

The Northwest Review.

Reading Room
Senate

VOL. I.

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 1885.

NO. 2.

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THE AMULET.

CHAPTER I.

CONTINUED.

'It is sad to see many murders com-
mitted in Antwerp,' said Mr. Van de
Werve. 'This is the fourth during the
past month. The victims each time
have been either Spaniards or Italians,
and that vengeance or jealousy was the
cause is sufficiently proved by the fact
that in no case have the bodies been
despoiled of their money or jewels. This
custom of lying in wait, attacking each
other, often without cause, is an outrage
both against God and man. And do you
not yourself sometimes fear, Signor
Geronimo, the assassin's dagger?'

The young man shook his head.
'For instance,' continued Mary's father,
'this is the eve of May. I need not ask
if you intend to offer to Mary the hom-
age of a serenade. It is the custom of
your countrymen to pay this attention
to young girls, and you would not omit
this opportunity were it not for the ad-
vice of a man of experience. Geronimo,
listen to the words of calm reason; do
not rashly expose yourself to the danger
of death; abandon your design this
time. Many of your compatriots have
aspired to Mary's hand; they have been
less successful than you, and on this ac-
count they may harbor unkind feelings
towards you.'

The young man received this advice
with a smile which indicated its refusal.
'It is difficult, sir, to speak of such
things in the presence of the one who is
to be object of our homage. Permit me,
however, the liberty to decide upon the
manner in which I will acquit myself of
my duty to this young lady.'

'But permit me, signor, to tell you,'
said the old man, in an offended tone,
'that it does you no honor to reject the
advice of a man of experience, in order
to carry out an unimportant fancy. Rash-
ness does not indicate courage, but
rather an absence of good sense.'

'Father,' exclaimed Mary, in a suppli-
cating tone, 'be not angry with Signor
Geronimo; he will incur no danger.'
'Foolish confidence!' said the old man.
'Why should Geronimo think himself
less exposed to danger than others? That
Geronimo should be rash is excusable;
but, Mary, you deserve a severe reprimand
for encouraging your friend in his
perilous design.'

The young girl bowed her head at this
reproof of her father, and murmured as
if to excuse herself: 'Geronimo has a
relic, father.'

This revelation embarrassed the young
man, and he glanced reproachfully at
Mary.

She said, caressingly:
'Don't be displeased, Geronimo; show
the relic to my father, and he will then
know why you do not fear that any ac-
cident will happen to you.'

The young man felt that he could not
refuse Mary's request. He drew from
under his doublet an object suspended
on a steel chain, and, approaching Mr.
Van de Werve, he placed it in his hand.

It was a flat medal of greenish copper,
on which were engraven unknown letters
and signs. A cross between two bent
sabres, and beneath them a crescent,
filled up the centre of the medal. At
the foot of the cross was a gray stone,
rudely inlaid. The whole was rough and
heavy.

Mr. Van de Werve examined this me-
dal attentively for some time; he turned
it over and over, as though he sought to
comprehend the signification of this
singular emblem.

'A relic!' he murmured. 'Here are
two cimeters, a crescent and cabalistic
characters. It is a Mohammedan talis-
man, and, perhaps, an emblem shocking
to our holy religion!'

'You are mistaken, sir,' replied Gero-
nimo. 'Is not the cross placed above
the crescent, and would not that signify
that the faith of Christ has triumphed
over the doctrines of Mahomet?'

'But why do you call it a relic?'

'Why so named it, not I. It is an
amulet, and if it has any power, it de-
rives it from the gray stone beneath the
cross. This stone is a dracinite, taken,
at the risk of life, from the head of a
dragon in the country of the negroes.'

A half contemptuous smile curled the
lips of the old man as he contemplated
the talisman in silence. At last he said:
'I remember, Signor Geronimo, to have
read in Pliny curious details of the dra-
conite and its extraordinary powers, but
I also remember that the great natura-
list forgets to tell us the inherent qual-
ities of the stone. Alas! signor, would
you trust in this talisman, and believe
that it could protect you against the
dagger of the assassin! The people of
the South have a strange piety. In their
superstition they confound what is holy
with things which owe their efficacy, if
they possess any, to the conjurations of
soothsayers.'

The young noble colored slightly, and
replied: 'You are mistaken, sir, as far
as I am concerned. For my justifica-
tion allow me to tell you that this am-
ulet belonged to a pilgrim; that it rested
one entire night of Good Friday upon
the tomb of our Lord at Jerusalem; but

I will be candid, and say to you that I
do not consider it possessed of the pow-
er to preserve me from danger. And
yet I always wear it with the firm and
unshaken conviction that it will protect
me in a critical hour from some misfor-
tune.'

'Perhaps it belonged to your deceased
parents,' said Mr. Van de Werve, struck
by the singular explanation of the young
man.

'No, sir,' replied Geronimo; 'this
amulet is to me a cherished souvenir of
a day upon which God gave me the
grace to perform a good action. I would
willingly tell you how the amulet fell
into my hands, and why I believe in its
power to protect me, but it is a long
story.'

'I would, nevertheless, be much pleas-
ed if you would satisfy my curiosity,'
said the old noble.

'If you desire it,' replied Geronimo, 'I
will comply with your wishes.
'You know that five years ago, when I
undertook for the first time the voyage
from Luca to Antwerp, I was made pris-
oner by Algerian pirates, and carried as a
slave to Barbary. I was sold to a Moo-
rish lord, who made me work in the fields
until my uncle should send the ransom
which would restore me to liberty. In
the same field in which some light work
was appointed me, I saw an old blind
woman attached like a mule to a plough,
and driven on by blows from a heavy
stick. She was a Christian slave, whose
eyes had been put out in wanton cruelty.'

I learned that she was an Italian by
birth, a native of a small village in the
environs of Porto Fiero, a seaport not far
from Genoa. She had no relatives who
could pay her ransom, and she had con-
sequently been fastened to the plough
like a beast of burden until death should
come to deliver her. The frightful fate
of this miserable slave so filled me with
compassion, that I shed tears of grief and
rage when I heard afar off her piercing
cries as the rod of the overseer descen-
ded upon her. One day my indignation
was so roused, when the pagan wretches
had knocked her down and were treat-
ing her even more cruelly than usual,
that I dared to defend her by force. Had
not my master expected a large sum for
my ransom, a frightful death would have
been the punishment of my audacity.

After being kept a few days in prison
and harshly treated, I was sent back to
the fields to work as before. The condi-
tion of the blind slave was not in the
least changed; she was still inhumanly
beaten. Her misfortunes pierced my
heart, and I was maddened by my in-
ability to protect from pagan cruelty a
woman who was my sister by our com-
mon faith and a common misfortune.

No longer venturing to have recourse to
force, I sought other means to mitigate
her sufferings. During the few hours of
repose granted to us, or rather to our
overseers, I hastened to the blind wo-
man and shared with her the best of my
food; I strove to fortify her from this
that God would liberate her from this
terrible slavery; I told her, that should I
ever become free, I would procure her
liberation, even were it necessary to re-
nounce for years my own pleasures that
I might amass sufficient for her ransom.

I spoke to her of our country, of the
goodness of God, and of the probability
of my liberation. The poor blind woman
kissed my hands, and called me an an-
gel sent by God to illumine the darkness
of her life by the sweet rays of consol-
ation and piety. I was only a few months
her follower. My uncle, learning my
captivity through messengers I had em-
ployed, sent to Algiers an armed vessel
to liberate me. Besides the amount of
my ransom, he sent me means to trans-
port some valuable merchandise from
Barbary to Italy. When I took leave of
the blind woman, I was so deeply touch-
ed by her sorrow, that I pondered upon
the means of restoring her to liberty.

It is true that in order to effect this, I
would be obliged to employ a large por-
tion of the money sent me by my uncle
for the purchase of merchandise, and I
was convinced that my uncle, who was
inflexible in exacting fidelity to commer-
cial regulations, would overwhelm me
with his anger, but my heart gained the
ascendency over my reason, and Chris-
tian charity triumphed. Listening only
to my compassion, I ransomed the un-
fortunate woman, and with my own
hands I unbound her chains. That was
the happiest moment in my life.'

Mary and her father were both touch-
ed by the recital of the young man.

'Oh, Geronimo,' exclaimed Mary, 'may
God bless you for having been so com-
passionate to the poor Christian slave!'

'You did well, Geronimo,' said Mr.
Van de Werve, 'and I esteem and love
you more for your generosity to the un-
fortunate blind woman. How happy her
unexpected liberation must have made
her!'

'When I told her she was free, and
that she could accompany me to her na-
tive land, she was almost wild with joy;
she laughed and wept by turns; she
cast herself upon the ground, and raising
her hands to heaven, thanked God; she
embraced my knees and watered my
feet with her tears. Not knowing how
to testify her gratitude, she drew this
strange amulet from her bosom and pre-
sented it to me, conjuring me to wear it

always. She told me that it possessed
the power of protecting and saving the
one who carried it on his person, when
all human aid failed or was insufficient.
As to the origin of the amulet, she only
knew that it had been brought back from
Jerusalem by one of her ancestors, who
had made a pilgrimage thither in expia-
tion of an involuntary homicide, and
from that time it had been religiously
guarded in their family as a precious
relic. She had no doubt of its power,
and related many strange things to jus-
tify her faith. She maintained that she
owed to the amulet her unexpected re-
turn to Italy.'

'Does she still live?' asked Mary.

'When in sight of Italy, I put her on
board of a boat bound to Porto Fiero; I
gave her a small sum of money, and
begged the boatman to attend to her
comforts. Poor Teresa Mostago—that is
her name—I doubt not, is living peace-
fully in her native village, and prays
much for me. This is the only reason
why I attribute any virtue to the amulet;
I believe in the protection of this sign
because it has been sanctified by an act
of Christian charity, and by the grateful
prayers of the poor blind woman tor-
mented by the pagans for the name of
Christ.'

The old cavalier remained a moment
silent, absorbed in thought. Then taking
the hand of the young man, he said to
him: 'I did not know you before, Gero-
nimo. I hope it may be in my power to
prove to you how much your generosity
enables you and elevates you in my es-
teem; but although your confidence in the
amulet rests on so laudable a sentiment,
I would not rely too much upon it. You
know the proverb says: "Help yourself,
and Heaven will help you."'

'Do not suppose, Mr. Van de Werve,
that on that account I would be guilty of
any foolish imprudence. When I pass
through the streets at night, I am always
well accompanied, and my hand never
leaves the hilt of my sword. Therefore
have no anxiety on this point, and per-
mit me to perform my duty to her to
whom I owe homage and respect.'

At that moment the painted-glass win-
dows trembled under the stroke of a large
clock from some neighbouring belfry.
This suddenly turned Mary's thoughts
into another channel.

'The clock of St. James is striking ten,'
she said. 'Father, will you walk with me
to the dock-yard to see if any new ships
have arrived!'

'What is the hour of high tide?' her
father asked Geronimo.

'At noon,' he replied.
'Why need we go so soon to the dock-
yard?' asked the old cavalier. 'Many days
may yet pass before the Il Salvatore ap-
pears in the Scheldt. Do not fear, Mary,
that the Signor Deodati will take us by
surprise. Don Pezoa, the agent of the
king of Portugal, has given orders that
I shall be notified as soon as the galley
we are awaiting is signalled in the river,
at noon.'

He was interrupted by the entrance of
a servant, who announced that the
Chevalier John Van Schoonhoven, the
bailiff, desired to speak with him.

Geronimo was about to withdraw, but
Mr. Van de Werve said to him, cordially:
'Remain, signor; I will send Petronilla,
Mary's duenna as a companion for her;
the interview with the Chevalier Schoon-
hoven may not detain me long. We will
at least enjoy the weather. Stay, I beg
you.'

Hardly had he left the hall when an
old woman entered, and seated herself
near the door. She drew a chaplet from
her pocket, and commenced praying in a
low voice. This was apparently an habi-
tual act with her, for neither the young
girl nor young man took the least notice
of the duenna.

Mary approached her lover, said, gaily
'Rejoice Geronimo! My father has just
promised not to propose very heavy
conditions to your uncle.'

'I am most grateful for his kindnes,'
said the young man, sadly.

'What can be the matter?' asked Mary,
surprised by his indifference. 'I noticed
you were depressed when you first came.
Be more hopeful; perhaps the Il Salva-
tore will ascend the Scheldt to-day.'

'God grant it may not arrive,' said
Geronimo, heaving a deep sigh.

'Do you then fear your uncle's arrival,'
exclaimed Mary, in an agitated voice.

'Do not speak so loud, Mary; your
duenna must not hear what I am about
to communicate to you. Yes; since
yesterday morning I have dreaded my
uncle's arrival. Previously I implored it
of Heaven as the choicest blessings and
now the thought of it makes me trem-
ble.'

'Have you then heard from your uncle?'

'Alas, my friend, at the very moment
when all seemed the brightest, when I
was thanking God for a happiness which
I thought already mine, a dark cloud
comes to overshadow my life. I seem
even now to hear my uncle's voice pro-
nouncing the cruel sentence which con-
demns me to a life-long sorrow.'

The young girl turned deadly pale, and
anxiously awaited an explanation of the
mystery.

'My beloved Mary,' he whispered, 'it is
a secret which I can only confide to you
in part, and which in strict honor I should
perhaps conceal entirely. Four weeks ago

a merchant, highly esteemed, was left by
a curious train of circumstances without
funds, and he begged me to lend him ten
thousand crowns. Should I refuse his
request, the credit of his house would be
irretrievably ruined. His name I consid-
ered sufficient security for ten times the
amount he wished to borrow.

At all events, although it pained me to
disobey my uncle's positive injunctions,
I could not deny the assistance which
was asked of me. I lent the ten thousand
crowns, and obtained a receipt with a
written promise of payment in one month
Yesterday the note fell due; my debtor
asks a delay until to-morrow. I met him
an hour ago, and he has not yet obtained
the money.'

'But if your debtor is rich and powerful,
you need not indulge your fears to-day;
tomorrow, perhaps, he will fulfil his prom-
ise,' remarked the young girl, with ill-
concealed anxiety.

'My fears may mislead me, Mary, but I
am sure that my debtor's affairs are in a
very bad condition. At his urgent entreaty
I made no entry of the loan upon the
books, in order to conceal the transaction
from the clerks; but still I have not the
amount in hand. O Mar, my uncle has an
eagle eye in business affairs; he will at
once discover the deficit of ten thousand
crowns—a deficit resulting from my lead-
ing money; a thing he has always warn-
ed me against, and which, even recently,
he strictly forbade. My uncle is a good
father to me, but this act of disobedience
is sufficient to deprive me forever of his
favor. I foresee many future evils.'

'Why were you so imprudent, Gero-
nimo. You ought to have refused so large
a loan.'

'Could not possibly refuse, Mary.'

'But you hold an acknowledgment of
the debt and a promise of payment. Sum-
mons this merchant before the magistra-
tes; at Antwerp justice is promptly and
impartially dealt to all.'

'Impossible!' replied the young man,
in a plaintive voice; 'my debtor is a man
to whom I owe many obligations; a com-
plaint from me would be the cause of
irreparable ruin to him. Let us hope that
he will succeed in procuring the three
thousand crowns. He told me even this
morning that he would endeavor to give
me bills of exchange on Spain.'

'But of whom are you speaking?' said
Mary; 'your language is so mysterious.'

'I will not tell his name. Be not off-
ended by my reserve; there is between
merchants a law of secrecy which honor
forbids us to violate.'

Mary appeared to respect this law;
but she was evidently absorbed in bitter
reflections.

Either the communication of his diffi-
culties to his beloved had given him new
strength, or the sight of her sorrow made
him affect a confidence he did not feel,
for he said to her in a cheerful manner:
'Come, Mary, you must not yield to
discouragement. Perhaps I exaggerate
the danger. My debtor is a member of
a house which equals any other in con-
sideration and wealth. In a few days, to-
day even, or to-morrow, he may acquit
himself of the debt, and should my uncle
arrive before the restitution, I will en-
deavor to delay his examination of the
books.'

He took the young girl's hand, and
exclaimed, with joyous enthusiasm: 'O
Mary, my beloved, may Heaven be propi-
tious to our vows. May the benedic-
tion of the priest descend upon our union.
We will pass in Italy the first months of
our happy life; Italy—that earthly
paradise where God has lavished all the
treasures of nature, and man all the treas-
ures of art.'

They heard Mr. Van de Werve's voice
in the hall giving urgent orders to the
servants.

'Mary,' said Geronimo; 'your father
is coming. I implore you not to divulge,
in any manner, what I have told you.
Keep my secret even from your father;
remember that the least indiscretion
might cause the ruin of an honorable
merchant.'

'Make haste, Geronimo; Mary, prepare
for a drive,' exclaimed Mr. Van de W-
erve, as he entered the hall. 'Signor
Deodati has arrived; the Il Salvatore is
in sight. Don Pezoa has just sent me
information to that effect, and he has
placed his gondola and boatmen at our
service. The weather is beautiful and
calm; we will go to meet the Il Salva-
tore.'

Mary, as though forgetting in this un-
expected news all that Geronimo had
told her, ran joyfully and put on her
hood before her duenna had time to
approach her. Geronimo also looked
happy, and prepared to meet his uncle
without loss of time.

In a few minutes all was ready; the
horses were harnessed to the carriage,
the great gate was flung open, and the
equipage was driven rapidly through the
street.

To be continued.

Ten deaths from cholera were reported
in this city to-day. Seventeen patients
were admitted to the hospital, eight were
discharged cured and 136 remain under
treatment. The physicians declare that
the cases here are more amenable to
treatment.