

THE LADY OF THE TOWER

A Continued Story of Romantic Adventure

CHAPTER XIV.—(Continued.)

By HEADON HILL

ANTONIO DIAZ nodded assent, choking down a sob at the failure of his mission, and at the plight of the patriots who would never get the armament he had procured for them with such patience and resource. Lance felt the disappointment as keenly as his friend, holding himself vaguely responsible for the breakdown, but there was not a moment to lose if they were to shed the signs of their lawless enterprise before the gunboat caught them, and he was kept too busy for repining. The reason for his prompt alteration of the course became quickly apparent. "The Lodestar" was now steaming broadside on to the "Cortez" though the latter had also shifted her helm so as to give chase in the new direction. But the incriminating cases which had restored the spirit of romance to St. Runan's Tower were all dumped overboard on the far side before the war-vessel had made an angle sharp enough to view the operation.

And Antonio Diaz, his face coal-grimed out of recognition, and stripped to the waist, was down in the stoke-hole feeding the furnaces as if to the manner born.

Lance was up on the bridge again by the time a blank charge from the gunboat called a halt. He obeyed instantly, and stood with his cap in his hand and a look of aggrieved surprise on his face at the gangway when a steam-launch from the "Cortez" disgorged a fussy little officer and a dozen heavily armed Guyacan blue-jackets on to his deck.

"This 'Lodestar' of Falmoot, England?" panted the chief aggressor, twirling his moustaches with the truculence of successful achievement.

"That, Senor, is the name of the steamer," responded Lance suavely. "May I ask why you have offered this insult to the British flag?"

AND he pointed to the tattered and dingy "Jack," which but for the parsimony of Polgleaze and Son would have been scrapped long ago.

The captain of the war-vessel shrugged his epauletted shoulders. "I act on orders of President Huerta," he replied. "There has news been cabled from England that you have guns for the rebels on board. I am to make search, and if I find I am to tow you into port as prize for breach of neutrality laws."

Lance regarded the intruder with withering scorn. "All very well, but there is another side to the picture, my noble Senor Captain," he said. "Shall I tell you what will happen if you insist on searching my ship and don't find any guns? The British Lion will roar till your measly President will have to save his skin by finding a scapegoat, and that scapegoat will be you. Now bring a couple of those scarecrows of yours below, and get your rummage over as quick as may be."

It was a sick and sorry naval officer who, profusely apologetic, and with tears in his eyes, went over the side an hour later amid the jeers of "The Lodestar's" crew. Lance almost had it in his mind to pity him when he explained that he should have been shot if he had disobeyed his orders, and that he stood a very good chance of being so for not finding contraband on board.

"We are both the victims of some cruel jest, Senor," Lance commiserated him. "I suppose you have no idea precisely as to the source from which this false report reached your President? I would see to it that the miscreant was punished, and then if you are shot you will have the satisfaction of being avenged."

"Alas, Senor, even that compensation is denied to me," the little officer

PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

JACOB POLGLEAZE, ship-owner, holds a mortgage on St. Runan's Tower, the home of Hilda Carlyon. His son Wilson proposes marriage to her, but is met with refusal, and swears revenge. At this time Lance Pengarvan, a ship-captain, arrives home from a voyage with his friend, Antonio Diaz, who is on a secret mission. The two men conceal a load of iron-bound boxes in a room in the tower, with the help of Nathan Craze, an old fisherman. Diaz meets and falls in love with the old man's daughter, Marigold. Just before Pengarvan sets sail with the mysterious boxes, Wilson Polgleaze arrives at the tower. They suspect him of knowing their plans, but leave at once. In the morning news is brought of the murder of old Jacob Polgleaze. Mr. Grylls, of the police force, is put on the case. He consults the son of the murdered man, who states that he believes Pengarvan to be guilty of the crime. Hilda Carlyon is threatened with foreclosure by Wilson Polgleaze, who now manages his father's business. And on the high seas Pengarvan's ship is chased by a gunboat, which has discovered that he has a load of rifles on board.

wrung his hands. "I know not who struck this blow at the amicable relations between two mighty Powers—Great Britain and Guyaca—with consequences so lamentable. The cable was anonymous."

"Where was it handed in?" demanded Lance sharply.

"At your port of Falmoot. It was that that deceived us. It seem as if someone on what you call the spot had made the discovery and sent us the news. How was one to know, Senor, who was at the end of a cable four thousand miles away?"

"I think I could tell you," muttered Lance to himself as he bowed the charged popinjay into his launch.

But the discomfiture of the better half of the Guyacan Navy was no compensation for the fiasco in which the venture had ended. When Diaz emerged from the stokehole, and after a wash and brush-up rejoined his colleague, they discussed the origin of the cable that had proved their undoing. Twist it which way they would they could come to no other conclusion but that Wilson Polgleaze had been the informant, either on the strength of the evidence of his own eyes or of facts gathered from Billy Craze.

They looked forward to some possible explanation when on the following day they arrived at Santa Barbara, their legitimate destination. But the agents of Polgleaze and Son had nothing to say about the matter, and of course they could not be even indirectly questioned. Nor for the matter of that did they say anything about the death of the head of the firm in far-off Falmouth, which was not surprising, since they had not been apprised of it.

They had, however, another surprise in store for Lance, which gave him food for conjecture. They had received orders from home that he was to discharge his cargo with all speed and return to England in ballast, without proceeding to other ports of call arranged under his original instructions.

Antonio Diaz, Santa Barbara not being on Guyacan territory, waited openly in the sun-baked Plaza while Lance paid this business call, and on hearing the result squared his shoulders, smiling bravely.

"Then good-bye, my friend," he said. "I go to help my people in the war—

without the guns which would have made so much difference. I hear rumours in this town that they are in a bad way. But when the affair with President Huerta is finished, if I live, I shall come back to Falmouth."

"We'll give you a welcome, old man, but I shall be sorry for Wilson Polgleaze," said Lance grimly, noting the sombre gleam in the patriot's usually mild eyes.

But Diaz only shot out his lean brown hand, and with another "good-bye" turned on his heel and strode up the dusty street to a posada on the outskirts. There he mounted his horse, and put himself at the head of the mule train which he had chartered to take supplies across the frontier for his struggling friends in Guyaca, but his heart was sad because the quick-firers were not included in the load.

Three weeks later, on the day before Lance Pengarvan sailed out of Santa Barbara homeward bound, the news was brought in by an Indian runner that there had been a bloody battle between the Government troops and the rebels over the border in the neighbouring state, the latter being hopelessly defeated. The revolution was quelled, and Antonio Diaz with many prominent leaders, had perished, fighting manfully against desperate odds.

"A good man gone under through a dirty job done by a dirty rascal five thousand miles away, and a fellow countryman of my own, worse luck," Lance muttered under his close-clipped beard as he read the ill-printed news-sheet with tear-dimmed eyes. "I shall treat Master Wilson as a legacy left me by poor Tony when I get home—aye, if I lose my billet over the conversation I shall hold with him."

CHAPTER XV.

Sanctuary.

"THERE'S that blamed Marconi at it again," growled Timothy Pascoe, as he clattered into the hall at St. Runan's Tower to throw a log of drift-wood on to the fire in the cavernous hearth.

It is a firmly rooted belief in Cornwall that the rain which is the prevailing feature of the climate owes its origin to the vast electric waves scattered from the wireless station at Poldhu and the consequent disturbance of the atmosphere. So Hilda and Mrs. Pengarvan accepted the statement, gravely and without comment, as the natural explanation of the torrential downpour outside.

The depression from which the two ladies were suffering was not wholly due to the outrageous weather. The morning's post had brought a letter from Lance at Santa Barbara, describing the failure of the gun-running enterprise, and informing them of the departure of Antonio Diaz on what was practically a forlorn hope without the armament he had hoped to import. The South American had won their hearts with his chivalry and boyish enthusiasm, and they were grieved to think that he would now be fighting for a lost cause. The letter had been written some time before the news of his death had been received at Santa Barbara. They were therefore spared that shock, and there was a ray of comfort in the prospect of "The Lodestar's" earlier return.

They had been, however, rendered uneasy by the absence of any reference in Lance's letter to the murder of Jacob Polgleaze. They naturally concluded that it would have been cabled to the agents. Lance's silence on the tragedy seemed strange, and, taken in conjunction with the recall of the steamer before due date, almost ominous.

To add to the sense of gloom that hung over St. Runan's Tower that wet



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Dept. of Inland Rev. Bulletin No. 305 tells about "Canada First." See page 5, Table 11, for comparisons.

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