....... STEALING THE PADRE. By EDGAR MAYHEW BACON. . . Copyright, 1896, by the Bacheller Syndicate . . .

year the campaign of the Agua Alta occurred. Upon resigning command of the army I had promised Perpeta that my fighting days were over, but from the time that the first gun was fired I fretted and chafed. My oranges and grapes no longer engrossed me, the rose garden was untouched and the Hennequin aloes went to pole unheeded. From the veranda of my house there was a clear view across valleys and forests to the mountains of Agua Alta, and I spent my time in contemplation of that prospect till Pepeta herself brought me my sword and bade me go and join Gen. Maduro.

Shame that I should say it, but I went with alacrity. I had no anxiety, no responsibility, no fear. Going as a volunteer, I forgot my gray hairs. I was a soldier of fortune again, and my heart bounded with youthful enthusiasm as I bade adieu to my wife and rode away. I reached Maduro's camp at sunset of the second day after departing from home. Four miles westward of the Agua Alta it lay, on a little plateau, upon three sides of which was the forest. I had with me only my man, Antonio, who had



I CALLED IN THE VOICE MY VET-ERANS KNEW.

served me in the old wars as body servant, but would not have left me for a fortune. The pickets passed us on till we reached the headquarters of Maduro. whose welcome was evidently dampened by keen anxiety and vexation. I did not have to look far for the cause. Among the fires the men stalked about, meeting in groups, gesticulating excitedly and paying no attention to discipline. Their officers seemed to have lost the power to control them and were in despair. A soldier reads such indications as a physician knows the symptoms of disease. He does not need to hear any words; the murmur of sullen voices is a threat in itself. It means insubordination.

I turned again to Maduro, knowing that he would have something to say. He answered my look:

"You see! I have used appeals and arguments in vain; they have been harrassed by an enemy they cannot meetcannot see-till they are exhausted. For four nights successively, in difcapes us. The soldiers have grown superstitious about it and exchange all sorts of supernatural stories. I will not be able to keep them in the field long, even with bribes."

"Your pardon, general," said I, interrupting his confession of weakness. "Permit me to go down and talk to the

"Willingly," he responded, but added: "It will be useless!"

I stepped into the middle of them, and standing on a little hillock, close beside a fire that I knew would light my face strongly, I called in the voice that my veterans knew: "Who was with me at Chico?" Surprise silenced every voice, turned every head. There was a moment of scrutiny and then some old wardog recognized me and shouted: "Arroya! It is the general!" In an instant, it seemed, the cry was taken up by a thousand throats; "Arroya! Ar-

It was music to me. I knew the braying of the faithful old hounds that led the pack, and when they had shouted themselves hoarse and worked off their excitement that way, I raised my hand for silence and they fell to listening, as docile as children.

"Yes, my comrades; it is Arroya, who has envied you your glory and could not keep away. Your welcome has stirred eart as no other music could, for the old days when our blood reddened the Chico and we fixed our flag on the wall at Bonita. I have come to fight with you, to share your dangers and your victories; not as captain now. but as your comrade. Now that you are in the face of the enemy again I know that you will justify the praise that I have always given you. Together we

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will obey the commands of my dear When the king was in his twentieth Gen. Maduro and glory in the service of the king." Before they had time to say a word or raise the shout that was in their throats I led them in cheers for Maduro, and I knew that that good man's face must have brightened as he heard them and understood that the

meeting was over.
I have seen men who, in Maduro's position, would have been jealous, but I will do the general the justice to say that his was not a small nature; on the contrary, upon my return to his tent he greeted me with hands extended and a warmth of expression that I could not doubt the sincerity of.

"We have had no chance to strike a blow," he repeated. "If I could give the army one battle it would restore their spirit; but what can I do with an enemy who is always out of sight?" So he harped on that string. "The mer begin to be exhausted with the sleep less nights. The strangest part of the whole matter is that they say that our opponents are led by a woman." That becomes interesting.

Who is the amazon?" "The wife, or rather the widow, of Sanchez, the chief who was taken-"Whose head you sent as a present

"The same. They insist that his widow is a witch who protects her followers with charms and spells, and that she is followed with blind devotion by the rebels, who idolize her."

"Truly that is an entertaining story," said I, thinking what a good correspondent some journal lost when Maduro adopted the profession of arms. "Besides that," he continued, "the

agua Alta seems to be bewitched." The Agua Alta is a swift stream that is fed by tributaries from numberless mountain ravines. When there is a rain it becomes a swollen rawing torrent. The river was the boundary of the territory of the rebels, whose capital, El Libertad, is perched upon a precipitous hill crest that is almost inaccessible. The city lies only six miles beyond the Agua Alta, but Gen. Maduro had not been able to cross the stream with his artillery. Three times he had essayed to build bridges and each time the river had swept the swung like a hammock from cliff to could be moved, nor the guns, without which an attack upon the stronghold

would be useless.

It was here that the father of the king had been killed fifteen years before, and I knew the ground well. As the general and I conversed, our feet. "They are at it again," he

cried, running out as he spoke. Several men had fallen; others wer scattered, seeking such shelter as they could find. A wounded man crawled toward a baggage wagon, behind which a group of soldiers had taken refuge. but a second ball killed him before ferent camps, we have been attacked by camp the officers successed in form- our victory, some guerilla band that hides and scat- ing the men, who were for the most ters in the dark woods and utterly es- part old soldiers, and returned an ineffectual fire, that only provoked a mocking yell from our assailants.

The confusion, however, did not last degree of order was restored and then a simultaneous, sweeping charge from the sides of the camp drove the guerrillas from their position; but none of them were killed while we counted a dozen of our force lifeless and more than double that number who were wounded. After this a stronger picket line was pushed out and partial quiet succeeded.

With the sound of firing the old habit of my military youth reasserted itself. and I seemed to understand things without seeing them; to reason without thinking.

"General, let me have thirty men with fifty rounds each," I requested, Maduro waved his hand toward the dready quieting camp.

"Take as many men as you like, senor t is said that you know every veteran n the army by name. There are many who have served under you; choose for

yourself." Then I quickly chose thirty good stanch volunteers out of the host that pressed their service upon me. It was an embarrassment of riches.

"Next time." I called to the disar pointed ones that I was obliged to reject and so we made haste, on foot, to reach the bridge. I felt assured that with speed we might anticipate the rebels, as they would not hurry after the attack, having, as they thought, finished their night work. Well, I intended to cut out some more of a serious nature for them before the moor

At ten o'clock I was at the river. We were early for our opponents, Sap-portez, an old sergeant, whose mettle knew well, whispered that we might illow them to get upon the bridge and then by cutting away the end, dash them all into the stream. The plan had its merits, but for many reasons I did not like it. I though: it a disadvantage to destroy all communication between the two sides of the river, and besides, I have a prejudice against that way of

We lay hid behind the bowlders that were strewn by the side of the stream's precipitous bank. We were to fire as the foremost of the enemy reached the bridge, charging them from the flank and rear and chasing them across into their own country if our fire left any of

them to chase. We had not waited very long when about a hundred and fifty men approached, with no apparent anticipation of danger. Not a sound, hardly a breath, from behind the rocks, till the bridge was almost reached, when some fellow of my party, too impatient to wait the word of command, pulled the trigger and then the volley blazed out and the veterans rose with a yell and charged. The moon was now up and we could see very distinctly by the bridge a huddled mass of men who forgot their recent pleasant excursion when confronted with retribution, Pell-mell they ran for life, and our bullets did

much damage among them. No doubt the rebels' fears magnified our numbers, and I think that one of my hardened old soldiers would have been a match for any three of them at least. The concentrated fire that poured into the crowd soon reduced the discrepancy in numbers and made our force more even. Their struggle to cross was like the flowing water through the small neck of a large bottle. We had an excellent opportunity to pay past scores at our leisure. Having no desire to join

the enemy in an involuntary descent to the bottom of the chasm, I held my men back till the last of the rebels had nearly crossed and then tried to preserve ome sort of a formation, not knowing what we might meet when the foe were heartened by finding themselves upon their own territory. The bridge was swinging violently from the rush of their mad retreat, so that we lost a little time in crossing, and a good many of them escaped us. We pursued them for about a mile, and nothing short of total destruction could have surpassed the punishment they received. I was more than satisfied, knowing the importance that this skirmish would have in restoring the morale of the army.

I had called a halt and we were commencing to retire, when a groan from a figure that lay by the path arrested my attention just as a soldier stepped aside and raised his rifle to give the coup de grace; an act of mercy under the circumstances, since before morning



THE VETERANS ROSE WITH Y YELL.

the wild beasts would glean where w had reaped. In the next instant there was an exclamation of surprise:"Sain Iago! It is a woman!"

Interposing to prevent the intended shot, I bent over the slight figure that lay full in the moonlight, with loosened hair streaming about the white face and big eyes that shone like those of a tigress brought to bay. She seemed to be beyond the power of motion, but there was no lack of intelligence in that glance. Sapportez had come near, and with an oath exclaimed: "It is the very

one; that is the witch herself!" Was it true, then, after all, what the soldiers said, that the insurgents were generaled by a woman? If so, the capture was an important one. I demanded that she give an account of herself, but whether she could speak or not I did not know. At all events, she kept a resolute silence, "Speak, you she devil! and one of my rough fellows put out his hand as though to shake here. I sternly ordered that no harm be done the prisoner, and then with such gentleness as the circumstances permitted I lifted structure away. The only permanent the little figure to ascertain where her crossing was an old Indian bridge that wound was. The blood was soaking the wound was. The blood was soaking the side of her jacket. She was a mere girl cliff. Over that no large bodies of men in appearance and was clad in a nondescript costume that was half femi-

nine and half military.
"Some girl who had gone to meet her lover at the bridge when he returned from the attack upon our camp," I

said. "No, general," protested another of rattle of musketry started us both to my men; "I saw her once before. That woman was with the foremost of those who passed our ambush tonight, and I have seen her, too, when her husband, Sanchez, was executed." I could feel the start of the form in my arms as that name was mentioned and saw the fierce look of rage and hate which she flashed upon the speaker. Then I knew he reached it. On the right of the that this was really the very crown of

PART II.

In a moment she turned her face to me "General! Gen. Maduro!" She beyond the first few moments of attack. I thrust her arm against my chest, nearly forcing herself from my grasp by the suddenness and fury of the effort. I understood the hatred of the man who had sent her husband's head as a pres ent to the king.

"Not Gen. Maduro, my child. I am Arroya." For though she was an enemy she was also a woman, and I pitied the little creature. At the name her whole expression changed and she looked at me with wonder and questioning: "Arroya? Arroya who was at 'Yes. I am that Arroya."

"Save me-as you are brave and merciful, save me," she faltered. She looked at the soldiers as though she would have them further away. Understanding that she might have something for my ear alone, I ordered the men to retire a little way, and when they had done so she spoke quickly, though with evident pain.

"Do you remember Col. Poey, who was with you at Chico?" "Poey, my dearest companion in arms; he died long since. I owed my life to him once on the battlefield. Why do you speak of him?"

Because I am Col. Poey's daughter. The news stunned me. I could find no words to express my astonishment. As though in a dream I heard her say 'I am mortally hurt. But I would not die without the consolation of the church of my religion. O, if you are really that Arroya that my father loved, get me a Padre that I may confess and receive absolution before I die."

It would not be difficult, I thought, to do as she wished if I had but a place to leave her; for it was very evident that an attempt to move her to our camp would be fatal before we could reach it.

"Is there no house or cabin near?"

"There is a hunter's cabin about half a mile from here," she gasped. "It is in the footpath that turns to the left as you go towards the river." So we lifted her carefully and carried

her slowly to the hut she had indicated and in that rude and inhospitable shelter we laid our burden, who had fainted from the loss of blood and the pain of her journey. "Quick," I directed Sapportez. "Go to

to the general) and bring back your Padre. But Sapportez said:"General, we have no Padre in the camp. We had two, but one died of the fever and the other ac-

the camp; take a dozen men with you

for safety, carry this (a note I scribbled

companied his body back to the city to celebrate mass for him." Here was a dilemma which had not een anticipated. Just then Antonio

came up to me. "Antonio," I asked, "do you know El Libertad?" "As well as I know your house, senor.

was born and raised there." "Stay Sapportez. You will not go to the camp, but I will leave you in command here to guard the prisoner, Dispose your men well, recollecting that you are in an enemy's country. Plac your pickets carefully: guard the lady in the hovel yonder with your life, if necessary, against any harm, but do

you alive kill her with your own hand first. Do you understand?" "Yes, senor. Perfectly. I am to kill the witch-"

not on any account permit a rescue,

only as the last alternative; when you find that your life will no longer serve to keep her from being rescued. She is to be cared for until I return. Now, do you comprehend?"
"I understand, senor."

"Then come, Antonio." We reached the main path, and I had turned toward and so expedite this business, or must El Libertad before Antonio, who was we carry you? Do you consent to a well-drilled servant, ventured to ask a question.

"May I be pardoned, senor-but where "To El Libertad. You are to show e some way by which we may enter

the city undetected." "But, senor! To attack the garrison? Only two of us?" "No, no. But only to steal the Padre, Antonio."

We had gone another mile before the man again addressed me. "Pardoh, my general, but here are three dead by the path." "Well, what of it?"

"Their clothes might be convenient as a disguise." We approached them, and some night creature fied snarling away into the dark. I exchanged my coat and hat for those of a dead rebel, and Antonio

did the same, hiding ours in a convenient place. Then we pushed on rapidly towards the city, my man leading as we drew near till we reached a shaded wall, at the end of which was a little white house. Upon the wall he got, and I followed in silence. At the little house we clambered down again into an overgrown garden and up a circuitous path that was only broad enough to pamil the base of her. But how enough to permit us to travel in single file, but which was worn hard with frequent use. It seemed as though we had made a detour of half a mile, constantly ascending, when Antonio departed from the path by a trail that was hardly -visible in the moonlight, and a few moments later we were removing an overgrowth of vines from the dark mouth of a walled culvert that pierced the masonry that defended

"It is the old drain," whispered An-"There is a lumber shed now on the other side, and the people have forgotten it. We boys used to use it when we would steal pines from old Pedraza's garden."

El Libertad.

I hated to put foot in the uninviting passage, not knowing what moment I might feel the fangs of a serpent in my leg; but there was nothing else We reached the other extremity in safety, and crossed ourselves as we emerged into the shed, which was half of old barrels and rubbish that

the builders had left. "Now, where is the priest's house?" "It is there, on the corner, senor. There are two there who live together." "Two? The devil!"

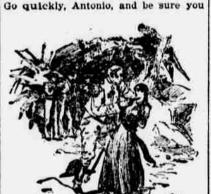
"No, senor, both Padres, I assure "But, loo you, Antonio. We do not

want two. One will be plenty for our purpose. Perhaps they are not at nome, as there is no light in the house?" "No, senor, they are both at home Do you see those little red sparks on the veranda?" Sure enought, there were two points like the eyes of an

animal. As we looked one described a semi-circle and returned to its first position. They were the cigarettes of the reverend companions. "There is no time to be lost, An-

tonio; you must take away one of them, and I will kidnap the other." "But how?" asked Antonio.

"Listen. You have an errand from the sick. Do you hear that uproar in the distance? That is the noise of a woman wailing over the dead. There will be some wounded there too. A wounded man has called for the Padre.



I AM COL. POEY'S DAUGHTER.

take the largest one with you, if there is a difference. If you lead him yonder some one will be sure to want him." The servant went. He stole back in the shadow until he had gone far enough to be out of sight of the house on the corner, then, emerging boldly into the street, passed me running. and so came to the Padre's door I could hear their voices as they spoke, parleying and debating until one of them flung his cigarette into the street and directly passed my hiding place,

guided by the invaluable Antonio. Rising from where I had crouched. as soon as they were out of sight I crossed the street and knocked at the The remaining Padre, who had gone inside the house when his companion went away, came to the door, and I besought him to accompany me

in haste to see a wounded soldier. "Bother your wounded man," he answered. "There was a fellow here just now on a similiar errand. Those wounded all belong to the other city district anyhow, and they have Padres enough there of their own to attend to them. I do not like to interefere outside of our own cure." With this he would have shut the door in my face but that I put my foot against it. He was angry at my boldness, but I made haste to say that the wounded man was in his own district and was rich. He was little moved by this, to do him credit, and barely allowed the door to remain open between us while I spoke. I was afraid should have to commence to use force there and that would have been inconvenient. Though he was a small man, I might be seen carrying him across the street and a rescue would be attempted. However, I had another card in my

"I was sent by his daughter, Padre Such a beautiful girl, who is all alone and she will not be comforted." The Padre reached for his hat.

"Why of course; it does not become my cloth to refuse to go upon errands of mercy, but you see what time it is? It was, indeed, one o'clock.

We were opposite the shed when I seized him and covering his mouth so that he could make no outcry retired into the tunnel like a spider who has caught a large and vigorous fly. Here I made haste to secure and gag him well and then rested and waited for Antonio. He came almost immediately. I heard his approach and hailed him i a low tone. He responded joyfully "Have you got him, senor?"

"Yes, I have him here; make haste, if we are to finish this night's work in We hurried with all the speed that we

could. We were on the road, if road it could be called, being but a half-made JOHN H. PHELPS, Scranton, Pa.

"No, no!" I exclaimed. "That is pathway for donkeys and their burdens, before we set our captive on his feet

and spoke to him.
"Padre," said I, "I am sorry to put you to this inconvenience, but there is a woman wounded in a hut near the river and she requires confession and abso lution before she dies. Will you walk, we carry you? Do you consent to walk?" He nodded his head.

"Do you also agree, on your honor, to make no noise or outcry if we remove the bandage from your mouth?" Again he signed assent.



I SEIZED HIM AND COVERED HIS MOUTH.

removed the gag than he turned to me came she in your charge? Why this secrecy? Who are you?"

"As for that, father, she is a pris oner, and while I was willing to fetch the church to her I was not willing to surrender her person, nor my own, for that matter, to the rebels at El Liber-

"Let us make haste," was all the an swer he made, nor did he say anything more during the remainder of our journey. In fact, our pace was not a good one to encourage conversation, and I doubt if the churchman was accustomed to such violent exercise. When we finally reached the hut Sapporter saluted and said:

"All has been quiet, general, but you have come none to soon, for I think she is only waiting for the consolations

of the holy church. I went into the hut with the Padre, and the dying woman turned to me a face that was pitifully white, even in the glare of the smoking torch that Sapportez had placed at the doorway. The poor creature's great eyes were so full of gratitude that my heart smote me for having been the cause of her wound. Of all the foes that I have slain or caused to be slain during my life of warfare I never regretted one so much. Crossing the cabin to her side, I knelt and placed my hand on her forehead. She took it in hers and attempted to kiss it, but I would not allow that, but bent over and kissed her brow instead, for the sake of her father, the companion in arms that I loved. So I left her

with the priest. In the early dawn the padre came out from the hovel, and there were traces of tears in his young face. "She is gone," he said, quietly; then, holding out his hand, added; "Senor General, I thank you for abducting

"I need the church's pardon for that

violence, Padre." "That is granted. And now tell me,

will you add to the kindness already done and permit us to bury her?" That required thought. To have let her go back alive, though in the throes of death, would have been to invite concealment of her death and leave her name still a terror to our people; but now, with her end so attested, there could be no objection. Still, I was willing to shape the conclusion affair so as best to serve the interests of the king. The padre was waiting

patiently for my answer. "If at noon tomorrow an escort from El Libertad comes with a flag of truce and requires the body it will be delivered at the further end of the bridge. This was the reply I finally made to his

The time agreed upon had not arrived when Gen. Maduro and a large detachment were in position with such military pomp as our circumstances permitted, and the chieftainess lay in state, awaiting the escort with the flag of truce. At noon the party appeared with the little Padre and some dignitary of the city in the lead and between them the flag. In the distance there was a crowd of people with many women among them, walling so that we could hear their lamentations above

the brawling of the Agua Alta. We delivered the body as I had agreed and with all possible ceremony and respect. To this Maduro had consented with difficulty and sorely against his will; but when, on the following day, another flag followed, resulting in ne gotiations and the capitulations of El Libertad, he embraced me and would have it that I had done alone what he and all his army had failed to do. As I had said, Maduro's nature was not small nor his disposition jealous.

By my front door is a settee where Pepeta sits with her Spanish lace embroidery, while I in my arm-chair study some authority on fruit culture or the care of roses. There we were the day after my return from the shortest campaign of my life, and I was telling Pepeta the story I have written here. As I told it the tears dropped on her lace and on her hand, and I could not see her eyes, but the lashes were wet or

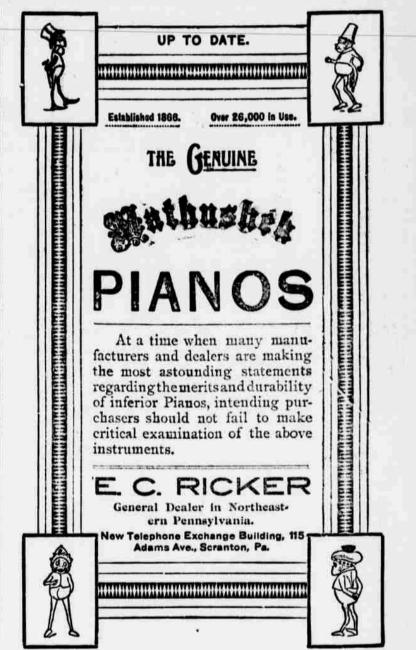




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