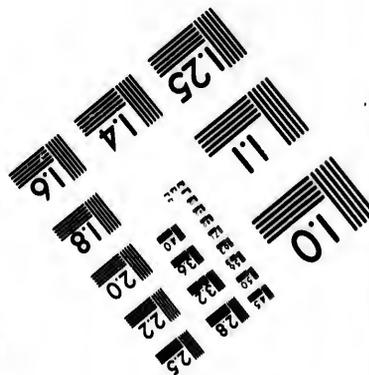
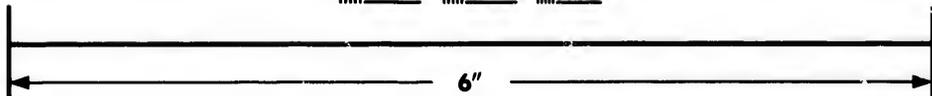
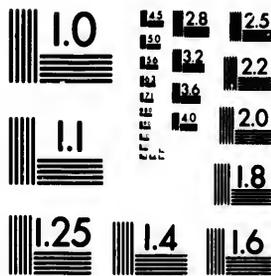


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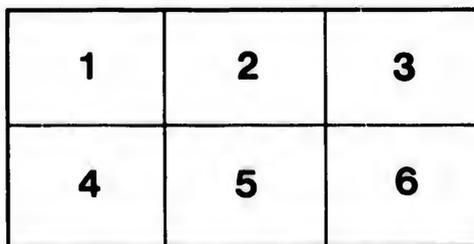
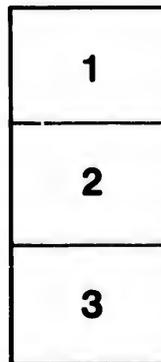
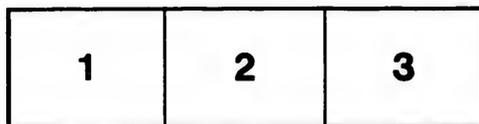
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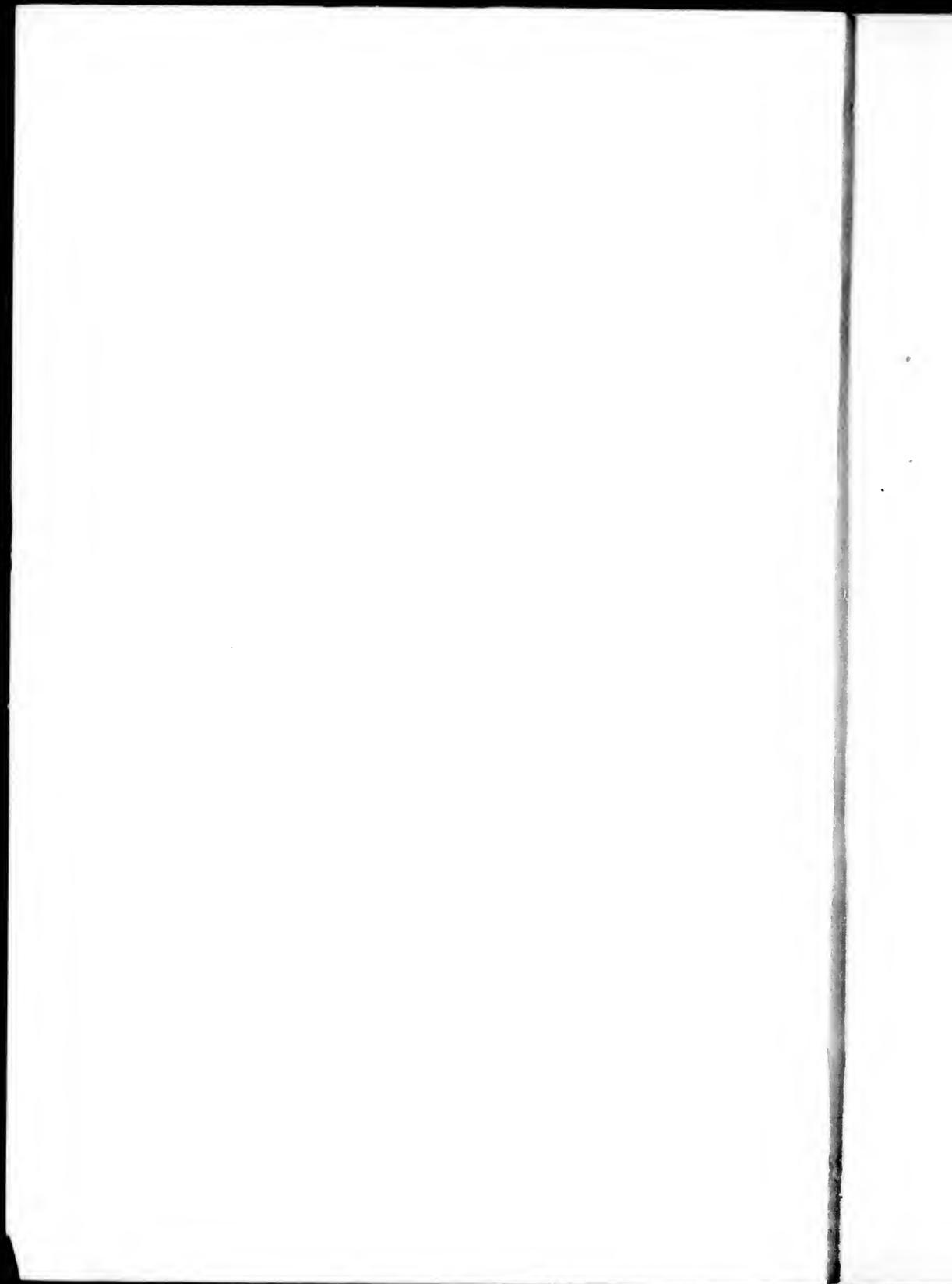
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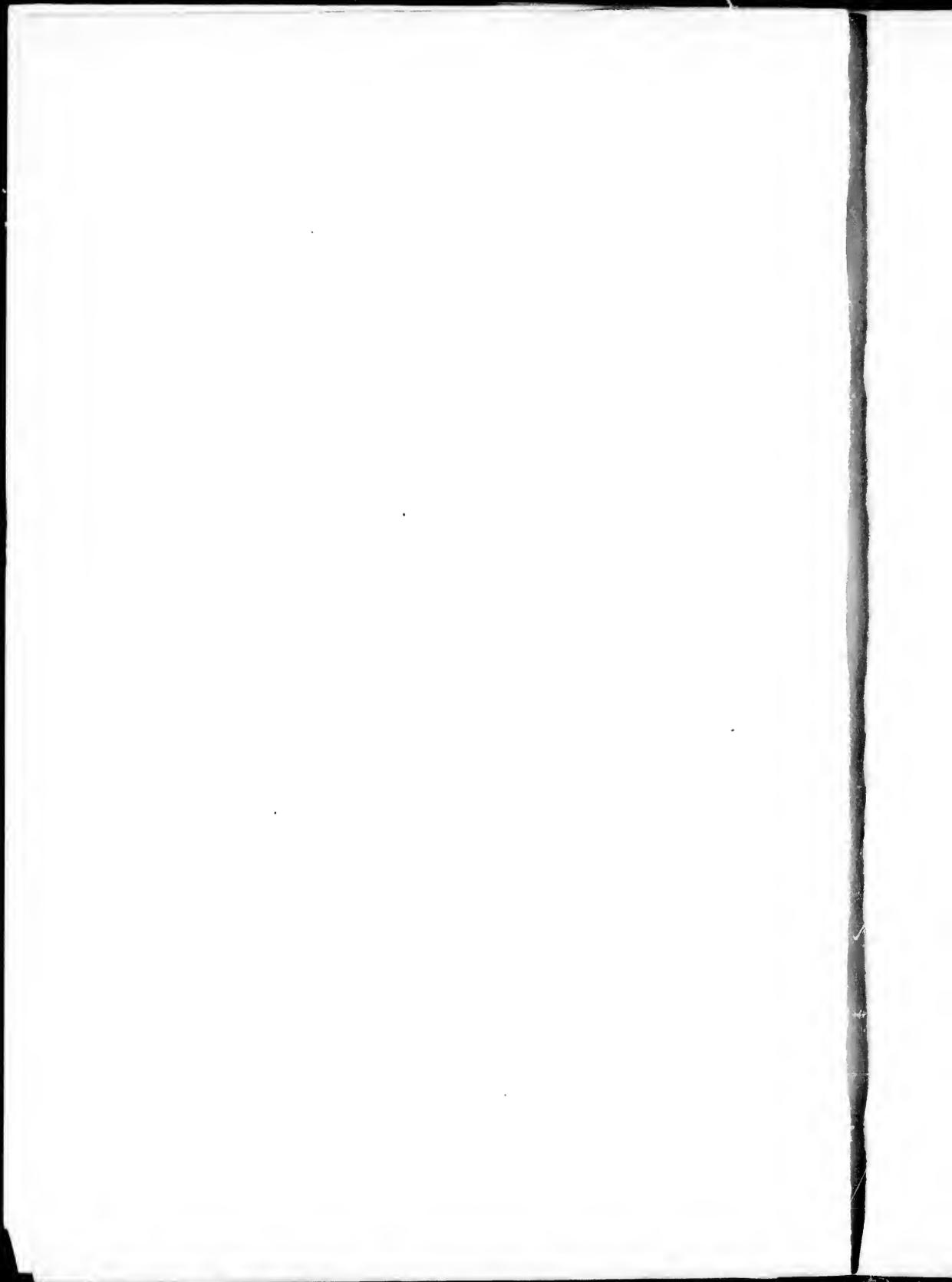
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THE
PRESIDENT OF BORAVIA



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THE
PRESIDENT OF BORAVIA

BY
GEORGE LAMBERT

AUTHOR OF
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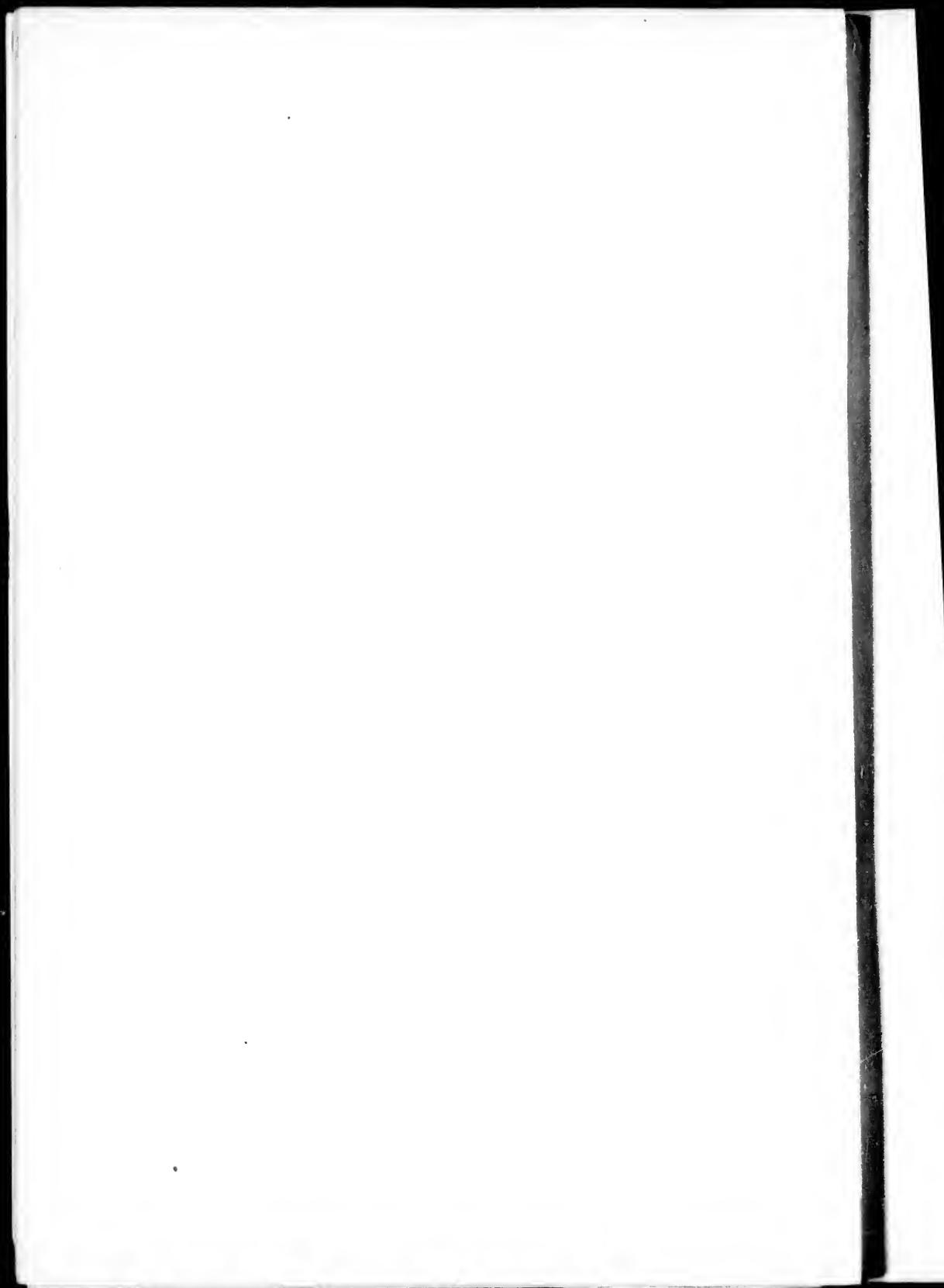
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THE
PRESIDENT OF BORAVIA

CHAPTER I

MASTER AND MAN

JOHN STANDEN, civil engineer, was tired of doing nothing. His chief, the great Sir George Graves, had been so pleased with the way Standen had carried out a delicate affair in the United States of Rosolio that he had promised his subordinate the next suitable appointment at his disposal; but it was now many months since Standen had come home from South America, and he was still sponging on his father. The old doctor's suburban practice was not now a very lucrative one, for younger men were in the field; moreover, Standen knew his father had pinched himself to give him, the only child of his first wife, a good start, for Sir George

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Graves did not take every Tom, Dick, or Harry as his pupil, and his premium was a large one. The doctor's second wife, too, had presented him with a numerous and healthy family, and altogether things were not too prosperous at Argyle Villas, N.W. John Standen's relief, then, was great when at last he got a letter from his chief, offering him the post of resident engineer to the Santa Maria Waterworks Company, in the Republic of Boravia, with the comfortable salary of 1,500*l.* a year. The offices of the Santa Maria Waterworks Company were in Victoria Street, Westminster, and at twelve o'clock the same morning he had his letter. Standen was seated opposite Sir George Graves, a bluff, burly man, with grizzled hair and beard, and keen grey eyes, in the consulting engineer's private room.

'I have been wanting to do something for you, Standen, for some time,' Sir George was saying, 'but I also wanted to use you to the best advantage, not only for your own profit, you must understand.'

'It is very kind of you,' Standen replied, inwardly wondering why he had been kept so long waiting for a berth if what Sir George had just said were anything more than a polite fiction; for one or two suitable positions had come in Sir George's way since he had last

employed Standen, and Standen had been passed over.

'I expect you are wondering why you have had to wait so long,' said Sir George, with a keen glance at Standen: 'the fact is, I have had you in my mind for Santa Maria. Things have not been going on satisfactorily there for some time: poor Whirlow was hardly the man to be in charge out there; he was too bluff and uncompromising for the Boravian fiscals, and yet he was such a straight man that the directors really could not see their way to ask him to retire.'

'I heard he had retired,' said Standen, as Sir George paused, and seemed to expect him to say something.

'Yes, he has, or I should not be able to offer you the berth. Now, I don't disguise it from you, Standen, that I was very pleased with the way you managed that Rosolio affair. It was a tough job, there's no doubt about it, and if you had not been there when the chief engineer died, and all the fuss began, it would have been a poor business for a good many folk who had their money in that railway.'

Standen murmured something or other about 'doing his best' as Sir George stopped and looked at him. And the truth is Standen had indeed had a tough job, as Sir George said,

for he had scarcely taken the reins in his hands after the death of his chief when one of the political upsets so frequent in those South American republics took place, and, a strong anti-English President and ministry getting into power, they determined to complete the railway themselves, and packed off Standen and his staff incontinently. The Government of Rosolio also calmly refused to pay anything like an adequate sum for what had already been done, and it was in the consequent negotiations that Standen showed a skill and diplomacy which carried the English company triumphantly through all sorts of complications and difficulties, and saved the loss of a very large sum of money.

‘Heaven only knows,’ Sir George went on, ‘when some such sort of trouble may not crop up in Boravia: the country has been in a most unsettled state ever since they got rid of the King. Da Piera, the President, is by no means firmly seated in the presidential chair: so long as he is in power our interests are fairly safe, but he is in a most uncomfortable position. On the one side there is a strongish conservative party in favour of the restoration of the monarchy, and on the other there is the tag, rag, and bobtail party, with a plain leaning towards repudiation of all Boravian contracts and debts.

So you see, young man, you won't have a very easy time of it, and I think it is only fair to put everything before you, so that you can decide as to going out there, or not, with your eyes open.'

'I shall not hesitate a moment, Sir George,' said Standen; 'at any rate, it can't be worse than Rosolio.'

'Exactly so,' replied Sir George, evidently much relieved at Standen's decision; 'and the same qualities which got you out of that affair with such flying colours will, I have no doubt, stand you in good stead with these shifty Boravians. And now as to your starting: the truth is that since Whirlow's retirement everything is at sixes and sevens, and we want you to go as soon as ever you can.'

'I shall be only too glad to go by the very first chance,' said Standen. 'I am tired to death of doing nothing: let me see, the Royal Mail goes out every other Wednesday; to-day is Saturday.'

'Here is the Royal Mail list of sailings,' interrupted Sir George, taking the paper from a rack in front of him, 'I see the "Peronia" sails next Wednesday, but of course you couldn't ——'

'Oh, yes, I could,' said Standen; 'I shall be glad to get off at once. I have my old

Rosolio outfit by me, and I can easily get off by the "Peronia."

'Well, that is something like business,' said Sir George, with an approving smile, and evidently well pleased at Standen's promptness. 'I would ask you to lunch with me, Standen,' he went on, 'but unfortunately I have an engagement I cannot get out of. If you have nothing better to do you might come up to my house at Highgate and dine with me to-night, when we can go into matters thoroughly, and I can show you the lie of the land out there.'

Standen readily agreed to this, and, shaking hands with the great Sir George, he took his leave in a jubilant frame of mind, for, barring fevers, revolutions, and a few other South American possibilities, he was a made man, and as he was barely thirty, strong in health, and conscious of a clear and decided mind, he never gave these possibilities a single thought, and only looked at the present relief from enforced idleness and consequent pecuniary embarrassment.

As Standen passed through the huge mahogany and glass swing-doors of the sumptuous offices of the Santa Maria Waterworks Company he uttered a suppressed cry of pleasure, for there, coming along Victoria

Street at a slow pace, he saw a man who had been in his mind's eye ever since this new appointment had dawned on his somewhat dark horizon.

'Hullo, Burch! Hi, man! stop a minute!' he cried, running down the wide steps, as the man he wanted slowly passed on.

'Why, blamed if it idn't Measter Standen,' said the man, as he stopped suddenly and turned round to see who was calling him by name. 'Aw, sir, I be terrible glad for to see 'ee,' he went on, as he gripped Standen's hand in his powerful grasp. They were a strong contrast, these two, as they stood facing each other, for Standen was tall and slight in build, with dark hair and dark eyes, and clean-shaven save for a short moustache, and Burch was a stout, stocky little man, with red hair and beard, and keen blue eyes, and he looked, as indeed he was, as strong as a bull.

'How's the world using you, Jan?' asked Standen. 'I haven't seen you since we came home from Rosolio: a pretty tight fit that was, Burch, and lucky we were to get out of the place with whole skins.'

'All the same, sir, I wouldn't make no odds about going out theer agen, and so I tell 'ee. I've a been ganger tew a job in Wales, and fer drink and devilment and all that theer I'd

all so soon hev to dew with they old natives in America ; iss, fay, so 'a would. And what be you a doin' of, measter, mekking so bold as to ask 'ee?'

'Well, Jan, that's rather a long story to tell, and I'm not at all sure whether you may not, perhaps, come into it ; but we can't stay talking here in the street, and I'm just as hungry as a hunter ; how do you feel that way?'

John Burch intimated with a grin that he could 'pick a bit,' and, Standen hailing a hansom, the two were soon on their way to the Trocadero Restaurant, in spite of Burch's protests that 'it was not for the likes of me to make so free with Measter Standen.'

Over a substantial meal and a postprandial cigar, Standen unfolded his prospects to Burch, to the latter's great content, for he had an inkling that the story was not told for nothing, but that, as Standen had hinted, he had, or might have, something to do with it all. He was not left long in suspense.

'Now, Jan,' said Standen, leaning forward in his chair, and looking full at his companion, 'you've heard the whole story, and the reason why I've told it you is because I want you to come out with me.'

'Aw, glory be,' cried Burch, reaching out his hand, and giving a hearty shake to Standen's ;

'tes just the very thing as I should love, be gor.'

'Well, wait a moment,' said Standen, with a smile at his subordinate's delight; 'things are a bit unsettled out there at Boravia: there may be ructions, and I want a man who not only can do his work, but upon whom I can depend at a pinch.'

'Measter Standen, sir, zo zure as yew be sitting theer, yere be a South Devon man as'll stick to 'ee through thick and thin, so her wull, yew may depend.'

'I know it, Jan,' returned Standen; 'we've been through two or three roughish shindies together before, and with something of the same sort of people too, so I'm not afraid about you.'

'No more you needn't tew,' cried Burch, bringing his great hand down on the table with a thump that made their neighbours look up. 'You'm a goin' tew start next Wednesday, so yew said,' he went on, and then he paused, and a vivid blush appeared on his already rubicund visage.

'Why, Jan, what's the matter with you?' asked Standen with a laugh. 'You're as red as a turkey cock, man; going to have a fit, eh?'

'Naw, sir, 'tidn't no fit; trewth is—an' I don't mind telling yew—since I see yew last

I've bin doing a little bit of business in the matrimonial line.'

'What, Jan, married?'

'No, not azactly—but theer's a little gell as I'm a keeping company with, an' I must rin down to Devon for tew see her before I go, and trewly there idn't much time.'

'Well, Burch, I wish you joy. You'll have a great deal more money out there than you could earn here, and before very long you can come home with your pockets full of nickels, and have bells ringing, folks cheering, and "the parson a pocketing his fee," as the song says. Well, I've got a lot to do, and a short time to do it in, so here's good-bye to you, Burch, for the present. By the way, you had better take your passage: I've told you what your salary will be, and if you want an advance ——'

'I've a plenty to go on with, sir,' said Burch, 'and I shall be at Southampton on Wednesday, please the powers,' and with that master and man parted, well contented the one with the other.

CHAPTER II

THE SANTA MARIA WATERWORKS COMPANY

As Standen dismissed his hansom that same night, and followed the footman through the wide corridor of Sir George Graves' house at Highgate into the big hall, he wondered whether his good fortune would ever bring him into such luxurious surroundings. The corridor was bordered on each side with beautiful flowers, and the hall wore a tropical look with its foliage plants and tree ferns, one or two marble statues gleaming out from the greenery under the bright electric light. After all, he thought, the great Sir George himself had begun at the lowest rung of the ladder, and the same qualities of shrewdness, skill, and application which had brought him the immense wealth with which he was credited might bring him, Standen, to a like ending; at any rate, these evidences of prosperity were a sort of lesson to him to seize his opportunity and make the best of it.

'Ah, you are punctuality itself,' said Sir George, as, after shaking hands with his hostess

in the drawing-room, Standen greeted his host. 'We are alone to-night, and as we have a great deal of ticklish ground to go over, I have asked Lady Graves to excuse us after dinner, and ordered our coffee to be brought into the library.'

Standen was rather sorry for this, for it was not the first time he had been a guest at Highgate, and Lady Graves was a charming hostess and a remarkably clever woman: she had been a great beauty, and was good to look at now—a small, alert woman whose still lovely brown eyes and black eyebrows and lashes contrasted strangely with a wealth of silvery hair. She had been with her husband in his various enterprises in all quarters of the globe, and she knew how to talk about what she had seen and done.

'You will find things changed out in Boravia from the old times when Sir George and I were out there,' she said as she took Standen's arm, and they moved across the drawing-room. 'I had a pleasant time there: the old King took quite a fancy to Sir George, and we were very often at the Palace and at his summer place in the mountains. Our Ambassador was a widower too, and I had to do all the receiving for him. I was a person of importance, I can assure you, and it seemed rather strange to come back to

England and be a sort of nobody. Ah, well, we had some happy times in the old Quinta, and I shall always have a kindly feeling for Boravia, in spite of its present troublesome ways.'

'Troublesome ways, indeed,' said Sir George, 'they have cost me and a good many other people a pretty penny already, and we have not seen the end of it yet, I am afraid. By the way, Standen, talking of the Quinta reminds me to tell you that that place, the Quinta de los Mangos, will be your abode in Santa Maria: the company bought it in my time, and the chief engineer always has it.'

'I am sure I quite envy you, Mr. Standen,' said Lady Graves; 'it is a most delightful place, out of the heat and noise of the city, and the gardens are lovely. It used to be the house of the chief, or Provincial, or whatever they call him, of the Jesuits, until the Government turned out the Order, and confiscated all their property. The house is built right into the side of a high hill, and on the top are the ruins of the old Jesuit chapel. I shall be interested to hear how the old place is looking.'

'I will be sure to let you know about it when I get out there,' said Standen: 'it is a relief not to have to hunt about for a place to put oneself in.'

‘The old King was a most simple-minded man,’ said Sir George. ‘Many an hour have I spent in the Palace, the King and I grubbing about on our hands and knees over huge maps spread on the floor. There were few things the King of Boravia knew nothing about : he took the most intelligent interest in the Santa Maria drainage and waterworks, and would have every single detail explained to him. I can quite imagine that Da Piera, the President, is another sort of man altogether.’

‘Of course, I remember the Da Pieras well,’ said Lady Graves ; ‘it seems strange to think of him as President of the Republic. Why, he was one of the most loyal of men, and seemed devoted to the King. Don’t you remember, George, how fond the Crown Prince was of him ? He very often stayed at the Da Pieras’ country house at Buena Vista.’

‘I wonder whether his wife is alive,’ mused Sir George : ‘he married an Englishwoman, a daughter of old Sir Luttrell Dodds, who was once Ambassador at Boravia. I don’t think it was altogether a successful arrangement ; she could not stand the climate, and did not get on with Da Piera. I never heard the rights of the thing ; at any rate, the Viscondessa da Piera elected to live in Europe, and we never saw her.’

'I have a sort of dim idea that there was a daughter, an only child, unless I am mistaken; however, she must be grown up by now. You will be able to give us all sorts of news of Boravia, Mr. Standen. But I can see that Sir George is getting fidgety, and so I will say good-bye, and *bon voyage* to you, for I expect I shall be fast asleep long before you break up your conclave,' and, with a hearty hand-clasp, Lady Graves departed, leaving her husband and Standen to a long business confabulation in the library.

'Well, I think we have about broken the back of it,' said Sir George, after about a couple of hours of poring over maps and papers; 'you have your notes you have just taken, and, with the papers I will give you just before you start, you will have something to amuse you on the voyage; and when you get out there, with what I have been able to tell you, you will soon get the hang of things. The staff are a fair average lot of men, most of them well up to their work.'

'Ah, that reminds me,' said Standen. 'I don't suppose you remember one John Burch who was out with us in Rosolio?'

'Perfectly, a sort of overseer of the men—I don't often forget people—an honest sort of fellow—very red, rather short, and very strong.'

'Yes, I met him just as I was coming out

of your offices this morning, and, oddly enough, I was thinking about him at the time.'

'He'd be a capital fellow to have out there, Standen,' said Sir George.

'Well, he was out of a berth, and was mooning about Victoria Street and Great George Street, looking for something to do, and I have asked him to come out with me on Wednesday.'

'You can easily find some way of making him useful,' said Sir George. 'Have another cigar? No! Then I think I'll say good-night, and I don't suppose you'll be sorry either, for you have a lot to do and think about.'

Indeed, Standen had plenty of food for his mind as he walked briskly down Highgate Hill towards the nearest cabstand. It was a cold, drizzly November night, and he was not at all sorry to think he would soon be out of the fogs and mists of the English winter, and in the sunshine of the tropics, for he forgot for the moment the attendant worries of prickly heat, mosquitoes, scorpions, centipedes, and all the other agreeable adjuncts to the sunshine aforesaid.

CHAPTER III

THE PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTER

ON the following Monday Standen went to the Royal Mail Steamer office to book his berth for Boravia in the R.M.S. 'Peronia.' He found that John Burch had been beforehand with him, for his name appeared in the list of steerage passengers, though the salary he was to receive from the Santa Maria Waterworks Company could easily have borne the strain of a second-class, or even of a first-class passage. Sometimes the clerks in these offices are of a haughty, stand-offish sort, and assume a demeanour which might induce the innocent traveller to imagine that the company was conferring an immense, and indeed undeserved, favour on him in carrying him to his destination. The clerk, however, who attended to Standen's wants was a young man of a most affable disposition.

'Going to Boravia?' he said, as he made out the ticket; 'we're carrying a distinguished passenger out there this trip: the President's

daughter is going out ; she was in the office about a week ago to choose her cabin. We've had the President in here before now ; he's a fine fellow to look at, but I daresay you know him by sight, at any rate ?'

'No,' said Standen, curious to know what sort of a person the President's daughter might be, after the conversation of Saturday night at the Graves' house ; 'this is my first experience of Boravia, though I know other parts of South America well enough.'

'I thought I knew your face,' said the clerk.

'I was in that Rosolio affair : went out and back several times,' said Standen.

'Of course, I remember now. I knew the face and the name, but I could not locate you. Anything going on in Boravia, if I may ask ?'

'Santa Maria waterworks,' briefly replied Standen, a little tired of the young gentleman's easy-going ways.

'You're sure to knock across the President, then,' replied the young man, as he put the ticket and receipt into an envelope, and handed it to Standen. 'The daughter's a wonderfully nice-looking girl, tall and dark, like her father ; proud too, I should say,' and a sort of frown came over his face, for he did not forget the snubbing with which the Señorita had greeted his affable advances. 'Hope you'll have a good

voyage,' he said, as Standen nodded to him and left the office. Another interview with Sir George at Victoria Street put him quite *au fait* as to what was expected of him out in Boravia, and, after taking a kindly farewell of his father and his stepmother, and consoling the children with promises of Boravian 'dollies' and plenty of boxes of guiabada—a South American sweetmeat concocted of mangoes and sugar, and much appreciated at Argyle Villas—he found himself at Southampton on the Wednesday, ready to start, and with everything in good trim.

'Well, Burch,' he said, as he made his way through heaps of luggage to the place where Burch was standing on the tender, 'well, we're off now, and I hope we shan't have such a bad time out there; anyhow, anything is better than loafing about at home with one's hands in one's pockets.'

'Trew, trew; what you'm a saying is right enough, measter; 'tis gude to have a plenty to do,' and Jan Burch gave a most portentous sigh.

'Why, man,' said Standen with a smile, 'to hear the way you pumped up that sigh of yours one would think you were sorry to be off.'

'And so I be, measter, sorry and glad too.'

'My dear Jan, I beg your pardon, I am sure,' said Standen, still with a bit of a smile lurking round his lips. 'I quite forgot that you're "keeping company," and of course you've only just said good-bye to the young lady; no wonder you're sad. Cheer up, old man, we'll have a cocktail—remember the cocktails, Jan, eh?—as soon as we get on board, and drink a good health and a speedy marriage to Jan Burch and—— You never told me the lady's name?'

'Meary Perryman, that be her name,' said Burch, somewhat shamefacedly, but with a sort of lingering relish on the not untuneful syllables. 'Aw, sir,' he went on, 'tidn't nothin' for to make May-games of: I never could see why folk should make sich a fun of coortin' and marriage; they'm serious enow, come to think of it.'

'Well, you're right, Jan, after all,' said Standen, not without a backward glance at a somewhat unfortunate love affair of his own.

As Standen turned round after speaking he gave vent to a low and prolonged whistle, for he caught sight of a face and figure which drove out of his mind at once and for all the little suburban beauty, with her frills and furbelows, her up-to-date costumes, and her wee-est suspicion of a cockney twang, who had so heartlessly jilted him.

'Well!' exclaimed Burch, as he followed the direction of Standen's gaze, 'her's the praperest bewty as iver I zeed; blamed as if her idn't so like yew as two peas, tew; like a pair of twins you be.'

'Nonsense, Jan,' said Standen, as he recovered himself and his pursed-up lips regained their ordinary curves. But, though he was anything but a vain man, and would never have dreamt of putting himself in the same category with the beautiful girl before him, yet he could not but see that there was something of an odd sort of resemblance between them; for both were tall and slight, both had clean-cut features and dark eyes, and there was an air of distinction in the girl's whole presence, which, although he did not know it, was a mark in Standen's personality too. She was standing in the midst of a group of foreign-looking folk, and was smiling at something one of her friends had just said, and Standen was not slow to remark the exceeding sweetness of the smile, and the bright flash of the large luminous eyes which seemed almost to light up her face, while the close-fitting jacket of some dark and costly fur did not hide the graceful lines of a slim and lovely figure, and the toque she wore left to view her face and the luxuriance of her fine dark hair, blown in delicate tendrils about her

by the sea breeze as the tender puffed and panted its way against the wind towards the huge looming hulk of the R.M.S. 'Peronia.'

'I 'opes as her's a going along o' we,' said Burch in a low tone; 'tis a goodly sight even to look 'pin her.'

'Jan, Jan,' said his friend and master, 'only a minute ago you were bemoaning your fate at having to part with Meary.'

'And so I dew, most trewly I do,' said Burch, 'and a prettier maiden of her sart yew doan't vind wi'in the borders of Devon; but, aw, sir, this yere—her's like to a Empress; the likes of her is not to the likes o' me, but, be that as 'twull, us hev a got eyes in our 'eds as well as one yere or theer, and thicky maiden over theer, her wouldn't be sorry or shamed to know what Jan Burch thinks upon her.'

'She certainly is a lovely girl,' said Standen, half to himself and almost forgetting his companion. 'I shouldn't wonder—tall, dark, like her father, so that clerk fellow said—it is the President's daughter.'

'And a praper, vine darter the gentleman have a got,' said Jan; 'but howsomever, us be nearing the vessel; and yew giv me 'old of summat to carry for 'ee, for yew've a got a most amazing heap of traps, zure enough.'

'Why did you go steerage, Burch?' asked

Standen ; 'surely your salary could afford something better than that?'

'I've a got a plenty to do wi' my bit,' answered Jan : 'us Burches be a savin' lot—tew savin' some on 'em, for my old father have a saved so much that he've a starved his land. I've got he to look after, and soon as I've got what I'm lookin' for I goes home, get married, and takes oop wi' the old volks. But us'll be left behind if us bides tellin' yere.'

CHAPTER IV

R. M. S. 'PERONIA'

THOUGH Standen kept his eyes open, he did not catch sight of the dark-eyed and stately beauty until long after the tender had gone, and the great ship was under way. As neither he nor Burch had had anyone to see them off, they were in their respective quarters, getting things into order, when the last call for the shore was heard.

It must be confessed, traveller though he was, that Standen felt a little forlorn and lonely as, everything below being arranged to his satisfaction, he went on deck and watched the shore growing darker and darker, with here and there a gleaming light, as the short November day drew to its close. To see Burch he must pass over to the steerage, and he knew that too much of that sort of thing was not encouraged on board, while the steerage passengers not infrequently objected to the visits of the 'toffs,' as they called the saloon passengers. However, he had never yet failed of making friends in his

various voyages; and here was the bell for dinner ringing; and then perhaps he would see the handsome girl.

Thinking thus, he quickly made his way to the great dining saloon, which was, together with all other arrangements of the huge steamer, a perfect model of luxury and comfort.

'This way, sir,' said one of the stewards, as Standen reached the bottom of the broad flight of steps. 'It's Mr. Standen,' he went on, in a lower tone; 'I thought I knew you, sir; came home with you in the "Altura."'

Standen smiled a greeting to the man, and followed him to the head of the captain's table, where he found he was placed on the right hand and next but one to the captain; for the Santa Maria Waterworks people did an immense business with the Royal Mail; and the chief engineer of that company was no mean person in the eyes of the service. The seat on the left hand next to the captain's place was vacant, nor had the captain himself yet put in an appearance, and, as he unfolded his serviette and studied the elaborate menu, Standen wondered who his neighbour at table was going to be. Some aged and venerable dowager, he thought, some Viscondessa—Viscondessa da Piera! Ah! if that beautiful girl were indeed the President's daughter she

would most certainly occupy the seat of honour. And lo! Standen is right, for the lovely object of his thoughts, and his wishes, is even now coming down the wide stairway into the saloon, talking to a stout, homely, comfortable-looking dame, who is conducted by a steward to the seat on the left hand of the captain, while the dark beauty is shown to the seat next to Standen.

Standen, of course, rose as the girl came to her place, and the slight smile and bow with which she repaid his courtesy formed a sort of introduction to ordinary talk until the captain took his place, and soon introduced them in due form.

'Señorita da Piera,' said the polite skipper, 'this is Mr. Standen, who is going out with us to Santa Maria to take charge of the waterworks.'

Standen muttered a few words expressive of his sense of delight, and honour, and so forth, and the Señorita followed suit by introducing the stout and comely middle-aged lady opposite as 'My aunt, Miss Dodds.'

As Standen was inwardly wondering how a Señorita da Piera could possibly have an aunt of the homely name of Dodds, for he had forgotten for the moment what Lady Graves had said, he saw that the subject of his thoughts

was accurately guessed by the bewilderingly beautiful girl by his side.

'My mother was an Englishwoman,' she said, with just the suspicion of a smile at Standen's evident embarrassment at having his thoughts thus divined: 'she was the daughter of Sir Luttrell Dodds, who was Ambassador to the King of Boravia, and Miss Dodds is my dear mother's sister. It is not so complicated, after all, is it?' and again she smiled.

'If you won't think me rude, Señorita,' replied Standen remembering, 'I will tell you that I heard this only a night or two ago.'

'Well, now, that is odd,' said Miss Dodds, who had of course been hearing the conversation, 'and I never even heard your name — Oh, I beg your pardon!'

Miss Dodds was often begging people's pardon, for she had a sort of blunt way of going at things which accorded well with the thick-set stolidity of her general appearance and figure.

'I am sure there is no need for you to say that, Miss Dodds,' said Standen laughing. 'I don't suppose you ever did hear my name; indeed, I am such a humble individual that I am not used yet to the high and mighty position of engineer-in-chief. But it was at Sir George Graves'—he is practically head of

the company; the directors leave almost everything to him. I was dining at his place at Highgate last Saturday, and he told me he knew the Visconde da Piera quite well under the old *régime*.'

'There are no Viscondes now;' said the Señorita with a smile, 'the Republic has abolished all titles.'

'A great shame,' interpolated the skipper, who had the Briton's love for a handle to a name. 'They've abolished a good many other things, too, that they might have left alone; we don't do half the carrying we used to do when the old King was to the fore; but I beg your pardon, Señorita, I quite forgot ——'

'You forgot that my father is the President,' said the Señorita with a laugh; 'I am afraid I am not very loyal to the Republic myself. I suppose it is the English blood in me.'

'I hope it is safe out there,' said Miss Dodds anxiously; 'one hears of so many revolutions in South America that I was half afraid to come out. I certainly should never have come, Lois dear, if it had not been for you.'

'Oh, you need not be afraid, madam,' said the skipper. 'As long as the Señor da Piera is President he will keep things in order. Your father is a strong man, Señorita,' and the

captain, with a bow right and left, went off to his multifarious duties.

After his long confabulations with Sir George, Standen had his own opinions as to the absolute stability of things Boravian, but he had no wish to rouse the fears of the timid Miss Dodds.

'Ah, it was a charming country when my father was Ambassador,' said that lady, 'though I was quite a child. I well remember Santa Maria, and the Embassy, and the lovely place in the mountains where we passed the hot weather time.'

'I dare say you won't find it so terrible, after all, auntie,' said Lois da Piera; 'you must remember that your niece is a Boravian, and we are not all savages, I assure you, dear.'

'Well, one can't help feeling a little anxious, Lois,' said her aunt. 'It will be all so different; I'm sure I've forgotten nearly all my Spanish too, and what to do with the servants I can't tell.'

'They will not trouble you much, auntie,' said the niece, as she remembered the Presidential establishment, with its major-domo, grooms of the chambers, and almost royal retinue; for the Presidential revenues were large when the President's daughter had been last in Boravia, and Da Piera had kept up some state.

'You don't give Mr. Standen a very reassuring outlook in his new country,' she added, turning to her neighbour.

Standen would like to have said that any country and almost any conceivable circumstances would have been rosy-hued if only the dark-eyed beauty beside him were the centre of the surroundings; but he did not dare to give utterance to his thoughts, and the opportunity passed him by, for the aunt and niece rose, and, followed by many curious and admiring glances, Lois da Piera left the dining saloon.

CHAPTER V

MAKING FRIENDS

As Standen smoked his cigar after dinner he had plenty of food for thought, and, despite the somewhat noisy chatter that the other numerous smokers kept up in the smoking saloon, he suffered his mind to dwell on the many perfections of his charming fellow passenger. He was forced to recognise the fact that his interest in the beautiful Lois was of more than an ordinary sort, and all kinds of pleasing visions in which she was the central figure filled his imagination, to be dismissed with a contemptuous 'Pshaw!' But, alas! he might 'pish' and 'pshaw' as much as he liked, but still the entrancing vision of the girl he had just left would insist upon coming before his mental vision, and the result of his deliberations left him with a firm resolve to check himself in time, lest he should find himself consumed with a hopeless passion for the daughter of the President of Boravia.

When Standen had finished his cigar he went aft to the steerage to see how his fellow

voyager, Jan Burch, was getting on. He found Burch the centre of quite a little crowd of obviously poor folk, who were listening intently to a sort of oration he seemed to be delivering.

'Well, Jan,' said Standen, as Burch broke away from the company, 'are you fairly comfortable? There seems to be a pretty crowd here: you had much better have come forward into the second saloon.'

'Aw, pore souls, pore souls,' said Jan with a sigh; 'I misdoubt mezul but they've been terrible do'ed by some old raskils or other.'

'Why, what's the matter with them?' asked Standen. 'They don't look to be much overburdened with this world's goods, it is true.'

'Naw, they bean't, and that's the trewth,' said Burch: 'tes a lot of emigrants, that's what 'tes. They'm all a going out to Parania, and they think as they'm goin' to make their fortunes, and come home soon with their pockets full of money.'

'Whew—w—w!' whistled Standen. 'Why, I thought the Government had warned folks against this emigration scheme; indeed, I saw the warning up in several post offices.'

'Zo they have, but the agents have been tellin' up a power of lies, and these pore volk have belaved them. If they gets back with their skins 'twull be a bit of good luck.'

“Have you been giving them this cheering piece of information, then?”

“Naw, sir; so soon as I’d let out as I’d a been to Rosolio, they axed me what sort of a place the province of Parania might be, and then I know’d what was up, and I was a describin’ of it to mun-when yew came up.”

‘I hope it won’t turn out as badly as you fear,’ said Standen; ‘it’s not a bad climate and the soil’s good.’

‘Aw, yes, ’tes so, but I knaws about farmering; and wheer’s the market and wheer’s the labour? ’Tes sinful wickedness to chate pore volks, I reckon.’

And as a matter of fact it was not such a long time before the remnants of the unfortunate emigrants were back at the British Embassy at Santa Maria, half-starved, with their clothes worn out, and clamouring for a passage back to England.

The kind-hearted Burch found so much to do in lightening the woes of these unaccustomed seafarers that he seemed scarcely ever to have a minute to himself, and Standen saw but little of him during the three weeks of the voyage.

Although they left a few passengers at Lisbon and at Vigo and St. Vincent, where they touched, there was a tolerable complement on board, including the ubiquitous drummer, a few

South American merchants, both English and Spanish, and a number of trippers, who were thus bent on escaping the British winter, and seeing something of the world at the same time.

These latter were a gay and lively lot, and they kept things going with all manner of ship's games, with dances, concerts, and private theatricals.

Now, although Lois da Piera was far from being too proud or exclusive, at the same time the noisy and, truth to tell, sometimes a little vulgar, amusements of these folks had no attractions for her, and beyond showing a singularly refined command over the piano at some of their impromptu concerts, and singing for them in a sweet, deep, contralto voice some quaint Boravian songs, she did not join in the daily and nightly games and festivities; and as Standen was, as Burch described him, 'a man as kep hisself to hisself,' they were both of them left out of the hurly-burly, and consequently thrown very much together; for, for the first part of the voyage, Miss Dodds was prostrate with sea-sickness, and continually bemoaning her folly in leaving the comforts of her beloved Bath for the perils and miseries of an Atlantic voyage; and when she was sufficiently recovered to endure the slow roll of the great waves, ensconced in a deck chair she passed her time knitting endless

woollen affairs for some mission she was interested in, or idly turning over the pages of a novel. So it came to pass that Standen's good resolutions went the way of the majority of that sort of commodity, and day by day he found himself getting more and more intimate with the President's daughter, and, as a natural consequence, more and more hopelessly in love.

'How delightful it is to get gradually away from the cold and mist and rain of England! It seems all a sort of bad dream.' It was Lois da Piera who was speaking, and she and Standen were seated side by side under an awning on deck. Lunch was well over, and Miss Dodds close by was comfortably indulging herself in a snooze, unawakened by the shouts and laughter of a lot of youngsters, and some older people too, who had got some nets rigged up, and were playing ship's cricket a little way off.

'If I had the money,' rejoined Standen, 'I never would stay a single winter in England; indeed, if we are to judge by the general exodus among the richer folk, we English will soon come and go with the swifts and the swallows.'

'Oh, I hope not,' she returned; 'although I suppose I must call myself a Boravian, my mother was English, and I should not like the

'English people to get into the exhausted and limp state of those who live where it is always summer.'

'Then you are not so keen about going back to Santa Maria?' asked Standen.

'Of course I want to see my dear father,' she answered. 'I have not seen him, save only for very short visits, for years; and then he was only just made President when my mother died and I came to live at Bath with my aunt, and before that we lived mostly at the Quinta; it was a pleasant, lazy life enough, and a little different from the stir and movement of father's new life in the Palace.'

'I wonder which life you will like best,' said Standen, as he looked at his stately and beautiful companion, and confessed to himself that she was indeed formed both by person and character to adorn even the most exalted of positions.

'Well, I do not know,' she answered musingly. 'Of course I know as yet but little of the Palace life, save only such items as I have gleaned from my father's letters, for I was quite a child when I came away, and he has so much upon his shoulders that his letters have been brief and not very descriptive.'

'Was not President da Piera a great friend and favourite of the ex-Crown Prince? I

remember Lady Graves said something of the sort to me.'

'Oh, yes, they were very often together. The Prince used to stay at the Quinta at Buena Vista very often; they shot together, and went orchid hunting; the Prince had a great love for flowers, and birds, and butterflies, and so forth, and so had my father. You are wondering why in face of this the Visconde da Piera should be changed into President da Piera? I have not seen very much of my father for years, only on his short visits to England, but I know enough of him to be certain he does not easily change his likes and dislikes, and you may be sure he is perfectly consistent in the position he has taken.'

'I can easily conceive,' said Standen, 'that he might have felt it his duty to take the Presidential chair in order to keep out someone whose election would have been bad for the country.'

'I dare say that is the reason—or it might possibly be—but I must not tell you what I sometimes imagine,' said Lois.

'Will you let me guess?' asked her companion; and as she nodded her head—'the President might wish to see the Crown Prince on the throne again,' he whispered.

'Oh, hush—hush,' she said in a low tone.

Just then Miss Dodds showed evident signs of waking up, and the conversation became general.

But enough has been recorded to show that the quick passage from acquaintance to friendship, and from friendship to intimacy, which the close companionship of the voyage at sea brings about, was showing another example in the case of Lois da Piera and John Standen.

CHAPTER VI

A GLIMPSE OF THE GULF FIXED

THE time passed rapidly, too rapidly for John Standen, on board ship; and the more he saw of Lois da Piera the more the beauties of her person and her character and mind filled his thoughts, until there was scarcely a waking moment when she was not present to him either in very deed and fact or in the imagination. And now, true to time, the great steamer was nearing the somewhat narrow entrance to the magnificent harbour of Santa Maria, and already the two promontories, frowning with the batteries with which the Boravians protected the only way into the Bay of Santa Maria, were in sight.

'One would think you were sorry to see land again,' said the Señorita as she leaned over the bulwarks, looking at the rapidly approaching points between which the 'Peronia' was so soon to pass.

'I wonder what makes you think that,' said Standen; for indeed he was sorry that their

pleasant intimacy of the last three weeks was soon to be over.

‘Well, you are different from everyone else on board,’ she answered. ‘Their only desire seems to be to get off the steamer as soon as they can—I am sure some of the people about our cabin have been packing and repacking for the last three days; but you—you seem sorry; from what you have told me it is a responsible position before you, but ——’

‘It is not that,’ said Standen with a sigh.

‘Then you are sorry to get to Santa Maria?’ said the girl.

‘Ah,’ he returned, ‘it has been a happy three weeks for me—the happiest time I have known; I cannot help being sorry that it is over.’

A warm blush rose in Lois da Piera’s face and neck, and she turned her eyes away from Standen, and looked towards the nearing promontories. Standen was sorry he had spoken; he felt he had said more than he had any right to say; for, after all, he had but little reason to suppose that the beautiful girl beside him regarded him in any other light than that of a pleasant enough companion; and it was evident from her manner that he had shown her too plainly his feelings towards her. Her next words, however, altered the whole complexion of his thoughts, and sent a rush of hope and

happiness into his mind such as he had scarcely even dared to think of.

'I am sorry too,' she murmured in a low tone of voice, and as if speaking to herself.

Standen had no time to take advantage of her admission, even if he had intended to do so, for just then Jan Burch came up to them.

'Us be pretty near in,' he said to Standen, touching his cap to the Señorita. 'I axed 'em to let me come auver and see if I could help 'ec in getting ready to land. 'Tidn't much as I've got to look to mezul.'

Standen thanked Burch, though inwardly he cursed what he most ungratefully called his officiousness; and he was going to send him off on some pretext or other when Miss Dodds arrived upon the scene and effectually put an end to any further chance of continuing the *tête-à-tête*.

'Ah, Mr. Standen,' said Miss Dodds, 'I expect you are as glad as I am to see the land once more; I simply dreaded the voyage, and I am thankful it is over. I am sure my niece and I are grateful to you for all your kindness and attention, and I hope we shall see a great deal of you at Santa Maria.'

Standen murmured his acknowledgments, but he had a dismal foreboding that, although his position was a good enough one, he should

not see much of the daughter of the President of the Republic. He determined, however, to be with her till the very end, and he quickly instructed Burch as to the disposal of his various belongings, so that he might give all his attention to the two ladies.

'Tis certainly the most beautiful scene in the world,' cried Miss Dodds, as the 'Peronia' passed through the narrow portals, and the vast expanse of the Bay of Santa Maria opened out to their view. So immense was the bay that on either hand its shores were almost lost in the distance, their limits being only to be guessed at by the faint outlines of far-off mountains, while the bay itself was dotted with islands large and small, and all covered with tropical greenery and waving palms.

'How it all comes back to me!' Miss Dodds went on, as she pointed out and named place after place, as the 'Peronia' steamed rapidly towards the land. 'I can just see Santa Maria itself,' she cried at last. 'Look, look, Lois, your eyes are better than mine—surely that is the city in front of us!'

'Yes, auntie, that is the city getting plainer and plainer every minute. The guns from the fort will have told them that we are coming in, and I expect that even now father is driving down to the quay.'

In a short time the towers of the Cathedral, and the spires of many churches, and the great blocks of the public buildings were visible, and Miss Dodds was excitedly naming the various places to Standen, while the Señorita was silent and somewhat *distracte*.

'Ah, I can see it now,' she said at last; and, touching Standen's arm, she pointed out a hill which rose at the far end of the huge city before them. 'That is the Monte de la Capilla,' she said, 'and built close against the side of the hill is the Quinta de los Mangos. I can almost see the house, and the little ruined Church of the Jesuits at the hilltop.'

'I am sure I hope you will have many happy days there,' said Miss Dodds to Standen politely, quite oblivious of the obvious fact that, even in the excitement of her return to her old home and country, her niece was thinking of her companion and friend of the last few weeks.

But whatever hopes these various indications may have given to John Standen, they were quickly dispersed as the great steamer slowly and majestically ranged alongside the handsome quays of Santa Maria. There was evidently some function toward, for a troop of cavalry was escorting a handsome barouche drawn by four splendidly caparisoned horses, and attended by footmen in gorgeous liveries.

‘Why, father has come down quite in state!’ cried Lois da Piera in a slightly vexed tone, as she gazed at the array of soldiers and the splendid carriage. ‘I am sure he need not have—— Ah, here is dear father,’ and she forgot her vexation as a tall dark man, whose somewhat melancholy cast of countenance was lighted up with a welcoming smile, came quickly to her and folded her in a warm embrace.

‘My dearest girl—my dearest girl,’ he murmured as he kissed her, ‘it is good to see you again;’ and having greeted Miss Dodds kindly—‘now you need not trouble about anything,’ he said; ‘the carriage is waiting, and we can get off to the Palace at once; the equerries will look after all your belongings.’

A way was respectfully made for the President, even on the crowded deck of the steamer, and through a lane of bowing, obsequious people the Presidential party passed to their carriage, which soon rapidly drove off amid hat-raisings and shouts of ‘Viva el Presidente!’ and accompanied by the clatter of the escorting troop of cavalry.

‘I reckon us best be moving,’ said Burch; for in the midst of all the bustle Standen was looking shorewards apparently lost in thought. Though he yet felt the warm hand-clasp with which the Señorita had bidden him farewell,

after a hurried introduction to her father—of which the President took but little notice, so engrossed was he with meeting his daughter—Standen could not but be dolefully impressed with the state and magnificence which evidently surrounded the President of Boravia ; and the gulf between the Engineer-in-Chief and the President's daughter was only too wide, and only too plain. He started as Jan Burch addressed him, and looked about him for a moment in a dazed sort of way.

Just then a big, stout, moist-looking individual in a suit of whites, and with a huge Panama straw hat on his head, came up to where Standen and Burch were. ' Mr. Standen, I think ? ' he said, with a broad, good-humoured smile on his expansive visage. ' I am Wetherell—your second, you know. I thought one of us would be enough to come on board, and I did not encourage the whole crowd to come. '

Standen was pleased with the good-natured face of his stout subordinate, and shook hands heartily with him, introducing Jan Burch at the same time. Wetherell could not make Jan out, for, though he was a bluff, honest-looking fellow there was nothing of the gentleman in Jan, and Wetherell was rather astonished at finding him upon such good terms with his chief.

' I've got a tilbury waiting, ' said Wetherell,

the greetings over, 'and the sooner we get out of this boiling heat into the cool of the Quinta the better you will like it, I dare say—the better I shall like it, I know ;' indeed Mr. Wetherell very evidently felt the heat, and his 'whites,' which in the morning were a cool and seemly sight, as the day wore on became more and more limp, until, when the day's work was over, they were a sorry spectacle indeed. It was not long before, their luggage in charge of one of the Company's men in the Custom House, the three were driving through the broad Calle de la Darsena towards the Monte de la Capilla and the House of the Mangoes.

CHAPTER VII

THE HOUSE OF THE MANGOES

A LONG drive through the busy main streets of Santa Maria, glowing under the tropical sun and noisy with the passing to and fro of countless conveyances, the rattle of trancars and the cries of the negro vendors of various commodities, brought Standen and his companions at last to a quiet side street, whose pavements were fringed on either side with palm trees. The houses here were all private dwellings, and at the end of the street—a *cul-de-sac*—were huge wrought-iron gates of an ancient look, and flanked by pillars in solid time-defying masonry; through the gates a wide avenue of palm trees was seen, leading apparently towards the dark tree-covered Monte de la Capilla, crowned with its ruined chapel.

‘Well, here we are at last,’ said Wetherell, as the big gates swung open at their approach, and the tilbury was rapidly driven up the avenue. ‘I am almost melted, and I have a thirst on me of the value of many piastres.’

And indeed the stout engineer possessed a most expensive appetite for drinks, and was quite an authority on the fragrant subject of swizzles and cocktails.

'Old Oliver the butler is a past master in drinks,' he went on, smacking his lips in anticipation. 'I've been staying at the Quinta since Whirlow went home, but all my traps are gone back to my old diggings, and I shall leave you in sole charge. I shan't be sorry either, for 'tis a bit dull all alone in this great house, as I expect you'll find; it's more suited to a man with a wife and half a dozen youngsters. I am sorry the place is in such a muddle,' he went on, pointing to the scaffolding which disfigured the front of the house; 'but we did not expect you so soon, and the front is being cleaned and painted—it's nearly finished now.'

Just then the tilbury drew up at the wide steps of the large two-storeyed, stone-built Quinta de los Mangos, a somewhat imposing-looking mansion, with wide verandahs running along the front on both the upper and the lower floors.

A white-wooled negro and a younger black servant were waiting at the bottom of the steps to receive Standen; and an old negress, with a much younger black woman, were grinning a welcome at the top of the steps.

'There's your establishment, Mr. Standen,' said Wetherell, waving his hand towards the little group, 'and they'll make you comfortable enough, you may be sure. Old Oliver has been butler here ever since the Company started, and the whole show is a family business, for the old woman is his wife, and the other two are their son and daughter. Nice and cool here,' he went on; 'you'll find it pleasant to get into this shady place after the glare and the heat of a day in the city.'

'You'd better stop and have dinner with me,' said Standen; 'indeed, I hardly like to feel I am turning you out of the place.'

'Not at all,' said Wetherell; 'I like things a little lively, and I have comfortable quarters at the Hôtel de Paris—been there, in fact, ever since I came out. But I will gladly stay with you for a bit, for there's a lot to be talked about, and we can go into matters over a cigar after dinner.'

'Why, what has become of Burch?' said Standen. 'He's a capital fellow, Mr. Wetherell—a bit rough, but as straight as a die. I've half a mind to get him to stay on here: he is a very unassuming man, and I've got used to him.'

'Well, you might do worse; I don't suppose he'll expect to mingle with the aristocracy, for you will have to do a good deal of hospitality

and so forth; one has to keep in with the fiscals.'

'Oh, Jan Burch would never bother himself about that. It will be dull here alone, and I really think I will ask him——'

Just then Burch came into the cool room, with its polished floor and somewhat scanty furnishings, followed by the old butler, who bore a tray of well-swizzled-up cocktails.

'Well, sir,' said Jan, who had been seeing to the disposal of such light traps as they had brought with them from the steamer, 'I reckon I'd better be looking after somewheers to put mezul; p'reaps this gentleman 'd be kind enough to tell me wheer ——'

'I think you'd better stay where you are, Burch,' said Standen with a smile, for there was a rueful look on Burch's face as he had turned to Wetherell: 'I shall want someone to look after things generally, and to be at hand, and there's plenty of room.'

'Aw, sir,' interrupted Burch, a broad smile lighting up his face; 'tis what I should like well, but 'tidn't hardly vitty as the likes o' I ——'

'Nonsense, Jan,' said Standen; 'you go and fix it up with Oliver. I don't want to be here alone; and it is quite as much to my advantage as it is to yours for me to have you here.'

And thus the matter was settled, and John Burch took up his abode at the Quinta, greatly to his content, for he had always had a liking for Standen, and was proud to think that his chief had such a regard for him. With the old butler's assistance he fixed upon two rooms at the extreme end of the Quinta as his abiding-place; and here he settled down, having his meals brought to him by Oliver's son as a rule, though Standen, when he was alone, more often than not got Burch to join him, for he hated to be too much by himself.

For the first few days Standen saw but little of Burch, for his time was very fully occupied in taking up the various threads of his work, and numbers of people officially connected with the Company in various ways called upon him, and invited him either to their own houses or to some restaurant or another, or dined at the Quinta, so that, save breakfast only, he scarcely had a meal in his house alone.

Burch was soon put at the head of the labour department, and had plenty to do in looking after the wages bill and in generally superintending the large body of negroes employed both in the permanent works and on an extension which was being carried out in one of the suburbs; and so it came about that it was nearly ten days before Standen found himself dining

at home alone ; and then he sent for Burch to keep him company.

'Well, Jan,' he said, as they were smoking a cigar in the verandah after dinner, 'I think I am getting the hang of things ; there is plenty to do—I don't seem to have had a moment to myself since we landed.'

'Aw, yes, 'tis a big job, a lot bigger than Rosolio,' said Jan. Something of a tired sound in the tone of Burch's voice caused Standen to look at him with more than ordinary intentness.

'Why, Jan,' he said, 'you're not looking yourself, man. I noticed you did not make much of a hand at your dinner too. What's the matter with you? I hope you are not going in for fever or dysentery, eh?'

'Naw, sir,' said Burch, 'there idn't much amiss : I haven't been a slaping not so well as usual night-times.'

'Mosquitoes been bothering you, I can see,' said Standen ; 'they always do go for you light-coloured gentry.'

''Tidn't only they muskitters,' said Jan, whose face bore evidence of the virulence and persistence of the attacks of these plagues of the tropics, 'though they'm bad enough for certain ; naw, wind's bin terrible high last two or three nights, and theer's a most curious

whisht kin' o' a noise in my rume whensoever
as it blows hard.'

'The jalousies are loose, I expect. You'd
better get one of the carpenters to come up and
have a look round.'

'Tidn't the windows,' said Jan, in a reflec-
tive tone. 'I can't mek up azackly what it is :
seems to come in one of the cornders of the
room.'

'Well, Jan,' said Standen, 'it won't do to
have you knocked up ; you'd better do what I
say, and get a carpenter to come and look into
it, and, if he can't fix it up for you, there are
plenty of other rooms in the house, and you
must shift your quarters' ; and he rose from his
chair, and, throwing away the end of his cigar,
he wished Jan good-night, and went to his own
room.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SECRET PASSAGE

IN all the whirl and press of his first few days at Santa Maria John Standen found himself continually thinking of the Señorita—in fact, as soon as ever the business in hand, whatever it might be, was over, his mind naturally, and as a matter of course, reverted to Lois da Piera; and he passed the greater part of such leisure and solitude as his busy life afforded him in going over again the conversations he had enjoyed with her on ship-board, in thinking of her many beauties of mind and body, and in devising all sorts of plans and possibilities in which the face and figure of the beautiful girl had the centre place, with John Standen in close attendance. As he went to and fro on his multifarious business engagements in the city he kept his eyes open, for he hoped to see her as she drove about the place, or perhaps even to have the good fortune to meet her walking in one or other of the principal streets. Once or twice his careful watching was rewarded by a

glimpse of his divinity as she drove rapidly by, and once he had received from her a bow and a sweet smile from the carriage.

But all this was but poor satisfaction for the craving he had to look into her eyes again, to hear her speak, and to feel the warmth of her greeting as she pressed his hand. He was sitting idly over the breakfast-table on the morning after he had noticed Burch's unaccustomed lassitude, and was wondering how he could compass a meeting with the Señorita, when someone knocked at his door, and in response to his 'Come in,' John Burch opened the door.

Standen was a little vexed at having the thread of his thoughts thus interrupted, and there was just a shade of annoyance in the tone in which he asked Burch what he wanted; but he soon perceived that Burch was in such an agitated state of mind that he did not notice his chief's rather cold reception.

'I've a found out that theer curious rumbling kin' o' a noise in my rume, sir,' he said rather excitedly, as he carefully closed the door behind him, and advanced to the table where Standen was sitting.

'Well, what is it, then, Burch?' said Standen, in not too interested a tone—'windows, after all, I suppose?'

'Naw, sir, 'tidn't winders ; 'tis wan o' the most curiouset things as ever did beval, and I shouldn't wonder but what our fortunes be made by this yere gashly old noise.'

'Why, man,' cried Standen, looking keenly into Burch's excited face, 'what with the heat, or the sleeplessness, I verily believe you are half out of your mind.'

'Naw, I beant,' said Jan sturdily ; 'I be so sane as wan yere or theer.'

'Well, well, go on with your story,' said Standen irritably.

'Now, don't 'ee be put about wi' me, measter,' said Burch in a tone of apology, 'but just hear-ken to what I be tellin' 'ee.'

'You're a precious long time about it,' said Standen. 'Sit down, man, and get on with your tale.'

'Well, sir, and axin' your pardon for disturbin' of you, 'tis like this yere : 'twas terrible starmy last night—the wind was blawin' hard, and as soon as I'd got under the muskitter nets that old buzzin' noise begun agin.'

'Oh, bother the noise,' interrupted Standen ; 'get a mason or a carpenter, or clear out of the room altogether.'

'Aw, but—I've a found it out,' cried Burch with much excitement. 'I nipped out of bade pretty quick, and lighted up my lamp, and

sarched about the rume, listenin' yere and theer ; 'twas in the cornder, as I told 'ee avore, behind an old press as is tight plumb to the wall ; blamed if I didn't think 'twas ghostesses, or pixies, or summat of that sart ; but 'tidn't, fay ;' and he paused, much to the exasperation of his chief. 'Well, sir,' he went on, 'I muded thicky old press, and a tough job he were, for he's martial heavy ; and what dew you think as I found behind 'un ?'

'Rat holes,' said Standen sardonically.

'Naw, sir,' said Burch, 'I didn't find nothen at all.'

'Oh, hang it all, Jan,' cried Standen, now really angry, and rising from his chair, 'I can't stand this any longer—you *must* be out of your mind.'

'Look 'ee here, sir, now do 'ee bide still a minute,' and Jan Burch rapidly went on, for he was afraid his chief would leave him ; 'I was leanin' agen the wall behind the press with my back tew the wall, a listening to the rumbling, and wonderin' whatever it could be ; I was a drummin' and a knackin' my heels agen the wall without a knowin' of it, when all of a suddint the wall give way behind me, and I valled down, and caught mezul a most terrible clout 'pin tap o' the back o' my head.'

'What?' cried Standen, 'the wall gave

way? Why, that part of the house is built right into the side of the hill.'

'So 'tis, sir, so 'tis, you'm right theer, and these old monkish Jesuites as lived yere have a hollowed out a kin' o' passage way, and 'twas into thicky darksome place as I valled, and got a lump so big's a pigeon's aig,' and Jan rubbed the afflicted part ruefully.

'Well, and where does this mysterious passage lead to? A way to the chapel on the top of the hill, I expect,' said Standen, not particularly interested, and looking at his watch. 'I'll tell you what, Jan, when we have time we will explore the place——'

'Sir,' interrupted Burch in solemn tones, 'theer's more in that theer passage than you thinks on. I told wi' old Oliver about this yere noise, and theer's an old noration among the naygurs as these Jesuites was turned suddint out of the country a many years agone, and that all the treasures and riches o' mun is hid in thicky hill behind the Quinta.'

'My dear Jan, if that were the case you may be certain that there would have been scores of people after the treasures long before now.'

'And so theer hev, so theer hev, scores o' mun, as yew say; why, sir, Oliver says as the Government have had a shot at it, and spent

hunderds o' pounds a digging yere and theer in the sides o' the hill.'

'Well, that certainly looks more promising,' said Standen with a laugh; 'we'll have a turn at your secret passage without a doubt; and perhaps we shall light upon this treasure after all.'

'I dew belave as I've discivered what they've a bin a diggin' an' a delvin' at for years 'pin years,' said Jan with the same solemnity.

'Don't you get that idea too firmly fixed in your mind, Jan, for there's just a chance of madness lying that way, and I feel pretty certain you'll be disappointed. First of all, I expect the passage does lead to the Chapel.'

'Naw, sir; it don't go oop same way as 'twould if 'twas goin' towards the tap o' the hill,' interrupted Burch. 'I vollered un for some way; it goes sart o' round the hill like; but 'twas a whisht job all alone theer, and the knack I got 'pin my head made me kinder dazed like, so I didn't go vurry far. I putt back the old press when that I came out, and leaved the opening partways oppen.'

'What sort of an opening was it? You did not tell me that,' said Standen.

'A most 'mazin' heavy door it is; it cooms flush wi' the wall, and is pented zo as you

couldn't see no differ. I reckon I must hev kicked 'pin a spring o' some sart or another.'

'Well, it's very interesting,' mused Standen; 'there may be something in this treasure business after all. Of course you'll keep a quiet tongue about it, Jan, and we'll have a grand exploration to-night when Oliver and his interesting family are gone. We shall have the place to ourselves.'

'I thought o' that,' said Jan; ''tis a gude job the naygurs live in their own huts. I'll be ready, sir, you may depend; and here's wishin' us the luck to find the treasures. My ivers! aw'll make a leady of Meary Perryman if so be us does get a holt o' these riches,' and Burch went about his business, leaving his chief in sooth with something to think about. Standen laughed at his own folly as Burch's last remark brought the Señorita to his mind, and as the idea came into his head that the treasure—if there were any treasure, and if they found it—might mean something to him and his beautiful adored one.

'Pshaw!' he said to himself, 'it is all nonsense.'

But in spite of this, the thought of the treasures of the Jesuits haunted him all the day, and he found himself looking forward to the

hour when the Quinta would be deserted by everyone save himself and his faithful henchman, and they could, without any fear of interruption, go into this mystery which Jan Burch had lighted on.

CHAPTER IX

A DEADLY TRAP

As for John Burch, he was a man of a most sanguine and cheerful disposition, and he never doubted for one moment but that he was on the way to fortune. He longed for the night to come, and found great difficulty in concentrating his mind on his business; for through all the concerns of the day's work visions of his beloved Mary clothed in purple and fine linen, and bedecked with shining gems, came before his eyes, and he thought longingly of the little village on the hill-top in far-away Devon, where his father and mother were wearing out the ends of their days in such comfort as their only son's kindness could provide for them, and where the faithful Mary was waiting the blessed time when her Jan should come home from 'furrin parts' and settle down on the little farm which had been the home of the Burches for so many generations. As it happened, Standen had no engagement that night, and when he

got home to the Quinta from the city he sent Oliver to ask Burch to join him at dinner.

Of course the master and man said nothing about what was so fully occupying both their minds, for the old butler and his son were in and out of the room continually during the progress of the meal. But when the dinner was over and Oliver had departed into the back regions, leaving the coffee and cigars and liqueurs on the verandah, Standen and Jan Burch discussed their plans of operations in low tones over their after-dinner cigars.

'I be glad for tew see, sir, as yew ain't a laughing at it all, now,' said Jan. 'You may depend theer's summat in it, or else all these volks wouldn't a spent theer money in so much digging. Why, Oliver tells me the old mountain is praperly riddled wi' adits and holes as they've a prospected arter thase treasures.'

'I do begin to think there's something in it, Jan,' said Standen; 'but that's no reason why you should have hit upon the way to the treasure; you're so cocksure about it that I'm afraid you'll be the more disappointed.'

'Us be goin' to find the treasure, that I knaw,' said Jan. 'I've got a kin' o' feeling about it as meks me sartain zure.'

'I've had that kind of feeling once or twice in my life myself,' said Standen, 'but nothing

ever came of it. Well, there goes the little nightly procession,' he added, leaning forward and looking over the verandah—'Oliver and Mrs. Oliver and the hopeful progeny.'

'Well—what do you say, Jan? Shall we set about our darksome deeds? Upon my word, there's a sort of burglarious flavour about the whole thing that I don't half like; not that I really think anything will come of it.'

'I've thought o' that mezul,' said Jan meditatively; 'us Burches have allus been honest volk, and I shouldn't mar nor meddle in anything as ain't straight; but I looks at it this way—'tis a most 'mazin' long time since this old treasure was putt away; it don't belong to nobody, for these Jesuites they did play oop sich capers in them old times that they was praperly shunted out o' the country, and all their goods was confuscated by the Government——'

'Ay, there's the rub,' said Standen; 'for the treasure really belongs to the Government.'

'Which?' asked Jan. 'Why, theer's bin a mort o' Governments since they times; and if they was all to claim it there'd be vine old pickings for the lawyers. No, "findin's keepins," that's my motter in this little old job, and if so be as us dew vind the stuff, and anybody can claim it, well, let 'em—they've a got to get a hold

o' it, and I shan't let go, and I reckon yew won't nayther, measter?'

'I'm sure I don't know what to think about it,' mused Standen; 'but upon my word we are a pair of fools; we've got to find the treasure first, and, as the Scotch say, I "hae ma doots" about that self-same treasure,' and with that Standen rose from his rocking chair, and, taking a lamp, he preceded Burch to the far end of the building, where Jan's rooms were, and where was the entrance into the mysterious passage.

'I wish the wind was ooup, so as you might hear the old rumbling noise, but 'tis all quiet now,' said Burch as they came into the room.

'I'll sune muve the old press,' he went on; and, Standen lending a hand, the heavy ancient piece of furniture was quickly moved from the wall, and the strange doorway, slightly ajar, was disclosed to view.

'Here, wait a minute!' cried Standen, as Jan impatiently swung open the massive door and stepped into the passage. 'We should be in a pretty case if by any means the door swung back, and we got shut in. I've no desire, treasure or no treasure, to be boxed up in the hill to die of slow starvation.'

All the time he was speaking Standen was carefully examining the bottom of the door, to

find out where was the spring that Burch had unwittingly hit upon.

'Ah, here's the contrivance,' he said at last ; 'it's plain enough in the inside, though I'll defy anyone to discover it on the room side. We can't be shut in now, Jan. Here's a sort of metal button : you push that and the trick is done.'

'I'll stop in the passage, and shet tew the door, and oppen 'un for yew, so's to mek sure,' said Jan, suiting the action to the word.

'Stop! you idiot!' cried Standen, pushing against him and preventing him from shutting the door : 'I haven't found the room side of the spring yet, and you'd look foolish if you were shut in and couldn't get out.

Jan Burch muttered something or other impatiently, for he was all hurry to get to the treasure, which he seemed to think was close at hand ; however, he waited while Standen took the bearings of the spring on the passage side, and marked with his pencil the exact spot on the room side.

'All right, I've got it now,' he said. 'You can shut yourself in now, Burch. No, stay! you'd better come out, and we'll open the door from inside the room.'

'Well, sir, I reckon as yew knaws best,' said Jan unwillingly ; 'but suppose if us can't oppen the door agen?'

'Oh, come out, man,' said Standen ; ' I don't want to run any risks.'

Jan came out of the passage, and shut the door behind him, and Standen pressed on the marked place on the door, which opened and gave way at the least pressure.

' Well, that's all right, Jan,' said Standen ; ' and now we can go on, and load up with Mary's diamonds and sapphires, &c.'

Jan gave a grin, and went on first into the dark passage, Standen following with the lantern.

' He endeth at this end,' said Jan, looking to the right of him, ' but he goeth on vine t'other way.'

' There's a nice mouldy smell about the place,' said Standen, sniffing at the dank air ; ' it smells like a damp church with plenty of vaults underneath the floor.'

' Must a tooked a mort o' labour to hollow out thase old passage out o' the rock,' said Burch, as he went quickly on in front.

' Be careful how you go,' said Standen. ' Wait for the light, man ; you don't know what pits or holes may be in front of you.'

' There idn't no pits, measter,' said Jan ; ' 'tis all paved with slabs o' stone so broad as a man can stretch pretty nigh.'

But he paused in obedience to his chief's words, and waited till Standen came up to him.

'On we goes agen,' he cried cheerfully.

But these were the last words he uttered, for, as he stepped upon the next wide flag, the broad stone gave way beneath him, and, to Standen's infinite horror, his companion, with a cry of dismay, suddenly disappeared, while the flag which had given way under his weight slowly came back into its place.

Standen gazed stupidly in speechless misery at the treacherous stone for a moment or two, until his senses came back to him, and he braced up his mind to face the terrible calamity.

CHAPTER X

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE PIT

'My God!' cried Standen to himself, 'the poor fellow is without doubt killed: what a hellish trap!' and, putting down the lantern by his side, he laid himself face downwards, with his body on the firm flags they had passed over, and pushed, with all the force he could muster in such a cramped position, on the treacherous flag; it was, however, a heavy stone, and wanted more weight than he could bring to bear in that way to move it more than an inch or two.

After a minute or two vainly spent in trying to force the flagstone open, Standen rose to his feet, determined to call up the two negroes to help him, and, leaving his handkerchief upon the flag to mark its position, he took the lantern and ran back to the doorway, trying to think of some way by which he could get at the body of his friend and follower.

Suddenly the thought of the scaffolding which was now waiting removal at the side of

the Quinta came into his mind, and he thought that with the help of the ropes and a plank he might be able to get at Burch—if he was to be got at all—by himself, and so save time, for the negroes' huts were some little way off; and in a very short time he was on his way back to the fatal passage, staggering under the weight of two short planks, and with a great coil of stout scaffolding-rope slung round his neck. When Standen got to the flag he carefully placed the longer of the two planks across it, and, standing on the sort of bridge he had thus made, he found he had strength and purchase enough to move the flagstone, which slowly swung back on his pressure, and disclosed a deep and darksome hole, with apparently smooth sides. Keeping the flagstone open downwards with much exertion, he called out to his friend, 'Jan! Jan! Jan Burch!' he cried, 'can't you hear me, Burch? Oh God! poor fellow, he's dead, he's dead!' said Standen sorrowfully, as not a sound was heard, and the pit yawned black and silent and threatening beneath him.

There was considerable pressure with the flagstone, which was persistently forcing its way back into its place, and it took Standen all his strength to keep the hole opened while he cried out to Burch.

It was for this emergency that he had

burdened himself with the second and the shorter of the two planks. The swivel upon which the flag worked was at the side nearest the way the two had come, and the whole concern was so contrived that the weight of the stone itself brought it back into its original position as soon as the unhappy victim of the infernal trap had gone down into the depths below, and the pressure was thus removed. Standing upon his improvised bridge, and with the shorter plank handy to his grasp, Standen with great difficulty forced the heavy stone downwards again, and, whilst it was slowly coming back to its place, and before it got equal with the surrounding flagstones, he seized upon the shorter plank and tried to jam it in between the ascending flagstone and the stone next to it. At first he was unsuccessful, and the returning stone was too quick for him, but with the courage and persistence of desperation he tried again and again, until his arms ached with the terrible strain. At last, however, he was in his turn too quick for the stone, and, with a cry of delight, he got his short plank in between the two stones, and the revolving flag was kept in its downward position by the timber. All the time Standen was thus straining every nerve to get at John Burch not a sound was heard save the pantings and the

muttered exclamations of his strenuous exertions : all was silent in the yawning narrow pit, and Standen had no hope but to recover the body of his companion. He waited a moment to see if the stone would keep in its place, and then used more and more force to try the stability of his preventing wedge. Everything seemed to be perfectly secure, and there was apparently no danger of the plank giving way and the stone revolving back once again. Satisfied as to this, Standen quickly fastened one end of the long coil of rope around the longer plank, and, placing this plank across the hole and close to the far side, so that he might guide and help his descent with the wall of the pit, he let the rope go down, and, tying the lantern round his neck with his handkerchief so that it hung down in front, he carefully let himself down, and descended hand over hand, the wall giving him some slight help, and lessening the strain, for the mason's work, after the first foot or two, was of a rough order, and he could rest from time to time with his feet upon one or other of the slight projections. He was at first afraid lest his rope should give out before he got to the bottom of the narrow pit, but luckily there was length enough ; yet, spite of this, he soon began to fear lest, after all, he should fail to reach his companion, for the

lantern began to burn dimly, and the air became so foul that he could scarcely breathe. But the light still held out, and, though faint, Standen was just able to bear the strain, and at last, and with a relief which seemed to give him new vigour, he stood upon the bottom of the Jesuits' trap.

Burch's body was lying huddled up upon a heap of bones in the middle of the floor, and with but faint hope and a beating heart, Standen flashed the lantern in his face. Burch's eyes were closed, and his ruddy face was wan and white as his friend looked at him.

'Thank God,' he cried out loud at last, as he gazed, for he soon saw that the man was plainly breathing, and, whatever injuries he may have sustained, he was still alive.

'Burch! Jan!' called out Standen, his voice sounding strangely weird and hollow in the deep and narrow mantrap. 'It's all right, man, rouse yourself, and let's get out of this horrible pit.'

But no sound came from Burch; his eyes still remained closed, and Standen thought he must be dying. He quickly felt over his limbs, but the heap of bones had eased his fall, and arms and legs were sound. And as Standen was despairingly looking at him a sigh

upheaved Burch's chest, and his eyes opened and blinked in the lantern light.

'Wheer be I?' he said in a faint voice. 'I reckon I be daid; valled down intew a pit.'

'Thank God, old man, you're alive enough. I can't tell you what a relief it is to hear you speak; "falled" down into a pit, however, you certainly have, and how to get you out is more than I can tell.'

'Aw lor, aw lor, I seem as if all my bones was broked abroad,' groaned Burch, as he tried to rise.

'I tell you what it is, man,' said Standen, 'you must let me leave you here for a minute or two while I go back into the house and get some brandy for you: your limbs are sound enough, but 'tis a miracle you're alive.'

'Don't 'ee lave me, sir,' said Jan plaintively; 'I'll be better sune. I can't hardly breathe in this stinkin' old hole.'

'The sooner you get out of it the better, then,' said Standen; 'now you wait here while I shin up this rope. I'll be back again in a minute,' and, not waiting to hear any more beseechings from Burch, Standen quickly climbed up the rope, helping himself by the wall, and in a very short time he returned with a flask of brandy.

Two or three sips soon put new life into the

shaken man, and he sat up and began to look about him.

'My ivers,' he cried, as he saw the couch upon which he had been reclining, 'tis skeling-tins! I've a valled 'pin a hape of dead volkses!'

'And a good thing for you, Jan,' said Standen; 'for you would certainly have been a "dead volk" yourself if it had not been for this terrible heap of bones.'

The horror of his position had almost as much effect on Jan as the brandy, and gave him such a keen desire to get out of the dreadful place that he actually stood up and staggered away from where he had been lying, and leaned panting against the wall, gazing down with an awed look upon the ghastly remains before him. As Standen looked down with something of the same horrified expression, he saw, a little space away from the heap, and as if it had been jerked away—possibly by Jan's fall—the skeleton of a hand, and, loosely held in it, a narrow metal roll, like a modern map case. Standen stooped forward and took up the case, and put it away in his pocket.

'I wouldn't touch the gashly old thing,' said Burch with a shudder.

'Nonsense, man, don't be so superstitious,' said Standen grimly. 'I'm going to have some-

thing for all this work and worry. Now, Jan,' he went on, 'take another sip of the flask, and see what you can do towards getting out. I feel I shall be stifled if I stay here much longer.'

With great difficulty and with the exertion of much strength, Standen at last succeeded in getting John Burch to the top of the dreadful pit, though more than once he thought he must give way under the strain. He got John to grasp hold of the rope first, and, although the poor fellow did all he could to help himself, Standen had almost more than he could do to gradually push him up the sheer and narrow place, and if it had not been for the roughness of the wall he could not have succeeded.

However, at last, with a deep sigh of relief, Standen got him to the mouth of the pit, and with his left arm round the plank, he forced him over the side, and soon saw Burch sink down on the flags, worn out with the pain and exertion of his difficult ascent, but alive and to all appearances not very seriously injured by his perilous adventure.

CHAPTER XI

THE METAL ROLL

'Do you think you can manage, with my help, to get back to your room, Jan?' asked Standen, as Burch looked up at him in a sort of dumb distress; 'you're a bit too heavy for me to carry, but I'll call Oliver if you can't help yourself.'

'Naw, naw, don't 'ee call no one,' said Burch, in a low weak tone of voice, as he tried to rise from the flagged passage-way; 'us don't want no one else in thase old job.' And with Standen's aid he managed with great difficulty to struggle to his feet, and, supported by his companion, he at last got into his room, and sank exhausted on his bed.

'Now, this won't do at all, Burch,' said Standen, as he looked down on him; 'you're more hurt than you think, and I shall send off Oliver for a doctor at once.'

'Don't 'ee dew naw sich a thing, sir,' said Burch feebly. 'I tell 'ee I shall be all right enough to-morrow; there bean't no bones

a broked as I can mek out ; 'tes the shaking, and the air, and they old skelingtins.'

'Well, I'll help you off with your clothes and into your pyjamas, and then we'll see how you are,' and, suiting the action to the word, John Burch at last, and with some groaning, for he was very sore and stiff, was laid in his bed, and the mosquito nets comfortably drawn around him.

Standen left all the paraphernalia of planks and ropes in the passage, and, after carefully closing the doorway, he moved the press back into its place, and came over and had a look at his friend.

Burch was evidently much exhausted, for, in spite of the noise Standen had made in moving the heavy press, he had sunk into a deep sleep, and was breathing quietly and regularly. Standen muttered a word or two of thankfulness as he looked at him, and, feeling utterly worn out himself, he went to his own quarters, inwardly determined to leave the Jesuits and their shadowy treasures severely alone for the future.

But in this resolve he reckoned without John Burch, who was of a stolid, not to say obstinate, disposition, and not to be turned from his purpose by a few bruises and strains, however severe these might be. As soon as

he awoke, Standen hastily dressed and went over to Burch's room, in some considerable anxiety as to the state he should find him in. Burch was still sleeping, to Standen's great relief, but as he was softly moving towards the door, determined to let him have his sleep well out, Burch woke up with a start and a quick groan.

'Aw, lor, 'tis yew, sir,' he said, with an air of relief. 'I've a dramed the most terrible drames, sure enough; all gold and jools and skelingtins. My ivers!' he went on, as he tried to rise in his bed, 'I be most 'mazin' stiff and sore, to be zure: I can't hardly muve.'

'I'm only too glad that it is nothing worse, Jan,' said Standen; 'you've had a narrow squeak of it, man, and I should think you've had enough of treasure-hunting to last you for the term of your natural life.'

'Naw, sir,' replied Jan, as he sank back on his pillow, 'I bean't a goin' to be bate by they durned old wicked prastes. They've most a done for me, 'tes trew, and so soon as I can muve vitty I'll hev their old treasure, so zure as my name's Jan Burch.'

'Well, what you want now is a doctor,' replied Standen, with a smile at Jan's determined air of rancour.

'Ef you'll excuse me mekking so bold, and

if yew'll give me a helpin' hand, I reckon as us can dew wi'out no doctors. I haven't niver tooked none of their trade so fur, and I sim 'tis nothen but a bruise, after all: plase God, I feels well enough in mezul, and terrible hungry, too.'

'I'm more than delighted to hear it, said Standen, as he drew back the mosquito nets, and helped Jan to rise: and by degrees and with a considerable amount of flinching, and some far from complimentary remarks on Jan's part regarding the murdering ways of the 'Jesuites,' as he called them, Burch was up and dressed and able to walk, though very stiffly, to Standen's quarters, where the evident gusto with which he satisfied a more than ordinarily keen appetite showed that, after all, a few days would find him as well as ever he was.

As soon as Oliver had departed with the débris of the breakfast the two discussed their last night's adventure from every point of view, and Standen soon found that Burch was quite determined to go on with the affair.

'Why, sir,' he exclaimed, 'tes sartain zure as the treasure is theer: there must be something worth guarding, else they wouldn't hev concocted that gashly old death-trap. Other volkses hev a bin arter the money as well as we, you may depend, for their was more than

wan or tew skelingtins as I dropped 'pin. I bean't no veather-weight, and I should ha' been broked all abroad if so be as theer hadn't a bin a reg'lar mort o' old bones as I valled on.'

'Why, upon my soul,' cried Standen, as Burch ceased speaking; 'there's the case!'

'Case?' queried Jan, with a puzzled air.

'Yes, man, no wonder I forgot it, for you forgot it yourself—the roll I picked up at the bottom of the pit. It's in the pocket of the old coat I had on last night, and by the same token our clothes must be in a nice state of mess. Oliver will be wondering what we've been up to; however, it is nothing but dust and so forth, and that can soon be put straight. I'll go and get the case now, and I'll get over to your room at the same time and give your clothes a brush-up to make sure. Now you sit still and go on with your pipe,' Standen went on, as Burch stiffly rose. 'If we are going on with this affair we had better, as you say, keep it to ourselves, and I don't want the servants to suspect anything. If they see the pretty state of our clothes they certainly will think something or other is up,' and, with that, Standen left Burch to muse over the whole affair, and to wonder what the metal roll might contain, while from time to time he felt over his bones to see

whether anything was 'broked abroad' after all, for his stiffness and soreness seemed to increase as the time wore on.

It was not long before Standen returned.

'It's all right,' he said, as he sat down in a rocking chair beside Jan Burch; 'nobody has been either in my room or yours, and there's nothing to call for remark in either your or my garments now, though they were dirty and dusty enough.'

'T'es a job as I ought to have done,' said Jan, with his eyes glued upon the small roll which Standen held in his hand.

'It's as much as you will be able to do to sit quietly and get rid of your bruises for the next three or four days, or I'm mistaken,' said Standen as he marked the stiffness with which Burch moved. 'I don't know either,' he went on, 'how you are going to explain your crippled state. In fact, you had better give up until you can move about easily; you can let Oliver think it is an attack of rheumatism.'

Burch was not attending very much to what his chief was saying, for his mind was too fully occupied with the roll of metal which Standen held, and with which he was carelessly punctuating his remarks.

'Bean't 'ee going to oppen it?' he asked at

last eagerly, unable to bear the strain of suspense any longer.

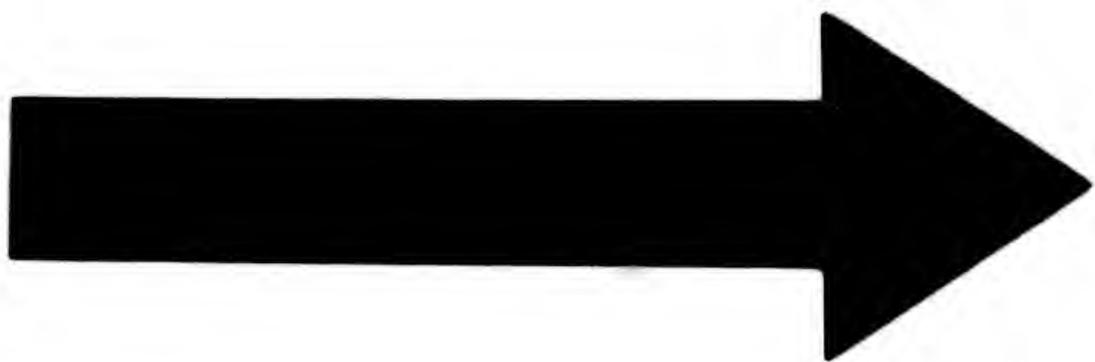
'Well, Jan,' said Standen, 'since it nearly cost you your life, and is all we have got for our pains, I think you certainly have a right to know what is inside : it looks like a map case or something of that sort. However, we shall soon find out. It's none so easy to open, after all,' he went on, as he wrenched away at the top of the case ; 'got rusted in—it is a tough job.'

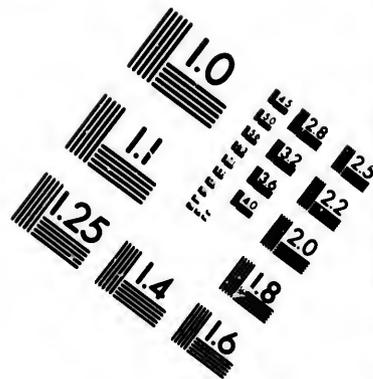
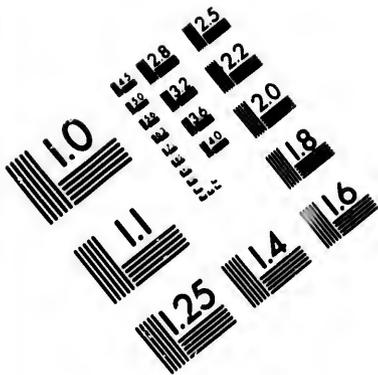
'Give me yere,' cried Burch, eagerly stretching out his hand ; 'I reckon my hands are a bit more useder to heavy work nor yours ; no offence.'

Standen, after a final tug at the top of the round metal cylinder, handed it over to Burch, who seized upon it, and tugged and wrenched away in his turn.

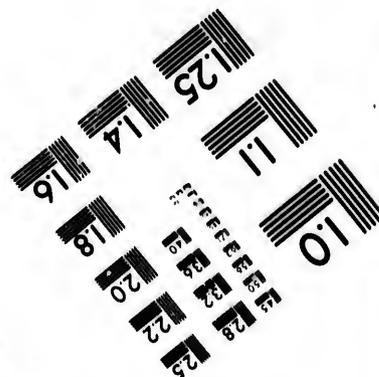
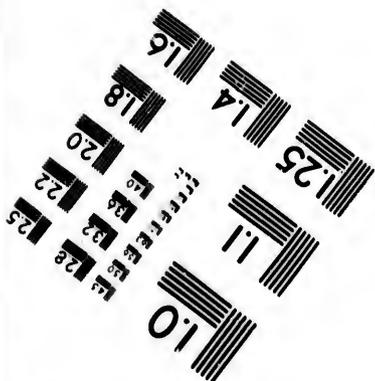
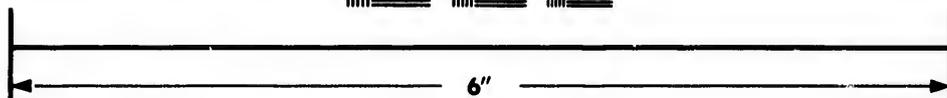
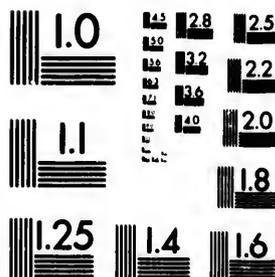
'Blame take the old thing !' he cried at last ; 'if I wadn't so stiff and sore I'd oppen he quick enough, but I can't get no purchase o' mun ;' and with that he gave a mighty twist with his right hand, holding the roll in his left. By some means or another, the cylinder flew out of his hands and came with considerable force against the wall of the room.

'You're about as clever as I am,' said





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Standen laughing, as he rose and picked up the tube. 'By Jove, though, I believe you've done the trick after all,' he cried, as he looked at the roll carefully, and, giving another wrench to the top, at last, loosened by the fall, it came off, and the contents of the metal tube were disclosed to view.

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CHAPTER XII

THE TREASURES OF THE JESUITS

THERE was a moment of suspense as Standen drew out from the metal case a roll of parchment which was somewhat tightly jammed in, and had to be taken out with much care. Burch was intently looking on, and a sigh of disappointment escaped him as, after extracting the roll of parchment, Standen turned the case upside down, and shook it to see if there was anything else in it.

‘Nothen but a lot of old peapers, seemingly,’ said Burch.

‘What did you expect, Jan?’ said Standen, as he carefully unrolled the document; ‘a few diamonds, and a nugget or two, eh? I think you will find that this paper is worth a good many of those desirable commodities; that is to say, if it turns out to be what I expect it is.’

‘Ah!’ he went on, as he rapidly scanned the crabbed and difficult writing. ‘By George, Jan! we’ve struck oil this time, unless I am very

much mistaken. Don't speak, and I'll read the whole thing to you when I've deciphered it.'

This deciphering was no easy task, and took more time than Burch could put up with quietly, and he rose stiffly and hobbled about the room in great excitement, which was increased by the exclamations of astonishment with which Standen liberally punctuated his reading.

At last he put down the roll of parchment on his knees and looked at Burch—who had come over to him, and was hungrily gazing at the roll—with a sort of far-away air, almost as if he did not see him.

'Aw, sir, now do 'ee tell me what's in the peaper,' cried Burch, unable to bear the suspense.

'My dear Jan,' said Standen solemnly, 'it's the most extraordinary—— Why, man, the whole box of tricks is here in this roll; the history of the treasure, a list—and such a list—of the valuables, and a plan of the galleries——'

'Aw, glory be,' cried Jan; 'our fortins be made, zure enough!'

'Don't you be so sure, Burch,' said Standen: 'we're only at the beginning of the affair, and, even if this paper is all right, when we get to the place we may find nothing at all, or perhaps a lot of empty boxes.'

'Naw, naw, don't 'ee think that, sir!' said

Burch, shaking his head ; ' they volks as hev made the holes and adits in the old hill would surely hev knawed if so be as the treasure was found. Plase tew read un out, sir.'

'It's written in a crabbed hand, and in old Spanish, and I can't make it all out in a minute ; but here goes.'

And with many pauses and discussions on the meaning of various words, Standen read out the document :

Letter from Padre Pedro Ferini to his son João.

"At twenty years you are to follow the profession of arms, not only because it is the inheritance of your ancestors, but because I gave honourable services to Italy, which is my country.

"The treasures accumulated to-day amount to 210,000 Portuguese contas, not reckoning a diamond weighing 24 octavas. In this letter you will see the plan of the Monte de la Capilla : the interior is protected by a deep ditch, which makes an abyss to all the entrances which surround the hill. In the treasure chamber are columns of stone to which are secured the boxes of gold in powder : on to the centre column is secured a silver box with jewels ; and underneath the earth by the centre column, at a depth of three feet, will be found

buried 110,000 contas of reis, the Holy Apostles in silver, St. Ignacio and other ornaments of the convent. My son, your mother belonged to the noble family of Sorelli, and she died walled up in the subterranean passages of the convent ——”

‘Aw, lor, the wickedness of them old times!’ cried Burch, interrupting the reading; ‘but p’reaps her was daid avore they walled her up; but I axes pardon; do ’ee go on, sir.’

““ Passages of the convent,”” repeated Standen. ““ You have been educated at the expense of the Society,”” he went on, ““and as soon as you arrive at a proper age, go and discover the arms of your family. Perhaps this criminal step taken by your father will be the curse of your life. Your father belongs to the noble family of Ferini, and I have been at the hard necessity of changing my name, and joining the Society of Jesus, to escape the persecutions I suffered from the Government of my country, on account of political troubles. I was sent on a commission as a visitor of the Society to the kingdom of Boravia, and I was afterwards appointed chief of the Society there. In Florence will be found the palace of your fathers; and you will find in the Sala of the Reception, on the right-hand corner of the entrance, and three inches from the corner of

the angle, a false door or sliding panel, inside which you will find a strong box with all the likenesses and jewels of my family, and documents which will enable you to claim your rights. With regard to the titles and wealth confiscated by the Government, if any day you go to Italy, do not claim them, or ask any favours of them, as they are all proud people and untrustworthy. Listen to the counsels of your father and your friend."'¹

'M,' murmured Standen, pausing in his reading, 'that's the end of his letter: he seems to have been a nice old boy, what with his political troubles and his walled-up nuns ——'

'I don't see as we've got any forrarder in regards to this yere treasure, so fur,' said Burch rather despondently.

'Wait a bit, Jan,' said Standen, taking up the parchment again; 'that is only the overture; the music of the opera now begins. Here follows a list of the treasures, and it will make your mouth water, Burch:

"Our treasures are walled up and doubly walled up, and no profane person can get at them without serious risk to his life."

¹ We may here note that inquiries were made in Florence by Sir John Standen at the King of Boravia's request, and it was found that the family of Ferini had long been extinct, and no traces of their palace could be discovered.—[AUTHOR.]

'Trew, trew,' interrupted Jan, and with a wry grimace ; 'thicky old praste be right theer, zure enough ; a praper risk tew. Why, if it hadn't a been for thicky old skelingtins Jan Burch would hev been corpsed, treasure or no treasure. I reckon as you've a saved my life, sir, and I don't forget they things.'

'Nonsense, Jan ; do let me get on with this job, or we shall never get to the bottom of it,' and Standen went on reading.

' " The treasure is enclosed in coffers, as declared in the Secret Book, as also the secret of the coffers. It was decided by the majority, in order to save the coffers, to convey them to the treasure chamber in the base of Monte de la Capilla, and to render the galleries leading to the chamber impenetrable except to him who holds the plan. The secret of the galleries is here, and belongs only to the three first of the Superior Grade of the Society. We have been driven out of the country, and we must leave the treasures which have been gathered for three hundred years in safety until we can return and get them ; they are the power of the Society, and we will sacrifice our lives to save them. Here follows the list :

' " Three thousand arrobas of gold in powder.

' " Two hundred and fifty thousand crusadas in gold.

“One image in gold weighing 220 arrobas. One diamond of 24 octavas, beyond value. A crown of gold.

“Two hundred and sixty thousand crusadas in gold. The Ceylon ruby, besides the contas of reis, the Holy Apostles in silver, and the other ornaments of the Convent.”

‘Well, Jan,’ said Standen, as he put down the parchment, ‘that finishes the “noration,” as you call it, and a more extraordinary document, I take it, has seldom come into the hands of man. We’ve wasted very nearly a whole morning over it, anyhow.’

‘Wasted!’ cried Burch indignantly, ‘why, sir, surely you don’t mean what you’m a sayin’; by the dockiment hisself theer’s thousands ’pin thousands in it.’

‘Personally I’ve too much respect for the Society to suppose that all this treasure is left to waste its sweetness on the desert air of the treasure chamber, and I expect, as I said before, that if we go on with the job we shall be employed on a fool’s errand, and meet again with some such misfortune as overtook you, Jan; and perhaps we shall not be so lucky another time. Anyhow, I must go down to the office,’ and Standen rose to depart.

‘You don’t mane as you won’t go on no

further,' said Jan Burch anxiously; 'and arter all as I've gone through.'

'Well, we can't do anything until you are able to move about a little more freely, and in the meantime here's the plan, and you can study it at your leisure. There must be other nasty pitfalls in the way, else why did the skeletons you lighted on get into that loathsome death-trap?'

'Us'll muve along a little more cautious-like,' said Burch, as he took the parchment from Standen, who left him to nurse his sore bones and joints, and to study at his leisure the way to the fortune he so firmly believed in.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PRESIDENT OF BORAVIA

THAT evening, just before sundown, and when the heat was a little moderated by a cool breeze from the sea, there was no small stir at the Quinta de los Mangos, for no less a person than Hilario da Piera, the President of the Republic of Boravia, accompanied by his lovely daughter, drove up in a well-appointed barouche and pair to call upon Standen. John Burch was seated by Standen's side on the verandah as the carriage swept up to the entrance steps, and he made his exit with such speed as his stiffness and soreness permitted him, and left Standen, cap in hand, to descend the wide steps and receive his distinguished guests. It is needless to say that, pleased as Standen was at the honour done him by the President, he was more than delighted to see at close quarters once more the beautiful girl whose image was continually in his mind's eye; and a fine colour spread over his face as he handed her down from the carriage, a colour which he did not fail

to note was reflected on the face of his fair visitor.

'I should have called upon you before,' said the President graciously, as they ascended the steps, and took their seats on the verandah; 'but mine is no easy post, and I have but little leisure.' The President spoke in most excellent English and with very little accent, for he had lived much with English people and had learnt from his wife to speak her language almost as if he had been an Englishman himself.

'It is very good of you to call,' murmured Standen, feeling, it must be confessed, a little confused at the presence of his beloved divinity, who indeed was looking most charming in her white costume, and whose charms were but enhanced by the fine blush which was slowly leaving her handsome face.

'Nay,' said the President, 'I owe you a debt of gratitude for your kind attentions to my daughter and her aunt on their voyage out. They have often spoken of you, and I am sure we shall do our best to repay you by making your stay here in Boravia as pleasant as we can. As you are aware, my dear wife was an Englishwoman, and if only for her sake I shall always cherish a regard for the English people.'

Standen had but little chance of saying

much to the Señorita, for her father almost monopolised the conversation. Da Piera seemed already to have taken quite a liking to his host, and conversed with him more freely than Standen could have expected on matters Boravian and the affairs of the Santa Maria Company.

'You have very pleasant quarters here,' he said, as, after a rather lengthened visit, he and his daughter rose to go. 'The Jesuits knew how to make themselves comfortable. By the way,' he added with a smile, 'I wonder if you have heard the story of their hidden treasures.'

Standen was taken aback at the directness of the question, and scarcely knew how to reply, for he had no intention of making his and Burch's discoveries common property.

The President, who was beckoning to his coachman, did not notice his confusion, but Lois da Piera saw that he was embarrassed, and wondered at the reason.

'I've heard some such stories from the black folk,' he said at last, as Da Piera turned round and looked at him for his reply.

'I do not believe myself there is anything in it,' said he President. 'Even if there ever were a treasure, it has probably been removed long ago. I remember the old King gave a concession to a man to search for the treasure,

but nothing came of it, though the silly fellow spent a small fortune in excavations, and in fact went quite out of his mind with disappointment.'

'I believe the treasure is there, after all,' said Lois da Piera ; 'all the negroes are firmly convinced of it.'

'Yes,' said the President with a laugh, 'some of them spend a considerable amount of their valuable time in digging and delving for the entrance to the cave, or whatever it is, where the phantom treasure is supposed to be hidden. It would be a perfect godsend if anyone did discover it, for the financial affairs of Boravia are not in the most flourishing state, and, if what these people imagine were true, such an immense wealth of valuables would go far to put us on our feet again.'

'Would the Government claim the treasure, then?' asked Standen, in a tone of assumed carelessness.

'Oh, the finder would have certain rights, and would take a proportion, but the bulk of the find would go to the State, for the property of the Jesuits was confiscated when they were driven out, though I confess I am rather vague as to the exact laws as to treasure trove.'

Just then the carriage drew up at the steps, and the President and his daughter drove off,

not, however, before Lois da Piera, at her father's request, had invited Standen to dine at the Palace at an early date. John Standen's mind was so full of the entrancing personality of the beautiful Lois that he did not feel disposed for any society but his own, and he passed the evening in solitary communings over all that the Señorita had said, and the many beauties and graces she had displayed : he did not conceal from himself that his life's happiness was bound up in her, and he passed many unhappy moments in realising the hopelessness of the whole affair, though he dared to think that she was at any rate not indifferent to him. During the few days that intervened before his longed-for appearance at dinner at the Palace he saw comparatively little of Burch, for that stolid Devonshire man had but one topic of conversation, and Standen was getting not a little tired of his plans and his conjectures as to the treasure and the discovery thereof. It is not to be supposed that Burch, crippled up though he was, was going to let the matter stand, and he spent a good deal of time poring over the document, which Standen gladly allowed him to retain, and studying the plan of the galleries. Every night, too, he moved back the press, and, unknown to Standen, who showed impatience at any approach on Burch's part to the subject of

the treasure, he carefully traversed the old ground, and went on still further in his researches. His painful fall into the death-trap of course rendered him very wary as to the possibility of other like pitfalls, and he pushed the longer of the planks, which the two adventurers had left in the passage, from square to square of the flags of the pavement, coming back to his room in the same cautious fashion. Stiff as he was, and still feeling his severe bruises, his progress was very slow indeed, the more particularly as the passage seemed to be interminable. There was marked on the plan a doorway or opening into the side of the mountain, and from this opening, which apparently descended, for the plan was none too clear, the way to the treasure chamber seemed to lead. It was his intention to go on as far as the finding of this doorway before he let Standen into the secret of his further searchings; but although he had, with infinite labour and many groanings on account of his bruised limbs and muscles, gone a considerable distance along the passage, he had lighted on no such opening.

'Drat the old plan,' he said to himself; 'I dew belave as thicky vorgotten old passage-way goeth all round the hill; seemeth to me as if there warn't niver no end to 'un; and measter be so tooked up with thicky dark-eyed

bewty as he can't bring his mind to bear on naught beside, and 'tes hard does going on discivering like this yere all be mezul. However, plaze God, he'll come to his senses sune, and then us'll show these Jesuites as they ain't a going to batter and bruise and most kill Jan Burch for naught. Sartain sure I'll tackle measter to-morrow night: I be getting more asier to my bones, and I'll see if so be I can't stir him up for another go in,' and with that, tired out with his plank pushings, he slipped under the mosquito curtains and soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIV

AT THE PALACE

AT last the longed-for night of Standen's engagement at the Palace arrived, and his buggy, for he had invested in one of those light and spidery conveyances and a pair of smart ponies, was waiting for him at the steps of the Quinta, the black coachman, in all the pride of his new livery, impatiently waiting to display his skill and his brave attire to the dusky beauties who thronged the streets of Santa Maria. Standen was not a particularly vain man, but he knew he looked his best in evening attire, and he had spent a good deal of unaccustomed time and trouble on his toilet; and, indeed, a handsome fellow he was as, with his dark eyes shining in anticipation of an evening spent in the society of his beloved, he descended the steps drawing on his gloves, a light Inverness cape veiling the chastened glories of his apparel.

The long drive led him through the main street of Santa Maria, for the Palace—of old

time the King's Palace—was in a suburb, leafy with palm trees and the feathery bamboo, at the further end of the city from the Quinta, a route Standen was destined very often to traverse. And now the light and elegant equipage is come to the great gates of the Palace, flanked on either side by sentry-boxes and a guard-house; and just as Standen's buggy passed through the gates the relief filed up to the guard-house, and again a qualm of discouragement came over him as he saw the state and ceremony which surrounded the father of Lois da Piera. Nor was this feeling lessened as he drove through the wide square and the beautiful grounds, bright with flowers, and trim and neat as the surroundings of an English country seat, and the vast gleaming white frontage of the huge Palace came into view, with its flanking towers and its *porte-cochère*. A perfect retinue of black servants, in liveries rather too gorgeous for European ideas of taste, marshalled by a white major-domo, was in the vast hall of the Palace, and Standen was soon relieved of his light overcoat and ushered into the reception room.

'We are alone to-night,' said the President as he advanced to greet Standen, and as Standen shook hands with the Señorita and Miss Dodds. 'It is a comfort to have a quiet

evening for once in a way, and we can have a pleasant chat about England and things English. I know that is what Lois and Miss Dodds are wishing for.'

Standen was still somewhat depressed by the magnificence of the President's surroundings, and he was glad to hear that he was not in for a grand function. Just then the dinner was announced, and the President, giving Miss Dodds an arm, Standen had the felicity of taking in the beautiful Lois, who was a picture of coolness in a white costume—which, indeed, she seemed to affect—and was looking more charming than ever.

The President proved to be a kindly and affable host, and Standen was very soon at his ease, and taking his part in the talk, which veered toward England, Miss Dodds, with British intolerance, enlarging upon the inconveniences of tropical life, and the President and Lois laughingly defending their country and climate, and confounding the English lady with doleful pictures of rain and fog, mist and mud. When the dinner was over, and the two ladies had retired to their drawing-room, the President had the wine taken into a cool room at the back of the Palace, where coffee was served in a wide balcony from whence a prospect of the city was obtained, the view ending in the

dark and distant outlines of the Monte de la Capilla. Though Standen was not an unduly conceited man, he could not but be flattered with the evident partiality the President displayed towards him, for as they sipped their coffee and *fin champagne* Da Piera became almost confidential in his talk.

'It is a comfort to get out of all the form and ceremony, Mr. Standen,' he said, as he puffed away at his cigar and slowly swung his rocking chair. 'I dislike intensely having to be always on one's guard. I daresay many people envy me, perhaps you among the number; but they little know the incessant care and anxiety of my position. Truly the only peace I have is when I can get out of it all for even a brief holiday, and go back to my old life at my house in the country at Buena Vista; but it is seldom that I can do this,' and he sighed as he leant back lost in thought.

'You may wonder,' he went on, 'why I continue in a position so distasteful to me?'

Standen was rather confounded at these confidential remarks, and he murmured some complimentary commonplace or other as to the advantage to the country, and so forth.

'Ah,' said Da Piera, 'I can see you think it odd that I should speak so freely to you, a comparative stranger, too; but in truth there

is not a single soul in the whole country to whom I can speak without all sorts of reservations.'

'I am sure, sir,' said Standen, 'I feel honoured.'

'Well, it is odd,' mused the President, 'and perhaps my daughter's and Miss Dodds's remarks may have something to do with it—for I can assure you they have sung your praises—but I feel I can talk to you in a way——' and again the President paused, and seemed sunk in thought. 'I can rely on your discretion,' he went on at last, looking stedfastly at Standen, 'and I am certain you are an honest man, and an intelligent man.'

Standen, still more astonished, and wondering what was coming next, again murmured his acknowledgments.

'The truth is,' said the President, plunging into his subject, and shaking off a certain hesitation which was evident in his manner, 'things are coming rapidly to something like a crisis in Boravia. My seat in the Presidential chair is a fairly secure one; but there are two factions here, with all sorts of ramifications, and the position is difficult, difficult——' and he paused again. 'Our finances, too,' he went on again, 'are in a state little short of disastrous: if it were not for that my way would be clearer.'

Ever since the old King was forced to abdicate things have been going on from bad to worse, and it is only my sense of duty to my country and certain hopes I have for the future that made me accept this intolerable position.'

'There was in England a universal regret at the King's deposition,' said Standen, as the President looked at him, and seemed to expect him to say something, though he hastily added, 'I ought not to have said that to you, sir; I am sure I——'

'Ah, that is what I am coming to,' interrupted the President. 'As a matter of fact, I have not that passionate devotion to a Republican form of government with which I am credited: in truth, and I need not point out to you the great trust and confidence I am placing in you——' and again Da Piera hesitated, as if after all he was on the point of drawing back.

'Sir,' said Standen earnestly, and looking him full in the face, 'I do not know what it is you are half-inclined to tell me, and yet seem half-afraid to say, and I do not seek any confidences, indeed I am astonished at your—at your condescension; but of this you may be certain—that you can trust both my discretion and my silence.'

'I know it, I know it,' said Da Piera; 'and

I will tell you the whole story, and also the reason why I confide in you. There is a party in Boravia which has been conspiring now for some time for the restoration of the monarchy. I know everything about this party ; I know the names of each individual member ; I know every detail of every plot and plan put forward by them ; indeed, if it had not been for this knowledge on my part there would have been a rising some time ago, and that rising would have been a most fearful fiasco. I prevented it, for I saw that the time was not come——'

The President paused as an exclamation of surprise came from Standen, who was intently listening.

'Of course, you are surprised,' resumed the President ; 'but listen to me. I only intrigued for and gained the Presidential chair as a means towards an end, and that end is the restoration of Dom Francisco III. to the throne of his fathers.'

As he spoke the President rose from his chair and moved restlessly about the room.

'Ah, God,' he cried ; 'it is the dream of my life, it is the salvation of my country, and if I could only see the monarchy once more firmly established, with what joy would I sing my "Nunc dimittis" ? I would gladly give my life for it. I am in constant communication with

the King, who deigns to be my dear and intimate friend,' he went on, turning to Standen; 'and, if it were not for this accursed lack of means, our party is strong, though they do not know yet that I am of them. There is a gradual but marked revulsion of public feeling, and I doubt not but that we should see His Majesty installed in this his Palace amidst the acclamations of his people.'

'I would do anything——' cried Standen, who was carried away somewhat by the enthusiasm of Da Piera, and was on the point of incautiously pledging himself to take a part in the local national affairs from which his position certainly precluded him.

'God forbid that I should ever involve you in such a tangled web of intrigue,' said the President interrupting him; 'indeed, for my purpose it is necessary that you should stand entirely outside the whole affair. You see, I have my daughter here, and her aunt, Miss Dodds. I tried to keep her in England, but she so constantly and so persistently begged to come back to her father—and indeed I longed too to see my only child—I dared not tell her of the state of things in Boravia, which, indeed, were not nearly as advanced then; and if I had she would still have wished to come; and, in truth, the long and short of the matter is this: there

is certain to be some serious *émeute* ere long ; God alone knows how soon it may come, and I want to feel that, should things come to a crisis, and our side meet with disaster, there is someone to whom I can confide the care and safety of these two ladies ; and that, sir, is the reason why I have dared to open my mind to you, and to confide in you these secrets of State.'

'With my life I will protect them,' cried Standen, rising and grasping the President's hand in a firm clasp. 'I am deeply grateful for your trust, and for the honour you have done me.'

For some time the two conversed on the all-important topic of the restoration of the Boravian dynasty, and the President was more than pleased at the quickness and shrewdness with which Standen grasped the situation. So long had their confabulation lasted that it was very late when they returned to the drawing-room. Miss Dodds had long ago retired, and the lateness of the hour only permitted Standen a very few minutes of conversation with the Señorita before he had to ask for his buggy, and to make his adieux.

CHAPTER XV

A GLEAM OF HOPE

DA PIERA'S confidences had given Standen so much exciting food for thought that he had but little sleep that night, and spent most of the hours of darkness in ruminating over the position in which he found himself so unexpectedly placed. He could not but see that, should the President's surmises prove correct, and should the imminent rising bring disaster upon the Royalist party, he must be brought into close relations with the beautiful Lois, and in such a case he knew how difficult it would be for him to avoid showing her how dear she was to him. At the same time, the great confidence Da Piera had placed in Standen made it a point of honour with him not to take any undue advantage of any intimate circumstances in which they might be placed, and he felt he must either tell the President the true state of affairs or else put such a strong guard upon his feelings as should effectually prevent the Señorita from seeing what a firm hold she had

upon his affections ; and, as he painfully thought out the problem, he was fain to confess to himself that he had already allowed her more than a glimpse of the truth, and sometimes he even dared to think that his advances were not altogether received with disfavour by the President's daughter. And, as he was considering, it suddenly struck him that after all there might be some truth in all these stories of the treasures of the Jesuits, and that if it were indeed true that there was somewhere in the depths of the Morro del Capilla a vast hoard of wealth, this might change the whole aspect of affairs for him and Lois. It was indeed hopeless for the engineer-in-chief, with his comparatively small salary and his not too exalted birth, to aspire to the hand of the only child of the noble and ancient house of Da Piera, and the daughter of the President of Boravia to boot ; but if he and Burch were fortunate enough to come upon the hidden treasure, and if he could come to the President with the news of vast wealth at his disposal, he might be the means of bringing the Royalist plots to a successful conclusion—for Da Piera had ruefully descanted on the lack of means which so seriously tied his hands—and the President might be induced to look with favour on his suit should he thus help in bringing to pass the one aim and ambition of Da

Piera's life. It was well on towards the dawn before this forlorn hope came into Standen's mind, and at last he sank to sleep with Lois da Piera's name upon his lips and with a firm resolve to do his best, at any risk to life and limb, to unravel the mystery of the treasure. As soon as he woke he determined to begin the search again that very night, and, breakfast over, he sent Oliver to bring Burch to him.

'Well, Burch,' he said, as the stout and stocky little Devonian came on the verandah, where Standen was smoking a matutinal pipe, 'how goes it with the limbs and the muscles? Do you begin to feel yourself again after that awful tumble?'

'Plaze God, sir, I be so fit as a fiddle; stiffness be most all gone, glory be.'

'All the same, I expect you've had enough of treasure-hunting, Jan?' asked Standen tentatively.

'Naw, fay,' said Burch emphatically, 'us'll hev those golden coins and diamonds and cetry, be it as 'twill.'

'Then you are still persuaded that the treasure is there?'

'I knaw 'tes theer,' said Jan decidedly. 'I've a studied thicky old plan, and I've a got mun full fixed in my mind. Tew tell 'ee the trewth, sir, and axin' your pardon for what I've a doed,

I've tooked the liberty for to hev a go in by mezuk.'

'What!' cried Standen. 'You've been searching on your own account? Why, man, I thought we agreed to wait till you were all right, and we could go to work again together?'

'Well, sir, I knaw as it were wrang, but I couldn't help of it. I seemed as I must go on; but, lor bless 'ee, I ain't a discovered nothen to count on. I folleyed on the old passage——'

'Tis a wonder you're here to tell the tale,' interrupted Standen in a vexed tone; 'how could you tell that there were not other death-traps in the way?'

'Aw, I muded along most cautious like, you may depend, and 'twas a slow work. I pushed the plank from flag to flag, and crawled keerful, I do assure 'ee. Seemeth to me as the old passage goeth most round the hill; any way, I ain't come 'pin no oppenings so far. You see, sir,' he went on, producing the parchment, and spreading it out on a little table between them, 'theer's a oppening somewheers or other in the hill leading out of the passage; seems to go downwards, as far as I can mek out.'

'The whole thing is so blurred with age and damp that it is almost undecipherable,' said Standen, poring over the parchment; 'but there certainly is an opening, and to-night, Jan, we'll

see if we cannot find it by hook or by crook. I only hope you won't be disappointed, Jan. After all, if we do find the chamber, the treasure may be gone, and God only knows what traps we may fall into.'

'Well, sir,' said Burch, 'I don't believe mezul as theer's nothen more o' that sart to fear. I've a thought it out keerful, and you may depend that, once past that old pit, 'tes pretty plain sailing. Wan go o' that sart is surely enough: 'tes the key of the whole job, I reckon, and if wan o' them gashly old skelingtons had been wan of the three chiefs of them Jesuites, he never wouldn't have valled down thicky pit.'

'It may be so,' said Standen musingly, and not noticing the 'bull' Burch had perpetrated. 'From the heap of bones down there many must have perished in the same awful way: those sorts of secrets have a way of leaking out, and it may be that this horrible device of the rolling flagstone was the one thing the three heads of the Order kept to themselves.'

'T'es so, you may depend,' said Burch. 'Howsomever, us'll take no more risks than us must, and I'll hev everything all ready for 'ee to-night, sir, and p'reaps us'll see the golden treasures and jools this very night,' and his eyes sparkled in anticipation.

'All right, Jan; ' said Standen, as he heard

the buggy coming round, and prepared to go into the city, 'I have had some talk with the President about this treasure business, by the way, and if we do come upon it we only get a share: it really belongs in the bulk to the Government.'

'Aw, lor, blame the old Government,' cried Burch contemptuously. 'A lot of raskils, I calls 'em: there's only wan as is worth his salt, and that's the President hisself—a fine figure of a man, sure enough.'

'Rascals or not, they have to be reckoned with,' said Standen, 'and then there's the getting the stuff away—— However, first catch your treasure, eh, Jan?' and with a laugh and a wave of his hand to Burch, whose duties lay in another quarter of the city, where large extension works were in progress, he lightly ran down the steps and drove off citywards.

CHAPTER XVI

THE END OF THE PASSAGE

IT was the English mail day at Santa Maria, and Standen found a heavy budget waiting for him when he reached the company's offices. Among the bulky official letters he found a letter from his father, and his conscience smote him as he realised how entirely he had forgotten the folks at Argyle Villas in the press of his work, his continued thought about Lois da Piera, and the excitement of the treasure adventure. Dr. Standen's letter was not at all a cheerful communication, for, though everybody was well enough at home, misfortune had come to No. 11 in the guise of a rascally attorney who had levanted with a very considerable portion of the doctor's hard-earned savings—no very large sum, indeed, but a serious loss to a man already ageing fast, and who had given hostages to fortune in the persons of a comparatively young wife and many hearty and hungry olive branches. The more Standen studied the melancholy paragraphs of his father's letter the more he

reproached himself ; and he saw that, even if he could prevail upon his father to take any help from him, it must be some time before he could be in a position to offer it, for, though his salary was a handsome one, his expenses were heavy, and he found he could only work easily with the watchful and jealous Boravian fiscals by the exercise of a lavish hospitality, involving many expensive restaurant lunches and dinners, and the dispensing of quite a little sum in the shape of small but frequent loans to these impecunious and venal gentry. If, however, this treasure business came up to the expectations of the sanguine Burch, he should be able to make his father's mind easy as to the future, and perhaps induce him to retire from work, which was already becoming a grievous strain upon the old man. Thus Standen had another inducement, if any were wanted, to do his best to find the enticing and elusive treasure.

The mail brought him a considerable amount of extra work, and when at last, with a sigh of relief, he laid down his pen, it was to accompany Wetherell to a dinner at the Hôtel de Paris; which dinner that stout and genial gentleman was giving to the staff of the company in honour of the chief engineer.

The hospitality of Wetherell was of an exuberant sort, and involved the discussion of

much iced champagne and sundry liqueurs and cigars, and it was not until quite late that Standen was at last able to get away, much to the content of his sleepy black coachman. It was so late that he expected, and indeed half hoped—for he was very tired—that Burch would have given up in despair, and gone to his bed; but he was disappointed in this, for there was Burch waiting for him in the verandah, and his first words showed that, so far from being tired out with his long waiting, he was only eager for the fray.

‘Well, sir,’ he said with a grin, ‘you hev a bin keepin’ of it up, axin’ your pardon for saying so. I thought as you never was a coming.’

‘It is horribly late, Burch,’ said Standen with a yawn; ‘what do you say to putting off our search till to-morrow?’

‘Well, sir, ’tes as you will,’ replied Burch, ‘but I’ve a got everything in trim.’

Burch’s tone and look betrayed such evident disappointment that Standen shook himself together, and made up his mind to go on with the affair at once.

‘Well, Jan,’ he said, ‘if I don’t go with you, you’ll go by yourself, and fall into some desperate hole or another, so here goes,’ and he led the way to Burch’s room.

'Tes gude of yew to come, so tired as yew be, said Burch, as they got into the passage behind the press. 'Yew take hold of the lantern whiles I moves along the plank,' and, something loth, for indeed it was as much as he could do to keep awake, Standen followed Burch in his toilsome way.

'Tes a long job,' said Burch, after they had laboriously gone on for some way past the death-trap, and he paused and wiped his face after pushing the plank on to another flag or two; 'us should get on quick enough if it warn't for fear o' they pits.'

'It won't do to run any risks,' replied Standen. 'Here, you take your turn at the lantern, man, and I'll do the plank business for a bit,' and, in spite of Jan's protests, Standen took his turn at the hard work.

'I med a mark so fur as I'd a gone,' said Burch. 'Did ought to be somewheeryereabouts, I reckon,' and he carefully held up the lantern and looked at the roughly hewn wall on the side of the hill on his right hand. 'Aw, here 'tes,' he cried; 'I knawed 'twadn't very far off.'

'You've got more go in you than I have, Burch,' said Standen as he paused; 'this is a tough job, and how you could have got on so far with all your joints stiff and sore is more than I can tell.'

'You let me take the plank, sir,' begged Burch earnestly; 'tes tew much for 'ee.'

This roused Standen's obstinacy, and he pushed along faster without a word, being just a little vexed at Burch's reflection on his powers of endurance.

For some way they went on thus in silence, for Burch saw that his chief was a little annoyed, and he did not like to speak.

'Thank Heaven!' cried Standen, as he gave the abhorred plank a final shove; 'here's an end of that accursed flagging at last; solid ground in front of us, Jan.'

'That theer's a thankful mussy,' said Burch, as, leaving the plank, they stood at last upon a roughish path, which, leaving the level of the flagging, began to trend in a downward direction.

'Now, Burch,' cried Standen, as Jan almost ran on in front, 'I'll trouble you to let me go on first. You've got such a keen nose for the treasure that you'll find yourself in another awkward fix if I don't look after you. Here, give me the lantern.'

With a crestfallen air Burch came back in his tracks, and, handing the lantern to Standen, he let him pass on, and followed in his steps.

'Ah,' cried Standen, with a sigh of relief, and after they had gone on for some minutes

in silence; 'here's the opening at last. I begin to think there's something in it, man.'

'A course there is,' said Burch gleefully, as the two stood looking at a dark opening in the right-hand or hill side of the passage. 'Us be made men, for sure,' and he stepped forward to enter into the dark hole in the wall of the passage.

'Stop a minute, Jan,' said Standen, pulling him back; 'the opening won't run away; let us see where this passage goes to first,' and he went on slowly and cautiously on the old course.

'Ah, I thought so,' he said, when he had gone on a little further; 'here's the end of the passage.'

'Well, us can't mek no mistakes now,' said Burch, as he gazed at the roughly hewn end of the passage; 'there's only wan way, and that's through the oppening,' and he began to retrace his steps, followed by Standen.

'Seems rather steepish like,' he went on, as they came to the opening, and Standen held forward the lantern; 'not tew much rume, either. Us must go forrard single file, I reckon,' and he stood aside, while Standen went in front with the light. This new passage-way was much rougher going than the main way they had left, but it was hollowed out of a soft sandy sort of

rock, and the marks of the tools were plainly seen on the walls. Standen held the light low down, for the footway was anything but smooth, and it was not easy to avoid stumbling, and at the same time the descent was fairly steep.

Suddenly the path veered right round to the left hand, and the descent became less and less pronounced, until at last the way was almost level.

'If us goes on much funder us'll come to the sayshore,' said Jan Burch, breaking a rather long silence.

'I was thinking the same thing,' answered Standen; 'it seems to me to be a little lighter ahead, Burch. I'll put the lantern behind me, and you look on to see if you notice it.'

'Iss, fay, 'tes so for sartain,' cried Burch in some excitement. 'Go on, sir, go on; us be getting to the treasure, surely.'

Lighter and lighter grew the path, until at last they scarcely wanted the lantern's help, and more and more excited grew Burch, while Standen himself hurried on with more haste than caution, Burch eagerly pressing on at his heels.

At length Standen gave a subdued cry as the rough path ended in a sort of chamber or cave whose roof was supported by several pillars.

'My ivers! us hev got un now,' shouted Burch, pushing forward in his delight.

'Hold back, you fool,' cried Standen; 'can't you see where you are going?' and he pointed downwards. As Burch's eyes followed the wave of Standen's hand, he gave a great cry of dismay, for—alas for his hopes of boundless wealth—the cave was full of water, and he and Standen were just on the brink.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS

STANDEN and Burch stood gazing at the slightly moving face of the waters, and listening to the soft lap-lapping of the tiny wavelets as they broke at their feet, in a disappointment too deep for words for some moments.

'Your guess was a right one, Burch,' said Standen at last, turning to his companion; 'we have got down to the sea, and the treasure, if treasure there be, is there deep down under the water. The sea has gradually worn through this sandy rock, and filled up the cave. Well,' he went on with a sigh, 'there's nothing more to be done; we can't pump the ocean out, Jan.'

'Don't 'ee talk about giving in, measter,' said Burch persuasively; 'theer be the pillars all correct, just as 'tes sot down 'pin the plan, and the chests and cetery be buried beside 'em, as the murdering old gent says, I'll warrant.'

'Even supposing it is so,' said Standen, 'it would take a regiment of skilled workmen and

all kinds of appliances to get at it, and I don't see much good in making a public job of it, as we should have to: it's precious little of the valuables we should finger in that case.'

'Aw, lor, to think as us should hev gone through such sweating labours in this heat, and me mos' broked to pieces wi' skelintins, and all for naught,' cried Burch disgustedly.

'It may turn out better than you suppose, after all,' said Standen, after thinking awhile.

'I hopes as it may,' said Burch, not in a very hopeful tone; 'but us can't go agen the say.'

'True, not by ourselves, but with proper means we can,' replied Standen. 'I'm afraid we shall have to take the President into our confidence, and if we can get him to go in for the chance of the treasure being there, and if it really is there, we can safely depend upon getting our proportion. President da Piera is an honest man.'

'Theer's a mort of "ifs" in it, sir, I zim,' said Jan, who had been stolidly looking at the water at his feet. 'My ivers!' he cried, after a pause, and still looking down; 'do 'ee look yere, sir, the watter's going back, sir, I dew believe. Aw, lor! us'll get thicky old treasure after all, without no President nor nobody! Tide's a going out, I tell 'ee!' and in his excitement he

grasped Standen by the arm, and pointed to the sandy floor of the cave upon which they were standing.

'Great Scott, Jan,' said Standen, 'you're right! It must have been high tide when we got here, and the sea is certainly ebbing fast,' and he gave a great sigh of relief as the two watched the steady ebbing of the waters at their feet.

'There's a chance, after all, Burch,' he said at last, and, looking at his watch: 'it's just on two,' he said. 'We can't do anything to-night, and the tide will not be properly out for hours. I am worn to death and fit for nothing, and the best thing we can do is to get back as fast as we can, and come here to-morrow morning,' and he turned to go.

Burch seemed as if he could not tear himself away, and still looked down as if fascinated by the slowly receding water.

'Come on, man,' cried Standen impatiently; 'you can't do anything even when the water has gone back; all the stuff is buried, and you can't dig it up with your fingers.'

'Glory be,' said Burch, as he turned to follow his companion; 'first pillar be bare to the base of mun already. I wish 'twas to-morrer, and I was yere wi' a pick and a spade,' and he stopped talking, thinking joyfully of the treasure,

as the two men made their way along the rough and dark passages. Standen, what with the heat, the lateness of the hour, and the excitement he had gone through, was completely exhausted, and when at last he said good-night to Burch, and got to his quarters, he scarcely had the energy to get into his pyjamas, and almost before his head was on the pillow he was in a deep and refreshing sleep.

It is to be feared that the office work of the Santa Maria Drainage and Water Company suffered somewhat that day, for Standen, who awoke refreshed and ready for anything, was so full of the work that the early morning had in store for him that he found it difficult to concentrate his mind on the daily routine of business; while John Burch displayed an impatience in dealing with his gangs of black labourers to which they were not accustomed, and which they resented with many muttered objurgations. The adventures and discoveries of the night before, and the still more exciting adventure in front of him, did not drive out of Standen's mind the image of his beautiful inamorata, and indeed the thought of Lois da Piera was bound up in all his hopes and doubts as to the treasures of the Jesuits; for, though he was not a sordid man, and did not yearn too heartily for wealth, he certainly did yearn, and

that very heartily, after the President's daughter, and the only chance he saw of winning and wearing this so desired prize lay in the success of his quest. As this thought persistently invaded his mind during the hot hours of the day, he had an intense longing to see again the object of his adoration, and a sort of feeling came over him that the sight of her would bring him good luck in the enterprise before him.

When, then, his buggy drew up at the entrance of the company's offices that afternoon, instead of driving straight out to the Quinta de los Mangos, Standen ordered his coachman to go on to the Botanical Gardens, in the faint hope that Fortune might favour him, and that he might chance to meet with Lois in that popular resort of the rank and fashion of Santa Maria; for here at sundown the wealth and the youth and beauty of the Republic was well represented, and a motley throng perambulated the shady walks, listening to the strains of a military band, and enjoying the soft sea breeze, whose punctual evening appearance alone made life supportable in the suffocating heat of Boravia.

Leaving his buggy to form one of the crowded ranks of conveyances at the entrance to the gardens, Standen sauntered slowly along

the broad avenue of immense palm trees, his careless pace and look concealing an eagerness to see Lois so intense as to be almost painful. And when at last he caught a glimpse of his divinity it was to experience a sort of thrill of disappointment and jealousy, for, with the comfortable and somewhat rotund Miss Dodds seated at her side, Lois da Piera was sitting in a shady corner of the bandstand, surrounded by a cohort of the *jeunesse dorée* of Santa Maria, and looking, in spite of their evident attentions, somewhat bored and *distracte*.

'Why, there is Mr. Standen,' exclaimed Miss Dodds, with whom Standen was something of a favourite, as, a head and shoulders taller than the somewhat diminutive Boravians, he slowly approached through the crowd. Though Standen did not hear Miss Dodds's exclamation, he was near enough to see the pleasant smile of welcome with which both aunt and niece welcomed him as he came up and greeted them.

'We don't often see you in the gardens, Mr. Standen,' said Miss Dodds, as, after shaking hands, Standen stood beside them. 'I suppose you are too busy to be frivolous.'

'I shall not be so hard pressed now that I have got things into working order a little,' replied Standen, inwardly determining that the

gardens should see a great deal of him for the future, and, a lady who was on Lois's right rising, he quickly secured the vacant seat. 'I have been here several evenings,' he said to Lois, 'but I have never seen you here before.'

'The truth is that my aunt has been so upset with the heat and the mosquitoes that she has not cared to come out much. Mr. Standen,' she said in a low tone, 'I wanted much to speak to you;' and, turning to her aunt, 'I am tired of sitting still, auntie,' she said. 'I will stroll about a little if Mr. Standen will be my escort,' and, with a smile at Standen, she rose, and he was quickly walking beside her. She did not say anything till they were well out of the crowd, and, comparatively speaking, alone, only a few couples passing them from time to time.

'My father has told me of what he was saying to you the other night,' she said at last. 'I hinted to you when we were on the "Peronia" that he was not altogether opposed to the coming back of the King.'

'I quite remember it,' said Standen, who, indeed, was not likely to forget anything said to him by his fair companion. 'I am much flattered at your father's confidence in me; he may be certain that I shall not betray it.'

'He knows that,' said Lois, with a kind look at the tall and handsome man beside her. 'I am

afraid the presence here of my aunt and myself just now is a great anxiety to my father : it was only last night he told me of the critical state of affairs. Ah ! if anything should happen to my dear father, how should I bear it ?'

'Forewarned is forearmed, Lo--Miss da Piera,' said Standen, turning red as he just stopped himself in calling her by her Christian name. 'The President has the confidence of both sides.'

'Yes, and he knows full well that it is a most dangerous position for him to be in: it cannot last, and any moment an outbreak may come. I dare not say anything to my aunt ; she is very nervous and excitable, and Heaven only knows what she might do or say if she had any suspicion of the state of affairs. I do not know why you should be troubled with all these complications of ours, but——'

'Troubled !' cried Standen, taking her hand, for they were seated in a remote and shady corner of the gardens. 'If you only knew—but indeed I must not, I dare not——'

'Why, here you are, Lois,' cried Miss Dodds, as she rounded a corner of the gravelled walk and came upon the two conspirators, and a shrewd and somewhat amused look came into her eyes as she marked the rather pronounced familiarity of their attitude.

'If you have quite finished your conversation, I think it is time we returned to the Palace,' she went on, not unkindly, for both Lois and Standen were a little confounded by her sudden appearance on the scene, and Miss Dodds, though not, in truth, of a very romantic appearance, was of a romantic enough disposition: her suspicions as to the feelings of the couple before her were already aroused, and before now she had tried to sound Lois with crafty hints and innuendoes. As her aunt ceased speaking, Lois rose, and accompanied by Standen the two ladies made their way to the entrance of the Botanical Gardens, where they parted from their companion

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TREASURE CHAMBER

STANDEN had much food for thought as he was being rapidly driven homewards. All his good resolutions as to his attitude towards the President's daughter were blown to the four winds, and, though he still felt many qualms of conscience as to the proceedings of the last half hour in the gardens, and knew in his heart that the charm of Lois da Piera's presence, and the spur of her evident distress, had betrayed him into a display of his feelings which he confessed his position did not warrant, yet still an overmastering sensation of gladness and delight possessed him, for she could not have failed to see his true affection for her, and she had not seemed to resent it, nor had she withdrawn her hand from his until Miss Dodds appeared upon the scene. The curious look with which Miss Dodds, too, had regarded the pair, had, in spite of his confusion at the time, not escaped Standen, and he ventured to hope that if Lois did indeed care for him her aunt might be their

friend with the President ; at any rate, things could not be well left in their present unsettled state, and he must muster up courage to put his fortune to the touch, for he felt that there could be no peace of mind for him until he knew, firstly, if Lois da Piera cared for him, as he almost dared now to hope she did care ; and, secondly, whether, in that blissful case, the President of Boravia could be induced by any means to look with favour upon the suit of so humble an individual as John Standen, civil engineer. Having come to this conclusion he reached his home, where he found Burch in waiting.

'I've a lot to tell 'ee, sir,' said Burch, as the buggy drove round to the stables, and left him and his chief to climb the steps of the verandah. 'Us 'appened to hit 'pin the spring tide last night, and 'tes several feet more higher than 'tes 'pin the common tides. I reckon the floor is most uncovered 'pin ordinary times : theer has been a kin' o' gale blowing the last day or two : 'tes the pampero as they calls it hereabouts, and that theer, he maketh the watter to go up also ; wind's gone down a good bit, too.'

'I'm afraid we shall only be able to work between tides, at any rate,' said Standen, who had been listening with much interest to Burch's information 'If we get down to the treasure

chamber by half-past two the first pillar will be out of water, and we can begin operations at once. We'd better get some sleep as soon as Oliver is out of the place, for we shall have to start a good hour before: that wretched plank business is most trying.'

'So 'tes, so 'tes,' said Burch biting his nails; 'most wears a man out before he begins. I don't believe as there's any more o' they pits, all the same as I said afore.'

'Well, any way, we can't run any risks,' replied Standen. 'If I don't come to you about half-past one, you call me, for I shall be asleep,' he added hastily, as Oliver came in to lay the cloth for dinner. Standen wanted to have his evening to himself, and he let Burch depart to his own quarters, for he did not want to be disturbed in his musings as to his somewhat complicated love affair, and not even the absorbing topic of the treasures of the Jesuits could keep his thoughts for long from the enthralling subject of the beautiful Lois da Piera.

Although Standen dismissed Oliver as early as he could, and then at once went to his bed, it was a long time before he could get to sleep, and when at last sleep came to him it came so masterfully that it took Burch some trouble to rouse him.

'Wake up, measter,' he said; 'tes half-past two.'

'Oh, then there's no use in getting up,' said Standen drowsily; 'you ought to have called me before.'

'So I would, measter, so I would,' said Burch; 'but us shan't tek so long in getting down. I was up yark and airy mezul, and I've tackled they flags: there isn't no more pits, and us can slip along praper.'

'Good heavens, man,' cried Standen, pushing aside the mosquito curtains, and jumping quickly out of bed; 'you don't mean to say you've been such an idiot as to go over those flags by yourself!'

'Well, then, sir, I hev,' said Burch sheepishly. 'I tooked every care, I did; I knawed as 'twas all right, and I pressed down 'pin every one o' 'em wi' the pick.'

'And if one had given way, and you had fallen in, I might never have found you,' said Standen bitterly. 'I've a good mind to give up the whole affair even now, if you are going to play the fool like this.'

'Don't 'ee say that, measter. I bean't such a vool as yew seems tew think. I had the old plank along o' me, and I kneeled 'pin him whiles as I shoved.'

'Still you might have slipped or fallen.

Well, anyway it's done now, and I hope to goodness you won't go running any such fool's risks without me again.'

'I promise 'ee faithfully as I won't,' asseverated Burch with a grin, as he saw his chief rapidly getting into his clothes and making ready to start. 'Pick's theer in the passage, and spades and lantern, and everything,' he went on, as they made their way towards Burch's room, and the press, and the heavy door behind.

'T'es a thankful mussy as us hevn't got to drag thicky old plank along, all the same,' muttered Burch, as he followed Standen along the passage.

Burch had marked the fatal flag by leaving the obnoxious plank across it, and Standen could never pass the spot without a slight shudder, though his sturdy companion appeared to have forgotten his very unpleasant experiences, and if he ever noticed the spot at all he only honoured it with a grin of defiance.

'Most all of the cave be bare,' said Burch, with an air of relief, as they came once more into the pillared Chamber of the Treasure. 'I reckon us 'ad better begin to dig at the foot of the first pillar, wheer the old praste says as he've a buried the silver box wi' jools in it,' and Jan Burch licked his lips in anticipation

of the rich sight in store for him. He had served a long apprenticeship as a navvy before his sterling qualities and his honesty had raised him to the position of a ganger; for, though a small farmer, Burch's father was poor—there was a large family, too, and very early in life he had had to shift for himself. Spitting on his hands, then, in true navvy fashion, he seized hold of one of the spades and began to shovel out the sandy soil with a will, while Standen, taking up the other spade, set to work, in an amateurish sort of way it must be confessed, at the next pillar. The air in the chamber was fresh, and comparatively cool, the night breezes finding their way into the cave from the sea. Although, as the dawn broke, a certain amount of light filtered through the dense growth of mangroves which concealed the cave on the sea-shore, when the two began to work it was dark, and even in broad daylight the light was so feeble that it was necessary to work by the light of the oil lantern with which they were provided. For some time they worked on in silence, the only sounds breaking the stillness of the chamber being made by the noise of their shovelling and by Standen's somewhat laboured breath as he put his back into the unaccustomed work, and tried to keep time with Burch, who vigorously threw out spadeful after spadeful.

Through it all, and when they paused to take breath, could be heard the soft sound of the ripples as they broke upon the sandy floor of the cave, further and further back as the tide went out. In spite of his eagerness to find out whether, after all their work, they were to be disappointed, Standen could not help remarking to himself the weirdness of the scene: the gloomy half light of the curious chamber with its pillars, only half illumined by the rays from the lantern, and the figure of Burch beside him rising and falling in a sort of rhythmic motion as he bent to his toil, formed a picture which often enough recurred to his mind in after years.

'Aw, lor,' said Burch at last, pausing and straightening his back, and taking a long breath; 'that gent as wrote the dockyment is a praper liard. I've a digged and digged a lot more than dree feet down, and I don't see no signs of nothen at all: p'reaps 'tes all may-games, arter all.'

'It's a great many years since the treasure was buried, Jan,' said Standen, not sorry to take a rest from his work; 'and the sea has washed up the sand and the soil, I expect.'

'Anyways, us won't be beat by a few feet of earth,' said Burch, as he bent to his toil again. 'I be so thirsty I could most drink a bucketful.'

Again and for some time the silence was invaded by the noise of the tools, and the falls of the spadefuls of sandy earth, as the pits became deeper and deeper.

As was to be expected, Burch got on more quickly with his work than his chief, and his pit was already more than knee-deep when again he paused in his work.

'Measter,' he said, in a kind of awed whisper, 'I've a touched summat ; do 'ee come yere and look at it.'

Standen jumped quickly from his shallow pit, and, with a muttered exclamation, ran over the few feet between them, looking on with keen excitement while John Burch shovelled out the earth with very great care.

'I've a got 'un! I've a got 'un!' cried Burch as he threw up the last spadeful, and the corner of some dark-looking object was disclosed to view. Going down upon his knees in the pit, he cleared away the earth with his hands, and, breathing hard, in an excitement too deep for words, he lifted up to Standen an oblong metal box, encrusted with the damp soil in which it had rested for so many years.

CHAPTER XIX

MUTTERINGS OF THE STORM

'It's the jewel box,' said Standen, in the same awed whisper, and looking round suspiciously, as if someone had discovered their secret enterprise and followed them into these depths of the earth.

'Aw, yes, 'tes so,' cried Burch gleefully, recovering himself; 'us be right enough now; us both be made men for certain. Do 'ee oppen 'un, measter, and let us see the gold and the jools inside: he don't look much like silver, neyther,' he added, in some disappointment; 'more like to iron, I reckon.'

'It's silver all right, I expect,' said Standen, who had taken the box or coffer to the lantern, and was carefully examining it: 'it is embossed and chased—a wonderful work of art,' he went on, as he rubbed off the earth, and the true outlines of the precious find were partly disclosed.

'Oppen 'un, measter! oppen 'un,' cried Jan Burch eagerly.

'That's easier said than done,' said Standen, who had been carefully turning the coffer round in both his hands—for it was heavy—and he could find no sign of any opening. 'You'll have to possess your soul in patience for a bit, Jan,' he went on. 'I can't even see a keyhole ; but here, take the thing yourself and see what you can do.'

Burch took the casket in his dirt-begrimed hands, and handled it tenderly, bending to the light and rubbing off the soil, looking the while for some crack or cranny which might lead to the opening of the coffer.

'I can't see no ways of oppenin' 'un,' he muttered at last, in much disappointment ; 'her's praperly full o' summat or other : I can hear the old jools a rattling as I muve the box about. Aw dear, 'tes hard does not to see they bewties o' shinin' stones and cetry inside o' mun. Tell 'ee what, measter, us'll put mun on yonder rock theer, and I'll tek the pick and break mun abroad.'

'For Heaven's sake, don't do anything so foolish,' said Standen, as Burch was moving towards a projecting rock to carry his proposition into effect. 'You'll smash up everything inside, man. We can't do anything here ; and, besides, its past five o'clock already, and Oliver will very soon be moving. It won't do for him to find us

out of the way ; in fact, there's not a moment to lose, we must get back as quickly as we can,' and, suiting the action to the word, he put on his coat, and, taking up the lantern, quickly hurried from the chamber, followed by Burch, who carried the heavy silver coffer very gingerly and carefully along the passages, over the flags, and into his own room.

'What shall us do wi' mun?' he asked, when the press was moved back to its place, concealing the entrance into the side of the hill.

'Oliver won't be here for half an hour,' said Standen, looking at his watch, 'and none of them will come to this part of the house yet awhile. You'd better give the box a thorough cleaning : you can throw the dirty water down the passage-way, and leave the coffer there till this evening. Perhaps you'll find some keyhole or spring ; anyhow, you'd better leave the coffer in the passage, and we must try and open it to-night when the niggers are gone,' and, as Burch nodded an assent, Standen went to his quarters to remove the evidences of his amateur navvy work, and to prepare for the advent of Oliver with his bath and his morning coffee.

As Standen drove down to his office, in spite of his preoccupation, he could not fail to note a

somewhat unusual state of things in the city. The streets were crowded, and there seemed to be a sort of subdued excitement in the air : the diminutive Santa Maria police, who made up for the insignificance of their stature by the ferocious and truculent appearance of their faces, adorned as they were with long, curled up, black mustachios, and who were armed with short but business-like looking swords, were very much in evidence ; and from time to time files of foot soldiers perambulated the causeways, while now and again a troop of cavalry clanked by, their arms and the accoutrements of their horses glittering in the bright hot sunlight.

‘ There seems to be something up in the city,’ said Standen, as he entered the office, and greeted Wetherell ; ‘ the whole place is pervaded by police and soldiers. What on earth is the matter ? ’

‘ You haven’t seen the papers, then ? ’ said Wetherell : ‘ there’s ructions ahead, or I’m very much mistaken. I only hope they won’t take it into their heads to go for the company ; we had a nice dusting last time they took it into their heads to upset things in general and start afresh with a brand-new Government,’ and he pointed grimly to a very suggestive-looking ornament attached to the wall of the room. It was a large glass case, and contained fragments of bomb-

shells and bullets, some flattened and some round and full, and all arranged in an artistic pattern, a reminder of past dangers and a sort of sarcastic defiance to future casualties of a like kind. Standen was rapidly glancing through the columns of one of the local papers while Wetherell was speaking.

'Whew—w—w!' he softly whistled as he turned over the leaf; 'things must be coming to a crisis,' and he paused as he thought over his interview with the President.

'No mistake about it, sir,' said Wetherell; 'a pretty strong measure, too, of the Ministry, to arrest Servetan, the editor of the "Diario," and smash up his types and machines: the Government must be either desperate or else very strong. I don't envy President da Piera: "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." It may mean a hot time for us, too: last smash-up one of our youngsters got a bullet through his thigh, a fiscal was shot dead in the office, and the whole place was partly wrecked by a shell from a gunboat in the harbour.'

'They can't get on without water, and if the drainage works are stopped the whole place will be decimated with Yellow Jack,' said Standen; 'they must be perfect fools to attack us.'

'They are,' replied Wetherell, with conviction; 'but they had the sense to leave us alone,

and the casualties whose pretty evidences you see in the case there were accidents.'

'Heaven preserve us from any such accidents now,' said Standen. 'It's bad enough, in all conscience, to have to live and work in this everlasting broil and heat, without the added amusement of the casual bullet and bombshell. However, I daresay it will all quiet down after a few free fights in the streets, and everything will go on as usual until the next upheaval. Any way, we must go on with our work,' and he turned to his correspondence, and Wetherell, taking the hint, went back into the outer office. When he was left alone, Standen sat thinking for some time: he had no intention of betraying the confidence of the President, and he did not wish to excite Wetherell's fears, for, in spite of his careless attitude, it was evident enough to Standen that his subordinate was very nervous as to the turn things were likely to take, and, should his fears be verified, a great responsibility might be laid upon Standen's shoulders, and the safety of Lois da Piera and of Miss Dodds might very easily depend upon his courage and quickness of resource.

The work of the office was much interfered with through all that day, and the place was thronged with Boravians—whether fiscals or others in any way connected with the works;

and the chatter and gesticulations of these excited individuals caused such a continued and distracting uproar that Standen was only too pleased when the hours of the working day drew to a close, and his buggy was waiting to convey him to the quiet of the Quinta de los Mangos.

Once or twice as the day had gone on they had been within an ace of having a disturbance in the office itself, for party feeling evidently ran very high, and the partisans of Antonio Servetan, the reactionary editor of the 'Diario,' were furious in their anger at the action of the Ministry, and loud in their expressions of disgust and their threats of reprisals, threats and expressions which the other side were not slow to resent. However, at last, with a sigh of relief, Standen saw the doors of the office closed, and climbed up into his buggy on his way homewards.

CHAPTER XX

THE SILVER COFFER

'THEER'S going to be a terrible rumpus, sir, or I'm very much mistook,' said Burch to his chief. 'I couldn't do nothen with the niggers at all, and the works be most come to a standstill; they was a chatterin' and a newsin' away like so many black rooks in a rookery. I reckon us be in for another Rosolio business. A lot of them little sogers come down to the works, too, and I thought at one time that they blacks would ha' gone for mun: took me all my time to keep 'em in order, so it did.'

Standen had sent Oliver to bring Burch to him after he had finished his dinner, and Burch, nothing loth, had brought his pipe with him, and the two were smoking on the verandah.

Standen did not reply to him for a moment or two, for he had been anxiously thinking all the day of the troubles that seemed looming in the near future, and he was wondering in his mind whether he had better confide in Burch

as to the safeguarding, or the possible escape, of the two ladies, or no. He knew that if any danger should arise he could thoroughly depend upon both the courage and the sagacity of his friend, and he also knew that Burch's help in any such crisis as he apprehended would be priceless ; but at the same time he felt some difficulty in bringing the whole state of affairs to the sturdy Devonian's knowledge without the permission of the President. However, as he rapidly revolved these matters in his mind he came to the conclusion that, after all, he must seek Burch's help should trouble arise ; and, as he was absolutely certain of his follower's discretion, and also of his personal devotion, he determined to tell him at least enough of the affair to forewarn him, and secure his help, for he did not know from one moment to another when the services of Burch might be required. As Standen came to this conclusion a clatter of hoofs was heard in the distance, and almost before he could look up a servant in the Presidential livery rode rapidly up the drive and stopped at the verandah steps.

'From His Excellency the President,' said the man, dismounting and handing a letter to Standen, who tore open the cover as he stood at the foot of the steps.

The letter was a very brief one, and merely

asked Standen to come to the Palace without fail on the next morning at eleven o'clock, the words 'without fail' being strongly underlined, and 'Do not answer' being added in a postscript, as a sort of after-thought.

Standen dismissed the man with a gratuity and a few polite words, and slowly remounted the steps with the letter in his hand.

'I suppose I must tell you, Jan,' he said with a preoccupied air, as he tore the letter into very small fragments. 'I know I can trust you most thoroughly——'

'That's trew so you can, sir,' said Burch; earnestly, and very curious as to what was to follow.

'Well, then,' Standen went on, 'that letter was from the President. You're right enough, Jan, there's trouble ahead. God alone knows which way things will turn out. I can't tell you all I know, but I can and I must tell you this much, for I want your help.'

'You shall hev it, sir, with a gude heart,' interrupted Burch.

'It's about the President's daughter,' Standen went on in a low tone, not marking the great surprise Burch showed at his words, or the short exclamation they evoked. 'You see, Burch,' he proceeded, 'the President's

liberty, and even his life, may be in great danger, and he has no one in whom he can absolutely trust ; and, in point of fact, should anything happen to him, if things went wrong—and you know the madness and violence of these South American revolutions—you and I, Jan, will have to look after the safety of the Señorita and her aunt.'

'Aw, sir, I hope as 'tidn't so bad as all that comes to,' said Burch ; 'nobody wouldn't wish to hurt that lovely maiden ; but if so be as anybody does, yere's wan as'll do his little best to get her out of this gashly old country safe and sound, if it costs him his life.'

'I knew it, Jan, I knew it,' cried Standen, grasping Burch's hand, 'and when the time comes, if come it does, I shall look to you for help.'

'I shouldn't wonder if it all fizzled out agen,' said John Burch, thoughtfully, after they had smoked on together in silence for a few moments ; 'they'm always up to some barney or other in these yere hot latitoods : seems to be a kind of wholesome blood-letting like.'

'I should not have had such an urgent call from the President unless he felt sure that things were coming to a head,' replied Standen. 'No, Jan, I can't tell you all about it, but I know enough to know that Da Piera is in a very

ticklish position, and if things go against him he may have to flee for his life, even if he escapes assassination.'

'My ivers!' cried Jan under his breath, 'is it so bad as that?'

Just then Oliver came in to know whether anything more were wanted; and soon the closing of the doors in the house told Standen and Burch that they were alone in the Quinta.

'Excuse me for interrupting 'pin another subject,' said Jan, when the sound of the footsteps of the small procession of the black servants had died away in the distance; 'but theer's that theer box as us discivered yesterday.'

'Good heavens, Jan, of course there is! For the moment the President's letter put everything else out of my mind; you fetch it here, Jan.'

'Aw, 'tes all safe enough. I've a putt 'un in the passage, sir. I gie mun a good washin' and polished a bit o' mun up last night, and he's silver right enough. I've got a fair-sized hammer and a steel wedge too, and it'll go hard wi' us if us doesn't get to the inside of thicky old box tonight,' and Burch went off and quickly returned with the coffer, which looked very different after the washing it had received; and, taking from his pocket a heavy hammer and the steel wedge,

he placed the articles upon the table beside Standen.

'Rather a risky business, Burch,' said Standen, as he poised the hammer in his hand and felt the thin edge of the steel implement; 'if we are not careful we shall smash up the whole affair.'

'But us'll be keerful,' replied Burch; 'you see, sir, I've examined of 'un, and though theer's a kayhole right enough, 'tes praperly chucked up wi' muck, and if so be as 'twasn't, us hev'n't got no old ancient kay for to fit 'un. But see yere, sir,' he went on, handling the casket, and pointing out what he had found to Standen, 'he've a bin buried so long that he've a got rusted loose like, and the wards o' the old lock hev gived way a bit or summat. Anyways, theer's a bit of a crack betwixt tap and bottom, and I zim, if us can get the wedge in, and gie mun a most terrible keerful tap wi' the hammer, us shall oppen mun, and us shan't do no such a girt dale of harm naythur.'

'I don't see any other way out of it myself,' said Standen after a pause; 'anyway, here goes!' and, placing the coffer endways on the floor of the verandah, he got Burch to go down on his knees and carefully place the wedge with the thin end against the slight opening in the silver box.

'Ready, Jan?' he asked, and, Burch nodding, 'Mind your fingers, man,' he said, and he gave a slight tap with the hammer.

'Naw, 'tidn't mued, not wan bit,' said Burch disappointedly; 'you'm tew aisy wi' mun, sir; must knack mun a bit harder.'

'I'm afraid of smashing the thing,' said Standen as he raised the hammer to try again. 'Look out,' and he gave a somewhat heavier blow.

'Tidn't no use, sir,' said Burch with a sigh, as the obdurate casket still kept its secret; 'better let me hev a try: I won't break mun abroad, I promise 'ee.'

'No, Burch, I shan't trust you, you wouldn't know how roughly you struck; have patience, man, I shan't rest till we get the thing open, you may depend upon that.'

'Aw, well, I reckon as you knaws best,' said Burch, as he again set the coffer in position; 'only yew must not be tew delicate, or us won't niver see the inside; they'm a rottlin' praper, tew.' This time Standen put a little more force into his blow, and as he struck the wedge the old and rust-eaten lock gave way and the coffer flew open. In a moment the part of the floor of the verandah where they were was covered with glinting, scintillating gems—diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, and rubies rolled along

the polished floor in bewildering profusion, their colours plainly displayed in the bright light of the lamp.

'Well, I be blamed!' cried Burch, who was groping about on the floor, raking together the stones into a heap. 'These be diamonds, sure enough.'

'Sh—sh, man,' said Standen in a loud whisper; 'don't make such a row—we've made noise enough with the knocking. By George, look here, Jan,' he went on, as he picked up the silver coffer, 'this must be the great diamond in the list of the treasures.'

The casket was divided into compartments by thin silver plates, and in the centre, embedded in some velvet-looking material, loose and rotten with age, was the afterwards far-famed Boravian diamond, which reft its unique honours from the 'Mountain of Light' itself, and splendidly shone forth in the Boravian regalia as the biggest and finest diamond in the world.

'My ivers! he's a whopper,' said Burch, as Standen took the stone from its resting-place, and it flashed and glittered in his hand. 'I reckon he's worth a mort o' money.'

'And here's the Ceylon ruby, and a huge sapphire,' Standen went on, replacing the diamond, and taking the other two stones from where they were set in a row in the casket

beside the great diamond. 'What a trio! Why, Jan, I don't know much about the value of gems, but there's enough here to make half a hundred fortunes, or I am very much mistaken.'

'Aw, lor, to think as they little pebbles be worth so much money; us could put mun all into wan big pocket,' said Burch. Standen did not answer him for a short while, for he was sorting the stones, and putting the diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, and rubies into their several compartments.

'Look here, Jan,' he said at last, shutting down the lid of the coffer after a last look at its bewildering contents. 'I remember you said "findings is keepings," but what on earth do you and I want with such fabulous wealth as this? Just think, man: this is only a part, and possibly a small part, of these treasures; they have been—so the parchment says—three hundred years in collecting, and that at a time when millions of money or money's worth was sent over to Spain in the galleons year after year. And then how are we to get it all away? or get rid of all this stuff for its money's worth?'

'What be goin' to dew wi' it, then?' asked Burch in a tone of surprise and disappointment. 'Us hev found thase treasures fair

enough, at the risk of wer lives : nor they don't belong to nobody, so fur as I can see.'

'Strictly speaking, Jan, the treasure belongs to the State.'

'A praper State!' cried Burch scornfully ; 'why they'm all to a rummage even now, and if so be as yew gives mun up to the State, these miserable little darkies will levant wi' the treasure, an' nobody won't never hear nother more of mun.'

'You don't think this of President da Piera?' asked Standen.

'Naw, sir, I dew believe as he's a honest man, so fur as that goes, but——'

'You believe, then, that he would act fairly by us?' asked Standen.

'Yes, I dew,' replied Burch ; ''tidn't he as I fear, 'tes those behind 'un.'

'Now, Burch,' said Standen impressively, 'I know more about the state of things out here than I can tell you just now. I know enough to see that this find, coming just at this nick of time, may be the salvation of the country.'

'Oh, darn the old country,' interrupted Burch ; 'they've a turned out the King, and the whole place belongs to a pack o' hungry thieving raskils.'

'Supposing this treasure were the means of

getting rid of this scum, and setting the King firmly on his throne again?' asked Standen, with a keen look at Burch.

'Twould be a gude job, for certain,' he answered; 'but wheer do us come in? I bean't more greedier nor most, but——'

'I tell you, Jan, that, even if there were nothing more than what we have here, our proper legal share of the treasure trove would be an immense fortune; and I should always feel like a thief if we kept all this fabulous wealth to ourselves. Hang it all, man, you don't want more than enough, do you?'

'Naw,' said Burch rather sulkily; 'but what do 'ee mane to dew, then?'

'Well, I am to see the President to-morrow at eleven, and I propose to take him into our confidence: to safeguard our interests we can keep possession of the bulk of these stones. I know all his plans, and I will get his permission to tell you what I know. You will then see what a godsend this find is to Boravia, and in the end we shall both be rich as Cræsus, and honest as the day to boot.'

'Well, sir, I ain't agen that,' said Burch; 'and I don't keer if you dew tell the gentleman, if so be as us kapes a tight 'and on the jools.'

'Then that's all right,' he said to Burch, with a sigh of relief. 'And now I shall turn in, for

there's ticklish work ahead of us, or I'm much mistaken.'

'Bean't 'ee a goin' on wi' the treasure job, then?' asked Burch disappointedly.

'Not to-night, Jan,' said Standen; 'I'm stiff and sore with last night's work, and stupid for want of sleep.'

'I'll hev another go in mezul then, if you've no objection,' said Burch.

'Do as you like, man: only I advise you to get a good night's rest; the stuff won't run away.'

John Burch shook his head, and, with a good-night to his chief, he left him, after seeing the silver casket and its precious contents securely locked up in Standen's bureau.

CHAPTER XXI

THE STORM BREAKS

IN the midst of all his anxieties and excitements, Standen did not forget the state of worry at home which his father's last letter had disclosed, and now that the treasure was really found, and with it the certainty of considerable wealth, he determined to let Dr. Standen know enough of his good fortune to ease his mind, and give him courage to face the future with a good heart. As soon, then, as he had finished his breakfast the next morning, he sat down at his bureau, and he had just succeeded in concocting a letter which he hoped would satisfy his father without letting him know too much—for, indeed, the secret was not his alone—when Burch came into the room before starting for his duties at the extension works.

'T'es all right, sir,' he said, coming close up to Standen, and speaking in a mysterious whisper. 'I had a good go in last night at the pit you was a digging of, and I soon come down on summat as you'll be glad to hear tell on: 'tes

the iron boxes as holds the gold dust and gold coins, I reckon. They'm one 'pin tap o' t'other, longer nor they are broad, and not very deep, but so heavy as lead. I be pretty strong, but 'twas as much as I could do to muve the one 'pin tap at all.'

'Well, Jan, that proves what I told you last night, and the jewel coffer is only part of an immense treasure. I hope you're reconciled now to letting the President into the secret, and us taking our legal share?'

'Aw, theer be enough and to spare for us all, for sartain,' replied Burch. 'Howsoever, I shouldn't say naught about the jools yet awhile; us can kape them till us sees how things be goin'.'

'All right, Jan,' he replied, as he rose from his chair, and folded up his letter. 'I must be off now; I suspect I shall have a lot to tell you to-night.'

Although it was early, for in the heat of Boravia work began betimes, there was the same stir and the same suppressed excitement in the streets of Santa Maria as Standen drove down to the office, and the faces of Wetherell and the rest of the staff wore a look of anxiety, while work seemed to be almost as much at a standstill here as it was at the extension.

'Things are no quieter, I fear,' said Standen,

as Wetherell followed him into his private office. 'No, sir, we didn't get much sleep here in the city last night,' replied Wetherell; 'there is not much in the papers, it is true, but the Press is gagged, for there were yells and shoutings going on all night; shots were heard too. They say many arrests have been made, and the prisons are full. It's a ghastly job, and I hope we shall get out of it with whole skins. I really think, sir, we ought to ask for some protection for the company's offices and works.'

'If it is as bad as you fear, we certainly ought, and I will try and see the President himself about it,' replied Standen, glad of an excuse for his visit to the Palace.

The hired tilbury in which Standen was seated had much difficulty in making its way through the surging mass of the people, as, towards eleven o'clock, he drove to the Palace, and he noticed that an evident change had come over the soldiers and the police, who, instead of attempting to keep order and to break up the groups round excited mob orators, seemed in some cases to be passively looking on, and in others to be plainly fraternising with the people.

As he got into the long wide street at whose end was the vast white Palace front, the mob became so thick that it was quite impossible

for the tilbury to get through, and Standen had to dismiss his driver and try to force his way on foot : and as he did not wish to get into collision with anyone, and so defeat his object in coming to the help of the family at the Palace, he could only make his way very slowly, edging on towards the closed gates with many apologies, and soft answers to angry opposers to his progress.

The air was thick with the shouts and cries of the opposing parties, and 'Viva Antonio Servetan!' 'Viva el Rey!' 'Muera el Presidente!' were answered by counter cries of 'Viva la Republica!' 'Viva el Presidente!' 'Mueren los traidores!' The din was deafening, and insults were followed by blows on every side until it seemed as if the mêlée would become general, and the excitement find its vent in a regular street fight between the opposing factions ; and as the Boravians for the most part carried knives, and many were armed with revolvers, the prospect was anything but encouraging to Standen as he slowly made his way through the pushing, shouting populace.

At last, and thoroughly exhausted by his long struggle in the torrid heat, he found himself closely jammed against the huge closed iron gates of the Palace. Through the bars of the gates he could see that the vast square in

front of the Palace was almost full of soldiers : cavalry, foot, and artillery were drawn up in orderly ranks, and evidently grimly ready for the worst. General d'Arentas, a short, thin man with quick black eyes, a dark skin, and snow-white moustache and hair, was in command, attended by his aides-de-camp.

Standen knew that this warlike array might easily mean the very opposite of safety to the people in the Palace : he knew that there was widespread disaffection in the troops, and that any moment they might turn upon their officers and declare for the King, while many, if not the majority, of the officers were themselves ripe for any change which would seem to give them a chance of getting their long deferred pay. And as these thoughts rapidly coursed through his brain, he was almost maddened to think that the Señorita should be in such imminent danger, and he, Standen, here, ready to give his very life for her, and kept from her by the envious but sufficiently substantial iron bars of the great Palace gates. Stolid and still the serried ranks of the soldiery stood at arms, listening apparently unmoved to the din of the shouting, struggling masses only separated from them by these gates, and deaf to the appeals made to them by both the Royalists and staunch Republicans in the heaving, surging mob ; and

Standen was wondering how long this state of things was going to last—for the Royalist party was thickly mustered round the gates, and already cries to force the gates were being raised—when there was a movement in the ranks, and as hoarse cries of command were heard, the lines of soldiers wheeled away from the wide steps of the Palace entrance, the doors swung open, and the President descended the steps, surrounded by a brilliant staff. Stopping half-way, Da Piera raised his hand, and addressed a few words to the troops, who responded with a general salute, and with cries of 'Viva el Presidente,' cries taken up enthusiastically by the Republicans in the mob. As he ceased speaking, and the cries died down into silence, the soldiers formed a sort of lane, down which the President slowly made his way, surrounded by his staff, towards the gates, with the evident intention of trying to pacify the mob.

'My God!' cried Standen to himself. 'What utter madness! He cannot know——' and as he was thus thinking, at a word from Da Piera, the great gates swung open, the lines of soldiers closed in behind him, and the multitude poured into the square of the Palace, carrying Standen with it in its first onrush. The President, however, knew well what he was about, and, as he had rightly surmised, the array

of cavalry and infantry, and the black mouths of the cannon pointed towards them, kept the mob in check, and in a short time the cries with which they had rushed forward quieted down, and a grim, expectant silence settled on the scene.

Again the President raised his hand, and his voice rang out clearly: 'People of Boravia,' he began, 'I am only here by your voice, elected by you President of this Republic. I have already called a session of the National Assembly, and if——' but as he came to this word the still quietness of the scene was suddenly broken by the sharp quick sound of a gunshot, and in a moment President da Piera, uttering a stifled cry, staggered and fell back into the arms of his aide-de-camp, who ran swiftly towards his chief as he saw him wavering.

CHAPTER XXII

THE PRESIDENT'S WOUND

THAT there was much disaffection in the Boravian army was well known to the authorities, and there were plain reasons for believing that at any moment the troops might revolt and declare for the King, a movement Da Piera had been secretly working for for some time. Indeed, he had at last, and after much hesitation, placed himself entirely in the hands of General Porfirio d'Arentas, the War Minister, who had been once a personal friend of the President's, and who was known to be not too strongly attached to the Republic. So popular was he, however, with the soldiery that it was impossible to ignore his claims without provoking strong feeling, both on the part of officers and men, and thus it was that he held his important position, much against the wish of the Republican majority in the House of Deputies. He was, however, most jealously watched, and there were many Government spies in his *entourage*.

President da Piera had succeeded in getting

at D'Arentas' real mind after a good deal of fencing. The stormy state of the political atmosphere had precipitated matters, and, only the night before, a long and secret interview had taken place between the President and the Minister of War. Porfirio d'Arentas was astounded at the President's attitude, for Da Piera had been elected by an overwhelming majority, and D'Arentas had regarded him as a renegade whose ambition had conquered his feelings of friendship and loyalty to the King, and rendered him callous to everything but his own advancement. It needed, then, strong proofs on Da Piera's part to convince D'Arentas that this apparently sudden change of front was not a trap, and not until he had read an autograph letter from Dom Francisco himself to Da Piera did the General believe in the President's sincerity.

Once, however, convinced of Da Piera's loyalty, he threw aside all reserve, and, as he discussed the whole position from a Royalist point of view, he was more than surprised to find how deeply the President was in the King's confidence, and how earnestly he desired the King's return. As to the army, D'Arentas assured the President that it was largely a matter of money. Already there was talk of disbanding should the deferred pay not be forthcoming: the

Treasury was almost in a state of collapse, and both the President and the Minister of War shuddered to think of what the state of their unhappy country would be were these hungry, destitute hordes of armed men let loose on the community ; and they were both agreed that the troops would welcome any change which would ensure them their deferred pay, and regular pay in the future. Of this fact Porfirio d'Arentas had already—so he now told Da Piera—informed the King. But where to get the money was a question neither of them could answer, for the Republic of Boravia was almost in a bankrupt state, and neither the royal families in Europe with whom Dom Francisco was nearly connected, nor the great banking houses, would advance a single penny on such a risky business as the restoration of the Boravian monarchy.

Nothing, then, could have been more inopportune than the unlucky shot which had struck, and for the moment disabled, the President, for, almost before the sound of it had died away, all hopes of the troops declaring for the King were vanished ; for, regarding the shot as an act of defiance on the part of the mob, the whole force of the soldiery, both horse and foot, without waiting for any word of command, charged the seething mass of the populace, who

fled panic-stricken, leaving—a gruesome sight, —many dead and wounded on the ground.

Standen, who had been in the forefront of the crowd, and not far from the group which had surrounded the President, had rushed forward the moment the shot was heard, and almost before Da Piera fell he was close beside him, unnoticed in the sudden confusion.

The President was in a half-fainting condition, supported by his aide-de-camp; and an army surgeon, who got to the group surrounding him at the same moment with Standen, quickly found out the extent of his injuries.

‘The bullet has gone right through the fleshy part of the forearm,’ he said, as with his scissors he deftly ripped up the coat-sleeve.

Just then the President recovered himself, and, shaking himself free from the surgeon and the officer, he stood up, looking out on to the square before him, still in a dazed state.

‘My God!’ he muttered, as he saw the space in front of him, a few minutes ago densely packed with an expectant multitude, and now empty save for the still bodies of the dead and the writhing forms of the wounded. ‘My God!’ and then, as full consciousness returned to him, and he realised the state of affairs, ‘I must go at once into the city,’ he cried, ‘and stop this terrible bloodshed.’ But even as he spoke and

took a quick step forward, he stumbled and almost fell, for the blood was pouring from the wound in his arm.

'Excellency,' said the surgeon, taking hold of the wounded arm, 'you can't do anything. General d'Arentas has already gone after the troops, and if you don't have your wound attended to at once I cannot answer for the consequences. You will bleed to death.'

There was no need for him to use any more threatenings or persuasions, for Da Piera fell back in Standen's arms, and lay there unconscious, fainting from loss of blood.

The President's daughter and Miss Dodds had been watching the scene from an upper balcony in the Palace, and, although Da Piera had assured them over and over again that there was no danger, and that a few words from him would soon induce the people to disperse quietly, they were looking on at the angry multitude and listening to the hoarse shouts and cries with beating hearts. The pride, then, with which Lois saw the noble figure of her father advancing alone, and facing the crowd, and marked the sudden hush which greeted his appearance, was not unmixed with fear, and a cry of horror and anguish escaped her as she heard the sudden sound of the shot, and saw the President stagger and fall back.

Followed by her aunt, she rushed quickly to her father's help, and she got across the wide square and reached his side just as he fell for the second time.

'Father! my dearest father! They have killed him,' she cried breathlessly, as she knelt down by his side, and, seizing his right hand, she kissed it and stroked it fondly.

'Calm yourself, Señorita,' said the surgeon, who was rapidly making a tourniquet with his handkerchief; 'the President is not dead, thanks to God: he has fainted from loss of blood. We must get him into the Palace at once: he will be as well as ever in a few days, I doubt not.'

'Oh, God be thanked! God be thanked!' said Lois, in a tone of intense gratitude. 'I thought that he was dead,' and the sudden revulsion of feeling forced the tears into her eyes.

And, indeed, Da Piera presented a woeful spectacle as he lay on the blood-stained ground, his head supported on Standen's knee, his face white and wan, his eyes closed, and his garments all covered with the blood from his wound.

Assisted by Lois and the aide-de-camp, for Miss Dodds seemed stupefied, and stood by uttering incoherent words and wringing her hands, the surgeon soon stopped the flow of

the blood, and, rising from his knees, he looked around for some means of getting his patient to the Palace.

The artillerymen had left their guns and joined in the rush on the mob, and the whole square was deserted save for the pitiful figures on the ground and a frightened group of black servants who were huddled together and chattering vociferously in the *porte-cochère* in front of the Palace.

'One of the long cane chairs from the verandah,' said Lois quickly, speaking to Standen, and she took his place, tenderly resting her father's head in her lap as she knelt down.

Standen nodded, and hastening across the square, and beckoning to the little crowd of servants in the porch the while, he soon reassured them as to the President's safety, and returned with some of the men carrying the chair; and in a very short time the melancholy procession was formed, the servants carrying their master, and Lois walking by his side and holding his hand, Standen and the surgeon following with Miss Dodds, who still hardly seemed to realise what she was doing, and stumbled on in a dazed state in the wake of the others.

Lois had no eyes for anyone save her

father, who seemed to be recalled to life by the movement ; and the surgeon assuring him that there really was no danger, Standen felt that his further presence savoured of intrusion, and after soothing Miss Dodds's fears, and getting her into something like a sensible frame of mind, he shook hands with that lady, and, with a valedictory nod to the aide-de-camp, he turned back as soon as he had seen the President safely carried into the Palace.

CHAPTER XXIII

A LULL

As Standen recrossed the square the anxious friends of the dead and wounded had already crept fearfully back from the rout, and their grief-stricken cries mingled with the moanings of the hurt and dying. It was a harrowing sight, and though he was full of anxiety as to the safety of Wetherell and the staff at the office, he could not resist the piteous appeals with which the air resounded, and he was soon busily employed in carrying water to the sufferers, at the risk of a sunstroke, too, for there was nothing for it but for him to fill and refill the soft felt hat he had been wearing, and, bare-headed in the broiling heat, to carry the water from the great fountain in the middle of the square to the wounded citizens. Soon, too, a number of vehicles drove into the square, and Standen was helping to raise one of the last of the dead bodies into a cart, when he heard his name called, and, quickly turning round, he saw Burch, whose face was streaming with perspira-

tion, and who was almost breathless with the haste with which he had run to seek his chief.

'My ivers! but I be glad for tew see 'ee,' he panted out as he grasped Standen's hand; 'but you bean't hurted, be 'ee?' he asked anxiously. And well might he ask, for Standen was a terrible sight—his clothes and his hands all stained with blood, some from the President and some from the wounded and dead he had been helping and lifting, while his face was white with heat and fatigue.

'No, I'm all right, thank God,' said Standen, 'or I shall be when I've got rid of all this horrible mess.'

'Do 'ee come home to once, sir,' said Burch, hailing a tilbury which was going away empty the last of the wounded having been carried off. 'You'll hev the faver, for certain. Aw, I be glad for to see 'ee alive——'

'I can't go home yet, Jan,' said Standen, as he wearily walked towards the carriage. 'I must go to the office. Heaven only knows what has happened there.'

'T'es all right, sir,' said Burch: 'I've only just come from theer. I runned off theer so soon as us heard of this barney at the works. They was just a coming to seek 'ee. Measter Wetherell—ah, here be they two young gentlemen,' and, as he spoke, two of the juniors from

the office hurried up, nearly as relieved as Burch himself to see their chief safe and sound.

'We could not get away before,' explained one of them; 'the street was blocked from end to end. The soldiers are simply mad, slashing into the people with their swords, and shots flying in every direction. As soon as we heard of the President's death——'

'He is not dead. I left him only a short while ago in the surgeon's hands—a shot wound in the arm. He will soon be all right again,' said Standen.

'Why, they were all yelling out that Da Piera was assassinated,' said the young man. 'Well, we got away as soon as we could, for Mr. Wetherell was in a terrible way about you, sir.'

'I'm just going to the office,' said Standen.

'Axing your pardon for meddlin', and mekin' so bold,' said Burch, 'but 'tes all right theer, as these two young gentlemen can tell 'ee, and you'm not fit for nothen but a bath and a bade.'

The young men chimed in with Burch, and at last persuaded Standen to let the driver turn his horse's head towards the Quinta de los Mangos.

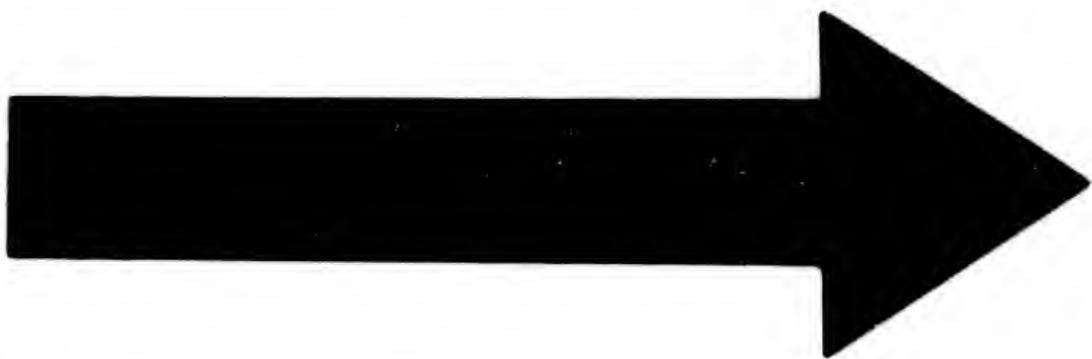
''T'es a pretty old caper, this,' remarked Burch, as they drove through the now deserted streets, and saw how the windows along their

route were all closely barred. 'I only hope as these murderin' raskils hev'n't tooked it into their heads to stick up the Quinta: theer's all them jools in your desk, sir.'

'It isn't likely they'd get out so far as that,' said Standen wearily, for he felt half-dead with the heat and the fatigue.

'I bean't so sure about that,' said Burch; 'they've got a down on us Britishers in both parties, and I did hear as some of them hev attacked the Embassy. Lend a man money and make an enemy of him, as the sayin' is, and these Boravians owes us more than all the rest putt together.'

Burch's fears, however, proved to be ungrounded. The disturbances in the city had evidently not reached the quiet suburb in which was the Quinta de los Mangos, and they found Oliver and his family going on in the ordinary course, apparently but little troubled by the excitement in Santa Maria. Standen's wan and blood-stained appearance, however, struck terror into the old butler, who appeared at the head of the steps at the sound of the wheels of the tilbury. His master left Burch to answer his many questions, and made his way to his room, whence he soon emerged with all the signs of the day's events removed, save only the lassitude and weariness.



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'Tidn't much use me going to the works,' said Burch the next morning; 'none o' they naygurs won't turn up. They'm all so mad as hatters, and not a stitch of work'll be doed till all this rumpus be over, wan way or t'other. I seem I'll bide home an' have a gude go in at the treasure, if so be as the watter'll let me: 'tes going to be a long job, that theer.'

'So do, Jan,' said Standen, who was looking as fit and as strong as ever after a good night's rest.

Standen, in truth, had hardly heard what Burch was saying, so full of thought and anxiety was he. His first duty was to the Santa Maria Waterworks Company, and Sir George Graves had made no mistake in appointing his *protégé* to his important position, for in the midst of all these various excitements he did not for one instant forget his responsibility, and, though his heart and mind were full of the thought of Lois da Piera, and though the dangers in front of her and her father were constantly before him and impelled him almost irresistibly to make his way as quickly as he could to the Palace, yet he fought against this overmastering desire, and drove as quickly as he could to the scene of his duties.

He was reassured to see a sort of lull in the state of affairs in the city, for, though here and

there barred windows showed the apprehensions of the more timid, for the most part the streets presented almost their normal appearance, and the only evidences of the rioting of the day before were the smashed jalousies in many of the houses and the unusual number of police and soldiers patrolling the streets.

'Well, sir,' said Wetherell, who was looking as stout and as genial as ever; 'it's all over but the shouting. The soldiers made a clean sweep of it yesterday, and there isn't going to be a revolution this time: and a precious good job for us here, I can tell you. I suppose you've heard about the Embassy?'

'Burch told me of some rumours——'

'Rumours!' interrupted Wetherell. 'It was a precious narrow squeak. The soldiers only just got there in time yesterday: if they had been a few minutes later the mob would have wrecked the place and murdered the whole crew, and then we should have had gunboats to the fore, and all the rest of it. A precious narrow squeak.'

'Any news of the President?' asked Standen, taking up a paper, and with an assumed carelessness which he was very far from feeling.

'Oh, he's all right. Got a hole in his arm; lost a lot of blood. Best thing that could happen that fellow shooting him: it's turned the army

round to him, for I hear they had half a mind to declare for the King.'

'I'm glad it's no worse,' said Standen ; and as all seemed quiet enough, and things were evidently gradually settling down to their ordinary routine at the office, as soon as he had got through the more urgent of the business matters which had awaited him he left the place, and, hailing a tilbury, made his way to the Palace.

CHAPTER XXIV

STANDEN'S GOOD NEWS

ALL traces of the previous day's fatal disturbances were removed already, and the Palace and its surroundings showed no tokens of the rioting, save that a squad of black employés was busily engaged in scraping and sweeping the gravel in the great square, whistling and singing unconcernedly the while.

There was a bulletin posted on one of the outer columns of the *porte-cochère*, informing the public that 'H. E. the President had passed a good night, and was going on well;' and as Standen was reading this the major-domo came forward, and, greeting him politely, told him that His Excellency would see him. All the servants at the Palace were devoted to their master, who was kindness and courtesy itself, and it was evident that the major-domo was grateful to Standen for his timely help of the day before.

The bright and happy look in Lois da Piera's face, as she came into the room into

which Standen was shown, was evidence enough that the bulletin told the truth.

'I never thanked you yesterday,' she said as she shook hands; 'but I do thank you now from my heart. It was so good and brave of you to run forward to my father's help.'

'It did not want much bravery to do that,' returned Standen with a smile; 'indeed, if I had stayed where I was I might have got a shrewd slash from one of your little Boravian soldiers.'

'Ah, but you did not know that,' she persisted; 'you only thought of him.'

Standen had an idea that the thought of the entrancing person before him might have had something to do with his movements of yesterday, but he had the sense to keep his thoughts to himself.

'It was his heart they aimed at,' she went on, with a shudder. 'The bullet went through his left arm: it was close to his side. I—I thought he was killed,' and the tears welled up in the dark eyes as the memory of the terrible scene came over her.

'Thank God, Señorita, he is safe,' said Standen. 'I had a letter from him: he wanted to see me, and I was trying to get to the Palace when the mob stopped me. I thought it must be some danger to you and to Miss Dodds that

he wished to see me about ; but all danger must be over now——

'I do not care for anything now that my dear father is safe,' she said, interrupting him ; 'but, indeed, the danger is not over, for—but hush—hush,' she whispered as Miss Dodds came into the room.

All traces of yesterday's excitement were gone from Miss Dodds's face, upon which, indeed, an expression of pleased contentment shone, for Miss Dodds was a born nurse, and, while she was truly sorry for the President's wound, and grateful that he had escaped with his life, at the same time this opportunity to exercise her natural gifts brought her a satisfaction she could not disguise, and indeed proved a perfect god-send to all concerned, for in her excessive and somewhat irksome care of her patient she had so much to engross her that the dangers and troubles ahead came upon her quite unexpectedly, and the plans of the President and Lois and Standen were not embarrassed by the suspicions and fears of the ultra-timid woman.

'We can never be thankful enough to you, Mr. Standen,' she said as she came into the room. 'I saw you from the balcony, running to his help in the face of the crowd : indeed, that is the last thing I did see, for, what with the horrible fear of being murdered, and the running

down the stairs, and along the passage, and across the square, in the heat, I was so upset that I hardly know anything about it. It's a terrible place—so different from what it was when my dear father, Sir Luttrell, was Ambassador and the dear King—— But I must not forget my message. The President would like to see you. I told him he must keep quiet, and not talk or excite himself, but he will see you—and I don't wonder, for he wants to thank you; but you will, I know, be careful not to let him talk too much,' and as she went on in her usual rambling way she led Standen to the President's room, and left him at the door, satisfied with his reiterated assurances that he would be careful with her patient.

The jalousies were all closed, and the room was very dark, for the heat was intense, and everything was done to keep the wounded man as cool as possible. Da Piera was lying in a *chaise longue*, propped up with pillows, and with his arm in a sling, and as soon as Standen's eyes became used to the half-light he noticed how deadly pale the President was, and how brightly his dark eyes gleamed in the white setting of his face.

'I cannot rise,' said Da Piera, as Standen came up to his couch. 'It is all nonsense, I think, for, save feeling weak, I am as well

as ever I was,' and he held out his hand to Standen.

'I am only glad it is no worse,' said Standen, as he drew up a chair close to the President. 'It seemed to me to be touch and go yesterday, and at one time I feared the mob would rush the soldiers in the Palace Square, and then God only knows what would have happened. Everything now, however, seems to have quieted down, and I hope we have seen the last of the *émeute*, though the Señorita is still nervous.'

'Ah, and with reason,' said Da Piera; 'and that is why I wanted to see you. Nothing could have been worse for us than that unlucky shot. From the very day of the late King's forced abdication I have devoted my life, my means, and all my powers to the restoration of the monarchy, not only from personal affection for his son Dom Francisco, but also because it means, I am convinced, the salvation of my unhappy country. It is with this end in view alone, as I told you before, that I have plunged into the muddy waters of Boravian politics, and, through means I hate to think of, have at last got to the Presidential chair. And now, just at the moment when everything was in train, and D'Arentas and I had come to a clear understanding—when, as he assured me, only money

was wanted to get the troops over to the King's side—this unhappy shot has upset everything, and the chicanery, the bribing, and the false pretences must begin all over again,' and the President paused, and seemed sunk in gloomy thoughts.

'I can't quite see matters as you do,' said Standen at last. 'It was the defiance of the shot that exasperated the troops: the position was strained and tense, and in a moment, and without thinking, they charged the mob, shooting down and sabring Republicans and Royalists alike.'

'But the troops were on the side of the Government,' said Da Piera, 'and this will be known by now, not only through all the States of Boravia, but all over the world. Dom Francisco has been already told by D'Arentas that the army only waits its pay to come over to the King's side, and already the King and his friends in Europe are doubtless using this fact to raise the necessary funds, and the news of yesterday's events will give the lie to D'Arentas, and everything will be stopped. We can do nothing, of course, without the army, and not a sou can be raised in Europe after this fiasco.'

'Do you think, if the necessary funds were forthcoming, that the army might still be won over?' asked Standen.

'I do most certainly think so,' replied the President. 'Both officers and men are sick to death of the promises of the Republic, promises for which, in my extraordinary position, I am held responsible; and money I must have, for, if some part of the back pay be not forthcoming, the army will disband, as I warned you before, and the whole country be reduced to anarchy. Was ever man in such a position? The King, D'Arentas, and you alone know the truth: not even Dom Francisco's most trusted friends are in the secret, which was kept from D'Arentas himself until the very last moment,' and again the President lapsed into a gloomy silence.

'If it is only money that is wanted, Señor da Piera,' said Standen, 'it is waiting for you.'

'Waiting for me? Good God, man, do you know what you are saying?' exclaimed the President, rising in his chair, and staring at Standen as if he thought him mad. 'Why, every device has been tried: my own estates have been mortgaged to the last penny, the country is bankrupt, and you say the money is waiting for me!' and he sank back exhausted in his chair, still staring at Standen.

'I am perfectly sane, and I know what I am saying. The money is waiting for you, and moreover, it is Boravian money. Do you

remember,' he hastily continued, making a deprecatory movement with his hand as the President again rose and began to speak, 'do you remember speaking to me about the treasures of the Jesuits?'

'The treasures of the Jesuits?' repeated Da Piera. 'Why, you don't mean to say——'

'Indeed, then, I do,' said Standen excitedly. 'The treasures are found. Burch and I have found them, through what chances and adventures I will tell you another time; but they are there, in a cave in the Monte de la Capilla—wealth incalculable—gold dust, coins, and precious stones.'

'My God, it cannot be true,' muttered the President. 'I must be dreaming.'

'I tell you, sir, solemnly, that the treasures are there, and, to convince you that I am not romancing, see here,' and he handed the President the Great Diamond.

CHAPTER XXV

A WAY OUT OF THE DIFFICULTY

As soon as Standen had placed the precious stone in the President's hand he went to the window and opened a small crack in the jalousies: a thin ray of the sun pierced the gloom of the chamber, and in its light the marvellous gem sparkled brilliantly from its many facets.

Da Piera was for the moment dumbfounded at the obviously immense value of the diamond, and he seemed fascinated by its glinting and gleaming.

'Remember,' said Standen, who was regarding him curiously, 'this is only one, though it is by far the most valuable of these treasures. There are hundreds of other stones—diamonds, rubies, sapphires, and emeralds—to say nothing of the hoards of coin and gold dust,' and as he spoke he drew the Superior of the Jesuits' parchment from his pocket, and, marking the list of the treasures with his finger, he handed the discoloured and ancient document to the

President. At this moment a knock at the door recalled Da Piera to himself, and, hastily thrusting the stone into his pocket, and letting the document fall to the ground on the side of his chair furthest from the door, he called out to the person knocking, to enter, and, the door opening, the substantial form of Miss Dodds appeared on the threshold.

'I am sorry to interrupt you, Hilario,' she said as she came into the room; 'but the doctor's orders are strict, you know, and you were to be kept very quiet. It is time, too, for you to take your medicine. I am sure Mr. Standen will excuse you.'

'Oh, he has done me a world of good already,' said Da Piera, with a meaning smile at Standen. 'We shall not be very much longer. By the way,' he went on, as he handed back the emptied medicine measure, 'will you please send Lois to me? There is a letter I want her to write for me. She is my amanuensis now that I am *hors de combat*,' he explained to Standen.

Miss Dodds protested volubly, and with uplifted hands, at such disobedience to the doctor's orders, but Da Piera persisted, and, with vigorous shakings of the head, the worthy lady at last retired to do her brother-in-law's bidding.

'Miss Dodds knows nothing of the state of

affairs here,' explained the President. 'I believe she would go out of her mind with fear if she did; but my daughter knows all. She is a sensible girl, and by no means timid, and, in fact, I have had to tell her everything, for the two ladies may be forced to flee from the Palace at any moment.'

'Good heavens, it surely cannot be as bad as that now,' cried Standen.

'Indeed, then, it is,' replied Da Piera grimly, as he took up the dropped paper from the floor. 'I cannot trust a soul here. I have reason to believe that some suspicions concerning me are already aroused. There are spies everywhere, and if the cry of treason to the Republic were started my life would not be worth an hour's purchase.'

As he finished speaking, and before Standen could reply, the latter's heart gave a bound as the door softly opened, and the tall and slender form of his beloved came into the room.

'Dearest father,' she said, as she came up and kissed him. Through the slight opening in the jalousie the sun struck across the *chaise longue*, and the President's face was clearly seen in the light.

'Why, dearest,' she exclaimed in a tone of glad surprise, 'you look so much better and brighter. Auntie and I were afraid your long

talk with Mr. Standen would fatigue you, and I have strict injunctions to get rid of you, sir, as soon as I can,' and she smiled as she looked at Standen. 'But you have done good instead of harm.'

'See here, Lois,' said the President; 'this is a sample of the kind of medicine Mr. Standen has been giving me,' and he took the diamond from his pocket, and handed it to his daughter.

Lois da Piera had all a woman's love for beautiful gems, and an expression of surprised delight escaped her as she turned the magnificent stone about in her fingers.

'Oh, father,' she cried, 'it is surely priceless—the most splendid diamond in the whole world! Why, wherever did you get such a magnificent stone from?' and she turned to Standen.

'And that is not all, Lois,' said her father, as he held up the parchment. 'Listen here,' and he read out the list of the treasures, with a fond lingering over the details of this immense hoard of wealth.

'But—but—what does it all mean?' she cried, as her father finished reading the list.

'Why, my darling, it means the salvation of Boravia; it means the restoration of our King; it means peace and plenty and prosperity to our country. But let Mr. Standen tell you: we owe it all to him,' and he lay back on his couch

with an expression of keen delight on his face, as Standen, nothing loth, unfolded to the Señorita the whole story of his and Burch's adventures in the finding of the treasures of the Jesuits.

Da Piera did not lie back for long, however, for, as Standen rapidly went on with his story, he soon shared the excitement of his daughter at the discovery of the passage, at Burch's narrow escape, and at the finding of the pillared treasure chamber and the silver box of jewels.

'By the way,' said Standen, when he came to this part of the narration, 'I shall get into friend Burch's black books. I was to keep the "jools," as he calls them, as a sort of pledge. Indeed, I verily believe he more than half wanted to keep the whole vast pile to himself and me, though what he would do with such immense wealth is a curious question.'

'He need not be afraid,' said the President, 'the finders' share will be riches enough and to spare if this parchment tells the truth; and the King and I will surely see that neither you nor he are defrauded.'

'There is much to be done yet,' said Standen, when he had finished his tale. 'Burch tells me that the iron boxes of gold dust are too heavy for even him to move. There is much treasure still

buried in the chamber, and one can only work when the tide is out. It is likely to be a long affair; and, even when we have laid all the treasure bare, there is the getting it away.'

'No one must know but the King,' said Da Piera, 'for you can easily guess what would happen if any hints of the treasure got about; and there are people always searching for it, even now. No, there is nothing for it that I can see but for you to go on as you have begun, and when it is all ready we must devise some means of getting it out of the cave,' and the President paused, and thought for a while over the problem.

'I have it!' he exclaimed, at last breaking the silence that had fallen on the little party. 'The man-of-war! The treasure chamber gives on to the sea. Now the King of Asturia, Dom Francisco's uncle, will help with all his power to restore him to his throne: it is only the utter hopelessness of things that is holding him back. Indeed, he may be stirring even now: D'Arentas' news of the army will have reassured him. I must see D'Arentas at once!' he cried, remembering himself. 'Lois, ring the bell, there's not a moment to lose. Good heavens! in all this excitement of the treasure I have let the time slip by——'

As he was thus confusedly speaking the

black footman came in and an equerry was sent with an urgent message to the Minister of War.

'D'Arentas must be told that the pay is ready for the troops, though how I am to explain I cannot tell. However, it will come. Some story must be devised: set your keen wits to work, Lois.'

'The gold dust can easily be converted into cash here,' said Standen: 'it is always being brought into the city from the mines of Parania.'

'Yes, yes—but such a weight as will be wanted,' interrupted Da Piera impatiently.

'Then the stones, father; some of the Boravian diamonds can be sold without suspicion. And as to General D'Arentas,' she went on, 'the European mail came in yesterday; could you not——'

'Of course—how was it I did not think of it? You are right, my dear, and indeed I have a letter from Dom Francisco's agents in London—the usual recital of hopeless negotiations, delays, and so forth. The end must justify the means for once, and this dismal letter must contain advices of large money help;' and the troubled look faded out of the President's face as these ways out of the intricate affair presented themselves.

'But the man-of-war, sir?' queried Standen; 'you were saying——'

'Ah, yes, it was about getting the money away. The King of Asturia will put a man-of-war at the absolute disposal of Dom Francisco as soon as he is assured of any possibility of his restoration, and you may be certain it will not be long now before the King of Boravia is on his way to his kingdom; and, can't you see? the bulk of the treasure can be put aboard, and in the end taken to Europe, and disposed of there. But D'Arentas will be here in a few moments, and we must avoid even the appearance of suspicion. So, sir,' and he turned to Standen, 'you must not be seen here with the President. I shall leave you to discuss the getting rid of some of the gold and the stones with my daughter. I must think hard, for I cannot trust even D'Arentas. Your news has put new life and hope into a desperate and miserable man,' he added with emotion, as he shook hands heartily with Standen, who followed Lois da Piera out of the room, his mind full of joy at the turn things had taken, and also of hope that the treasure trove might bring him what he valued more than all the gold of Golconda or the diamonds of Boravia—viz. the hand of the President's daughter.

CHAPTER XXVI

BETTER THAN DIAMONDS AND GOLD

THE memory of the last interview in the Botanical Gardens, when Miss Dodds had interrupted what was perilously near a declaration on Standen's part, was present in both their minds as Lois da Piera led the way to her own private sanctum, and a sense of restraint and confusion was upon them both as Lois seated herself and motioned to Standen to follow her example. For a moment or two there was an embarrassed silence between the two, and Standen was looking earnestly at her, and thinking how lovely she was, as, with downcast eyes and the long silken lashes showing against her slightly flushed cheeks, she avoided his ardent gaze.

'We can never be grateful enough to you,' she said at last, raising her eyes and flashing at him a glance which thrilled him with a nameless delight. 'Your prompt help to my dear father in his danger yesterday—and now this

wonderful discovery, and all that it means—why, it seems fated that you should be our good genius.'

'Indeed, I have done nothing,' said Standen rising impulsively and coming over to her side, for he was intoxicated with the girl's beauty and scarcely knew what he was doing. 'I would give up my life for you,' he cried, trying to take her hand.

A warm flush suffused her face and neck, as in much confusion she waved him back. 'But you do not know what this means to my father,' she went on, somewhat haltingly, for she could not but see Standen's agitation, and she had a curious sense of apprehension at the declaration she felt to be trembling on his lips. 'His whole life is given up to the King's cause, and all seemed so dark and hopeless——'

But Standen was not to be denied: the nearness of the girl he adored so passionately, the subtle fragrance of her presence, took from him all prudence and all hesitation, and, despite a nervous shrinking on her part, and a shy drawing back, he seized her hand, and, bending down he dared passionately to kiss it.

'Lois,' he said, in low tones of suppressed excitement, 'I can bear it no longer. I must tell you how you are all my life to me. I think

of you all day, I dream of you at night—dearest, I dare to love you with all my heart and soul. Ah, look up and let me see that you forgive my presumption——'

But the beautiful girl was silent, though her bosom was heaving with the quick, agitated beatings of her heart, and she still looked away from him, though he held her hand in a firm, warm clasp.

'You do not love me,' he said at last, in a tone of deep despondency. 'Ah, why should you? How could I dare to think—— But, Señorita, at least forgive one who would gladly die for you, and whose life now——'

Lois had withdrawn her hand from his, and had covered her burning face, and as Standen was thus distractedly craving her forgiveness, a sob escaped her, and he saw the tears coming through her slender fingers.

'Ah, what have I done!' he cried remorsefully. 'I cannot bear to see you in this trouble! Would to God I had not spoken! Señorita, I will leave you—be assured that I will never again presume——'

But as he turned to go, in great agitation, another sob broke from the girl, and as he hesitated to leave her, and was earnestly looking at her, a slight sign with her hand caused him to stay, and almost made his

heart stop beating with the sudden revulsion of joy.

'Dare I hope?' he cried, as he swiftly came close to her again. But he did not need any answer in words, for Lois rose from her chair as he drew near, and, with a look of love which Standen never forgot to his dying day, she tottered and fell into the warm embrace of her lover, who held her tightly clasped, as if no power on earth or in heaven should part them, and showered kisses on face and hair and lips, murmuring soothing words of comfort and of love the while.

It is to be feared that the disposal of the gems and gold dust of the treasures did not get on very far that morning. Standen could scarcely realise that all the hopes and fears of the last few months were turned to joyous certainties, and it seemed as if the few lover's privileges which Lois's coyness after her first abandon—of which, indeed, she had a naïve sense of shame—allowed him were not enough to assure him of the fulness of his happiness, and she had with many a blush, and shy words spoken with averted looks, to tell him more than once that she did love him, Standen, before he could come to his senses, and discuss matters with his newly betrothed in a coherent manner.

'But what will the President say?' he

asked at last, not unnaturally anxious on this all-important point. 'I shall, of course, speak to him at once, and Heaven only knows how he will take it.'

'He likes you so well, and now he is so grateful to you, Mr. St——'

'My friends usually call me Jack,' said Standen with a smile.

'Well, Jack, then,' she said, flushing adorably, so that Standen was forced—but, indeed, the transports of lovers are interesting only to themselves, and may safely be left to the imagination of others.

'I am not sure that father does not already think that you—that I—ah, well, Jack dear, I may tell you that ever since that meeting of ours in the Gardens, and indeed before that, my aunt, who is a most romantic person, you must know, and a great admirer of Mr. Standen, has been making my life a burden to me with her hints and questions and innuendoes. So I expect that the President of Boravia, great man as he is, will not be so formidable, after all. But seriously, Jack, what should you fear? Particularly now, when, as you know, we owe everything to you. Why, with these treasures you are a most eligible *parti*, and perhaps poor Lois da Piera may have to wear the willow?'

But that there was no chance of the President's daughter coming to such a dismal fate was plainly shown by Standen's immediate actions.

During a slight pause in the conversation, the deep booming of the great Palace clock was heard as it struck twelve.

'Twelve o'clock,' exclaimed Lois. 'How the time has passed,' and she gave a sigh of great contentment. 'Now, Jack, you really must go,' she went on. 'Father is sure to be wanting me if, as I expect, General D'Arentas has left him. You know he cannot leave his room, and there is so much to be done and seen to.'

'There!' she cried, 'that is his bell. Do not write to him or see him until you have heard from me,' and with a tender embrace the two parted, Lois to her father's room and Standen to the office.

'Why, Lois, what have you been about?' said the President impatiently. 'The General has gone long ago, and you know I—— My dear girl, what is the matter?' And no wonder he asked, for with eyes suffused with tears, and with tremulous lips, his daughter had come close to his couch, and, going down upon her knees, she put her arms round her father's neck, and hid her face in his breast. 'My dear girl, my dear girl, why, what——'

'Oh, father,' she murmured in broken tones, 'I have no one but you, no dear mother to tell it to—and—oh, will you be angry with me?'

'My darling, tell your father what has moved you so. I cannot be angry with you, and that you know,' said the mystified President, himself deeply moved, and very anxious withal at his daughter's emotion.

'It is about Mr. St—about Jack,' she whispered. 'He—he has——'

'Oh, is that the secret,' said Da Piera, smiling in some relief at Lois's halting words; and he gently unwound her arms from his neck, and with his whole hand he put her from him a little, so that he might look her in the face. 'You forget my wounded arm,' he said in playful reproach.

'Oh, father dear,' she cried, 'have I hurt you? I did not mean——'

'There is not much damage done,' said the President laughing. 'I expect this business of yours is a far more serious affair. No, Lois, dear,' he went on more earnestly, 'you need not be afraid of me, darling. Indeed, I am not altogether blind, and, if I were, your aunt seems to be clear-sighted enough in such matters, and you may be sure she has not left me in the dark.'

‘Then you do not mind—you are not sorry?’ asked Lois, clasping her hands and looking with all her soul in her eyes at her father.

‘My dear,’ he said very seriously, ‘I am glad. I like Standen well: there is no one to whom I would rather confide my daughter; and in all the troubles which I fear are only too surely in front of us it will be an inexpressible relief to me to know that there is an honest, manly fellow with a right to see to your safety.’

Even in the midst of her joy at her father’s ready consent a thrill of fear went through her heart at his words—fear, not for herself, but for the father who was so dear to her.

‘Oh, father,’ she said, ‘is there any new danger, then? I thought that this treasure of Jack’s was going to make everything right.’

‘I trust it will in the end, Lois; right for our country, for Boravia, but—well, dear, I know how brave you are, and I must tell you,’ and the President paused and suffered his hand to wander over the dusky tendrils of his daughter’s hair as she knelt beside him, leaning against his shoulder.

‘General D’Arentas brought bad news, Lois,’ he said at last. ‘What I have feared all along has begun to come to pass. I cannot tell how it has got about, careful and more than careful as I have been, but there are spies

everywhere,' and he paused again, leaving his daughter in a very fever of apprehension.

'You know, dear,' he went on, 'that if the cry of treason to the Republic is raised against me, my life is not worth a day's—nay, an hour's purchase, and D'Arentas tells me that ominous whispers are already going about. There was a stormy scene in the House of Deputies last night about the riot, and you know how many enemies I have there——'

'But the soldiers were on your side—on the side of the Government,' interrupted his daughter, who was intently listening to him.

'True, and it is a safeguard for the moment,' he went on. 'But D'Arentas has one of the leaders of the Republican party in his pay. They more than suspect me; while what we have been secretly working for for so long a time has come, alas! too suddenly to pass. The province of Parania has declared for the King, the troops have joined in with the populace, and they are even now marching on Santa Maria. D'Arentas is sure that the other provinces will follow suit; through Standen's lucky find we are now sure of the soldiers' pay, and D'Arentas has gone now to make things safe with the officers; there is no doubt they will declare for the King, and what I have worked for and prayed for for so many years

is coming to pass,' and as he paused again, in spite of his anxiety for his daughter—for he troubled but little about himself—a look of calm satisfaction came over his face.

'But you, father you! that you should be in danger when you have done and suffered so much!' cried Lois despairingly.

'But,' she exclaimed, with a sudden hope, 'will not the troops protect you when the soldiers know that you are on the King's side?'

'They will never believe it, my dear,' he said. 'Even D'Arentas could not persuade them that Da Piera, the Republican President, was a friend of the King's. No, no one but His Majesty himself can do this. No, Lois, there is only one thing for me—and you will judge how I hate it—I must get away into hiding. My presence here is a fearful hindrance to D'Arentas and to the King's cause, and such is my strange position that my life is in danger from both parties. If you and your aunt were only safe I would not care; I would to God you had not come out here; but things were different then, and you did so beg to come, and I—I longed to see you,' and, strong man as he was, a tear crept down Da Piera's face as he fondly kissed his daughter.

'Where we are to go is what I am trying to think of,' he went on; 'but all the provinces

will soon be in revolt. If we could get away by sea——' and he lapsed into a gloomy reverie.

'Father,' said Lois, breaking the silence, 'there is the treasure chamber.'

'Ah,' cried the President, rising from his couch in his delight, 'why did I not think of it before? unknown to everyone, giving on to the the sea—— Quick! for indeed there is no time to be lost. Write now to Standen: there will be less danger of suspicion in your writing; I will tell you what to say,' and, walking up and down the room, quite forgetting the pain of his wound in his excitement, Da Piera dictated a short, clear statement of the danger they were in, and of the refuge the treasure cave would be to them. He made his daughter tell Standen not to come near the Palace, but to wait at the Quinta and watch for them, for they would get away some time in the quiet of the dead of night.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE ESCAPE FROM THE PALACE

IN spite of the heat, John Burch had been busy all the day long in his underground operations, coming up from the treasure chamber for his meals, and carefully locking and barring the door of his room during his subterranean excursions; and he was on the watch for his chief in the evening, and eager to tell him of his experiences.

'I reckon theer's boxes of gold at the foot of all them pillars,' he said to Standen on his return. 'I've digged down and come 'pin another 'o 'em anyways, and when as the watter come up, and I couldn't dig no more, I filed through the tap box of the first pile in our old pit, sir, and I prized mun open. Aw, lor, you will be plazed for tew see mun: he's chock full o' gold dust. I pit in me vinger, and rummaged 'un about, and bless 'ee, sir, theer be enough of the yaller stuff theer in that wan box for to mek scores and hunderds o' golden sovereigns.'

But Burch had to pause in his interesting

narration, for Standen was obviously not listening to him. He had found Lois da Piera's missive waiting for him, and he was hastily reading perhaps the strangest first love letter ever man received. After telling him of her father's ready consent to their engagement and her gladness thereat, she went on at once, at her father's dictation, to put the danger they were in before him in a few words, and to tell him that that very night they must flee into hiding in the treasure chamber.

'Great heavens, Jan!' he exclaimed at last, in low tones of suppressed excitement. 'Listen here, man,' and he looked cautiously over the balcony to see if they were quite alone. 'I want your help: I know I can trust you. The President's life is in danger: at any moment the Palace may be in the hands of the mob, or of the soldiers. They have to flee the place; they are coming here this very night——'

'Yere!' cried Jan helplessly. 'What can us dew wi' mun yere? They'll all be murdered afore our vurry eyes!'

'No, no,' cried Standen. 'We must hide them. Don't you see, man?' and he looked impatiently at Burch, who seemed half stupefied. 'The treasure chamber——'

'My ivers! 'Tes the vurry place,' cried Burch, striking his hands together. 'Of course,

there ain't nobody but us tew what knaws nothen about it : us can putt 'em theer, so safe as safe. But whatever do it all mane?' he asked with a mystified air. 'What hev the old gentleman doed as they should be a murderin' o' he? Some o' they blaygairds as shot 'un yesterday, I reckon.'

'Yes, yes,' said Standen, in great excitement. 'You shall have the whole story presently, Jan ; but just now there's not a moment to lose.'

'Tew think o' them tew delicate ladies, and him with a hole in his arm, in that dark and gashly old place!' said Burch.

'There's nowhere else for them to go. The whole country is up in arms, and the President is in danger from both sides,' said Standen.

'Us must mek 'em as comferable as us can, though how us be going tew perwide vittals and bades and cetery for tew ladies and a gentleman without Oliver and them a finding o' it out is more than I can mek out all on a suddint like,' said Burch.

'And God only knows for how long,' said Standen anxiously. 'Well, we can't do anything until the servants are gone to their quarters ; and Miss da Piera says here that they will not start until very late in the night, when all will be quiet, unless, indeed, they are driven out by the mob. My God!' he cried, getting up in

his agitation and aimlessly moving about the room ; ' it makes me mad to think of the awful danger they are in, and just now, too, when—— Jan, I must tell you that Miss da Piera will one day, please God, be my wife.'

' Aw, 'tes gude news that, in-all this barney, exclaimed Burch, getting up in his turn, and heartily shaking Standen by the hand ; ' the lovely crature ! Aw, you be a lucky man, sir. Tell 'ee what, measter, so soon as us be quiet, us'll go and fetch her along werselves.'

' Good heavens, no, man,' cried Standen. ' Can't you see that if the slightest suspicion of my being mixed up with their flight arose there would be an end of their safety ?'

' You'm right,' replied Burch disappointedly, ' us can't dew nothen but wait, and I allow 'tes hard does for yew, sir. Lord, how timorsome I be mezul : if us only had 'em safe and sound.'

' No, there is nothing for it but patience,' said Standen, who, as he stood gnawing at his nails and with a look of intense anxiety on his face, did not present a very faithful picture of that virtue.

The evening hours drew out their slow length, and it seemed an age to the two watchers before Oliver made his last visit, and, shortly afterwards, left the Quinta with his family.

'They'm gone at last,' whispered Burch, peering out over the balcony into the darkness of the night. 'Tell 'ee what, sir, you bide yere, and watch, while I goes and gets dree matrasses.'

'Great Scott! you must not move a thing in the house; supposing the servants missed anything! Yes, that is the awful part of it: to think of the misery and discomfort, and Da Piera's wound, too,' and Standen paused and paced the balcony full of thought.

'I have it, Jan,' he said at last; 'there's a heap of rugs and greatcoats I brought out from England in the lumber room. No one ever goes there, and we must get the things into the passage-way. They are safe not to come for an hour or two, and I will help you,' and, as Burch nodded his acquiescence, they started off, and soon had enough coverings to prevent the wounded man and the womenfolk having to lie on the bare ground.

'They won't want any food to-night,' said Standen, as they returned to their watch on the balcony; 'but to-morrow——'

'I've been thinkin' o' that theer, sir,' said Burch, 'and I seem as if us can manage like this yere. 'T'es a mussiful Providence as I takes my grub in my rume yere, next to the bade rume. Don't 'ee see, sir? Wi' what they brings

me, and some tinned trade as us can smuggle in, and a taypot, and our pockets full o' sich ating trade as us can buy yere and theer, they won't dew so bad fur a bit, I reckon.'

'It's bad, terribly bad, Jan, at the very best,' said Standen gloomily ; ' and the worst of it is, the longer it lasts the more danger there is. Then, how to get them away in safety ?'

'Aw, wan thing at a time, sir ; don't 'ee despair ; us'll hev 'em yere safe enough pretty quick ; and some vine night us'll contrive to get mun aboard a British vessel, treasures and all, and away out of this murdering old country.'

'Ah, well, I only wish——' But what Standen wished he did not say : 'Hst,' he whispered, 'Jan, I am sure I hear footsteps,' and, followed by Burch, he crept quickly and cautiously down the steps of the entrance.

Standen's ears, alert and ready to catch the slightest sound, did not deceive him, and as he and Burch reached the lowest step three figures came swiftly out of the darkness. A forlorn little procession it was : the President, with his disabled arm in a sling across his breast, leading, and Lois following and supporting her aunt, who was plainly overcome with fear, and whose suppressed sobs as she was led on through the streets in the darkness had

filled both Da Piera and Lois with a horrible dread of discovery.

Miss Dodds started back and gave a slight scream as she saw the figures of Standen and Burch, but could not recognise them in the dark night, which, fortunately for the fugitives, was only illumined by the starshine.

'For God's sake, be quiet, Lavinia,' whispered Da Piera; 'can't you see it is Mr. Standen? In a few minutes you will be in a place of safety;' but the poor woman was trembling with fear, and, exhausted with the heat and rush of their flight, she fainted in her niece's arms.

There was nothing for it but to carry her up the steps and into the room giving on to the balcony, and in the agitation her breakdown brought there was but little time for explanations or greetings. As Standen brought brandy to Lois, and helped her in trying to restore her aunt to consciousness, the President was looking on in a state of the greatest impatience.

'Good heavens!' he cried, as, in spite of all Lois's and Standen's efforts, Miss Dodds showed no signs of recovery, 'there is not a minute to lose: the whole city is roused. The revolted soldiers and God knows how many armed provincials are in Santa Maria already, and if we are followed——'

A hasty consultation ended in Burch and Standen carrying the still unconscious woman as quickly and as gently as they could to Burch's room, the President and Lois following in silence, and in a short time—for the heavy door was ajar and the press put back—the whole party were in the Jesuits' passage-way, and so far in safety.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A STRANGE REFUGE

THE cooler air in the draughty passage-way very soon revived the fainting woman; who shuddered as her eyes opened and she saw her weird surroundings. They had laid her down on a rug stretched on the flags, for she was no small weight, and Standen and Burch were still breathing hard with their exertions in carrying her. The lantern on the ground but faintly illumined the strange scene, and no wonder she was frightened as she gradually took in its details—the narrow passage stretching away into the darkness, the flags, the rough and rocky walls, and the group of concerned faces looking down upon her as Lois rested her head upon her knees.

‘Do not be afraid, dear aunt,’ said Lois soothingly, and caressing her as she saw her terrified look; ‘we are quite safe now.’

‘But where are we? and why are we in this dreadful place?’ she asked in weak and broken tones.

'You shall know all about it soon, Lavinia,' said Da Piera: 'try and rouse yourself. We have not very far to go now, and, though we must all put up with some suffering, at any rate our lives are safe; and, please God, it will not be long before all this misery will be over.'

With Lois's help the still terrified woman rose to her feet, and, supported by her niece, she followed Standen and the President, Burch coming on close behind them.

'I only hope you are right, and that it won't be for long,' said Standen in a low tone, as slowly, on Miss Dodds's account, they made their way along the flags. 'It is horrible for the two ladies.'

'I meant what I said,' returned Da Piera. 'The King sailed from Asturia more than a fortnight ago, and in a few days his warship will be in the harbour. D'Arentas heard to-day by the French mail: the Emperor was only waiting for some chance of success to help his nephew, and D'Arentas' news of the disaffection among the troops has persuaded him. I cannot understand why the King did not cable to me or to D'Arentas: it surely is not possible for the cipher to be lost, and yet that is the only reason I can think of, for of course they could not cable without the cipher.'

'I cannot tell you how thankful I am,' said

Standen earnestly. 'It will be a miserable experience for Lois and her aunt, and for you, too, weak as you are with your wound ; but at least now you know it will not be for long.'

'I must not forget to tell you how grateful I am to you, Standen,' said the President with emotion. 'I feel we owe our lives to you, for even now the mob may be sacking the Palace. I mean to show my gratitude,' he went on with a sad smile, 'by giving you the best thing I have in the world ; I think you know what I mean,' and Da Piera looked back at Lois.

Standen was overjoyed at this open confirmation of all his hopes, and in some confusion he murmured his satisfaction and his gratitude.

With many halts, for the way soon became rough, and Miss Dodds more than once showed signs of giving way again, they slowly crept along the tortuous passage, until at last the faint glimmering of light from the treasure chamber told them that they were nearing their refuge, and that the dawn had already broken.

An exclamation of surprise broke from Da Piera and Lois as the passage at last ended in the cave, and they stood still for a moment looking at the treasure chamber, with its rough pillars and its sandy floor, broken in

places by Burch's diggings for the treasure, and listened to the lapping of the water as the tide crept slowly in. It was but for a short time that they stood thus, for Miss Dodds was so obviously exhausted by the emotions and the exertions of the last few hours that Lois lost no time in trying to make her aunt as comfortable as she could, and with Standen's help she soon arranged a sort of couch with the rugs in a recess in the cave, and, almost as soon as she laid her head upon the rolled-up ulster which did duty for a pillow, Miss Dodds sank into a deep and heavy sleep, to the intense relief of her niece.

While the newly betrothed pair were thus doing their best for the worn-out woman, Burch was doing the honours of the treasure chamber to the President.

'Look 'ee yere, yer honour,' he said, leading the way to the first pit; ' 'tes yere as us found the jools—a wunnerful sight they be, sure enough, and worth a mort o' money; and yere be some of the iron boxes, so vull of gold as they can hold,' and he lifted up the lid of the top box on the pile.

In spite of all the anxieties of their position, a gleam of satisfaction lighted up Da Piera's eyes as the dull yellow of the gold dust met his gaze.

'It's almost incredible,' he murmured.

'Aw, 'tes trew enough, yer honour,' said Burch; 'yew putt yer vinger intew mun, and stir mun up a bit: 'tes gude gold right down to the bottom. Theer's other piles of boxes buried yere accordin' to the dockyment, some o' mun wi' dust in 'em, and some wi' gold coins. Theer's a lot of old images tew, so her sayeth, though I don't hold wi' such papishers' idols mezul.'

'It will be heavy work getting it all away,' said Da Piera musingly, and almost to himself.

'If us had a boat and tew-dree stout sailormen, us wouldn't be long avore the cave was properly cleared out; and a good job tew, I reckon,' said Burch.

'You may very likely have what you want in the course of a day or two,' said Da Piera; 'Mr. Standen will explain everything to you,' and he turned away from the fascinating treasure pits to where his daughter and her *fiancé* were standing close together, engaged in earnest converse.

'You must try and get some rest, Lois,' said the President; 'I see your aunt is fast asleep, and I feel myself tired to death;' and when he had seen his daughter made by Standen fairly comfortable in the recess beside her aunt, he wearily laid himself down on a rug and closed his eyes, trying to forget both the pain of his

wound, which was now considerable, and the troubles of his mind, in sleep.

'Us must be more keerfuller about the lantern, sir,' said Burch, as he prepared to follow Standen through the passage, back to the house again; 'I be veared as us med be marked from the say.'

'The mangroves are very thick at the mouth of the chamber; I hardly think the light can get through; still, we cannot be too careful, Jan,' said Standen.

'Theer 'idn't sich a girt lot o' time, naythur,' said Burch thoughtfully. 'President says it might only be a day or tew afore they gets away; I reckon he's made his plans along o' some skipper as he can trusten tew.'

Standen explained the whole position to Burch, as they made their way along the now familiar track, and Burch was overjoyed to think that their anxieties had at anyrate a chance of being ended soon.

'Tell 'ee what 'tes, sir,' he said, before Standen left him to go to his own room, and as they were putting back the press, 'us hev got our work cut out for us, I seem: us oughter hev iverthing ready so sune as this man-o'-war cometh.'

'You may be sure that there won't be much work done in Santa Maria for some time, Jan;

the city is even now, as the President thinks, in the hands of the mob, or the soldiers—it does not matter much which, so far as we are concerned. Why, man,' he exclaimed, holding up his hand and listening intently; 'hark! can't you hear anything?'

'Iss, fay, 'tes shots, for certain!' cried Burch going to the window; and, as they listened, the irregular sound of a dropping fusillade pierced through and dominated the tropical night-songs of the cicadas and bull-frogs. 'They'm at it, sure enough,' Burch went on.

'Thank God, we have got them safe,' cried Standen devoutly, as the picture of what might have happened came horribly before his mind.

'Well, sir, I don't reckon as they raskils'll come to the Quinta yet awhile, and I seem I'll tek a bit of a snooze: 'twill be time for Oliver before long, and they dear leddies'll be wanting their brexfusses. Nor theer won't be nuthen done at no works while all this barney's going on, so us'll hev a gude go in at digging up the treasure, and cutting a way through they tough old mangrove bushes;' and Standen nodding a farewell to him, they both took such brief rest as they could in the face of the hard work in front of them.

CHAPTER XXIX

NEWS FROM THE CITY

So tired was Standen that though he intended to give only an hour or two to sleep, he slept on beyond his allotted time, and was only awakened by Burch's coming into his room.

'Excuse me for wakenin' of 'ee, sir,' said Burch, as Standen turned over on his pillow and stared stupidly at him, only half awake; 'theer's terrible ructions in the city, sure enough: I couldn't slape nohow, though most times I putts my head on the pillow and goes off directly-minute. I was up yark and early, and I slips out and downaways into the city fur tew see what was a going on. Aw, sir, they've been at it all night, I reckon. Theer's barricades up in the streets, and they'm fighting like demons; Lord He knows what'll be the end o't; 'twas as much as I could dew to kape out of the way o' the bullets.'

By this time Standen was thoroughly roused, and, pushing aside the mosquito nets, he leapt out of bed, and, telling Burch to wait

one minute for him, he quickly rushed through his bath and his toilet, and rejoined him in the sitting-room.

'I must get down to the office at once, Jan,' he said, as he hastily swallowed a cup of coffee and broke a roll; 'and you must look after the people in the treasure chamber; I don't suppose it's of much use, but go I must.'

'T'es as much as your life's worth, sir,' said Burch earnestly; 'I tell 'ee they'm firing wild like a lot o' savidges, and the bullets is flying everywheers. 'Tidn't no manner of use for 'ee to go; there won't be nobody tew the office, I reckon the old place be praperly busted up by them rebels by now. Aw, sir, don't 'ee go, I dew beg o' 'ee,' he cried, as Standen took up his pith helmet, and made ready to start; 'think of the dear young leddy, sir: whatever will her dew if they mad volkses was tew shoot 'ee dade. Wull, if 'ee wull go, I goes wi' 'ee, and that's flat.'

'You can't, Jan; one of us must stay here to look after these people.'

'Vurry wull, then,' said Burch; 'yew bide yere, as is only right and praper, and I'll go and see what's up.'

'Man, I tell you I must go; I can't stand here arguing,' said Standen impatiently; 'take all the food you can into the chamber. Don't

say a word about any danger : tell them I have to go to the office, and that I'll be back very soon.'

'Aw dear, aw dear, you won't niver coom back no more' cried Burch in great distress ; 'they'll shoot 'ee for certain, you'm a dade man ef yew goes. Aw, tew think as us should ha' gone threw all this——' Burch was following Standen out on to the balcony, and he suddenly stopped in his lamentations, for the two no sooner got to the top of the steps than they saw Wetherell coming up the avenue towards them in great haste.

'Thank God, you have not started,' he puffed and panted out, as he rapidly ascended the steps, and, after a hasty hand-grip with Standen, he sank exhausted on to a chair. 'It's all up, sir,' he said, as soon as he got his breath ; 'they've simply wrecked the place. Thank Heaven, we had a warning from Jose Aroyas, the fiscal, and got away with the money and the papers before the rumpus began.'

'But where are the others,' asked Standen, anxious about his staff.

'They're all right, at the Embassy : 'tis the safest place so far, but Heaven knows for how long, for "Death to the English" is already one of their cries. D'Arentas has sent a guard there, but whether the soldiers will stick to their post or whether the tag-rag and bobtail

will beat the troops is more than I can tell. Whew—w—w,' he cried, 'I'm simply parched with thirst,' and he looked gratefully at Burch, who quickly mixed and gave him some whisky and soda.

'I tell you what,' he went on, somewhat revived by his potation; 'you can't stay here. There's a bit of a lull just now—they've been at it all night; and we must get off to the Embassy at once. At any moment they may begin again.'

'Now, Burch,' said Standen, 'you go with Mr. Wetherell: there's no need for two of us to stay here.'

'I bean't a going to muve, sir,' said Burch doggedly; 'wheer yew stops theer I stops, and that yew knaws; so it idn't no use in yew sayin' nothen more.'

'Look here, Wetherell, I simply can't leave the Quinta. I can't tell you why, just now——'

'Well, you know best,' said Wetherell wearily, 'it's a risk, anyway, and after all they may leave you alone, at anyrate for the present,' and he rose from his chair to go. 'God knows if we shall ever meet again,' he said solemnly, as he shook hands both with Standen and Burch.

'Do not think I am ungrateful, Wetherell,' said Standen earnestly, as he bade him farewell, 'I know the risk you have taken for us, and

both Burch and I thank you from the bottom of our hearts. I hope and pray that you'll get safely back, and that we shall all come out of this affair in safety.'

'Well, there's going to be a fight for it,' said Wetherell grimly. 'All the English are at the Embassy; we're a pretty tough lot, and there's the women and children. I say,' he added reproachfully, 'we could do with your help, too: it may come to a hard push.'

'I cannot explain to you,' said Standen in despair; 'but I know I am right, I cannot leave the house.'

As soon as Wetherell turned his back on them, and began quickly to make his way down the drive, Standen turned hastily to Burch.

'Now, Jan,' he said, 'we must look after our people. Poor souls, they've had a miserable night, I fear. We must run some risks, anyway,' he went on, as he stuffed his pockets with rolls and biscuits; 'Oliver and his folk will wonder what on earth becomes of all the provender.'

'I don't think as yew need tew trouble much about he,' said Burch, 'he's in a terrible way, sure enough: his son's gone and bolted off and joined thase rebels. Most all they black naygurs hev a done the like, so her sayeth. I've putt my brexfus t'other side of the passage,

and wi' what us hev a got yere I reckon theer's enough to go on wi',' and with his own pockets bulging out, Burch followed Standen to the passage-way, where, besides the bulk of his 'brexfus,' he had carefully bestowed a big terra-cotta carafe of water, and a kettle and a teapot.

'Aw, I seem us won't do so bad, arter all,' he said, with a grin of delight, as he struck a match and lighted the lantern; 'I've hed a go in at old Oliver's cupboards, and I've a tooked toll of his tay, and a mort of other atables and drinkables besides; theer's bananas and mangoes for dessert, and, as President says, 'twon't be for long; ef worst comes to worst us can get down tew the chamber werselves, and shet tew the old door 'pin they rebels; safer nor the Embassy, I calls it.'

'And die of slow starvation,' said Standen grimly.

'Iss, fay, I niver thought o' that,' exclaimed Burch; 'tell 'ee what, us must get so much wittles as us can down theer: theer's a terrible lot of tinned trade in Oliver's stores.'

Standen did not answer him, for he was anxiously thinking how Lois and her father and aunt had passed the night, and he hastened along at such a pace that Burch had a hard job to keep up with him.

The sweet smile with which Lois greeted him, and the warmth with which she returned the pressure of his hand-clasp, quickly reassured him. Miss Dodds, too, was much the better for her long sleep of exhaustion, and the state of things having been fully explained to her, she was tearfully apologetic for the trouble she had caused them in their flight, and bravely determined to put up with all the miseries of their situation, grateful for present safety and hopeful of a speedy release. Standen quickly told Da Piera such news of affairs in the city as Wetherell had been able to give him, while with Lois's and her aunt's help a fairly comfortable meal was soon set before them. Miss Dodds had already dressed Da Piera's wound, and under her skilful treatment his arm was going on well, and gave him very little pain.

As soon as he saw the fugitives discussing this their first meal in the treasure chamber, Burch returned to the house, and took the first of several journeyings to and fro, each time bringing with him a load of such things as he thought would not quickly be missed, and would add to the comfort of the party, for he had heard Wetherell's remarks, and he feared that he and Standen might have to join the refugees sooner than the latter expected.

CHAPTER XXX

THE BLACK RAIDERS

WHILE Burch was thus going to and fro, Standen was not idly dallying with his beloved; for, though he saw no reason for tearing himself away from her presence, he did not want to leave all the work to the strong arms of his subordinate, and he set to work with pick and spade to empty out the last pit Burch had been engaged upon before the tide should come up and the water stop his exertions. Lois and her aunt were busily employed in making their strange dwelling-place as comfortable as possible, and the President was stretched out on the shelving sandy ground, watching Standen's operations, smoking a cigar the while, and immersed in deep and anxious thought.

'Mr. Standen, sir, a word wi' yew, plase,' called out Burch as he came to the end of the passage for the last time, throwing down, with a sigh of relief—for it was hot enough, in all

conscience—a load of pillows he had been carrying.

‘Good heavens, man, what are you thinking of?’ cried Standen, as he quickly came up and saw what Burch had been carrying. ‘Do you want Oliver and the whole gang to know where we are, and what we are about? Take the things back at once!’

‘St—st—I want to spake to ’ee, sir,’ said Burch mysteriously, and moving back into the dark passage-way.

‘Well, what is it, Burch?’ asked Standen impatiently. ‘You must be mad——’

‘No, fay, I bean’t, then,’ said Jan. ‘Us needn’t to trouble no more about Oliver, nor none of them : they’m all gone by this.’

‘Gone! why, what do you mean?’

‘Why, that theer son of hisn hev .a bin up, and hev warned his veyther as a party o’ thase rebels is’ a coming to stick up the Quinta—said as they’d hev the old man’s blood if so be as he told on ’em. But old Oliver’s trew to his wages and his mate, and so soon as he’d a told me he praperly bolted, him and his missus and the darter ; nor they won’t come back no more, yew may depend.’

‘How soon will they come, I wonder?’ asked Standen anxiously.

‘I never had no time to ax mun,’ replied

Burch ; ' not before nightfall, I reckon. 'T'es a gude job wan way,' he went on, ' as us can pick up anything as us is a mind tew now, vor into thicky cave us must go along o' the others, and theer us must bide until thase old barney's over wan way or t'other.'

It was obviously of no use to keep a matter secret which must perforce be known within a few hours, and Standen in a few words put the whole case to the fugitives, who, with Standen and Burch to direct them, rummaged the house from top to bottom, carrying such stores and conveniences as they could find to Burch's room, and thence into the passage-way, which quickly presented a curious enough appearance, heaped up as it was with mattresses, sheets, folding chairs, tins of biscuits, bottles of wine, big carafes full of water, and such other things as their necessities required.

'Tew things us musn't vorget,' said Burch to Standen as at last there seemed to be nothing more to take ; 'theer's the jools, sir.'

'Great Scott! to think I should have forgotten that,' cried Standen, running off at once and feeling in his pocket for his keys as he ran.

'Aw, then,' said Burch to himself, with a satisfied grin, ' 'tidn't likely as I'm fer vorgettin' t'nem sparklers; theer's Meary Perryman in

'em, and a free farm, and Lord knows what beside, if so be as us iver gets out of this hobble alive. Theer's a hatchet and hook wanted for they tough old bushes,' he said, as Standen came rapidly back with the precious silver box in his hands; 'I've a seed the old man a chopping away under the mango trees to the side, and I'll rin over theer, and soon fetch his tools along,' and he ran off in his turn, leaving the little company half dead with the heat and their unaccustomed exertions, and only waiting for his return to light up the lantern and carry some of their goods to their safe retreat.

'Ah, here he comes,' said Standen, breaking the short silence, as Burch's footsteps were heard hurrying through the adjoining room.

'Quick, measter, quick!' cried Burch in an agitated whisper, as he rushed into the room; 'don't 'ee hear mun? Us be yere to the back of the house, and us can't hear, but they'm coming up the drive, a holleying and bawling like old black devils. Theer idn't a minute to spare! Get intew the passage the whole lot o' 'ee! Us must dray-tew the old press agen the wall. Aw, lor, did iver anyone iver hear tell of the likes o' this?'

All the time he was speaking he was dancing about from one foot to the other in his intense anxiety to get his flock safely housed in time. It

did not need the hoarse cries and yells with which the mob entered and began to search through the house to hurry on the fugitives, and in a few seconds they were safe in the passage, the heavy press drawn back to its position by Burch and Standen, and the five of them breathlessly listening. The riotous sounds came but faintly through the massive door in the wall, and it was some little time before the disappointed searchers got into John Burch's room, when the fugitives heard the confused noises they made as the furniture was heaved about, the press itself being dragged out of place and burst open. Miss Dodds turned as white as a sheet as the noise came so close to them, and even Lois paled. 'Don't 'ee be afear'd, Miss and Madam,' whispered Burch; 'they won't never get at 'ee : door's all the same as the wall.'

'Sh—sh,' whispered Standen, with an angry look at him. Before long, satisfied that their quarry was not in that part of the house, the crowd melted away, and silence reigned once more.

'Thank God, they're gone at last,' said Da Piera, with a sigh of relief. 'It was a narrow escape.'

'A lucky job as I went for them tools,' said Burch. 'Us couldn't hear mun all back yere, and they might a been on us afore us

could a got away. Gude job I've a got thase hatchet and hook, tew : they mangrove bushes be main thick, and no boat couldn't get threw mun.'

Taking up such loads as they could carry, the five went back to the treasure chamber, Da Piera, still weak with his loss of blood and unable to bear a weight, carrying the lantern in front.

A few more journeys to and fro, with the President as light-bearer, enabled Standen and Burch to get everything into the chamber, the two ladies staying in the cave, and gradually getting the dark and dismal place into something like a fairly comfortable habitation.

Once settled in and resigned to the inevitable, Miss Dodds proved a host in herself, and, with Lois's help, she soon had a fire of decayed and dry mangrove sticks alight, and produced at last a meal from the tinned soups and meats which appealed to Burch's hungry soul and made his mouth water.

'You must not be so lavish with your provisions again, Lavinia,' said Da Piera, as he watched the women's operations; 'if those brutes take up their abode in the house we shall not get anything more, and, though I hope it will not be long before we can get away, we cannot tell.'

The tide was now far up in the cave, and the base of the first pillar was lapped by the tiny wavelets, which indeed covered the said base in the spring tides, creeping up and leaving but a small space between the high-water mark and the entrance to the passage and the little recess in which the women's mattresses were laid. Even before their repast was over, Miss Dodds was nodding and waking up again with profuse apologies to the company, and it was not long before their arrangements for the night were made, and soon all were fast asleep, with the sole exception of Standen, whose deep anxiety on Lois's account and whose dread of the future kept him awake for hours, wondering how they should escape from their perilous position.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE ASTURIAN MAN-OF-WAR

DA PIERA'S forebodings proved to be only too true. A detachment of the negroes made the Quinta their headquarters, and thus the sea became the only avenue of escape for the five prisoners. Nor, even if the way had been open through the Quinta de los Mangos, dared the President avail himself of it, for, though of course the people shut up in the treasure chamber knew it not, the low scum of the city, reinforced by continual dribblings-in of the outcasts from all parts of the Republic, had got the better of the Royalists and such of the soldiery as adhered to them, and Santa Maria was given up to anarchy and rapine, many of the troops joining in with the victorious mob. The whole European population, assisted by D'Arentas and such troops as still obeyed him and his officers, had taken refuge at the British Embassy. It was not a very large company, for for many years the trade prospects had been sorry indeed, and there was but little to tempt people

in the poverty and the torrid heat of Boravia. Driven by hunger, for the place was strictly invested, and led by General d'Arentas, they had sallied forth from the Embassy and fought their way through the mob; with the women and children in their midst, and they now occupied the two forts at the mouth of the harbour, whither they had safely got after long forced marches and much dire suffering, and where their position was a most precarious one, hampered as they were with the women and children, and short of all supplies. One by one the warships of the fine fleet the old King and his forebears had got together had been sold, and there was but little danger from the sea, D'Arentas' one hope, indeed, being the arrival of the Asturian man-of-war: for they were far from safe even now, and when the anarchists had looted the city they might turn their thoughts to the prey that had escaped them, and then—— D'Arentas hardly dared to face this fearful possibility, and only longed for the King to come.

Standen and Burch worked steadily on between the tides, and at last the bases of all the pillars were laid bare, and many more boxes of gold dust and coins found, but the gold crown, the gold image, and the silver image, and the ornaments of the Convent mentioned in the list

of treasures, they did not find, and, indeed, they were never discovered. And so the days wore slowly on and nearly a week had passed, and the condition of the five in the treasure chamber was becoming more and more desperate. All along they had been on the shortest of short commons, and now their provisions showed signs of soon giving out, while there was but one great carafe of water left.

'Tell 'ee what 'tes, sir,' said Burch, as he and Standen were gloomily smoking together on the fifth evening of their imprisonment; 'I can't stand this no longer. I don't keer for mezul, but 'tes they tew pore leddies,' and he pointed back to the recess where, after a somewhat silent and melancholy evening—for the confinement and semi-starvation were telling upon them—Lois and her aunt had retired. 'Naygurs or no naygurs, I means to get out and vind out what's going on: 'tes likely as us be boxed up yere when us might be safe and sound outside arter all. Trewth is, us don't knaw naught about it.'

'I've thought of that, Jan,' said Standen anxiously; 'but it's a great risk, man, not only for us, mark you, but for the President and the women folk. There's enough water for another day, but when that's gone, we must——'

'Hooroar! hooroar!' shouted Burch, jump-

ing up in his seat. 'Mr. President, sir, Miss and Madam! Don't 'ee hear mun? don't 'ee hear mun? 'T'es the cannon! 'T'es the King's man-of-war!'

'Don't be a fool, Burch, frightening the ladies like that,' said Standen, angrily pulling him back into his chair: 'we've heard plenty of cannon already the last few days.'

'Us hev, trew, trew, us hev, but thase yere be different. Only hearken tew mun, measter,' and, lifting up his hand, he called for silence. 'Theer!' he said softly at last, as the dull boom broke on the air: 'tes fur off—further off nor the others—she's a coming intew the harbour, you may depend.' They were all gathered together, listening hard, as again and again the guns sounded.

'I believe Burch is right,' said Da Piera at last, a look of relief coming on his face, wan and wasted with anxiety and sickness.

'Of course I be right,' said Burch; 'now, sir, yew write that letter to the King as you told about, and, plase God, be some manes or another I'll get mun aboard, and us'll hev 'ee all out o' this gashly old place in a trice. Us hev doed a bit o' work last vew days, and bushes be most cut threw, and treasures all ready to be muved. 'T'es sartin sure us can't bide yere much longer, anyways.'

During the past few days the President and Standen and Burch had had many consultations as to what they should do when the King's warship arrived, and it was agreed that as Burch was the least known he—to his joy—should do his best to make Da Piera's miserable and dangerous position known to the King.

The short tropic twilight was already well over, and the darkness of night had settled over the land and the sea—a darkness lightened now and again by great gleams of light; for it was indeed the Asturian man-of-war which was slowly steaming into the harbour, and her search-lights were sweeping over the great bay.

'The suner I be off, the suner you'll all be out of these old hole,' said Burch, as he bade farewell to the little company, who one and all heartily shook his hand, and called down God's protection for him on his perilous enterprise. And so, with the precious letter safe in his breast pocket, a sharp two-edged Boravian knife from the President stuck in his belt, and a revolver from Standen, for Burch had no lethal weapons of his own, he started along the passage for the last time. Standen accompanied him, for he was loth to part with his friend, and he would gladly have gone with him.

'T would be more risk fur tew than fur one,'

said Burch, in answer to Standen's regrets. 'The guns be sounding nearer and nearer: they'm properly bombarding the city, and I reckon these little old Boravians'll scoot out of it so quick as they can; and in the bustle and scurry I can git down to the quay, and if so be as I can git holt of some sart o' a boat it won't be long afore I'm aboard the warship. I only hopes as I shall git out of the Quinta without a murdering anybody with these knife and pistol.'

Burch need not have troubled himself, for the near approach of the great Asturian warship had frightened the Santa Maria people out of the few senses the riot and revolution had left them, and, as the shells began to burst in the crowded city, and fires broke out here and there, the whole population was panic-stricken, and the people fled for the hills behind the town in thousands, trampling upon one another in their haste to get away from the falling bombshells.

As the two friends came to the door which opened from the passage into Burch's room they stopped and listened for a few moments; but no sound broke the silence, and when Standen cautiously opened the door, and peered into the room, he found the press pulled back from the wall, and burst open, and the room

still in the confusion in which the raiders had left it.

Still in silence, and as noiselessly as possible, they went through the house ; but they soon changed their cautious attitude, for not a sound was heard, and the frightened rioters had evidently levanted. All seemed oddly still, too, as they stood on the verandah steps, the curious incessant tropical evensong of the insects being only broken by the whish and crash of the bombshells which from time to time whirled through the starlit night, and fell on the doomed city.

'Well, good-bye, Jan, and God help you ; I wish I could go with you,' said Standen, grasping Jan's hand.

Not a word did Burch say as he returned Standen's hand-grip, and looked him earnestly in the face ; but there was a set look on his features which told more plainly than words could tell that he knew the dangers and difficulties of his task, and meant to do his best.

CHAPTER XXXII

HOME AT LAST

THE suburb in which was the Quinta de los Mangos was quite deserted as Burch quickly made his way towards the quays ; but when he got to the city itself he found he was stemming a vast tide of humanity on foot and in every description of vehicle, and all hastening with frantic speed to get away to the hills. He had therefore to leave the main thoroughfares, and through the comparatively lonely byways he hurried on till he reached the sea-front. Here all was so quiet that he could hear the soft lapping of the water against the long stretch of the embankment, while at the various steps which broke the monotony of the walls boats of all kinds were rocking at the stretch of their painters, some of them with their sails unfurled and the cars in them, just as their owners had left them in their haste to join in the general stampede.

Burch chose a boat that one man could easily manage, and, jumping in and loosing the

painter, soon had her bows turned seawards, and in a few moments a light night breeze was quickly bearing him towards the huge bulk of the Asturian warship, which itself was slowly approaching Santa Maria.

As he sailed on in the darkness towards the lights of the ship he was suddenly enveloped in a flood of radiance as the search-lights of the man-of-war swept the bay. The tiny speck his small boat made in the wide reach of waters was evidently seen by the ship, and, securing the sheet, which he was holding in his hand, Burch went forward and vigorously waved his white handkerchief. He was rudely awakened to the folly of this, for, without his guiding hand on the rudder, the little boat slewed round and very nearly capsized. The great ship and the tiny boat were rapidly nearing each other, however, and that his signal was seen on board was evident, for there was an answering wave of white from her decks, and the continued booming of the guns suddenly ceased, it being thought that he was bringing a message of some terms of capitulation from the city, though the flag of the Boravian Republic was still flying from the ramparts of the two dilapidated forts which flanked but did not protect Santa Maria. There was in truth no one in the forts to haul down the flag, the

garrison having fled at the first fire from the warship. Burch was soon alongside, and, scrambling up the ship's ladder, he found himself the centre of a group of officers, one of whom questioned him in the Asturian language.

'I am English ; I hev a message from the President to the King,' said Burch, holding up Da Piera's letter.

As he spoke the group divided, and the tall, thin figure and dark-bearded face of Dom Francisco appeared.

'From Da Piera?' said the King in English. 'It is for me,' and Burch handed him the letter, which the King quickly opened and read.

Da Piera had informed the King, as shortly and as plainly as he could, of the state of affairs in Santa Maria, and of his own dangerous position, and also of the immense treasure awaiting removal, and as soon as he had read the letter Dom Francisco, with a quick exclamation of surprise, beckoned to one or two of the officers, and, after rapidly telling them of such of the contents of the letter as he thought fit, he called Burch to him, and narrowly questioned him as to the state of affairs in the city.

'Santa Maria is deserted, gentlemen,' said the King, when he at last grasped Burch's meaning, for Jan's Devonian lingo was a

difficulty. 'We have only to land and take possession.'

The news was received with a shout of joy by the officers, and as it quickly circulated through the ship shout after shout arose.

'How shall we find the mouth of this cave?' asked Dom Francisco of Burch, when the noise had somewhat subsided.

'I knaws whereabouts it be,' said Burch, 'and us can see the light of the lantern.'

The King was all anxiety to rescue his faithful friend and follower from his unhappy position as quickly as possible—to say nothing of securing the treasure—and in a very short time Burch was seated by the side of a naval officer, who spoke some English, in the stern of a stout man-of-war's boat manned by a crew of stalwart sailors, who looked quite capable of handling the heavy treasure-boxes. As they neared the shore Burch soon made out the light, which Standen had tied to the thick stem of a mangrove bush, wading in up to his middle to fasten it.

'Theer it be, theer's the lantern,' cried Burch excitedly, pointing to where the small speck of light broke the darkness of the shore. 'Aw, glory be, us'll soon be safe now,' and he rubbed his hands with glee, and could scarcely keep still in his place, so full of delight was he

at this happy end of all their troubles and adventures.

Burch did not wait for the heavy boat to touch the sandy beach of the cave, but, as soon as her nose got through the thin line of bushes which was all that his work with hatchet and hook had left, he promptly jumped overboard into the shallow water, and, pushing his way through, he gave a great cry of joy as he rushed into the cave, and went from one to the other of the little group, shaking each one by the hand with a vigour they could well have dispensed with, for the hand-grip of Jan Burch was a thing to be remembered.

The stern of the boat was jammed in the bushes as her bows touched the beach of the cave, and the whole crew, under Standen's and the officer's directions, were soon moving the heavy iron boxes from the places where they had rested so long into the stout ship's boat, not without wondering thoughts and muttered questions as to what these weighty coffers might contain.

Now that all was quiet in Santa Maria, and that the Quinta was deserted by the rioters, there was no need for Standen and Burch to take refuge on the Asturian warship, while there was a very strong necessity for them to remain in the city and look after the disjointed affairs

of the Water and Drainage Company. It needed, however, many assurances of his safety and of the positive duties before him, on Standen's part, to reconcile Lois to the parting, and it was a tearful maiden who took her place in the boat beside her father and her aunt.

Da Piera told Standen and Burch once more that they might be quite certain of the King's gratitude and of absolute fairness in the division of the treasure, and after a somewhat sad farewell on all sides, the two men saw the bushes close in again behind the boat, and returned to the Quinta de los Mangos to try and get something iike order out of the chaos the black raiders had left behind them. In this work they were soon helped by Oliver and his wife and daughter, who reappeared on the scene on the following morning.

Standen found that the company's offices had been thoroughly gutted by the rioters, and it was some days before Wetherell and the staff got back from the fort, and some time before things were got into their normal state. Under the new *régime*, however, the work soon began to go on quietly and regularly, and the souls of the staff were no longer vexed by a horde of venal and grasping fiscals, so that when, in course of time, Standen resigned his post, and returned to England, Wetherell, who succeeded

him as chief, had no difficulty in carrying on the vast and important work of the company.

The King of Boravia was waiting at the gangway as the heavily laden boat drew near, and as Da Piera, following Lois and Miss Dodds, was assisted up the ship's side, Dom Francisco affectionately embraced his devoted follower, and, after cordially welcoming the two ladies, he commended them to the care of the captain, who soon had them comfortably settled in the cabin of one of the officers, where a more substantial and elegant meal than the last few days had afforded the half-famished women was set before them. The King took Da Piera into his own state cabin, and when the ex-President had satisfied his hunger, and the stewards had left them alone, Dom Francisco eagerly listened to the story of the late events in Boravia. His astonishment and delight at the immense treasure, which was soon safely bestowed in the strong room on board, may well be imagined, for the King was but slenderly provided with funds, and these ancient stores of wealth, as the valuables were gradually and cautiously realised, would enable him to rehabilitate the finances of his kingdom and to put things on a firm and solid basis.

The mischief done at the Palace by the riotous mob took a crowd of workmen some

days to repair, and in the meantime the whole party remained on board the man-of-war, for the ex-President's wound was troubling him, and both Lois and Miss Dodds were weak and unwell from the excitements and privations they had gone through.

The Santa Marians returned to the city as soon as order was restored, and the troops, assured of their pay, made their submission to D'Arentas, who had entered Santa Maria at the head of his faithful few and with his many fugitives, without any opposition. Indeed, the whole nation welcomed with joy the promise of a period of peaceful and honest government, and the King was received with acclamations whenever he appeared in the streets of his capital.

Dom Francisco's gratitude to Da Piera was boundless : all and more than all the money the latter had so lavishly spent for his King was restored to him, his estates were freed from encumbrances, and by the King's urgent request he took the office of Prime Minister, and with the help of a strong Cabinet gradually got things into a stable and satisfactory state. And when, at last, all things were in order for the great royal function, and the King of Boravia made his progress through his city of Santa Maria, Hilario da Piera rode in the place of honour

on the King's right hand, the faithful D'Arentas riding on the left.

Dom Francisco, as yet a bachelor monarch, insisted on Da Piera and his party occupying their old quarters at the Palace, and a proud woman was Miss Dodds, who in her after life, when she was again settled down in her beloved Bath, would descant often and at great length upon the glories of those times when, with her beautiful niece, she assisted at the various Court functions which marked the accession of Francisco III. to the throne of his fathers.

Standen's part in sheltering the President and his family, and in the discovery of the treasures, was, of course, made known to the King, who commanded his presence at the Palace and received him most cordially. Nor was John Burch forgotten, the only ring he ever wore, a single diamond of great value, testifying to the royal gratitude.

As soon as Dom Francisco heard of Standen's betrothal to the ex-President's daughter the King sent for him, and, in very gracious words, he offered to give him an estate in Boravia and to confer upon him the title of Visconde ; but, as this would have involved Standen's becoming a naturalised Boravian subject, he respectfully declined the honour.

It was, however, and by the King's special command, from the Palace that in due course of time Lois da Piera was married; and the little Anglican Church—for Lois adhered to her mother's faith—was crowded with the rank and fashion of Boravia when the Chaplain of the British Embassy joined the two together in Holy Matrimony, His Majesty himself being present and signing the registers. After spending a brief honeymoon at Da Piera's country house, Standen and his beautiful wife returned to England, accompanied by Miss Dodds. They were soon followed by John Burch, who gladly returned to his beloved Devonshire, where he married the faithful Mary and settled down to the farmer's life he loved on an estate that he bought with a part of his share of the treasure. No one knew how rich the homely fellow was, and his children—to whom he had given the best of educations—and his widow were not a little surprised when his will was read.

'Tes wunnerful how things dew vall out,' said John Burch, meditatively, some years after. It was a still evening in September; Standen and he had had a long day's tramping after the birds over Squire Burch's stubbles and roots, and the two were seated smoking under the

great group of lime trees on Burch's lawn: the harvest moon was just rising over the shoulder of the hill opposite, and the soft gurgle of the stream in the valley beneath and the rustle of the leaves above them were the only sounds that broke the silence. 'Yere be I a praper squire 'pin me own estate, wi' a plenty o' money fur missus and the young uns, and yere be yew a Parlymint man, med a barrownight for yer services theer by the Queen, not tew say nothen of her leddyship and they tew dear little byes of yourn. Who iver'd a thought it when us went out to that whisht old Santa Maria in the "Peronia"? Five hunderd thousand pound apiece! 'Tes surprisin'; I can't hardly belave it even now; 'tes a mort o' money, sure enough. Sometimes I thinks as 'tes rayther hard does on them ancient Jesuite prastes as gathered them diamonds and treasures and hid 'em so keerful,' and he paused as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

'Ah, well, I think we can keep what we have got with fairly clean consciences, Jan,' said Sir John Standen. 'You see, we risked our lives to find these treasures to begin with, and then everything that we have of them was given to us by the King, and was, after all, only our proper and legal share. And as to what was done with the bulk of the money, why,

man, look at the state of Boravia as it is now: the monarchy firmly established, the finances sound, the country being rapidly developed, and the people quiet and satisfied; and then remember what the place was like when we went out there! No, Jan, you may depend upon it these treasures could not have been better spent: they have in the main been the means of making a whole nation prosperous and contented, and I think, in regard to this modest share of ours, I can safely quote your old saying about this self-same matter, namely, "Findings, keepings."

'Well, I bean't sure but what you'm right, arter all,' said Jan, as he refilled and lit up his pipe, and sank back in his chair with a sigh of content.

