

of the Alcoba. They are no longer enemies, but unfortunate fellow-creatures who need our assistance.

Ney stepped forward, and the two generals clasped hands.

—We must assist them immediately, said the marshal. We should have done it before this, but terror left me helpless. I trembled for the first time in my life.

While speaking, the generals and their retinue had stopped on the brink of the chasm. An immense funnel of rocks, on whose sides the sun shone fiercely, opened at the surface of the mountain and sank straight in the ground into pitch-dark depths. Ney, Wellington and the officers looked down. . . . From the gaping pit rose a gust of cold wind which struck them in the face.

—Some one must go down, said Ney quietly.

Wellington shivered and a few faces in the English staff turned pale.

Ney looked around.

—Bring ropes, he ordered. Captain, have you a *man*?

The captain surveyed a company, made a sign, and a grenadier stepped out of the ranks.

—He is a Biscayan, said the officer, in presenting him.

The soldier took off his uniform, tied a cord around his body, made a rapid and comical salute to his captain, and bent over the edge of the pit. For a moment he was visible, descending slowly, a strong oaken stick in one hand, and with the other firmly grasping the rope—and he disappeared in the dismal obscurity.—Then the soldiers cried to him,

Are you all right?

—Yes, he replied, slacken the rope.

Then an English soldier wished to descend also. He was a mountaineer. Wellington proposed that he should be allowed.

—No, said the marshal; your Scotchman might rub against my man, who might profit of the occasion to commence an attack. They would fight suspended above the abyss. Instead of getting the information we desire, we might haul up two corpses.

Wellington did not answer. The descent was becoming more difficult; the

rope was now loose and floating with the wind

—There are trees, rocks that obstruct the passage and stop his progress, said an officer. Bending over the edge, he cried:

—Hello-o-o?

The rope tightened and a voice already distant mounted from the precipice.

—I see nothing; loosen the rope.

The rope quivered like an immense violin string under some fabulous bow. Four officers held it firmly and let it down slowly, little by little. The descent was slow; the man was undoubtedly feeling his way, groping in the dark.

—Hello . . . , cried the grenadiers, together.

Lower and lower, hollow and confused like an echo, arose a voice to their ears, —Slack-en again.

There was another pause. A few loops of the rope were slackened out and it then again became rigid. A few more feet were let down—But, Wellington turned around impatiently,—Bring the monk here he ordered.

A major started and soon came back, followed by a Capuchin friar.

—Marshal, said Wellington, here is one who can tell us if there exists in the side of the Alcoba a passage by which we might save our men. I arrested him this morning.

—Question him, said Ney.

—Father, said Wellington, do you speak French?

The monk answered 'yes,' by a nod.

—You live in this part of the country; you must know the Alcoba.

The monk nodded again.

At this moment the soldiers who held the rope felt nothing more weighing on their arms. The man had stopped.

—Oh-oh-o-o, shouted twenty throats.

There was a moment of silence, and a voice, a mere whisper, which their attentive ears could hardly perceive, reached the mouth of the opening.

—Slack-en a-gain.

The monk had heard nothing. Wellington turned again to him.

—Father, he said, a great misfortune has happened to us. This morning four thousand men were fighting on this very spot. Suddenly the ground gave way