was better to be killed in a dash for liberty than cooped up and slaughtered like a badger in a hole.

Now he hastened his steps, creeping as fast as possible along the curving wall. His hunters were no doubt feeling their way, on their guard against an ambuscade. Everything depended upon his gaining the exit before they came to

a spot where the removal of the stone would let a little daylight upon the scene. He ran along on tip-toe, bruising his arms now and then when he encountered projections from the wall, and almost dashing his head against the stone when he suddenly stumbled upon it. Pressing the top, as he had seen Romaña do, he turned the stone, clambered through the gap on to a ledge, and in ten seconds restored the strange gate to its place. He reflected that the enemy, if they had seen the fleeting gleam of light, would take some time to find the stone and discover its manipulation, or, on the other hand, make their way back through the cave to the opening by which they had entered. Whatever they did, he had gained at least a few minutes.

From the ledge on which he now stood he looked eagerly about him. In front of him was the waterfall, forming a filmy screen. He could see through it and around it. There was the man on the track a hundred and fifty yards away. Farther down the three men were still posted: they were now on horseback. Tim hoped that they could not see him. He was, in fact, quite invisible to them, as a person behind a curtain in a room is invisible to those without; though it is difficult for the one within to realise this: he feels that, being himself able to see, he must himself be seen.

The rough ground and scrub in front of the cave was deserted. The solitary figure at the end of the watercourse was in charge of the horses of the men in the cave, and of the three who had fallen to Tim's shots. Near him, at the edge of the track, lay the man who had been carried away wounded after the first attack. Tim could not see the cycle, but he had no doubt that it was there.

What should he do? The men in the cave must soon discover that he was gone. If one had the courage to strike a match the discovery must be made almost at once. There was very little time. The obvious course was to steal along the watercourse, and gain possession either of a horse or of the cycle. Escape on foot was impossible. He could not go otherwise than by the track, and as soon as he appeared there he would be pursued by the horsemen and overtaken in a few minutes. He resolved to creep down to the man who stood alone, try to secure the cycle, or, if not that, a horse, and ride away.

To reach the watercourse he had to pass through the waterfall, or skirt it and appear within full view from the track. He decided on the former course. The magnified shower bath was shattering. Though it was soon over, he was almost stunned by the pelting water, and emerged breathless and wet to the skin. Pausing for a moment to recover breath, he crept down the watercourse. The channel was shallow; he had very little cover; but he could not waste time in careful scouting. At any moment the men might return to the entrance of the cave and discover him. But by taking advantage of every bush and patch of long grass that he encountered, he at last came within twenty yards of the Peruvian

unperceived. The man had his eyes fixed on the cave, or he could hardly have failed to see the bent form stealing along.

Stooping until his eyes were level with the top of the bank, Tim looked ahead. There was the cycle, propped against a thick bush. It was headed down the track, as he had left it. He considered rapidly what he had better do. He could not shoot the man in cold blood. The alternatives were equally hazardous. He might make a dash for the cycle, start it, and try to get away before its guardian could seize him. But the man was only a few yards from it; this plan could hardly succeed. Or he might wriggle to within a few feet of the watchman, spring upon him with a sudden rush, and deal him a knock-out blow. He could not fail to be seen at that moment by the wounded man, if he was conscious; the alarm would be given; but there might be just time for him to get away before the three men lower down the track, or the four in the cave, could take aim at him.

The latter course was recommended by the fact that the watchman's attention was divided between the cave and the horses he held by the bridles. They were restless; the jingle of their harness and the stamping of their hoofs would mask any slight sound that Tim might make as he approached.

He slipped his revolver into his belt and crept along; then, gathering his strength, hurled himself upon the unsuspecting trooper. At the last moment of his rush the man half turned, hearing his footsteps, and gave him the opportunity for getting home a smashing blow on the point of his chin. He tumbled like a log. But the success of the attack was almost Tim's undoing. The horses kicked up their heels and stampeded wildly, some up, some down the track, one of them knocking Tim head over heels. But there were no bones broken. Springing to his feet, he rushed to the cycle, and wheeled it round. The engine was still firing; Tim ran a few yards, vaulted into the saddle, and throwing open the throttle to its full extent, rode up the hill after the galloping horses. He was scarcely conscious that the wounded man lying on the grass near by was shouting at the top of his voice.

CHAPTER XXII
A PUNCTURE

Tim's rush had been so swift, so silent, so effectual, that he was already running beside his cycle and preparing to mount before the three men down the track,

more than a quarter of a mile away, became aware that something was wrong. The first intimation was the pounding of the horses' hoofs as they took flight. They looked up to see the cause of the sudden stampede, but Tim was hidden from them by the galloping animals, which were dashing downhill at so desperate a pace that the troopers, if they waited for them, must be almost inevitably swept off the narrow track over the precipice. Though they now heard the yells of the mounted trooper above, they durst not delay, but promptly wheeled round and set off to head the race, intending to pull up as soon as the frantic beasts behind them had recovered from their fright.

Meanwhile the shouts of their comrade had brought the other men hurriedly to the mouth of the cave, which they reached just in time to see Tim disappear round a curve in the track. They plunged through the scrub, and screamed with rage when they caught sight of the crowd of horses headed by the three troopers far down the hill to their right. Men of southern blood make little attempt to control their feelings, and these Peruvians, their vision of £500 vanished, stamped and gesticulated and wept, venting bitter curses upon the hapless trooper whom Tim had felled, and who was now sitting up and dizzily feeling his chin.

It was the presence of the three men on the track that had determined Tim to ride northward. With them waiting for him, ready to shoot as he passed, or before, there would have been little chance of successfully running the gauntlet. He had not reckoned on the stampeding of the horses; nor had it occurred to him at the first moment to follow at their heels and snatch an opportunity of slipping through in the confusion. When he did think of it, he felt very much annoyed with himself for being so stupid. Not that he could have run past them: his experience on the track soon proved that the attempt would have been hopeless. Paradoxical as it may appear, this only deepened his annoyance. Three of the horses had started up instead of down the hill. The ascent being rather steep, they were more fatigued than frightened before they had run a mile. The gallop became a trot, the trot a walk, and they were making up their simple minds to stop and refresh themselves with herbage from the side of the track when a creature on two wheels came up to meddle. At the appearance of the bicycle they kicked up their heels and fled, all their terrors revived.

It was now that Tim was angry with himself. If this was the effect uphill, what would it have been in the other direction? Flying downhill after the troop, with a judicious use of his hooter he might have kept them all madly on the run, and even driven them before him into the arms of his amiable commander. It was too late now. Tim was unreasonably irritated. An older person might have consoled himself with the reflection that it is easy to be wise after the event.

He had intended, when he started from camp, to ride northward along this

very track; but he wished now that he had remained at the cross-roads, even though that might have involved playing nap with Colonel Zegarra, or making himself amiable to that gentleman's lady friends. There was danger behind him; there might be still graver danger ahead. Other parties of the enemy might be coming down; perhaps the junction of the tracks was held by them. It was a good defensible position, covering any possible attack on the Inca camp by way of the eastern route. If there had been any other path home, Tim might have taken it and bolted, without any reason to feel that he was a coward. But there was none; he was compelled to follow this only track–committed to an attempt to make the round.

There was not much reason to fear pursuit. The men whom he had tricked at the cave had lost their steeds; the other three would perhaps have to ride for many a mile in the wrong direction. Like John Gilpin, they could not help it. By the time they had checked the stampeded animals and brought them up the hill, a good many miles would separate them from the quarry who had baffled them. Tim felt quite easy on that score.

He began to take a little amusement in the chase in which he was, for his own part, involuntarily engaged. The riderless horses in front of him were not at all happy. They would gallop up the steeper inclines, out-distance the strange thudding creature behind them, and when they no longer heard its snorts, slow down and begin to take things easy. But on the more level portions of the track, and the occasional downward gradients, the machine made four or five yards to their one. They had no sooner settled down into an amble than the pertinacious pursuer came panting at their heels, and taking fresh alarm, they dashed on frantically until another rise gave muscle the advantage of mechanism. So it went on for eight or ten miles, until the horses must have thought–if horses think–that they were doomed to drop at length from exhaustion, and fall a prey to the modern centaur.

But Fate, after all, was kind to them. Tim suddenly became aware of that unpleasant sensation, abominable to every cyclist, which announces a punctured tyre. There was no loud bang, like the report of a monster pop-gun, such as sometimes startles pedestrians in the street, and makes horses tremble or prance. The air was oozing gradually away; moment by moment the rear tyre became softer and slacker; and Tim had to stop at once before irreparable damage was done.

Here was a disaster, the more serious because the track was no longer flanked by a cliff on one side and a precipice on the other, but ran along the crest of an exposed ridge, from which he could see a long way before and behind and on either hand. He could see–he might also be seen. The track afforded no cover, the country at either side very little. If he wheeled the cycle to right or

left in search of a sheltered nook in which to make his repairs, he would spend much time in getting there and back again. The enemy were doubtless now hot in pursuit. Missing the tracks of his wheels they would hunt for him, and here there was no cave, no waterfall, only a scattered bush or two. They would easily find him, and then!...

Tim sprang off the machine in a hurry. His only chance was to mend it on the track. He rested it against a rock, shot a glance around, then knelt to examine the tyre. Now, as every one knows, it is sometimes not easy to locate a puncture. Tim hoped that it would not be a case of immersing the tube in water, for that would involve going down to the river half a mile away. Luckily the puncture was a fairly large one, and easily seen. The outer cover of the tyre was cut through for about two inches, and the perforation had extended to the inner tube.

He opened the pouch in which he carried a few small tools and material for making temporary repairs. From it he took a phial of rubber solution, a strip of canvas, and a "gaiter"–a thickness of rubber vulcanised to two or three layers of strong canvas, shaped to the tyre, with hooks at the bottom. The first step was to repair the inner tube. This he did by smearing the cut with the solution and sticking on a rubber patch. Then he fastened the canvas by means of the solution to the inside of the outer cover, over the rent, to prevent the inner tube from being chafed by the rough edges made by the cut. The last operation was to fix the gaiter to the rim by its hooks. All this took some time. In tyre mending, as in other things, the more haste the less speed. Tim worked with deliberate care, glancing up and down the track from time to time. At last, after about half an hour's work, he straightened himself, satisfied that the tyre was good for a few hundred miles, and much relieved that he had been able to complete the repairs without interruption.

It only remained to inflate the tyre. He had just inserted the pump when a succession of faint irregular clicks fell on his ear. Turning hastily, he looked down the track. He had a good view of it for half a mile. At that distance it curved out of sight, but was visible again for a short stretch a mile lower down, and still farther in patches. The air was very clear; every tree and hillock was sharply defined in the sunlight; there was nobody in sight.

But the clicks were growing louder; they seemed to be the sounds of iron-shod hoofs upon the rocky ground. He gazed down the track, passing from patch to patch over the intervening bluffs and the stretches of rough country where it was not visible. The sounds came beyond question from his left; still he could see nobody.

Meanwhile he was pumping hard, keeping his head turned in the direction of the sounds. All at once he caught sight of six or seven dark specks moving towards him along the sunlit track. He guessed that they were about a mile

away. There was just time to fill his tyre before they came up with him.

The pursuers were now hidden by a curve in the track. He pumped on; the tyre was almost fully inflated. Suddenly he heard a shout, and saw a horseman round the bend half a mile below. He instantly whipped off the pump, turned the petrol tap, and had run a yard or two with the machine when he remembered that in his haste he had left his pouch on the ground. He could not afford to lose that. Backing, he recovered it, thrust it into his pocket, and in another twenty seconds was running slowly up the hill.

Glancing over his shoulder, he saw five men galloping after him. They were no more than a quarter-mile away, shouting, urging their horses to their utmost speed, gaining on him. But the crest of the hill was near; then the track was level for a while; then had a downward incline. The engine worked well; the cycle breasted the slope, gained the flat, and sped on at forty miles an hour.

A minute after Tim topped the crest, the horsemen reached the same spot on their panting steeds. They yelled with rage and disappointment when they saw their quarry bowling along at a speed that a Pegasus might envy. One took a shot at him, but Tim, bending over the handle-bar, offered a low target, and escaped injury. In two minutes he had turned a corner and was out of sight.

CHAPTER XXIII
A LEAP FOR LIFE

When Tim had ridden three or four miles farther, and felt at ease as far as the pursuers were concerned, he came upon the three stampeded horses again. They were peacefully browsing on some scanty herbage at the edge, quite content, no doubt, to be free from their human burdens. At the sound of the engine they once more took to flight, and the violent play they made with their heels suggested to Tim that they indignantly resented the disturbance of their meal.

He was now riding so fast that he could soon have overtaken the animals, in spite of the upward gradient. But if he did so, he would either run the risk of coming into collision with one of them, or drive them over the edge of the track on the left, and down the somewhat steep and dangerous slope to the river. It occurred to him that he might do better to moderate his pace and keep fairly close on their heels. They might prove useful. The cross-track to which he would come presently was somewhat looser than that on which he was riding. If the enemy

happened to be at the cross-roads beyond, the horses and the dust they raised might serve him as a temporary screen. So he opened his air throttle a little, and closed the petrol throttle to the same extent, maintaining a speed that would keep the horses on the run without exposing him to the risk of being overtaken.

He soon found that there was a certain disadvantage in following upon the heels of the horses. On coming into the cross-track, he was enveloped in a cloud of dust, thick enough to prevent his seeing more than a few yards ahead. The dust and the bodies of the animals completely shut out the view, and he realised that as he neared the fork he would be quite unable to tell what awaited him there. He thought it advisable to drop a little behind. No doubt the horses would turn to the left when they reached the crossroads, and gallop towards the Inca camp–the place which for some days past they had associated with fodder. If the enemy had not actually passed the fork and marched down the eastern track, he might manage to turn into it unperceived under cover of the dust-cloud, and soon ride out of danger.

Slackening down until he had doubled his distance from the horses, he noticed on his right hand a belt of trees which, if his memory was not at fault, extended for nearly a mile along the southern edge of the cross-track until it joined the eastern path. With one eye on the horses and the other on the trees he watched for the branching of the tracks. It came sooner than he expected. Suddenly the horses swerved to the left; a few seconds afterwards he turned to the right, and felt the machine quicken under him on the downward incline.

At that instant he heard the loud crackle of rifles behind him. Posted among the trees just above the fork there was a body of men who, watching with astonishment the maddened gallop of three riderless horses, caught a faint glimpse of the motor-cycle as it emerged from the whirling dust. They fired too hurriedly to hit the mark. At the sound of the shots Tim bent double and let the machine go. Riding at the rate of thirty miles an hour he knew that the enemy could not catch him on horseback on this particular portion of the track. But when he came to the foot of the hill, and began to climb a long rise, he glanced round and saw a large troop of horsemen dashing down in pursuit. They were a long way behind, and unless some accident befell the machine, he was sure that he could outpace them with ease.

The track wound frequently. For long stretches he was hidden from the pursuers. Looking back now and then he noticed with satisfaction, whenever they came in sight, that he was steadily increasing the interval between him and them. He might have run away altogether if he had driven the machine at full speed; but the track was very rough, and he felt that he must watch it carefully if he was to avoid the risk of a second puncture, or of collision with some boulder. Downhill he often had to check his pace, and so could not take full advantage of

the descents to give him impetus for the upward gradients of the switchback. But as mile after mile was covered he became less and less fearful of being caught; and when, at the end of a long, straight stretch, he saw that the enemy were at least two miles behind, he was perfectly easy in mind, and only wondered why they had not given up the hopeless chase.

His former journeys on this track had made him pretty familiar with the landmarks, and as he rode up a long incline, he knew that he would soon be in sight of the wooden bridge over the ravine, beyond which the party of Japanese were posted. A few miles of switchback, and then he would have a downward run home. But on rising slowly over the crest, he was staggered to see a troop of some twenty horsemen halted no more than half a mile in front of him. The track dipped to within about a hundred yards of the spot where they were standing, then bent somewhat sharply upwards, and disappeared over the brow rather more than half a mile ahead.

Tim instantly realised the desperate position into which he had come unawares. His first impulse was to screw on his brakes and dismount, to avoid rushing headlong among the enemy. But in a flash he saw that to do so would be simply to give himself into their hands, or into the hands of the men behind him. There was no escape either on the right or the left. The only possible course was to ride on and take his chance. Setting his teeth, and crouching almost flat over the handle-bar, he opened the throttle, and shot down the hill, sounding his hooter violently all the way.

If he had had the leisure to calculate the possible result he could scarcely have anticipated the success of his action. The horsemen instinctively edged away to the sides of the track, and on to the edge of the rough moorland which bounded it on the east. Some had the presence of mind to whip out their pistols, but as the cycle raced towards them with ever-quickening speed they found themselves in trouble with their horses, which began to quiver and sweat and prance at the strange sight and the terrifying sounds. Down flew the cycle, Tim gripping the handle-bar hard, no longer able to pick his course, but keeping the middle of the track, rough or smooth. He was unconscious of jerks and jolts; blind to the risk of puncture; in that critical half-minute he thought of nothing but the task of steering so as to avoid collision with the enemy, a disaster which they on their part were no less anxious to escape.

He was upon them, in a whirl of dust raised by the wind of his flight. A thrill shot through every fibre as he skimmed danger by a hair's breadth. One of the horses was cavorting on his hind legs, and his rider, almost as frantic as the animal, turned him into a whirligig by hard tugging at the bridle. A few shots were fired by the other troopers, but no man could take steady aim from the back of a rearing horse, at an object flashing by at forty miles an hour. With a rush

and a whizz Tim was past.

But his momentary joy at having got through vanished as he felt the slackening of speed enforced by the steep incline beyond. On his former journey he had dismounted and wheeled the machine. There was a great hubbub behind him. The throbbing hum of his engine was smothered by the clatter of the horses' hoofs, and the yells of their riders spurring them on. Short as the ascent was, its angle was so sharp as to neutralise in great measure the impetus he had gained downhill. Moment by moment the machine flagged, and, without looking behind, he was conscious that the pursuers were gaining. He feared that his engine power would not suffice to bring him to the top, upon which he fixed his eyes as it were imploringly. How far away it seemed!

He pressed the pace to the uttermost. The machine toiled up and up; the uproar behind grew louder. He was beginning to despair. The cycle seemed to be crawling. Would the engine hold out? At last, with what appeared to be a final heave, it crept over the crest. The downward slope had begun, and the cycle dropped down with a rush which carried it easily to the top of the farther rise. With a sigh of thankfulness Tim knew that he had now increased his lead.

At this point the track began to wind round the face of the cliff on his right. A few minutes would bring him within sight of the bridge. But there was still one long climb before him, and here, if the pursuers could last the pace, they would have the advantage of him. He glanced back; they were just rounding the curve, perhaps a quarter-mile distant. This was the crisis of the chase. As the cycle laboured up the hill, Tim was aware that the gap was rapidly diminishing. When he gained the top, he had scarcely fifty yards to spare. But now for three or four hundred yards the track was level, and the horsemen yelled with rage as they saw their quarry once more slipping from their clutches. They had no chance against him on the flat. By the time he reached the point where the track dipped to the mile-long descent to the bridge, they had lost more than a hundred yards.

The bridge was not yet in sight. The track bent to the left somewhat sharply. In ordinary circumstances Tim would now have clapped on the brakes, but he was strung up to attempt any feat of daring, and after the first hundred yards of the hill he contented himself with closing the throttle. He swung perilously round the bend, and looking ahead, saw the bridged ravine three-quarters of a mile away. A horseman was galloping towards it–doubtless one of his vedettes. But why was he dashing so desperately towards the bridge?

Tim lowered his eyes, for he wore no goggles, and the wind created by his pace made them smart and tingle. He was halfway down the slope when a dull report below him caused him to look up again. Where, a few seconds before, the bridge had been, there was now a cloud of smoke. His orders had been carried out only too thoroughly: the bridge was blown up!

He was thunderstruck. Reckless and impulsive as he was, prone to play many a mad prank on his bicycle, he had never attempted such a feat as now, in the twinkling of an eye, he saw himself committed to. The ravine was more than thirty feet across. He would reach it in half a minute. No power on earth could check his descent. He must either plunge into the chasm, fifty feet deep, or leap the gap.

How can his sensations be described! Every second his speed was quickening. The steepness of the slope induced the feeling that he was dropping into space. He was conscious of the strange heaving sensation that a person feels on descending in a rapidly-moving lift. His body seemed to be flying upward. The air rushed past, scarifying his flesh, catching his breath, stunning his ears so that he did not hear the report of a dozen rifles across the gap. Down, down, faster than an express train, as fast as a racing motor-car, his body rigid, his mind working swifter than the electric flash–down to he knew not what.

On either side of the bridge the ground had been cleared. He must avoid the ruins of the bridge; he would steer to one side of it. As he swooped meteor-like towards the gap the space on his right widened out, and the ground made a slight ascent to the brink of the ravine. A touch on the handle-bar altered his course a point or two. Barely conscious of the rise, breathless and dizzy, he shut his eyes at the fateful moment–and the machine shot off the brink of the ravine like a stone from a catapult. For a fraction of a second he was in mid air, the wheels whirring beneath him. Then there was a tremendous thud as they struck the ground 011 the opposite side. The machine raced up the incline; the speed slackened; instinctively he applied the brakes; and in a few more seconds he fell rather than jumped from the saddle, and dropped panting, a mass of quivering nerves, upon the track.

A group of Japanese flocked about him. One gave him water from a mug. All were trembling with excitement. When he had collected himself, and inquired what had become of the pursuers, he learnt that, as they rode headlong down the hill behind him, two of the horses had slipped and brought their riders to the ground. The rest had reined up at the volley from the Japanese. Apparently none had been hit, but recognising that further pursuit was hopeless, they had stood watching the last few hundred yards of the cycle's flashing course. The Japanese had been too much amazed and alarmed to fire again. Both the parties looked on as at a thrilling spectacle. After the cycle had made its leap their amazement held them motionless for a while. Then, at a second volley, the enemy wheeled round and galloped away.

Tim asked why the bridge had been fired. The vedette explained that, descrying the heads of a large number of horsemen over the tops of the bushes on the crest of the hill, he had dashed back to give the alarm according to orders.

The cycle, being lower, had been invisible to him. His comrades were so eager to carry out their instructions that even when Tim came into view they were too much occupied to see him, and only when the match was kindled, and they ran back to a position of safety, did they perceive with horror that they had, as they thought, cut off their master's chance of escape. Tim waived away their humble apologies; they had obeyed orders; and now that the strain of his nerve-shattering experiences was relaxed, he could afford to smile. The eastern track, at any rate, was impassable to the enemy.

CHAPTER XXIV
FROM DAN TO BEERSHEBA

Colonel Zegarra was holding a levee of his admirers from the town when Tim returned to camp.

"Well, my young friend, have you made any interesting discoveries?" he asked, from among a group of ladies as Tim passed.

"Several, señor," replied Tim. "Among other things, what it feels like to fly through the air on wheels."

"Very interesting," said the gentleman in amiable ignorance. "I was not aware that your machine could fly. How marvellous is the progress of invention!" he added, turning to the ladies.

"Wonderful!" they cried, clapping their hands.

"Will you show us how you do it, Señor Tim?" said the colonel's daughter.

"I regret, señorita, that it is impossible here," said Tim, laying his hand on his heart in the local way. "It requires a hill a mile long; a number of the Prefect's men pelting down after you, and bellowing like bulls; a ravine thirty feet wide spanned by a bridge; and some good obedient fellows who will blow up the bridge at the critical moment. These conditions do not exist every day, señorita."

The girl looked puzzled. Then a light dawned.

"Is it a joke, Señor Tim?" she asked with a smile. She knew something of Tim's jokes in carnival time.

"A joke that won't bear repetition, señorita," he replied, and then bowed himself away.

The eastern track being now impassable, he thought it sufficient to leave a few men at the broken bridge to guard against any attempt to repair it. The rest

he withdrew to the camp. One of the vedettes on the western track having been surprised and killed, he decided as a precaution for the future to place the men in couples. He did not enlighten Colonel Zegarra, when the visitors had gone, as to his flight through the air, but simply informed him that the bridge had been blown up to check a troop of the Prefect's horsemen.

Before he retired for the night he thoroughly examined the cycle, and found that the tyres, though showing signs of wear, were as yet sound. He gave it to one of the Japanese to clean, and then sought his couch, worn out by the racking experiences of the day.

Next morning word was brought that the enemy were advancing in force along the western track. Colonel Zegarra was not lacking in courage, and the plan of action to be followed in the event of attack had been settled in several conversations between himself and Tim. The ground on both sides of the track for half a mile from the cross-roads was fairly open, affording a clear field for fire. Though the enemy outnumbered the Mollendists, the latter had the advantage of being the defenders. Their position, protected by earthworks and the fringe of wood, was so strong that an attempt to force it ought not to succeed. To harass the enemy in flank, Tim had arranged to post himself with a small detachment in a dense copse on the left of the track about a mile in front of the camp. With luck he might not be discovered; if he was attacked, the closeness of the trees would enable him to make a good defence. He chose thirty of his own Japanese for this duty, knowing their good fighting qualities and their absolute personal loyalty to him.

They had been stationed in the copse for some hours before the head of the enemy's column appeared. The men were on foot. Tim had intended to worry them as they advanced, but it now occurred to him that he would do better to hold his hand until the attack developed. If Colonel Zegarra should be in difficulties, a sudden assault on the enemy from the rear might turn the scale.

The enemy opened out as they approached the cross-roads, intending to surround the camp. They made a concerted rush, but in the lack of artillery they were seriously handicapped, and after several attempts had failed, they fell back to cover. Some retreated in the direction of the copse. Tim saw his opportunity. Bidding his men wait until they were within a few hundred yards, he then gave the order to fire. In the shock of surprise the enemy fell into disorder, and fled in all directions. Their confusion was communicated to the whole force, and soon the discomfited rabble were in full retreat, suffering severely as they crossed the line of fire from the camp.

Colonel Zegarra rose to the occasion. Ordering his men to mount, he led them in pursuit. The retreat became a rout. Ridden down by the horsemen, cut up by the steady firing of Tim's men in the copse, the enemy were a disorganised

mob before they reached their horses, which they had left about two miles down the track. Some succeeded in mounting, and galloped away. Others were headed off, and were made prisoners. Within an hour of the first attack the Prefect's eastern force was shattered, and no longer existed as a fighting unit.

There was great jubilation among the Mollendists. On returning to camp Colonel Zegarra at once penned a flowery despatch to Mr. O'Hagan announcing his victory. The courier had not been gone long when Romaña rode up in haste, bearing a verbal message from the commander-in-chief. After long delay the Prefect was making a determined effort to force the defile, and Mr. O'Hagan asked for a reinforcement of fifty men, if they could be spared. It was arranged that Tim should start at once with fifty horsemen. It seemed unlikely that the troops just defeated would rally, but for assurance' sake he persuaded Romaña to remain at the cross-roads, to advise Colonel Zegarra if the enemy should attempt any movement which must be met rather by craft than by courage.

Tim rode ahead of his troop on the motorcycle. When about a third of the way to the defile, he suddenly discovered on his left a considerable number of men on foot descending from the hills towards the highroad. Their intention clearly was either to take the main Mollendist army in the rear, or to make a swoop on the cross-roads and then to San Rosario. Tim guessed that his father was unaware of this complication. The men must have been for at least two days on the march, for the hills were generally regarded as impracticable.

Tim halted for a few moments to make a rapid calculation. His father and Colonel Zegarra must be warned. If he rode on, the enemy, though at present a long distance away, would be on the road between him and Colonel Zegarra by the time he returned. On the other hand he might ride to the colonel and back before they reached the road, in which case he would still have a chance of slipping by.

He remounted and dashed back at full speed, ordering his horsemen when he met them to halt and be on the alert. Colonel Zegarra agreed to move out with all his troops, and if he found the enemy on the road, marching towards the defile, to hang on their rear. Then Tim set off again. He commanded his horsemen to await Colonel Zegarra; it seemed more important for the moment that the colonel should have his full number than that the party should press on to reinforce Mr. O'Hagan.

The head of the flanking column was only half a mile from the road when Tim dashed by. To some extent screened by trees and bushes, he became the target for the enemy's fire as he passed patches of open country. But he escaped unhurt, thanks to his speed and to the windings of the road, which caused his direction to alter frequently, and baffled the riflemen's aim. In a few minutes he was out of range, in a few more out of sight.

On approaching the defile, Tim heard sounds of heavy firing. The Prefect's attack was evidently being hotly pressed. He found the Mollendist force some distance farther east than he had expected. They occupied the rocks on either side of the road, and were firing along the defile. Just as Tim arrived he heard the distant roar of a gun, and a shell crashed high up among the rocks at his right hand. He slipped off his bicycle, and hurried to find his father.

Mr. O'Hagan greeted the boy with especial warmth.

"Pardo gave me a terrible scare when he told me he had got you," he said. "What happened?"

Tim related how he had been dealt with at the house.

"He had the cheek to come to you, then," he said. "Why didn't he go to the Prefect?"

"I suspect he did. He wanted to make sure of his price."

"The wretch said my price had gone up. What did he ask?"

"The hacienda!"

Tim whistled.

"You kicked him out, I hope?" he said indignantly.

"Well, Tim, you see Colonel Zegarra's despatch with your postscript came just in time, or—- But that's all over. How are things going?"

"We have fairly smashed the lot from the Inca camp. They attacked this morning. Romaña brought your message, and I was hurrying up with fifty men when I saw a detachment of the enemy, about two hundred strong, I think, marching over the hills towards the road, so I rode back and asked Zegarra to bring up all his men and then came on ahead to tell you."

"That's very bad news," said Mr. O'Hagan, somewhat perturbed. "I've as much as I can do to hold my own here. As you see, they've brought a couple of guns to bear on us."

"Where are they?"

"Up in the hills yonder. How they were dragged there I can't imagine. They're at least a thousand feet up. The Prefect has more energy and resource than I expected. When the guns opened fire this morning we had to abandon the head of the defile. We're pretty safe here for the moment, and can check any attempt to force the passage; but I dare say the Prefect will find another position for the guns where they can command us, and then we shall have to fall back again. With two hundred men threatening our rear—-"

"Couldn't you spare some men to deal with them?"

"That's a capital idea, Tim. It will take a long time to move the guns to a new position. We'll try it. I'll take a hundred and fifty men myself. You had better stay here; you've done your share."

"I'd rather come with you," said Tim.

"I dare say, but you had better go and report to the President what you have been doing. He's rather down in the mouth, and your victory at the cross-roads will cheer him."

Mr. O'Hagan soon set off with his men, all mounted. When he returned a few hours later, he was flushed with success. The Prefect's hill column found itself in the position in which it had hoped to catch the Mollendists–bottled up between two forces, which equalled or exceeded it in number, and were much fresher. Instead of attacking, the enemy were attacked. Fatigued after their long and difficult march, they were in no condition to make a prolonged resistance, and fell back before Mr. O'Hagan's impetuous onset. They were seeking a strong position when Colonel Zegarra dashed suddenly upon their rear. Hopelessly entrapped, they lost heart. Some flung down their arms and surrendered, others dispersed and sought safety in the hills.

With Mr. O'Hagan returned Colonel Zegarra and the greater part of his force, a small detachment being sent back to keep an eye on the road to San Rosario. President Mollendo, whose volatile spirits had already been exalted by Tim's report of the morning's success, was carried away by delight at the Prefect's second discomfiture on the same day. He insisted on promoting Tim captain on the spot, and made an oration to the troops which moved many of them to tears, and confirmed their belief that they had in Carlos Mollendo a statesman of the highest rank.

While this orgy of sentiment was in progress, Mr. O'Hagan was discussing matters with Tim quietly in the background.

"That's all very well," he said, jerking his head towards the spot where Mollendo was perorating, "but it doesn't prevent the Prefect from hauling his guns. I quite expect that to-morrow he will begin to shift them in this direction, and when they begin to play we can't hold the defile another half-hour."

"What then, Father?" asked Tim.

"Why, then we shall be compelled to fall back on San Rosario. The Prefect has three men to our one; and the moment the tide seems to be turning in his favour a lot of ours are sure to desert. It's the way of things here. But for the guns we could hold him off for months, so long as Galdos keeps up the supplies–though I'm afraid of ammunition running short. The two checks the Prefect has had to-day are decided set-backs, but we are not much better off unless we can take the heart out of him. If we could only capture his guns, now!"

"Why not?"

"Well, if you can suggest a way, do so. But don't reckon without your host. They're at least a thousand feet up, somewhere on that ridge. The War Office of this republic being unable to supply field-glasses, I haven't located them exactly. To climb the hill in face of the enemy would be a pretty tough job in itself, and

the guns are pretty sure to be well guarded."

"I'll try it to-night," said Tim, "with a few of our Japs. Some of them were in the war with Russia, and it won't be the first time they've had such night-work."

"I don't want to disappoint you," said Mr. O'Hagan, pulling at his moustache, "but it's too risky–indeed it is. What would your poor mother say?"

Tim was so well accustomed to this appeal *ad matrem* that it had quite lost its effect.

"She'd jib to begin with, to be sure," he said, "but she'd give in in the end; she always does when it's not an absolute question of right or wrong. You'd better say yes, Father."

It was on the tip of his tongue to relate the adventures of the previous day, but he reflected that the story might have quite the opposite effect from what he intended. Mr. O'Hagan's last instructions to him had been not to go adventuring, and though he felt that he could hardly be blamed for adventures which had hurled themselves at him unsought, it was probable that his father would not recognise any reasoning of that kind. So he confined his arguments strictly to the matter in hand. Mr. O'Hagan's opposition was really half-hearted. He had come to have great faith in Tim's resourcefulness and luck. Ultimately he agreed to let the boy do what he had suggested; the success of his scheme might prove to be the turning-point of the struggle.

Helped by a half-moon, Tim set off about midnight with a dozen of the Japanese who had served in the army, including three gunners. As weapons they carried only revolvers and knives, with a good supply of cartridges. One of them had a dark lantern for signalling the result of the expedition to Mr. O'Hagan. Slipping down the road for some distance in the direction of San Rosario, they turned to the right, and roped themselves together for the climb into the hills.

It was the hardest job that Tim had ever undertaken. He had no compass, and could only direct his course by the position of the moon. Its light was not sufficient to enable him to choose the easiest way. There was no path. At the head of the line he clambered up wherever he could find foothold, sometimes, indeed, crawling on all-fours up slippery slopes, scrambling over or between boulders, now and then brought up by a sheer wall of rock impossible to scale. The party had often to rest and recover breath, and the ascent was so arduous and slow that he was a little uneasy lest the dawn should surprise them before they gained the summit. To make matters worse the moon was dropping, and its incessant change of position rendered it a far from trustworthy guide.

At last, after three hours of fatiguing work, they reached the crest of the ridge, where they caught sight of the lights in the Prefect's camp below them far away to the west. Tim guessed that the guns were placed somewhere along the ridge. He stole along quietly, stopping now and again to listen for signs of

the men in charge. Presently he came to a formidable buttress of rock projecting over the valley and rising many feet above the general level. It appeared to be the highest point in this part of the country, and if the top was flat, was the most likely place to have been chosen for the gun platform. Whispering to his men to move as quietly as possible, he led them along a narrow ledge on the face of the cliff below the buttress, edging into the wall on his left hand so as to avoid a fatal fall into the depths.

At the farther end of the ledge he halted. It was now almost dark; the moon had descended below the hills on the opposite side of the road. But by aid of the last lingering sheen he detected signs of recent pick-work on the ground, just beyond the spot where he stood. Evidently a squad of labourers had been employed to clear a passage for the guns. There was no sound. Casting off the rope, Tim stole forward alone, and soon discovered a rough path leading in the reverse direction towards the rear of the buttress.

His heart pumping with excitement, he returned to the men, and whispered his final instructions. There was to be no firing unless they had to defend themselves against overpowering numbers. Then he led them on noiselessly up the path. It ended sooner than he expected. He came suddenly to a level space of some extent, on which he saw two guns, pointing over the valley. Stretched on the ground behind them were ten men. They were asleep. Secure in their supposed inaccessibility, they had posted no guard.

Tim paused a moment, then ordered his men to steal round until they completely encompassed the sleeping crew. At a low whistle from him they sprang forward; there was a brief and almost silent struggle; and the enemy, only half awake, found themselves prisoners. Not a shot was fired; scarcely a wound was given.

Hurrying to the edge of the buttress with the lamp, Tim flashed it three times into the darkness. He knew that his father at the end of the defile, more than a mile away, would be anxiously watching. Then he returned to the guns. By the light of the lamp, carefully screened from the enemy's camp, the Japanese loaded the guns and swung them round until they pointed to the west. When he started, Tim had expected that, if he succeeded at all, he would only be able to spike the guns and then run for it. But having captured the small party of gunners, he saw no reason why he should not turn his success to account. It was now nearly four o'clock. Dawn would break very soon. And he thrilled with delight in the anticipated surprise in store for the Prefect.

The men waited impatiently. On this hill-top they would have earlier light than the troops below. By the time that the first rosy gleam stole out of the east the gunners were at their posts. This was work after their own hearts. The guns were not the perfect machines to which they were accustomed, and they laid

them with especial care. The shadows upon the camp at the head of the defile dissolved. As soon as there was light enough, the two gunners fired almost at the same instant, shattering the still morning. A thousand echoes reverberated across the valley, and rolled diminuendo from crag to crag. Before they died away Tim caught the faint sound of cheers from his father's camp.

The two shells had plunged into the centre of the enemy's position, causing a wild rush for shelter. The Prefect's first feeling was consternation. There was no artillery in San Rosario; whence had the enemy obtained the guns? Why had not his own gunners replied? As he looked up towards the platform on which they were posted he saw two swift flashes, and two more shells whistled overhead and crashed on the rocks just above him. His question was answered; the Mollendists, the despised brigands, had captured his guns and turned them upon him. In that bitter moment he wished, perhaps, that he had lent a less ready ear to the suggestions of Miguel Pardo. All the enterprise and daring which his enemy had recently shown was inspired, not by Carlos Mollendo, but by the foreigners, and they, but for Pardo, might have been with him, or at least not against him.

It was soon apparent that matters were serious. Shells were dropping into the defile as fast as the gunners could load. Already they had done much damage, and panic was spreading through the ranks. The men were seeking cover; some were already running to the rear, where the horses were tethered; none had any spirit for fight. While this disorder reigned, there was a sudden cry that the brigands were charging up the defile. The Prefect's troops vastly outnumbered Mr. O'Hagan's, but he had no advantage of them now. They had no faith in their cause, no enthusiasm for their leader. Disheartened by previous failure, demoralised by the bombardment of their own guns, they were deaf to the Prefect's passionate entreaties to stand firm. They answered him with oaths and curses. Nor was the Prefect of the stuff of heroes. He was not the man to gather about him a few choice spirits and steadfastly defend the pass. Surrounded, almost swept away by the yelling mob of his terror-stricken army, he elbowed his way through them, to gain the tree to which his horse was tied. He had better have allowed himself to be borne away on foot among his men. Mounted, he presented a conspicuous object to the head of the eager little force charging up the road. A dozen rifles were levelled at him; a dozen bullets sang through the air; and when the Prefect's body was lifted after the defile was cleared, it was found riddled.

The attack having been made on foot, no effective pursuit could be maintained. So precipitate, indeed, was the flight of the cowed troops, that only the laggards of the rear were in much danger, Mr. O'Hagan's victory was almost bloodless. The fugitives poured into San Juan; the wildest reports found easy

credence there. It became known by and by that the Prefect was killed, a piece of news at which more than his enemies rejoiced. The magnates of the town were hurriedly called together; they agreed to accept the new republic; and when, in the course of the afternoon, Señor Mollendo and Mr. O'Hagan rode in at the head of their troops, they were received with acclamations by the populace, and with a flowery address by the officials. The wheel of fortune had lifted the outlaw to the headship of the State.

CHAPTER XXV
THE RAVINE

Much to his disappointment, Tim was not a spectator of President Mollendo's triumphal entrance into his capital. He did not hear the eloquent oration delivered from the steps of the court house, nor was he present at the banquet at which the President fell on Mr. O'Hagan's neck, and kissed him amid the frantic plaudits of the company. When Tim saw the troops charging up the defile, he set off to join them, leaving the Japanese in charge of the guns. At some risk to his neck he scrambled down the face of the hill, and came up with the little army in time to take a share in the final scenes. When the victory was assured, Mr. O'Hagan sent him with Romaña and a hundred men back to San Rosario, to report the defeat and death of the Prefect, and keep order in the town.

San Rosario had quietly accepted the new régime. The few well-to-do people, who had suffered from the Prefect's levies, hoped that the system of benevolences was buried, and were prepared to give the new President a chance; the poorer folk cared little who their ruler was, or what the nature of the government, provided they were able to earn their living in peace. Señor Fagasta was perhaps the only unhappy man in the town.

Finding that everything was peaceful and orderly in the town, Tim thought he might venture to visit the hacienda, arrange for the necessary repairs to be made to the house against his father's return, and reopen work on the plantations, which would soon become a wilderness through neglect. Accordingly, on the second evening after his arrival in San Rosario, he rode over on his motorcycle, accompanied by Romaña on horseback. Biddy Flanagan was still alone in possession of the house. She welcomed Tim heartily, but was less cordial to Romaña: he was one of "them foreigners." Her joy at the approaching return of "the

master" was dulled by distress at the bareness of the rooms. The establishment of a republic was to her an insignificant event beside the loss of the best "chainey," and military glory did not compensate the theft of the silver spoons. And when, early next morning, she carried breakfast into the dining-room, she mournfully drew attention to the fact that she had had to make the coffee in a delf jug.

"'Tis because the silver coffee-pot be took, Master Tim," she said. "And there's no silver spoons for the eggs, and what will I say to the mistress when she comes home!"

"We can get some more, Biddy," said Tim. "And really, I always think that coffee tastes better out of a jug."

"'Deed now, that's true, but 'tis not for the likes of me to say so at all. If there was no difference between the kitchen and the dining-room of a gentleman's house, what would the country be after coming to? Sure I hope the villain is killed, and will not be the way of troubling us again."

"I wonder what became of Pardo?" said Tim to Romaña when the old woman was gone.

"You may be sure he is not killed," said Romaña. "Pardo is not the man to risk his skin in the fighting line."

"No, it may give him lumbago," rejoined Tim with a laugh. "I suppose he has gone off with his loot. A good riddance! After breakfast you might look round the house and see what repairs are needed, while I go over to the huts and tell the Jap women that their husbands are on the way home. It's a blessing none of the married men were killed except the one Pierola shot."

Some twenty minutes later Tim set off on foot for the labourers' huts half a mile across the plantation. He followed a path that intersected a field of sugar-cane, which grew so high that he was completely concealed. Presently it crossed a broad stretch of grass land separating the sugar from the coffee, and here Tim was surprised to see recent hoof-marks. None of his father's horses remained on the hacienda, and he wondered who could have ridden in this direction. If the tracks pointed towards the house he might have supposed that Felipe Durand had come over to see him; but they all led away from it, as though the rider had come either from the stables, or from the meadow behind the house.

Curiosity piqued him to follow up the marks. He took no pains to walk quietly, but his footfall was silent on the grass. The tracks led towards the road that ran past Durand's house and ultimately to the Inca ruins. After about a hundred yards the path bent to the right. On arriving at the bend Tim started back. A little ahead a horse was grazing. A bundle was slung from its crupper. Just beyond, there was a disused well, and here Tim saw a man, whose back was towards him, turning the windlass. He stood partially concealed among the plants to watch. Presently a second bundle appeared over the edge of the well.

The man untied it from the rope and turned with it in his arms towards the horse. Tim had already suspected his identity, and he now saw without surprise that it was Miguel Pardo.

Acting on impulse, he dashed forward, hoping to reach the thief before he could mount. But Pardo caught sight of him, vaulted into the saddle, and galloped towards the road. It was hopeless to pursue him on foot. Tim had his revolver, but he was not one to use it in cold blood. Instantly he thought of the cycle, which was in its shed at the back of the house. He sprinted back, started the engine, and in a few minutes was dashing in chase.

He knew that Pardo, in spite of his start, must soon be overtaken, and he had little doubt of the direction of his flight. Neither San Juan nor San Rosario would be safe for him; he would almost certainly choose the track to the Inca ruins; trusting in course of time to be able to make his way round over the hills, and seek refuge in another province where he was unknown.

Tim flew along to the track, wheeled into it, and looked ahead. Pardo was not in sight. Suddenly he remembered the broken bridge. It would certainly not have been repaired. Tim wondered whether Pardo had heard of its destruction. In that case he would not have come this way, but would have chosen the western track. If he was in ignorance of what had happened, he would be checked perforce at the ravine, and the chase would soon be over. Even supposing he had followed the other track, Tim thought that the speed of his cycle would allow him to ride to the bridge, make sure, return to the cross-roads, and still overtake the fugitive, who would no doubt slacken his pace when he supposed himself to be unpursued.

As Tim passed Durand's house, Felipe came down the path. Tim afterwards discovered that he had seen the horseman dashing by, and wondered who could be so foolish as to ride along a track which within a few miles was impassable.

"Pardo!" shouted Tim as he flashed past, and Durand ran for his horse to follow the chase.

A mile beyond the house Tim caught sight of his quarry. In another minute or two he must turn at bay. No doubt he was armed, and Tim for the first time realised that he might presently be involved in rather a desperate struggle. While the horse was galloping, Pardo, encumbered as he was with his bundle, would be unable to take steady aim. But as soon as he came within sight of the bridgeless ravine, he would spring from his saddle and fire. Tim had set off in pursuit with the simple idea of capturing Pardo, and handing him over to the civic authorities for trial and punishment as a thief; but he saw now that he was not likely to succeed without a fight.

The distance between horseman and cyclist rapidly diminished. The long hill beyond the ravine came in sight, but the ruins of the bridge were as yet hidden

by the short acclivity beyond which the track dipped. Pardo was just reaching the top of this ascent as Tim arrived at the bottom. There were only fifty yards between them. Before Tim was prepared for the movement Pardo suddenly made a half-turn in the saddle and fired. The shot flew wide, and Tim, edging in on the near side of the track, so that Pardo could only use his revolver again if he turned completely round, or twisted to the left and fired over his shoulder, rode relentlessly on up the ascent. In a few seconds he expected the final tussle.

On gaining the brow of the hill Pardo checked, drew his restive horse across the road, and pointing his revolver steadily, fired. Tim had guessed his intention, and his own shot rang out almost simultaneously. Pardo, not allowing for his altitude, fired too high: Tim's aim was spoilt by his bobbing movement on the machine, and his shot wounded the horse instead of the man. Before either could fire again, the situation was changed with a suddenness that for a moment took him aback. The horse, already alarmed by the clatter of the engine and the sound of the shots, was rendered frantic by its wound. Springing round on its hind legs, it took the bit between its teeth and bolted down the slope towards the ravine.

When Tim gained the top, he realised with horror the desperate peril of his enemy, and instantly forced down his brakes and stopped the machine, in the hope that with the cessation of the noise the animal's terror would lessen in time for its career to be checked. Pardo, a moment after the descent had begun, saw the hideous gap in front of him, and made a desperate effort to rein up. But it was too late. The maddened horse galloped on blindly, came to the edge of the chasm, and instinctively made a frantic leap for the opposite bank. It jumped short by several feet. Then, with a scream that rang in Tim's ears for many a day, horse and rider plunged to the bottom.

Tim had already leapt off his machine. He ran forward and at no small risk clambered down the steep side of the ravine. Both horse and horseman were dead, amid a litter of broken pottery and scattered plate, which had burst from the bundles. Tim shrank from touching any of the stolen property. White to the lips, he climbed up to the track, and staggered into the arms of Durand, who had followed on horseback.

CHAPTER XXVI
HANDSOME ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

One evening, a few weeks after the close of the brief campaign, the town-hall of San Juan presented a picturesque and even brilliant spectacle. All the important people, and a good many of the unimportant, of the capital and of San Rosario were assembled in response to the President's invitation, to celebrate the foundation of the Republic. Two long tables ran the length of the hall; at the top a cross table was ranged beneath a shield bearing the Mollendo arms. The President occupied the centre seat. On his right hand sat General O'Hagan, on his left a young captain of the same name. Next in order to these were the principal actors in this little drama: Colonel Zegarra, his friend the lawyer, Dr. Pereira, Nicolas Romaña, Pedro Galdos, the Durands, father and son–for Señor Durand, having contributed to the Mollendist war-fund, had apparently determined to get something for his money.

Two personages whom one would hardly have expected to see there were Señor Fagasta and Captain Pierola. Señor Mollendo had been informed by Tim of the warning given by the gobernador, which had resulted in the discomfiture of Pardo's night attack on the house. The President argued from this that Señor Fagasta had his good points; and being anxious to conciliate the officials under the old régime he reinstated the burly gentleman in his former office. For the same reason he offered to Captain Pierola, now recovered of his wound, the command of the republican forces, which Mr. O'Hagan, deaf to all entreaties, had relinquished.

In a balcony at the opposite end of the hall sat a bevy of ladies, to watch the feasting in which they, angelically, were not to partake, and to hear the speeches that would follow. Mrs. O'Hagan sat in the centre beside Señora Mollendo. The younger ladies, dressed with all the grace and charm of which the Peruvian belle is mistress, were impatient for the end of the tiresome preliminaries: the banquet in which they could not share, the speeches which some of them had already heard rehearsed, had less attractions for them than the dance which was to round off the proceedings.

The table decorations were unusual. The vases were filled with leaves, blossoms, and berries of the nasturtium, of which homely plant every guest had a flower in his button-hole.

The courses were handed round; the glasses of wine and pisco were filled and emptied and filled again; and then the President rose. A smile beamed upon his benevolent features as he surveyed the cheering company. A broad band of orange satin formed a graceful loop over his white waistcoat, and a large diamond in his shirt-front flashed as it caught the rays of the innumerable candles. He was a dignified and impressive figure.

When the cheers had subsided, he began to speak. After a few introductory sentences, he launched into a summary of the events which had led up to

this culminating scene. He described the birth of the Republic, enunciated with great eloquence the principles which would govern his administration, and then, turning to personal matters, announced the honours and dignities which he had conferred on certain of the gentlemen whom he saw on either side. He made graceful references to the legal attainments of Señor Fagasta, to the military abilities of Captain Pierola, to the loyal services of Señores Pedro Galdos and Nicolas Romaña, whom he had appointed respectively treasurer and secretary of the Republic. Then, after an expressive pause, he proceeded:

"Gentlemen, on this great and auspicious occasion I have a duty to perform—a duty of which I acquit myself with all the ardour of an overflowing heart. There are epochs in the life of nations when the firmament is obscured by dark aggregations of cloud, which exclude the radiance of heaven's bright luminaries, and among which the thunder rumbles with awful and portentous reverberation. At such a period of distress and gloom, when Rome, the heart and centre of the ancient world, saw herself threatened by pestilent hosts of waspish barbarians, the eyes of men turned in their trouble towards a simple farmer, who pursued the avocations of bucolic life in his rural retreat, amid sounds no more horrific than the lowing of his cattle and the guttural ejaculations of his swine. To him repaired a deputation of his despairing countrymen, who found him cleaving the stubborn soil with his labouring plough, and besought him to quit those haunts of industry and peace, and, exchanging the gleaming ploughshare for the well-tempered sword, the smock of Ceres for the shining corslet of Mars, to return with them and save the State.

"You know, gentlemen, the sequel of that momentous domiciliary visit. You know how Cincinnatus marshalled his hosts, led them against the enveloping invaders, and having smitten Volscians and Æquians with irresistible might, laid aside the implements of war, and withdrew to replace the yoke upon his toiling oxen, and ruminate in rustic simplicity upon the vicissitudes of mortal things.

"Gentlemen, we too have our Cincinnatus. We have in our midst a gentleman who, driven from his peaceful fields by the shameless greed of tyranny, threw in his lot with the despairing victims of a rapacious despot: who, having laid down the sword which he had wielded with conspicuous dexterity in his youth against the enemies of his adopted country, girded it on in his maturer years at the call of an oppressed and suffering community. Gentlemen, it is to him we owe the inception of the reign of peace and prosperity in this elevated region. I bid you raise your glasses and drain them to the health of our illustrious friend and liberator, our Cincinnatus, Señor General O'Hagan."

The President's speech was hailed with a chorus of vivas as the company sprang to their feet to honour the toast. Handkerchiefs fluttered in the ladies' gallery. Tim, catching Durand's eye, winked, and his friend responded with a

look which meant "Look out! The old buffer hasn't done yet." Tim wondered what his father would say in answer to this effusion. He found that the President, instead of resuming his seat when the cheers had died away, remained standing, took a sip from his glass, and went on:

"History does not record whether Cincinnatus was a married man, but, indulging our imaginations, we may suppose that he had a wife and family. We may see with our mind's eye the homely Roman matron, leaving the meal-tub when her husband broke to her the fateful news, and wiping the flour from her industrious hands that she might gird him with the sword, and furbish his shield, and arrange the folds of his toga in comely dignity. We may picture his sons and daughters gazing with admiration not unmixed with awe at their heroic father, watching him as he bestrode his fields with the proud senators who had brought the people's summons, gazing with longing eyes day after day into the misty distance, wondering with anxious fears how their beloved progenitor was faring in the stress and heat of strife. We can imagine their pride and gladness when he returned, crowned with the laurel wreath of victory, and, so far as history relates, without a wound. We can see them gathered about his knee, on the winter nights when the pine-logs crackle, and the wolf's long howl undulates across the marshes, and hang upon his lips as he relates the story of great doings on the stricken field.

"These, I say, are the pictures which imagination paints for us; but we need no aid from imagination to behold the domestic life of our own Cincinnatus. *Integer vitae, sceleris purus*, as the great Roman sang, he has lived among us, in a home graced by the presence of a beauteous spouse, and brightened by the lively merits of a gallant youth. Such praise and gratitude as we owe to the father we owe also in no small measure to the son, who sits beside me in all the glow of healthy juvenility, blushing with ingenuous pride in the achievements of his noble sire. What need to recount, gentlemen, the exploits of this youthful warrior! Modestly as he himself has veiled them, the admiration of his devoted men could not be silenced, and they proclaim his prowess with unbated enthusiasm. Picture the scene, gentlemen, when, pursued for long miles by the mounted warriors of the tyrant, our dauntless friend sped on unfaltering on his matchless steed, and was not abashed when he beheld the yawning gulf unbridged before him. For him Fate had not ordained the sacrificial leap of Marcus Curtius; the safety of the State did not demand his death. Flashing like a meteor to the very brink of the abyss, he defied the laws of Nature, and soared through the startled air with the swift legerity of a mountain bird. Thus wonderfully preserved from peril behind and before, he played a manful part in the final scenes of this glorious revolution, and, in the words of the august orator of Rome, *de republica bene est meritus*. I bid you raise your glasses, and drain them to the health of Señor Capitan O'Hagan."

The toast was hailed with thunderous applause. Tim sat with downcast eyes, wishing that the floor would open and swallow him. "I hope to goodness the old josser is done now!" he thought. But the President waited with a benignant smile until silence was restored, then went on:

"It is known to you, gentlemen, that the Señor Capitan is the first recipient of the Order of the Nasturtium, which I have founded in celebration of the new era upon which we have entered. Since it becomes us to invoke the gracious countenance of feminine loveliness upon the order, I have inscribed at the head of the roll the name of the Señora O'Hagan."

Here he bowed very gallantly towards the balcony, and Tim, glancing up, saw his mother incline her head, and raise her handkerchief to her mouth, as if to hide a smile.

"It is known to you also, gentlemen," the President continued, "that in deference to the unanimous wish of the citizens, I have consented that a statue of myself shall be erected in the plaza of this town, not in any spirit of vainglory, but as a permanent witness of the triumph of the principles which I profess. But I deemed it unfitting that the sister town of San Rosario should be without a similar memorial, and I have therefore taken upon myself to order, from Paris, the home of art, two other statues, to stand in the plaza of our neighbour. The one will represent the Señor General as Cincinnatus, garbed in the toga of ancient Rome, with a sword crossed upon a ploughshare at his feet. The other will exhibit the effigy of the Señor Capitan. It was a matter of much deliberation how to mould this second statue that it might form a harmonious companion of the first. As you are aware, the Romans did not anticipate the triumphs of the inventive modern mind. They did not possess the motor-bicycle. But by dint of much thought I have reconciled the old with the new. The Señor Capitan will appear as Mercury, the messenger of the gods, with his caduceus in his hand, and his winged feet planted on a globe. These statues will face each other in the public square, and proclaim to future generations the features and the characteristics of the two gentlemen whose achievements and merits we honour so heartily to-night."

The President at last sat down. Mr. O'Hagan, looking supremely uncomfortable, thanked him and the company, for himself and Tim, for the flattering honours that had been paid to them; and after speeches from Señor Fagasta, Colonel Zegarra, and half a dozen other notables, the proceedings came to an end, and the hall was cleared for dancing.

"I say, old chap," said Durand, when he had an opportunity of speaking to Tim, "won't you feel rather cold as Mercury?"

"Shut up!" growled Tim. "Old Moll's off his chump. But he doesn't mean it."

"But he does!"

"Well then, I'll waylay the silly old thing on the road, and smash it to bits. I never heard of such silly rot."

But these violent measures were not necessary. Every now and then during the next few months Durand put Tim in a rage by announcing that the statues had left Paris, that they had reached Lima, that they were on the road. But the truth is that the financial straits to which the new republic was soon reduced have hindered the realisation of President Mollendo's generous dream, and up to the present the plaza of San Rosario is destitute of classic statuary. Cincinnatus lives very contentedly on his farm, and Mercury is now leading a grimy existence in some famous engineering shops on the Tyne.

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