

Estenega lit a match, and, kneeling beside the priest, held it to his stubbled beard. As the flame licked the flesh the man uttered a yell like a kicked brute. Estenega sprang to his feet with an oath. "I can't do it!" he exclaimed, with bitter disgust. "I haven't the iron of cruelty in me. I am not fit to be a ruler of men." He untied the rope about the prisoner's feet. "Get up," he said, "and conduct me back as we came."

The priest scrambled to his feet and hobbled down the long tunnel. They ascended the steps beneath the Mission and emerged into the room.

Estenega turned swiftly to prevent the closing of the trap-door, but only in time to hear it shut with a spring and the priest kick rubbish above it. He cut the rope which bound the other's hands.

"Go!" he said, "I have no further use for you. And if you report this, I need not explain to you that it will fare worse with you than it will with me."

The priest fled, and Estenega, hanging the lantern on a nail, pushed aside the rubbish with his feet, purposing to pace the room until dawn. In a few moments, however, he discovered that the despised hermit was not without his allies; ten thousand fleas, the pest of the country, assaulted every part of his body they could reach. They swarmed down the legs of his riding-boots, up his trousers, up his sleeves, down his neck. "There is no such thing in life as tragedy," he thought. He hung the lantern outside the door to mark the room, and paced the yard until morning. But there were dark hours yet before the dawn, and during one of them a figure, when his back was turned, crept to the lantern and hung it before another room. When light came—and the fog came first—all Estenega's efforts to find the trap-door were unavailing, although the yard was littered with the rubbish he flung into it from the room. He suspected the trick, but there were ten rooms exactly alike, and although he cleared most of them he could discover no trace of the trap-door. He looked at the hills surrounding the Mission. They were many, and