

A CAST FOR FORTUNE.

(Continued from 1st Page.)

years; and while a robber might be bold enough to attack a solitary traveller, he would consider long before attacking a party. How many were you?

"Five—and well armed." "The thing is impossible, then. But this is not the time or place to investigate the affair. That must be done later. Meanwhile, the sooner you get medical attendance the better. Do you think you can manage to sit in a saddle and ride a few miles?"

"If it must be done, I can do it," said Derwent with a certain grim resolution. "Help me to rise."

It was with a gentleness equal to his strength that the tall stranger assisted him to his feet. Then he called a mule, who brought up a richly-caparisoned horse of beautiful build and chestnut color.

"I will put you on my own horse," said the gentleman, "and he walks well and will carry you with as little jar as is compatible with any motion."

"You are truly a good Samaritan," said Derwent, gratefully. "May I ask if you are countryman?"

"Only in tongue, I fancy," answered the other. "I am an Irishman—Maurice Ormond by name. You are, if I mistake not, an American."

"Yes; my name is Derwent. I know now," he added, quickly, "why your face has seemed so familiar to me. I saw you the other day in Gundalajara."

"That is likely. I have been there lately. Now, Señor Derwent, make as little effort as possible and let us lift you into your saddle. There—as half a dozen ready hands did the work,—that is accomplished; but if you are to stay there you must take more brandy."

"The deadly faintness that almost overpowered him warned Derwent that this was indeed necessary. He took the stimulant willingly, and, thankful for the deep Spanish saddle which afforded him some support, they set out.

He perceived, now that he had gathered his senses a little, that the party formed a cavalcade. There were six or eight riders, besides himself and the man who having had to resign his horse to Señor Ormond, walked with a long stride and like bearing in advance of them. All with the exception of the stately Irishman, were Mexicans of the purest type, and all seemed to be his attendants.

As they proceeded down the mountain, Derwent looked about for some hint in the expedition of finding the bullet-riddled bodies of Fernandez Aranda and the muzzos. But, since no sign of them appeared, his wonder increased over the remarkable fact that they had apparently not concerned themselves in the least about his fate.

"I cannot understand this," he said presently to Señor Ormond. "It is incredible that my companions should have deliberately abandoned me."

"If you will tell me who they are," said the gentleman, "I can better tell you whether or not it is incredible."

"One of them was a man from this part of the country,—Señor Aranda—"

"I know him. Who else?" "A man who accompanied me from Gundalajara to show me a mine. His name is Fernandez. And two muzzos."

"I know also,—by reputation, the Fernandez of whom you speak. May I ask what mine he brought you to see?"

"The Buena Esperanza. Do you know it?"

"Yes," replied the other, smiling. "I know the Buena Esperanza. Did you, while there, see or hear anything of one Señor Ferrera?"

"I saw him yesterday at the mine. He came and had a three-act performance with Fernandez. What passed between them I do not know for, unfortunately, I have little knowledge of Spanish; but I perceived that there was trouble, and I declined to buy the mine. You do not think—" he looked at his companion with a sudden, startled glance—"that it could have been Ferrera who shot me?"

"No," was the decided answer. "It certainly was not Ferrera. He is a man of fiery temper and dauntless courage, capable of killing an enemy on sight, without reckoning consequences; but absolutely incapable of shooting him from an ambush. Besides, what quarrel had he with you? No, no, do not even in your thoughts do so great injustice to one who is in all respects a true gentleman."

"I was favorably impressed by him," said Derwent. "But the whole thing is so strange. Why should I have been picked off, and why have my companions made no search for me?"

"You were probably picked off because you were lingering in the rear of your party—a foolish thing to do, had you been aware of the danger—and so offered an excellent opportunity to the robber. Why your companions have not returned for you is more than I can answer. I advise you not to trouble yourself further about it now. I consider myself fortunate in having found you, and I really think it is fortunate also for you. I am the only English speaking resident of this part of the country, and my hacienda is near at hand, where you can rest and recover your strength."

"You are more than kind," said Derwent. "I put myself entirely in your hands." It was the greatest good fortune that brought you along this road."

"It was a lucky chance, certainly," said the other, cheerfully. "I have been for several days visiting the outlying ranches of my estate, and am now homeward-bound. Our road turns off at the foot of the mountain, and we will reach Miraflores in about two hours."

"Two hours! If he had said two days, Derwent could hardly at that moment have felt more dismay. With the terrible pain of his wound, and the deadly faintness from loss

of blood, how was he possibly to maintain an erect position in the saddle for that length of time? His companion must have read his thoughts in his paling face, for he said, quickly—

"Whenever you feel too weak to go on, we will stop and rest. I know that you are suffering horribly. Ah, I have a thought—Antonio!" He turned, and as a young Mexican came forward, spoke at some length in Spanish. "Señor," was the reply when he had finished, and, touching his horse with the spur, the young man rode on in advance, so rapidly that he was soon lost to sight."

"I have sent him to the hacienda with orders to bring a carriage to meet us," his master said to Derwent. "We shall be out of the mountains and on the land of the valley by the time it reaches us. Now, señor, if you can manage to keep up—"

It was hard work,—the hardest, Derwent thought, that he had ever attempted,—but, by the aid of renewed stimulus and desperate resolution, he fought the constantly threatening faintness, endured the pain which momentarily grew worse, and kept his seat. Once or twice he felt himself reeling, but a strong arm was instantly thrown around him and a hand commanded. He never consented to descend from the saddle, for he felt sure that if he did he could not regain it, but, after the rest of a few minutes, insisted on going on. It was like a dark and evil dream to him afterward; that passage through the mountain-defiles, until suddenly, even to his pain-laden eyesight, there unrolled a glorious picture—

a vast extent of wide, beautiful plain, green with cultivation, broken by stretches of forest, and with a distant silver lake gleaming in the last rays of the setting sun.

"Courage!" said his companion. "We are over the bad road now; the carriage must meet us before long, and Miraflores is not five miles away."

Derwent tried to smile, but he knew that his strength was going fast, and that if the carriage did not meet them he could never hold out for that five miles. Antonio had made good speed, however. With their slow progress they had hardly covered another mile, and he was on the point of saying, "You must take me down; I can bear no more," when a joyful exclamation from the whole party greeted the appearance of a carriage rolling rapidly toward them over the level, dusty road. Ten minutes later, they placed an insensible man in it.

[To be Continued.]

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1st. Strict adherence to the system of cash in advance for all subscriptions. 2nd. The reduction of the price of the paper to One Dollar a Year!

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