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McCRUM & DERN,

[INDEPENDENT IN EVERYTHING.]

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H. C. DERN,

EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.

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of the darkness, he led them by paths known only to himself, until but one more stage lay between them and their destination. Here they fell in with an Indian who had halted to feed his horses, and after reposing for a time, were preparing to resume their journey, when the cigarrera's mother, hastily approaching the two men in much alarm expressed her desire, as Tehucan was so near, to finish the journey by daylight.

"And why so?" asked the track-seeker, greatly surprised.

"Why," answered the lady making the sign of the cross, "our entertainer, the Indian, says that last night he saw the Midnight Mower, and that we shall most likely see him moving in the field of alfalfa (lucerne) by moonlight, with his great shears. By all the saints in heaven!" she continued, trembling with fear, "the sight of him would make me die of fright."

"Well, and if we do see him?" rejoined Andres, "the Midnight Mower never harms any one. The traveller whose horse is tired, is very glad to meet with grass of his moving. So there's no danger, and we might come upon something in the daytime much more terrible than a night adventure. I can't answer for you by daylight."

This consideration prevailed, and the party having mounted, betook themselves once more to the route. The belief in the Midnight Mower is one of the old superstitions accredited in the state of Oaxaca, where it is reported that, at the commencement of the conquest—an event dishonored by so many cruelties—a Spanish cavalier, who had signalled himself by his ferocity towards the natives, riding one day at full speed, captured an Indian whom he saw mowing lucerne in a field. "Halo, mingo, how soon will this pace take me to Oaxaca?"

"Never!" was the answer; and as it turned out, a little further on, the over-ridden horse died of fatigue. The Spaniard not understanding that the Indian meant he would never arrive with that horse, returned furious with rage, under the impression that a spell had been cast upon the animal, and killed the native with a thrust of his sword. The last murder put the finishing stroke to his iniquities; he disappeared the same evening, condemned, as the Indians say, to mow lucerne eternally, in order to terrify those who would treat them.

The travellers kept on their way in silence; another hour or two, and they would emerge from the by-path upon the main-road to Tehuacan, when suddenly, two pistol-shots were heard in quick succession, followed by the galloping of a horse, from which, as it approached the party, a Spanish soldier fell dead to the ground.

The track-seeker gazed intently forward into the gloom: "Those two pistol-shots," he said, "gave the same sound, they were both loaded by the same hand; and with equal measures of power, and by the same hand. Now I hear only the clash of swords; it is evident that some one is to be disarmed, and taken alive; I hear him cry for help; he is a foreigner."

Andres darted off at a gallop in the direction of the sounds, and Gamboa was preparing to follow, when the cries of the duenna held him back: "Mujer Santissima!" she exclaimed, "you are not going to leave us alone!"

The guerrillero remained; meantime the voice renewed its cries for succor. The track-seeker urged his horse the more, and fortunately the soft sand deadened the sound of the hoofs, and it was without being perceived that he became aware of three soldiers stooping over a man lying on the ground and binding him with cords. He fell upon them unexpectedly. It was too late, when they attempted to put themselves on the defensive. They were three Spanish dragoons, a sufficient reason to Andres for not waiting to consider whether he was wrong or right; in them he saw only enemies, and a poor wretch yielding to their number, and with two shots of his pistols he brought down two of the aggressors, ready to come to an explanation afterward with the third. But the Spaniard flew to his horse,

and plied the spurs so desperately that in a minute he was out of sight. The track-seeker, remaining master of the field, hastened to liberate the captive from his bonds, and seizing the horse belonging to one of the vanquished dragoons, placed the rein in the hands of the stranger, who sprang lightly into the saddle. Luz murmured a fervent thanksgiving as she saw them approach. The individual who had been so happily rescued was an Englishman, named Robinson.

"Thanks," he said to Andres, "you have rendered a more important service to your country's cause, and to General Teran, than you might imagine;" and after this formal acknowledgment in mysterious terms, he shut himself up in impenetrable silence.

A few miles further, the cavalcade were at last about to see the horses of Tehucan in the moonlight, when the track-seeker, pointing with his finger, indicated a sight to his companions that sent a shudder of horror through their veins.

In a field adjoining the road, amidst a thick carpet of alfalfa, across which, the moon threw the shadow of a few pale-leaved olive trees, they saw a man bending over the ground, and mowing, or pretending to mow, the herbage around him. An old gray, felt hat, looped up behind, and ornamented with a long feather, concealed his features, while a shirt with puffed sleeves, and short pantaloons tight at the hips, gave him a resemblance to the old portraits by Murillo, of the time of the conquest.

The travellers were, however, so much agitated to look with composure on this singular apparition of the Midnight Mower: The two blades of his huge shears shone between his hands in the moonlight, as he opened and reclosed them without noise; and when a swath of lucerne fell at his feet it seemed as though he searched in his pocket, and then descended a mysterious half circle in the air, with outstretched hand.

After that, he again went on with his shears, and ever as before the alfalfa fell beneath his strokes.

It seemed for a moment, in the pale light of the moon, that the track-seeker turned pale; that his expanding nostril and the fire of his eye showed that if fear had taken possession of him, it was at least not the detriment of his infallible sagacity. "Madre de Dios!" he said in a low voice, "it's the Midnight Mower!"

"Indeed!" answered the Englishman, who comprehended nothing of the sense of his words.

The track-seeker shook his head, and made no reply; but motioning to his companions to remain still, he slid quietly from his saddle and threw his bridle to Gamboa.

"What are you going to do?" asked Luz, terrified.

"Hush!" he answered; the next moment he was seen creeping behind the bushes, which bordered the road, until he found himself in a line parallel with the mower. The road hollow, and the ground on either side on a level with the heads of the travellers, so that by a little precaution they could see all that took place on the slope, without being observed.

While Andres, from the place of his concealment, kept his eye fixed on the mower, the latter again interrupted his labor to describe the strange circle in the air. Then, in a low voice he was heard to hum some mysterious chorus of the other world.

All at once the track-seeker disappeared; at the same moment the mower became invisible in the shadow, and behind the trunk of a tree, and nothing more was seen but the silent field and swaths of dewy herbage.

Robinson being altogether ignorant of the legend, remained perfectly unmoved; presently, Andres came back with a slow and measured step, and said, as he took his horse's bridle with me; "I should now know what to think of it."

"Of what use are balls against phantoms?" queried the guerrillero, in a low tone. "Did you not see how this one disappeared in spite of all your precautions and skill?"

"Ah! if I had but time I could fol-

low on his trail, even if he were a spirit of the air; but to stop here would be exposing ourselves to shipwreck in sight of port, for in a few minutes we shall see the towers of Tehucan." As he said this, Andres remounted his horse, and the party rode onward at a pace that made up for lost time. The track-seeker, however, remained silent, and seemed to be deeply absorbed in thought.

"You do not believe, then, in the Midnight Mower?" said Luz, interrupting his meditations.

"It is a mower of flesh and bone, as we!" replied Andres; "but what was he really doing there?"

"Per Dios!" answered the guerrillero, "he was mowing; accomplishing his eternal expiation. Did you not remark the hat with the feather, in the fashion of three hundred years ago?"

"It is playing a part," rejoined the track-seeker, "and when any one plays a part, he always tries to take the right costume; but why this comedy? that is what I say to myself. I will know," he exclaimed, "what this man or this phantom was doing! In an hour's time you will be safe in Tehucan; I shall be there two hours after." And deaf to the remonstrances of the two women and Gamboa, who continued to see a supernatural apparition in the Midnight Mower, the track-seeker retraced his steps at a gallop, and soon disappeared a second time.

Shortly afterwards, the party drew near to the town, a few minutes more, and all danger would be over, when a troop of twenty soldiers who had just issued from the gate, stopped their way. Day was beginning to dawn, and the nets which each rider carried showed that they were out in search of forage. Such in fact was their design. The leader of the detachment questioned the travellers and in the dragoon's horse, still mounted by Robinson, he saw confirmation of the report furnished by Gamboa, in reply to his questions.

After this incident, the cavalcade entered Tehucan without further interruption. While they are seeking quarters, we may say a few words respecting the stranger who had come so unexpectedly into their company. Robinson was owner of a considerable freight of muskets on board of a brig anchored outside the bar of the Gozacoalcos, and had sailed with the intention of selling them to the first customer, royalist, or insurgent. He had fallen in with a Spanish commandant, who, after hearing and agreeing to his propositions, contrived a scheme for obtaining possession of the cargo of arms without payment. The Englishman was thereupon seized, shut up in prison, and given to understand that the price of his liberty would be an order for the delivery of the muskets—a practical illustration of night makes right—against which he remonstrated vigorously, but in vain. Robinson then thought himself of the insurgent General Teran, and bribed his keepers to let him escape. They resigned compliance, received the stipulated sum; but the prisoner had scarcely left the fort behind than they attempted to re-capture him, and would have succeeded, but for the happy intervention of Andres, as has been related.

Notwithstanding his recent elevation, the insurgent chief was accessible at all hours, as well by night as by day. Robinson took no further time than to lodge his horse at the posada, to eat a mouthful, and at the moment that the bugles sounded the reveille, he presented himself at the palace. He was at once admitted, and found himself face to face with a young man, whose visage denoted at once distinction, affability, and high intelligence. It was the independent general, Don Manuel de Mierry Teran, he was seated before a table covered with papers and maps, for the business of the day had already commenced. Cash was then plentiful with the revolutionary leader, and he received Robinson's offer of the freight of muskets with the greatest satisfaction. They were settling the terms of the purchase, when a noise was heard in the square outside, where the rising sun shone on two regiments encamped in the open air for want of barracks. The

general approached the window to see the cause of the disturbance.

"Ah," he said, "our foragers—they have come back still more abundantly laden than yesterday; but what does that man want that is with them?"

"That man," answered the Englishman, "is Andres Tapia, the track-seeker. It is he who rescued me so bravely from the hands of the Spaniards, and if your cause triumphs by the aid of arms I supply you with, it is to that man your thanks will be due."

Andres was gesticulating and speaking vehemently, but his words were answered by laughter. "If it please you to listen to him," said Robinson to the general, "I am convinced you will be of his opinion."

"Well, we will see," replied the chief, and he ordered the track-seeker to be admitted. The latter cried as soon as he entered, "Will it please your excellency, (vueza ezencia) to give orders to burn as quickly as possible all the forage that your men have just brought in?"

"And why if you please?"

"Because our enemies use all sorts of fire-arms against us, and they have profited by a superstition believed all over our province, to poison the forage supposed to be cut by the Midnight Mower, and of which the quality is not suspected. This forage, I say, will cost us the horses of a whole regiment."

Andres seemed persuaded of the fact. The general, therefore, gave orders for a temporary sequestration of the forage,—too rare to be lightly sacrificed,—until a worn-out horse had been fed with the lucerne, and the result obtained. The order was obeyed. "So," said the guerrillero to the track-seeker, when they found themselves alone, "this Midnight Mower—"

"Was only a knave who played the part that had been marked out for him, but who was not clever enough for a match with me."

"Then he confessed that the forage was poisoned?"

"He did not tell me a word about it; we only spoke of the fine weather, and the late rains," answered Andres, as he finished taking the bride off his horse.

"And did that satisfy you?"

"Caramba, I have guessed that thought a many a man from fewer words than those. I had watched him for some time without his seeing me, and when I accosted him, I already knew what to expect. Friend, I said, I am sent as extraordinary courier to the commandant of Fort Villegas, on a message of life or death; my horse is dead beat, and if you will let me take a bundle of lucerne it will set him up again; otherwise the fort will be taken. I foresaw the answer: The Mower said that my horse would arrive much sooner if he had fed elsewhere, because,—because the lucerne was green and damp with the night dew. Very well, I replied I carry off a fool's hat. So saying, I snatched his masquerading beaver from his head, and he had not recovered from his astonishment when I galloped off to overtake you, and to convince you that the Midnight Mower is only a man employed to poison the fields of alfalfa in the neighborhood of the insurgent posts. In half an hour's time we will go and see how the horse is that has eaten the forage."

The event confirmed in every point the assertions of the track-seeker. The poor animal died in convulsions produced by the poison, and soon a huge fire had destroyed the last stalks of the lucerne, which but for Andres would have been fatal to the cavalry of General Teran.

KEEP HIM OUT.

"What noise is that?" said a judge, disturbed in the hearing of a case.

"It's a man, my lord," was the answer of the doorkeeper.

"What does he want?"

"He wants to get in, my lord."

"Well keep him out!"

The audience were comfortably seated; the case is going forward; to make room for the new-comer, some must shift their seats, and perhaps be jostled about a little; so they are all perfectly satisfied with a judge's dictum of "keep him out!"

You have yourself been in an omnibus when a stout passenger has

presented himself to the conductor, and petitioned for a place. You are all snugly seated—why should you be disturbed? The seats are full! "Keep him out!" But the intruder in, he presses forward to the inner corner, perhaps treading on some teaty gentleman's toes. How you hate the new-comer, until you get fairly "shook down" and settled again in your place! The door opens again,—another passenger! "Keep him out!" cry the company, and strange to say, the loudest vociferator of the whole, is the very passenger who last came in. He in his turn becomes conservative, after having fairly got a place inside.

It's the same through life. There is a knocking from time to time at the door of the constitution!

"What's the noise?" asks the men in power.

"It's a lot of men, my lords and gentlemen."

"What do they want?"

"They want to come in."

"Well, keep them out!"

And those who are comfortably seated within the gates, re-echo the cry of "keep them out! Why should they be disturbed in their seats, and made uncomfortable?"

But somehow, by dint of loud knocking, the men, or a rush of them, at length do contrive to get in; and after sundry shovings and jostlings, they get seated, and begin to feel comfortable, when there is another knocking louder than before! Would you believe it? The last accommodated are now the most eager of all to keep the door closed against the new-comers; and "keep them out!" is their vociferous cry.

Here is a batch of learned men debating the good of their order.—They are considering how their profession may be advanced.—What is the gist of their discussion?—The enactment of laws against all intruders upon their comfort and quiet. They make their calling a snug monopoly, and contrive matters so that as few as possible are admitted to share the good things of their class. "Keep them out!" is the cry of all the learned professions.

"Keep them out!" cry the barristers, when the attorney claims to be admitted to plead before certain courts. "Keep them out!" cry the attorneys, when ordinary illegal men claim to argue a case before the county courts. "Keep her out!" cry both barristers and attorneys, when Mrs. Cobbert claims to be heard in her imprisoned husband