POOR DOCUMENT

MC 2033

The Missourian

By Eugene P. Lyle, Jr.

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CHAPTER XLV.—(Continued.)

But however excellently Queretero served as a base of military operations, as a besieged place pocketed among hills her aspect altered woefully. She was like an egg clutched in the talons of an eagle. On north and east and south the hills swept perilously near, a low, convenient range, with only a grass plain a few miles wide separating them from the town below. On north and east the heights were already sprinkled with Escobedo's tents and cannon. They commanded the only two strongholds of the besieged, as well as the town itself, which lay between. One stronghold was the Cerro de las Campanas, a wedge-shaped hill on the northwestern edge of the town, which held nothing but trenches. On the northwestern edge was the other stronghold, the mound of Sangremal, which fell away as a steep bluff to the grassy plain below. From the bluff, across the plain, to the hills opposite, stretched a magnificent aqueduct. On the mound's commodious summit of tableland there was the Plaza de la Cruz, also the Church de la Cruz, and an old Franciscan hive, called the monastery de la Cruz. Here Maximilian established himself in a friar's lonely cell. On the north a small river skirted the town, on the south, where nothing intervened between the grassy plain and the wooded Alameda, the besiegers found the most vulnerable flank.

On this side investment began with the arrival of Corona and Regules, and soon after, of General Riva Palacio. The Republicans numbered fifteen thousand already, and more were coming daily, but as yet there were ragged strands in the noose being woven around the beleaguered place. Curiously enough, the most feverish to see the cordon perfected was none other than Don Tiburcio.

"Marquez will escape! Marquez will fly the net!" he kept bewailing. "Si, senor, and the padrecito with him, curse them both!"

Two weeks passed, filled with skirmishes and ominous tests of strength. At night fiery parabolas blazed their course against the sky, up from the outer hills, sweeping down on Las Campanas or La Cruz. Imperialist chiefs urged a general attack, but again Marquez foiled their hopes. Then, at two o'clock one morning, there came to pass what Tiburcio had feared. A body of horse stole out upon the plain, and gained the unguarded Sierra road to Mexico. Four thousand cavalry pursued over the hills, but in vain. The fugitives were Marquez and the Fifth Lancers, his escort. He was gone to the capital to raise funds, and to bring back with him, at once, the Imperialist garrison there of five thousand men. Doting Maximilian had even named him lieutenant of the Empire, and Mexico City would shortly have the Leopard for regent. Queretero, moreover, was seriously weakened by the loss of the Fifth Lancers, and there were those who remembered how, when Guadalajara was besieged by Liberals seven years before, Marquez had likewise set out for aid, and had returned—too late.

To his wrathful disgust, Don Tiburcio learned that Father Fischer was also gone with Marquez. The priest had disguised himself in an officer's cloak, and for the moment none in the town knew of his flight. The fat padre, it appeared, no longer hoped for the luscious bishopric of Durango. His was the rat's instinct, as regards a sinking ship.

The Leopard and the Rat got away only in time. The very next day day ten thousand ragged Inditos, largely conscripts, arrived from the Valley of Mexico and filled the gap in the besiegers' line. Investment was now complete against a paltry nine thousand within the town.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A Buccaneer and a Battle.

"The inclination to goodness is imprinted deeply in the nature of man."—Bacon.

But the paltry nine thousand were the best army of Mexicans ever yet gathered together. For weeks they kept more than thirty thousand Republicans out of an unwalled, almost an unfortified town. But while the Republicans were largely chinacos, or raw soldiery, they inside were trained men. There were the Cazadores, a Mexican edition of the Chasseurs, organized by Bazine under French drill masters. There was Mendez's seasoned brigade. There was Arellano's artillery, though numbering only fifty pieces. There were the crack Dragoons of the Empress, the Austro-Mexican Hussars, and a squadron of the Municipal Guards. There were veterans who had fought at Cerro Gordo, and steadily ever since in the civil wars. There was the ancient Battalion de Celaya, mainstay of the Spanish viceroys, and later of the Emperor Iturbide, its colonel. There were the Battalion del Emperador, the Tiradores de la Frontera, a company of engineers, and several well-disciplined regiments of the line.

But the day came when they began to starve, and being hungry took the heart out of many things. It took the heart out of bombarding Escobedo in his hillside adobe; out of taunting "uncouth rebels." The rebels were in trenches often not a street's width distant, and for reply they pointed to certain dangling acorns who had been "traitors" caught slipping through the lines. Being hungry took the heart out of the quick-time diana, played after a brilliant sortie. Out of the embrace Maximilian gave Miramon. Out of Miramon's call for vivas for His Majesty the Emperor. Out of standard decorating and promotions and thrilling words of praise. Out of the anniversary of Maximilian's acceptance of the throne. Out of a medal presentation for military merit, which the generals bestowed on their Emperor in the name of the army. Out of being made a caballero of the Order of Guadalupe, especially as the monarch could give only a ribbon, since the cross must wait until his return to the capital. And being hungry certainly made pathetic his prediction that some among those present could one day wear the medal for twenty-five years of faithful service to the Empire. Being hungry took the poet-hero's glow out of his wan cheek as he declared again that he, a Hapsburg, would never desert, for even then he heard Imperialist platoons shooting recaptured deserters. Or he thought of the wounded left to die on the grassy plain and lying there unburied. No, all the heart was being taken out of these things, for Marquez still did not come with the help he had gone to bring, and the noose was tightening day by day. Attempts were made to send some one through to depose Marquez, but each one failed. Splendid sallies resulted in prisoners taken, which were only so many more mouths to feed. The Roman aqueduct had long since been cut off, and now the wells were giving out. Mules and horses drank at the river, while sharpshooters picked them off. The feebler animals were butchered and distributed as rations. And still the sorry Marquez gave no sign. Even hope failed the empty stomachs.

But for those who waited outside as Vengeance enthroned, expectation began to take on a creepy quality. The besiegers were preparing against themselves a host, not of men, but of frightful specires, of famished maniacs, or unearthly ghouls, who would clutch and tear with claws any man that stood between them and a morsel of food. And the fury of desperation sharpened with each succeeding irony of a dinner hour.

The siege had endured six weeks. Marquez had been gone a month. But the Republicans held ready for whatever force he might bring. Their key to the situation was the Cimatario, the highest hill on the south. Between it and the wooded Alameda stretched the grassy plain. Republican trenches from base to shoulder of the peak opposed Imperialist trenches under the Alameda trees. Republican troops flanked the Cimatario on either side, lying in wait for Marquez. On one side Driscoll's Grays guarded the Celaya road.

So here they were sleeping encamped on the morning of April 27, when the bugle of a patrol cracked their slumbers. They lay booted and spurred. A moment later they were horsed as well, blinking across the plain in the pearly mist of dawn. They had heard hoofbeats, sharp and dry on the high tableland. Now they saw a wild, shadowy troop, which was hotly pursuing a spectral coach of gossamer wheels, with six plunging mules frantically lashed by outriders. At once, almost, the coach was lost among the dim strangers, who snatched at flying ends of harness, and with their prize raced on again.

The Grays stared. It was like some pictured hold-up, not real. But they knew better when from among themselves a colossal yellow horse and rider dashed toward the road. Then they awoke for certain, and tore after their colonel to solve this ashen mystery so early in the morning. Was it Marquez, perhaps? But the coach white with dust, and white curtains flapping, what was that?

Striking their flanks at an angle, Driscill drove hard into the fleeing horde. The Grays saw his hand raise as a signal, whereat they did not close in, but swerved and galloped parallel, some fifty paces distant. Driscoll struggled alone against the heaving sea about him. But no cut-throat of that pirate mass so much as drew a knife. By force of brawn, he wedged his way toward the coach, reached it, leaned forward, and caught up the curtain. And what he saw was a poke bonnet. The bonnet was a bower of lace and roses, held by a filmy saucy knot under a lady's chin. He saw a face framed within, of a skin creamy white, of lips blood-red, of hair like copper, and he saw a pair of eyes. They were gray eyes, and as they opened suddenly and wider upon him whom she thought must be her captor, the lady started violently, her cheeks aflame. But at once the eyes snapped as in mockery, and her lips moved.

"Monsieur permits himself—" she began, but no one heard except her terrified companion within the coach. Driscoll had already dropped the curtain as a thing that burned, and was raging on again with the turbulent stream. He got to the leader of the band, and jerked the fellow's bridle. He raised his voice, and louder than the the pounding of hoofs he cursed in wrathful disgust.

"Dam' you Rod, this here's getting monotonous!"

The man swung in his saddle. His eyes were black-browed and savage. He was Rodrigo Galan, the terrible Don Rodrigo. But shabby, how very shabby he looked for the thief of million dollar convoys! Yet that bonanza coupe of the bullion train had happened two years ago. Since then the outlaw had visited the capital. Boldly, audaciously, he had gone as a rich hacendado, and after the manner of rich hacendados he had "seen the City." Mozos with gorged canvas bags on their shoulders had followed his stately stride into the gambling casigos. He had played with regal nerve, and on the last occasion, had flung the emptied sacks away as nonchalantly as on the first. Only, the last time, he had felt remorse that the "bank" had profited instead of Tiburcio. In that matter of the bullion convoy he had not treated Don Tiburcio as one caballero should another.

Their horses—Rodrigo's and Driscoll's—were racing by bounds shoulder to shoulder. This endured for possibly the space of a second. Then Demijohn felt his rein tighten, and he took more time. Next his bit suddenly pinched, and down the old fellow came upon his front feet together, firmly planted, and sank to his haunches. Driscoll still held Rodrigo's bridle, and Rodrigo and horse, being in air, lunged backward.

"We stop here," Driscoll announced.

Don Rodrigo plumped down heavily in his saddle. His bristling moustache lifted over his cruel white teeth. Two hundred swarthy little demons reining in around them looked expectantly for a signal. But their chief frowned at the twelve hundred Gringo Grays hovering on his flank. They too wanted only a sign, and they outnumbered the Brigand's six to one. But Rodrigo believed he held the advantage. First he obediently halted himself and his mutineers.

"Now then, senor," said he in pompous and heavy syllables, "I am at your disposition. Will your people commence the battle, or shall we?"

Driscoll appreciated the dilemma. The carriage would be in the line of fire. He had had an intuition of its occupants, and for that reason had kept back his men.

"Where was she going?" he demanded.

Rodrigo feigned surprise. "And where," he asked, "or rather, to whom, should Your Mercy imagine?"

To Queretero! To Maximilian, of course! This, too, Driscoll had divined already.

"No matter," he retorted shortly, "but how did you run across her this time?"

The outlaw filled his chest. "You Americanos, senor, do not understand the feelings of a man bowed under a heavy wrong. You—"

"We'll let it go at that," said Driscoll, with a little wave of the hand, "but—how in——"

"You scoff already, senor. But will you, at these stains of blood? Then let me say to you, senor mio, they make me remember one shameless deed for which the tyrant Maximilian must pay."

The stains Rodrigo meant were on a little ivory cross which he had taken from his jacket. The emblem served him to lash his emotions, to goad his precious sense of wrong. He studied the cross intently; then, by a vast and excruciating effort, thrust it into Driscoll's hand.

"Yes, yes," he cried, "you must take it! He said so."

"He?"

"Si, senor, he who shares my wrong, Don Anastasio Murguia."

"Murgie!" exclaimed the bewildered American. "But—why, hombre, I haven't seen the old skinflint since—since he and I both were courtmartialled by Lopez!"

"Still I promised him to send the cross to you, because you will have a chance to give it to him. He said so."

"Oh, he did?" But Driscoll put the trinket in his pocket, not unwilling to see more of this foolish drama in Latin-American sentiment. "Now then, Rod," he went on impatiently, "you haven't explained yet how you happen to find her again."

"That," replied the outlaw, "was his part of the bargain."

"Who-se?"

"Anastasio Murguia's."

"Rod, you talk like a——"

"But no, senor, it's because you Americans cannot understand. 'Murguia also believes in vengeance. I haven't seen him, either, not since he sold his hacienda over a year ago. But I do know that he or some spy of his is in the capital, for a messenger from him came to me in the mountains. The messenger said that the Marquesa d'Aumerle was leaving for Queretero. If I captured her, it would be vengeance in kind. But Murguia wanted pay for his information. He wanted that cross—it was his daughter's—and I was to send it to him through you. Dios mio, but I had to hurry! A little more, and the Marquesa would have been inside your lines."

"She is already," Driscoll corrected him, "and so are you. Will you fight it out, or surrender?"

He pointed to the Grays as he spoke. They had dismounted, and each man had a rifle at aim across his saddle. It was a reminiscence out of Driscoll's boyhood of Indians and the Sante Fe trail. But Don Rodrigo only smiled.

"You want the coach first?" he said.

"No!" Driscoll retorted. "You're the one that's wanted, and you can either wait for your trial, or be shot now, fighting. The coach will have to take its chances. But see here, if the firing once starts, not a thief among you will be left standing——"

It was a perilous "bluff," and none might say if it would have broken the deadlock. But the outlaw interrupted.

"Listen! What's that?"

"Oh, nothing. We're only throwing a few bombs into Queretero."

"Only!" The brigand's eyes flashed, and his voice was filled with envy. Throwing bombs among the traitors?—and magnificence like that had grown common! Yet he, whose patriotism was a passion that fed and thrived upon itself, must be barred from such exquisite satiety.

Driscoll understood, and thought it droll. First there was that loyal Imperialist, Don Tiburcio, frothing chagrin because he had had to desert. And now here was this rabid Republican, heart-broken over being outlawed from the ranks of his country's avengers.

Again Rodrigo interrupted, more excitedly yet. "Senor, senor, you don't shoot them that way every day? What does it mean?"

Both gazed across the plain to the city of domes under the green hills. Driscoll's chin raised, and he listened intently. What had commenced like indolent target practice against a beleaguered town had suddenly burst into a terrific cannonading chorus. More, there was musketry, vicious and sustained. There were troops deploying over the plain. Something critical was happening. If it were the supreme rally of the famishing Empire!

Driscoll stirred uneasily. He glanced at his outlaw. He thought of the coach. To leave her with these ruffians? To miss a fight? Here was a quandary!

"You are not going?" Rodrigo cried at him furiously. "Now, now," he raged, "is the hour of triumph for the incarnation of popular sovereignty. Go, I say, go, the Republic needs you!"

Until those words Rodrigo had held the situation. With them he lost it, and Driscoll was master. And Driscoll grew serene, and very sweet of manner. He began filling a cob pipe. A nod of his head indicated the coach as a condition of his going.

"Look, look!" Rodrigo shouted. "Oh, que viva—they're running! We've smoked them out! We've smoked them out!"

Driscoll swept the country with his glasses. Thousands of men were running like frightened rabbits down the Cimatario slope, and spreading as a fan over the grassy plain. Mountain pieces boomed farewell behind them, until in abject panic they cast away cabbines and scrambled the faster. But other troops were pushing up the slope opposite the town, and these were ordered ranks of infantry. Up and up they climbed, to trench after trench, and the howitzers one by one stopped short their roar. When Driscoll laid down the glasses, his face was white. Rodrigo's glee turned to uncertainty.

"What—what——"

"Smoked out, you fool? We're the ones smoked out!"

"But those runaways?"

"Are our own men, ten thousand of 'em, raw conscripts to support our batteries on the Cimatario."

"But the Cimitario?" Rodrigo knew by instinct the crucial importance of the black cone.

"The Cimitario is taken by the Imperialists!"

Driscoll did not forget, however, the nearer contest, and as the Mexican grew frantic, he was the more coolly indifferent.

"Max has everything his own way now," he added soothingly. "He can either evacuate, or go around on the north side and thrash Escobedo."

But the Grays were clamoring for action. "By cracken, Din, hurry up there!" yelled Cal Grinders.

Driscoll raised his palm, waving the fingers for patience. He scanned the plain again. The Imperialist ranks were breaking. Hungry men rushed on the besiegers' camps, snatching untouched breakfasts. The townsmen poured out among the uniforms, and darted greedily in every direction. The llano was alive with scurrying human beings. Driscoll could well wait for the psychology of Republican defeat on Don Rodrigo, since at the same time he awaited the effects of victory on a starving army. The Grays fretted, but they knew their colonel was never more to be depended upon than when his blood grew cold like this.

"If," Driscoll observed pleasantly to the Mexican, "Escobedo isn't already making tracks for San Luis—"

It was the last straw. The patriot brigand jerked off his sombrero and flung it to the ground. He gestured wildly over the plan, and he gestured in the American's face. He choked on words that boiled up too fast.

"You—you—traitor!" he sputtered. There was actually froth on his lips.

"We haven't," Driscoll reminded him with exceeding gentleness, "settled this other yet," and again he nooded to the coach.

"That—that is why you wait?" Rodrigo had forgotten his prize entirely. "Take her, then, take her! Only go, go, kill all the traitors!"

"After you, caballero," Driscoll returned with Mexican politeness. He wanted to be sure of the outlaw's departure, since holding him prisoner was now out of the question. But Rodrigo chafed only to be gone. With a reed whistle he signaled his little demon centaurs, then at a touch of the spurs his horse leaped forward and all the band clattered close on his heels.

"Sure anxious to escape," thought Driscoll. But he stared after them in wonder. Instead of turning to the safety of the mountains, they charged straight ahead on the town, straight against the Empire, and in any case, straight into the maw of justice. Behind, the coach and mules stood high and dry in the road. Driscoll was at once all action.

"Shanks," he called.

Mr. Boone hurried to him from the Grays.

"Shanks, will you stay here with six men——"

"Jack Driscoll!"

"To watch the coach, Dan. There's two girls in it."

"Jack! Miss that there fight!"

"But Dan, those girls are friends of yours, you met them once."

Mr. Boone started violently.

"Never mind, I'll ask Rube Marmaduke or the Parson."

A pitiful struggle racked Mr. Boone.

"You, you're not fooling me, Dan?" he pleaded.

"Sure not. It's your empress all right. It's Miss Burt all right."

"Then, Lawd help me, I'll stay!—But you'd best be hustling and get to work."

"Just a minute, Shanks, there's the other one in the coach. She wants to go to Queretero. If she gives her word of honor—never mind, she knows honor from a man's standpoint—if she gives her word that she brings nothing that will help 'em inside, then you can escort the coach into the town after things quiet down some. All right? Good. Then we're off!"

Demijohn's hoofs pelted dust balls with each impact. The Grays were ready. They surged behind. The sound of them was a swishing roar. In the apex of the blinding tempest, Driscoll sat his saddle as unmoved as an engineer in his cab. He looked ahead placidly. Empire and a prince had just triumphed. So he was going to readjust fatality. The smile touched his lips as it never had before, and hovered there in the midst of battle

CHAPTER XLVII.

Blood and Noise—What Else?

"On stubborn foes he vengeance wreak'd,
And laid about him like a Tartar,
But if for mercy once they squeak'd,
He was the first to grant them quarter."
—Orlando Furioso.

Only for the moment of a cooling breath is Nature gray in Mexico. The sun's barbed shafts had already ripped away the cloak of dawn when Driscoll and his cavaliers swept over the glaring road. But there was no longer any battle. The plain swarmed confusion only. Panic cringed before hunger. The defeated besiegers panted, stumbled, ran on again, or lay still in trembling. The victorious besieged were gorging from fingers crammed full. It was the hour for trophies. A prosperous townsman bore a stack of tortillas, and gloated leeringly as he hurried to put his treasure safely away. A dashing Hungarian with fur pelisse shouted gallant oaths at a yoke of oxen and prodded them with his curved sword, as though a creaking cart filled with corn were the precious loot of an Attila. Pueblo and soldiery tore ravenously at fortifications that had so long kept them from one savory broth. With nails alone they would demolish walls and trenches. Some lurched over fugitives in the grass, and then pinned them there, with bayonets, the lust for food turning fiendishly to a lust for blood.

But what most inflamed the Grays were the captured cannon. They counted as many as twenty being dragged into the Imperialist lines. The Missourians were aggrieved. Never, never had Joe Shelby's brigade ever lost a gun. And as they galloped they looked anxiously about for chances of more battle. Just then Rodrigo's outlaw band caught their eye. These had swerved from the road out upon the field, hot to engage anything, everything. A long provision train offered first. Many carts had been loaded with Republican stores, and were being convoyed to the town by a squadron of Imperialist cavalry. It was the clash between this escort and the brigands that attracted the Grays coming on behind. But the escort wheeled and fled and the brigands pursued, slashing with machetes, and so charged full tilt into the Dragoons of the Empress who were sent to retake the abandoned prize. Red tunics mixed with ragged yellow shirts, and war-chargers and mustangs swirled together as a maelstrom. Then the Grays pounded among them, in each hand of each man a six-shooter. The red spots began to fall out of the peppered caldron. The red tunics that were left broke, retreated, ran. It became a rout. Only a few of the Empire's best survived those ten minutes of blood-letting. Fatality? Driscoll's lip curled. Fatality? The Dragoons, now, no more, had twice held him for their bullets.

Grays and brigands chased them back toward Queretero. The fleeing remnant began yelling for help. Driscoll rose in his stirrups, and saw just ahead a large force of the enemy. It was gathered around the Casa Blanca, a little house on the plain. The large Imperialist force there was an army, nothing less, though still disordered from the late action and victory. Surrounded by a brilliant staff was a tall, golden bearded chieftain, sumptuously arrayed as a general of division, regally mounted on a cream-coated horse of Spain. He was Maximilian, viewing from there the winning of his empire. The army behind him filled his ears—"Viva Su Majestad!"

But he who had given the cue for that thrilling music now saw the convoy's fate. He rode up and down anxiously, striving for order in the confused ranks. He wore the green sash of a general. He had a moustache and imperial, searching black eyes, and an open brow. His fine features showed in the blend of French and Castilian blood. He was the real chieftain. He was Miramon. Impetuously he made ready to avenge the Dragoons.

These things that he saw ahead brought Driscoll to his senses. With reluctance, but instantly, he made up his mind. He held high his sable and halted his own men, turning at the same time to collide obliquely, and purposely, against Rodrigo.

"Not that way, Rod, not that way!"

"But it's the tyrant! It's the tyrant!"

Driscoll got the brigand's bridle and swung him around fiercely. "Let the poor tyrant be!" he yelled. "We've got to take that there Cimatario hill."

A moment later Grays and brigands wheeled to the right and were off. Back at the Casa Blanca Maximilian lowered his glasses. "They surely, they surely are not—yes," he cried, "they are going to attack the Cimatario!"

Miramon smiled. "Then they are lunatics," he said. "Why, Your Highness knows that we have five thousand of our best men on the Cimatario."

"Yes," Maximilian agreed uneasily, "but I thought I recognized the man who leads those lunatics. Do you happen to know, general, how Tampico fell?"

"Do not worry, sire," Miramon replied, willing to humor the prince, "I will take our infantry to the Alameda and strengthen our reserve there, should anything really happen."

Across the grassy plan raced the twelve hundred cavalry and the two hundred outlaws. They raced to attack five thousand brave men who had that morning dislodged ten thousand. Five thousand in the trenches above, fourteen hundred in the open below, such were the odds of Empire against Republic.

Grays and brigands drew rein under the Cimatario's west slope, and the bugle sounded to dismount.

"But senor," Rodrigo protested, "don't we charge straight up?"

"And not have a man left when we do get up. Here Gem," Driscoll added to Old Brother and Sisters, the lieutenant colonel of the Grays, "you circle round and up the other side with eight companies. Take all the horses, but leave 'em back of the hill as you go. Don't that look like the bet scheme?"

The parson's cherub features beamed. "Good-bye, Din," he said. "But pshaw, I reckon—I reckon we'll be meeting up above." He referred, however, to the top of the Cimatario.

Four companies and Rodigo's band remained. These Driscoll spread out in a skirmish line that made a long beaded chain around their side of the hill. It was evidently an unfamiliar method, for the Imperialist tiradores fired down on them contemptuously. But each time, while the enemy above were reloading, the Grays and outlaws below were embing a few yards, each man of them individually, up from behind his own particular rock. The Imperialists, it appeared, had blundered incomprehensibly, since they had actually taken nearly all the cannon captured on the Cimatario. But six-pound affairs from batteries in the Alameda soon began to splinter and furrow around the climbing men. One loosened boulder rolled and struck Doc Clayburn on the tip of the shoulder, bringing him down like a bag of meal. He arose, feeling himself. "Now, by the Great and Unterrified Continental——" he began, as he always did at the monotony of being hit. Then his disgust changed to wonder. "Wy," he cried, "I'm not either, I only thought I was!"

They mounted higher, and the business grew hotter. Each man had to look to himself more and more sharply, lest he forget that economy of the individual was now the hope of the regiment. But for all that, when a Missourian craved tobacco—it is a craving not to be denied, in no matter what danger, as most any fireman knows—he would leave cover to beg his nearest neighbor for a chew, and obtaining it, would feel the heart put back into him.

As they drew close under the first of the trenches, they concentrated for a bit of sharp in-fighting, and so suffered more. But once they provoked the next volley, they meant to rush the works. The Imperialists though were loath to squander the one ball to a carbine when Indian-like fighters like these were so near. They had one mountain piece, a brass howitzer, and the gunner stood ready, the lanyard in his hand. But he hesitated, bewildered. His targets were not twenty paces below, yet nowhere crouching behind the rocks were the foe massed together. His pride forbade that the waste twelve pounds of death on a single man.

But suddenly that happened which the gunner never in this life explained. Poised expectant in the lull of the fray, he was trembling under the tense silence, when he saw the impetuous Don Rodrigo dart up the slope, full against the muzzle. At the same instant he heard shouts of warning behind him, and he heard the tiradores there above firing at someone almost at his feet. But the figure that had scaled up the back of the hill, crawling around the trench, was already on him. He drew back his arm to drive the heavy shot through Don Rodrigo in front, but only to feel the cord in his hand part before a knife's keen edge. With a cry of dismay he sprang to grasp the rope's end, but as in a vision a head of curly black and an odd smile rose between, and a swinging fist of a great bared arm crashed back his chin, and he sank as a brained ox.

"Lambaste-'em, Din Driscoll!"

It was a rapturous shout, and Cal Grinders, passing Rodrigo, tumbled over the earth-heap and joined his colonel against five hundred. Behind swarmed others into the newly awakened hell, coatless men of Saxon necks tanned a dark ruby, and in the hot Imperialist fire they settled to their work.

"By cracken, lambaste 'em! Why in all hell don't ye lambaste 'em?"

This fury boiled through oaths, unable to spend itself in blows. The tigerish rage seized on them every one. Teeth grated vengefully as men struck.

"Lambaste 'em, Din Driscoll!"

"Lambaste 'em—good—Din Driscoll!"

The yell swelled to a murderous chorus. These men did not know that they were raving. A war cry is just the natural vent. It is simply the whole pack in full cry.

But never before—for now around him there was the contrast of hate and panting and passions in ferment—had Driscoll seemed so distant a thing from flesh and the human sphere. In grime, in dust, in smoke, among faces changing demoniac wrath for the sharp, self-wondering agony of mortality, his face was cool, serene, with just the hint of a smile tugging at his lips. His own men would try to look another way, try uneasily to break the fascination of this strange warrior who led them.

The battle was short, but of the hottest. Its central point was the little brass howitzer. Driscoll, Grinders, Bledsoe, the Doc, all four pushed at the carriage or pulled at the trunnion rings, while around them, hindering them, swaying back and forth over rocks and in the ditches, the two forces battled for possession, hand to hand, with six-shooters and clubbed muskets. Grinders fell, cursing angrily. Bledsoe fell, toppling heavily his great length. The Doc fell. "By the—" he began, but got no further. He was not mistaken this time. But the gun was turned at last, and a vicious hand jerked the rope. Powder grains pierced the eyes of the nearest Imperialists. The shot tore through the mass of them. Yet Driscoll remembered most how wan, how hungry, they looked.

"Death to the traitors! A muerte! A muerte!"

It was a heavy nasal, hurled from the lungs with that force and venom peculiar to the Spanish tongue. It came from Don Rodrigo, who had pulled the lanyard, and who now pulled it again and again, crazed first with joy, then with rage because the emptied gun would not respond.

While the combatants were so confused together, the tiradores in the upper trenches had to hold their fire, but when the defenders gave way at last, those above could wait no longer. Four thousand and more, they leaped their earthworks, and came charging down the slope on what was left of Driscoll's six hundred.

Grays and brigands faced about, but most of all they looked beyond the enemy's right flank, to the line of the hill's crest there. For just beyond that jagged line and somewhere below Old Brothers and Sisters and the eight other companies must be toiling up. But they would have to appear in the interval of the Imperialists' downward rush. Driscoll chose the in-fighting, and naturally became himself the centre of the hottest patch.

"Help's here! in five minutes, just five minutes!" he spoke right and left to his men, as a carpenter will converse and hammer at the same time. For the outlying down over the rocks to crush them, their eyes were strained on the sun-embla zoned line against the sky. But the parson was a man. At last, just over the slope's crest, a head appeared, a cherubic head with spectacles, and two arms waved for haste to others behind. And instantly more heads bobbed up, and more yet, until the jagged line was fairly encrusted with mouse-colored sombreros, like barnacles on a stranded keel.

From where they were the new comers began their work, lying flat on their stomachs. Once over the ridge, down each man fell and joined the chorus of musketry. Their fusilade thickened to a blanket of flame, closely woven. The host rushing down the slope forgot the tales that were told of the marvelous sixteen-shot rifles. They thought instead that an army of Republicans, and not a man less, were upon their flank. For how else could volleys be so well sustained, how else so deadly? And how fast they themselves were dropping! The thing was not like bullets, but as the earth caving under them. The charge turned to panic. They plunged on downward, indeed, and even sheer into the cross fire of Driscoll's six-shooters and the one howitzer. But it was headlong flight. At the trench they did not stop to grapple, but fought their way through and fled on down the hill, on across the grassy plain, nor paused until they had crowded pell-mell into the main Imperialist army drawn up before the Alameda.

Maximilian and his resplendent staff were there at the Alameda. The Emperor was perhaps less astounded than they.

"Ai, general, if you had known how Tampico fell!" he said to Miramon.

Yet neither was actually dismayed. The Cimatario and five thousand men had succumbed to a thousand or fifteen hundred daredevils. It was hard enough to believe, in all conscience. But the daredevils could be dislodged, and they must be, at once. Miramon's orders rose sharply and quick, and the Empire sprang to obey. The Alameda batteries were trained on the hill, and a few moments later the guns on the roof of the La Cruz monastery were also. At the same time, the army of the entire Imperialist reserve, battalion after battalion in close, hurried rank, set out across the grassy plain, straight toward the Cimatario's front slope. Foot, horse, artillery, the concentrated might of the Austrian's sceptre, was being hurled against a handful of jaded warriors. Maximilian flushed with something like shame at the thought.

Back on the crest Driscoll cried, "No, no, keep to the trenches, you fellows! This ain't our menade."

And soon, when screaming comets began to fill the air and burst around them, they were glad of the ditches. There they waited, smoking, spitting tobacco against the torrid heat, but with sullen eyes on the army nearer and nearer. Where, all this morning, was Escobedo, who, with his thousands of Republicans on the north of the city, had taken no thought of the Republican stress on the south? He had not fired a shot. Yet surely he must know by this time. But no matter. Over a hundred outlaws were left, and nearly a thousand Grays. Missourians, brigands, and guerrillas of Michoacan, they were a dangerous blend.

'Got a match, Harry?" asked Driscoll of the Kansan, as he filled his cob pipe.

"They had to wait, you see. Yet haste was all they would have been of the advancing Imperialist host.

The red jackets of the Lancers—the few that were left—brightly attired, in the van of the attacking thousands. On either side rode the Second and Fifth Lancers. Behind tramped the battalions of Iturbide, of Celaya, and regiments of the line. They gained the foot of the hill, and the cavalry were dismounting behind they drew fire. The baptism had a shaken but rooter deadliness, even at that distance, but the Imperialists waited tenatively. No, there was but one volley. When the second came, it was only after an interval long enough for reloading. Officers and men glanced at one another more hopefully. The terrified fugitives were, of course mistaken, they thought. For force above could not be large, nor possess the mysterious sixteen-shot rifles. The assurance gave the buoyancy of relief. To charge against carbines that made each man as sixteen were uncanny, too much like challenging the Unknown. But a thousand men who fired only every two or three minutes—an antagonist like that was quite well known to their philosophy. So breathing hard, they valiantly marched up the hill. They suffered cruelly under the scattered fusillades, yet were not materially resisted. At last they were near enough, and the bugles sounded for the final rush.

Now what was odd, the Republicans stopped firing altogether. But they were waiting for shorter range, and a moment later, at a hundred paces, their reopening volley had all the clockwork dispatch of a platoon drill. Yet the Imperialists took the dose as a thing expected, and sprang over their wounded to gain the trenches. They required only the lull of reloading. But instantly a second volley prolonged the first. The column staggered, and faces blanched. In a sudden despair they realized the enemy's tactics, for enemy did have those terrible rifles, after all. From the trenches a low sheet of flame had spread, searing the breasts of rank after rank that pressed against its edge. Scarlet-coated Dragoons, the last of them, flecked the rocks, and over them fell green uniformed troopers, as grass will cover a bloody field, and the Municipal Guards, swaying up from behind, paid out a sprinkling of blue—a ghastly pousse-cafe, as one grim jester described it afterward. The long massed lines wavered.

"They've stopped, they've stopped!" cried Rodrigo. "Now we'll close with them, eh, senor—por Dios, now!"

"All you fellows," shouted Driscoll, "just fill your rifles while they wait. Stopped nothing, Rod! And anyhow, who'd hold the hill if we left it? Who?"

The answer came at once, and in dramatic form. One of the pickets stationed on the flank ran among them.

"There's another big slew of 'em a-coming!" he yelled excitedly. "Yonder, over yonder!"

Driscoll rose and followed the man to the east slope. From there he beheld an overpowering force, advancing diagonally across the llano below. It came by the Carretas road, which skirted Queretaro on that side, and it was hurrying toward the Cimatario. The colonel of Grays watched them anxiously through his glasses.

"Shucks," he said at last, "the fight's over. It's Escobedo. He's sent his reserve. Don't you see those black shakos, Jim, and those gray coats? They're the Cazadores de Galeana, and the best yet. Now we'll have someone to hold the hill!"

But getting back to the trenches, Driscoll saw that the help might not come soon enough. For however the Imperialists squandered their lives, they would yet overcrowd death. Some had already gained the first trench, and were there engaged hand to hand, with sabre and pistol. In the trenches above the Grays steadily fed the molten flame. But Driscoll chose the in-fighting, and naturally became himself the centre of the hottest patch.

"Help's here! in five minutes, just five minutes!" he spoke right and left to his men, as a carpenter will converse and hammer at the same time. For the outnumbered it was the help arrived already.

The Imperialists cannon had of necessity ceased firing, for what should be the consternation of the attacking column to have a shell among them from the rear! All events, panic rose, not that their own batteries had made a mistake, but that there had not been a mistake. The reserve sent by Escobedo, bearing the battle, had wheeled and, straight down the centre of the battle, had the chance of giving quicker aid. Once in sight of the trenches, they still considerably to the right of the Imperialists, they had unlimbered a gun, while cavalry and infantry pushed on to the rescue, to be caught between trenches and the Imperialists acted with soldierly precision. Their clarions sounded retreat.

"Now it's our turn," shouted Driscoll, and with the persons of the Kansan and the outlaw chief, and the terrible old Missourians pouring out their dikes, he chased down hill the concentrate might of an Empire. So closely was that hasing performed that pistol shots burst into standards and uniforms.

Maximilian and Miramon and the high officers of the realm were still at their post of observation in the Alameda. For the third time that morning they faced Imperial columns hurled back upon them by a man called Driscoll. Miramon reproached himself bitterly. His plans to intercept Escobedo in reserve in the north had failed. The emperor's pallid features were drawn with the fever of a big loser. Yet in the eyes of blue there flashed a chivalrous wonder at the enemy's valiant deed.

On the llano fugitives and pursuers mingled as one in the human whirlpool of confusion. Escobedo's cavalry had overtaken the melee, and blended with the rear of the fleeing column, until it seemed like that both must enter the town together. But a charge of grape, fired obliquely from the Alameda, mowed a path between them—a Spartan business, for the reaped Imperialists among Republicans. However, a second and third blast were better gauged, and these carpeted the new alley way with Republican bodies. Also, the Imperialists were re-forming, and under a withering fire the little band of victors had to draw back to the Cimatario.

As Escobedo's reserve occupied the hill, Driscoll marched his own force behind the same to get his horse there. But the mustangs of the brigands thitmselves, moving swiftly over the plain toward the mountains. They hardly numbered two-score now, and at that distance seemed a few men herding a drove of empty saddles. The late indignant patriot, Don Rodrigo, had changed back to outlaw. As another Cid, he might have looked for pardon from a grateful country, but possibly he feared the Roman justice of Juarez too much to risk it. Besides, a man will not lightly give up his career. That same night Rodrigo lay again among the sierras, quite ready for the first bullion convoy or beautiful marchioness passing by.

Shells and minie balls were yet dropping perfunctorily, and the llano between hill and town was still a dangerous place enough, but scattered here and there were a few of both sides looking for their wounded, and often themselves going down before the aim of sharpshooters. Stiffening bodies lay under the trampled grass in every varied horror of mutilation, and glassy eyes peered unseeing upward through the stalks, like the absurd and ghastly contrast of a horrible dream. But among them were the stricken living in as varied an agony, of raw wounds stung by gnats, of pain cutting deep to vitality, of thirst, of the broiling sun, of a buzzing fly, or of an intolerable loneliness there with death. Groans rose over the plain, and guided the searchers. Driscoll had already found many of his men in this way. Once he heard his own name. The voice was weak, but there was something vaguely familiar to it, and involuntarily he held his pistol against treachery as he parted the grass and revealed a wounded man at his feet. It was a piteously famished body that raised itself a little by one hand. It was a soul-tenanted death-head that crooked gruesomely down on the shoulder and lifted its eyes to Driscoll's in greeting. They were glowing coals, those eyes, glowing with the virile fire of twenty men, however wasted the face or tightly drawn the yellow parchment skin.

"Murgie!"

Driscoll's exclamation was a shudder rather than the surprise of recognition. That could it be that had grown so—possible in the weazen, craven miser! And that the abject little coward on a battlefield, and wounded! An occasional he even screeched overhead. And for clothed in uniform, a soldier's uniform, the Don Anastasio!

"Curious!" Driscoll