

Cumner & South Sea Folk, v4

Gilbert Parker

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CUMNER'S SON AND OTHER SOUTH SEA FOLK

by Gilbert Parker

Volume 4.

A SABLE SPARTAN
A VULGAR FRACTION
HOW PANGO WANGO WAS ANNEXED
AN AMIABLE REVENGE
THE BLIND BEGGAR AND THE LITTLE RED PEG
A FRIEND OF THE COMMUNE

A SABLE SPARTAN

Lady Tynemouth was interested; his Excellency was amused. The interest was real, the amusement was not ironical. Blithelygo, seeing that he had at least excited the attention of the luncheon party, said half-apologetically: "Of course my experience is small, but in many parts of the world I have been surprised to see how uniform revolutionises the savage. Put him into Convention, that is clothes, give him Responsibility, that is a chance to exercise vanity and power, and you make him a Britisher--a good citizen to all intents and purposes."

Blithelygo was a clever fellow in his way. He had a decided instinct for military matters, and for good cigars and pretty women. Yet he would rather give up both than an idea which had got firmly fixed in his mind. He was very deferential in his remarks, but at the same time he was quite willing to go into a minority which might not include pretty Miss Angel who sat beside him, if he was not met by conclusive good arguments.

In the slight pause which followed his rather long speech, his Excellency passed the champagne cup, and Lady Tynemouth said: "But I suppose it depends somewhat on the race, doesn't it, Mr. Travers? I am afraid mere uniforming would scarcely work successfully--among the Bengalese, for instance."

"A wretched crew," said Major Warham; "awful liars, awful scoundrels, need kicking every morning."

"Of course," said Blithelygo, "there must be some consideration of race. But look at the Indian Mutiny. Though there was revolt, look at those who 'fought with us faithful and few'; look at the fidelity of the

majority of the native servants. Look at the native mounted police in Australia; at the Sikhs in the Settlements and the Native States; at the Indian scouts of the United States and Canada; and look at these very Indian troops at your door, your Excellency! I think my principle holds good; give uniform, give responsibility--under European surveillance of course--get British civilisation."

His Excellency's eyes had been wandering out of the window, over the white wall and into the town where Arabia, India, Africa, the Islands of the South and Palestine were blended in a quivering, radiant panorama. Then they rose until they fell upon Jebel Shamsan, in its intoxicating red and opal far away, and upon the frowning and mighty rampart that makes Aden one of the most impregnable stations of the Empire. The amusement in his eyes had died away; and as he dipped his fingers in the water at his side and motioned for a quickening of the punkahs, he said: "There is force in what you say. It would be an unpleasant look-out for us here and in many parts of the world if we could not place reliance on the effect of uniform; but"--and the amused look came again to his eyes--"we somehow get dulled to the virtues of Indian troops and Somauli policemen. We can't get perspective, you see."

Blithelygo good-naturedly joined in the laugh that went round the table; for nearly all there had personal experience of "uniformed savages." As the ladies rose Miss Angel said naively to Blithelygo: "You ought to spend a month in Aden, Mr. Blithelygo. Don't go by the next boat, then you can study uniforms here."

We settled down to our cigars. Major Warham was an officer from Bombay. He had lived in India for twenty years: long enough to be cynical of justice at the Horse Guards or at the India Office: to become in fact bitter against London, S.W., altogether. It was he that proposed a walk through the town.

The city lay sleepy and listless beneath a proud and distant sky of changeless blue. Idly sat the Arabs on the benches outside the low-roofed coffee-houses; lazily worked the makers of ornaments in the bazaars; yawningly pounded the tinkers; greedily ate the children; the city was cloyed with ease. Warham, Blithelygo and myself sat in the evening sun surrounded by gold-and-scarlet bedizened gentry of the desert, and drank strong coffee and smoked until we too were satisfied, if not surfeited; animals like the rest. Silence fell on us. This was a new life to two of us; to Warham it was familiar, therefore comfortable and soporific. I leaned back and languidly scanned the scene; eyes halfshut, senses half-awake. An Arab sheikh passed swiftly with his curtained harem; and then went filing by in orderly and bright array a number of Mahommedans, the first of them bearing on a cushion of red velvet, and covered with a cloth of scarlet and gold, a dead child to burial. Down from the colossal tanks built in the mountain gorges that were old when Mahomet was young, there came donkeys bearing great leathern bottles such as the Israelites carried in their forty years' sojourning. A long line of swaying camels passed dustily to the desert that burns even into this city of Aden, built on a volcano; groups of Somaulis, lithe and brawny, moved chattering here and there; and a handful of wandering horsemen, with spears and snowy garments, were being swallowed up in the mountain defiles.

The day had been long, the coffee and cigarettes had been heavy, and we dozed away in the sensuous atmosphere. Then there came, as if in a dream, a harsh and far-off murmur of voices. It grew from a murmur to a

sharp cry, and from a sharp cry to a roar of rage. In a moment we were on our feet, and dashing away toward the sound.

The sight that greeted us was a strange one, and horribly picturesque. In front of a low-roofed house of stone was a crowd of Mahommedans fierce with anger and loud in imprecation. Knives were flashing; murder was afoot. There stood, with his back to the door of the house, a Somauli policeman, defending himself against this raging little mob. Not defending himself alone. Within the house he had thrust a wretched Jew, who had defiled a Mahommedan mosque; and he was here protecting him against these nervous champions of the faith.

Once, twice, thrice, they reached him; but he fought on with his unwounded arm. We were unarmed and helpless; no Somaulis were near. Death glittered in these white blades. But must this Spartan die?

Now there was another cry, a British cheer, a gleam of blue and red, a glint of steel rounding the corner at our left, and the Mahommedans broke away, with a parting lunge at the Somauli. British soldiers took the place of the bloodthirsty mob.

Danger over, the Somauli sank down on the threshold, fainting from loss of blood. As we looked at him gashed all over, but not mortally wounded, Blithelygo said with glowing triumph: "British, British, you see!"

At that moment the door of the house opened, and out crawled to the feet of the officer in command the miserable Israelite with his red hemmed skirt and greasy face. For this cowardly creature the Somauli policeman had perilled his life. Sublime! How could we help thinking of the talk at his Excellency's table?

Suddenly the Somauli started up and looked round anxiously. His eyes fell on the Jew. His countenance grew peaceful. He sank back again into the arms of the surgeon and said, pointing to the son of Abraham: "He owe me for a donkey."

Major Warham looking at Blithelygo said with a chilled kind of lustre to his voice: "British, so British, don't you know!"

A VULGAR FRACTION

Sometimes when, like Mirza, I retire to my little Hill of Bagdad for meditation, there comes before me the bright picture of Hawaii with its coral-bulwarked islands and the memory of an idle sojourn on their shores. I remember the rainbow-coloured harbour of Honolulu Hilo, the simply joyous Arcadie at the foot of Mauna Loa, and Mauna Kea which lifted violet shoulders to the morning, the groves of cocoa-palms and tamarinds, the waterfalls dropping over sheer precipices a thousand feet into the ocean, the green embrasures where the mango, the guava, and the lovi lovi grow, and where the hibiscus lifts red hands to the light. I call to mind the luau where Kalakua, the King, presided over the dispensation of stewed puppy, lifted to one's lips by brown but fair fingers, of live shrimps, of poi and taro and balls of boiled sea-weed stuffed with Heaven knows what; and to crown all, or to drown all, the

insinuating liquor kava, followed when the festival was done by the sensuous but fascinating hula hula, danced by maidens of varying loveliness. Of these Van Blaricom, the American, said, "they'd capture Chicago in a week with that racket," and he showed Blithelygo his calculations as to profits.

The moments that we enjoyed the most, however, were those that came when feast and serenade were over, when Hawaii Ponoī, the National Anthem, was sung, and we lay upon the sands and watched the long white coverlet of foam folding towards the shore, and saw visions and dreamed dreams. But at times we also breathed a prayer--a prayer that somebody or something would come and carry off Van Blaricom, whose satire, born and nurtured in Chicago, was ever turned against Hawaii and all that therein was.

There are times when I think I had a taste of Paradise in Hawaii--but a Paradise not without a Satanic intruder in the shape of that person from Illinois. Nothing escaped his scorn. One day we saw from Diamond Head three water-spouts careering to the south, a splendid procession of the powers of the air. He straightway said to Kalakua, that "a Michigan cyclone had more git-up-and-git about it than them three black cats with their tails in the water." He spent hours in thinking out rudely caustic things to repeat about this little kingdom. He said that the Government was a Corliss-engine running a sewing machine. He used to ask the Commander of the Forces when the Household Cavalry were going into summer camp--they were twelve. The only thing that appeared to impress him seriously was Molokai, the desolate island where the lepers made their cheerless prison-home. But the reason for his gravity appeared when he said to Blithelygo and myself: "There'd be a fortune in that menagerie if it was anchored in Lake Michigan." On that occasion he was answered in strong terms. It was the only time I ever heard Blithelygo use profanity. But the American merely dusted his patent leather shoes with a gay silk kerchief, adjusted his clothes on his five-foot frame as he stood up; and said: "Say you ought to hear my partner in Chicago when he lets out. He's an artist!"

This Man from the West was evidently foreordained to play a part in the destinies of Blithelygo and myself, for during two years of travel he continuously crossed our path. His only becoming quality was his ample extravagance. Perhaps it was the bountiful impetus he gave to the commerce of Honolulu, and the fact that he talked of buying up a portion of one of the Islands for sugar-planting, that induced the King to be gracious to him. However that might be, when Blithelygo and I joined his Majesty at Hilo to visit the extinct volcano of Kilauea, there was the American coolly puffing his cigar and quizzically feeling the limbs and prodding the ribs of the one individual soldier who composed the King's body-guard. He was not interested in our arrival further than to give us a nod. In a pause that followed our greetings, he said to his Majesty, while jerking his thumb towards the soldier: "King, how many of 'em have you got in your army?"

His Majesty blandly but with dignity turned to his aide-de-camp and raised his eyebrows inquiringly. The aide-de-camp answered: "Sixty."

"Then we've got 1/60th of the standing army with us, eh?" drawled Van Blaricom.

The aide-de-camp bowed affirmatively. The King was scanning Mauna Loa. The American winked at us. The King did not see the wink, but he had caught a tone in the voice of the invader, which brought, as I thought,

a slight flush to his swarthy cheek. The soldier-his name was Lilikalu --looked from his King to the critic of his King's kingdom and standing army, and there was a glow beneath his long eyelashes which suggested that three-quarters of a century of civilisation had not quite drawn the old savage spirit from the descendants of Lailai, the Hawaiian Eve.

During the journey up the Forty-Mile Track to Kilauea, the American enveloped 1/60th of his Majesty's standing army with his Michigan Avenue and peanut-stand wit, and not always, it was observed, out of the hearing of the King, who nevertheless preserved a marked unconsciousness. Majesty was at a premium with two of us on that journey. Only once was the Chicagonian's wit not stupid as well as offensive. It chanced thus. The afternoon in which we reached the volcano was suffocatingly hot, and the King's bodyguard had discarded all clothing--brief when complete--save what would not count in any handicap. He was therefore at peace, while the rest of us, Royalty included, were inwardly thinking that after this the orthodox future of the wicked would have no terrors. At a moment when the body-guard appeared to be most ostentatious in his freedom from clothing the American said to his Majesty: "King, do you know what 1/60th of your standing army is?" The reply was a low and frigid: "No."

"It's a vulgar fraction."

.....

There were seven of us walking on the crater of the volcano: great banks of sulphur on the right, dark glaciers of lava on the left, high walls of scoria and volcanic crust enveloping us all about. We were four thousand feet above the level of the sea. We were standing at the door of the House of Pele, the Goddess of Fire. We knocked, but she would not open. The flames were gone from her hearthstone, her smoke was gorging the throat of the suffering earth.

"Say, she was awful sick while she was about it," said the American as he stumbled over the belched masses of lava.

That was one day. But two days after we stood at Pele threshold again. Now red scoria and pumice and sulphur boiled and rolled where the hard lava had frayed our boots. Within thirty-six hours Kilauea has sprung from its flameless sleep into sulphurous life and red roaring grandeur. Though Pele came but slowly, she came; and a lake of fire beat at the lofty sides of the volcanic cup. The ruby spray flashed up to the sky, and geysers of flame hurled long lances at the moon.

"King," said the American, "why don't you turn it into an axe-factory?"

At last the time came when we must leave this scene of marvel and terror, and we retired reluctantly. There were two ways by which we might return to the bridle path that led down the mountain. The American desired to take the one by which we had not come; the rest of us, tired out, preferred to go as we came--the shortest way. A compromise was made by his Majesty sending 1/60th of the standing army with the American, who gaily said he would join us, "horse, foot and cavalry," in the bridle-path. We reached the meeting-point first, but as we looked back we saw with horror that two streams of fire were flowing down the mountain side. We were to the left of them both, and safe; but between them, and approaching us, were Van Blaricom and the native soldier. The two men saw their danger, and pushed swiftly down the mountainside and towards

us, but more swiftly still these narrow snake-like streams came on.

Presently the streams veered towards each other and joined. The two men were on an island with a shore of fire. There was one hope--the shore was narrow yet. But in running the American fell, spraining his ankle badly. We were speechless, but the King's lips parted with a moan, as he said: "Lilikalu can jump the stream, but the other--!"

They were now at the margin of that gleaming shore, the American wringing his hands. It was clear to him that unless a miracle happened he would see his beloved Chicago no more; for the stream behind them was rapidly widening.

I think I see that 1/60th of his Majesty's infantry as he looked down upon the slight and cowering form of the American. His moment of vengeance had come. A second passed, marked by the splashing roar of the waves in the hill above us, and then the soldier-naked, all save the boots he wore--seized the other in his arms, stepped back a few paces, and then ran forward and leaped across the barrier of flame. Not quite across! One foot and ankle sank into the molten masses, with a shiver of agony, he let the American fall on the safe ground. An instant later and he lay at our feet, helpless and maimed for many a day; and the standing army of the King was deprived of 1/60th of its strength.

HOW PANGO WANGO WAS ANNEXED

Blithelygo and I were at Levuka, Fiji, languidly waiting for some "trader" or mail-steamer to carry us away anywhere. Just when we were bored beyond endurance and when cigars were running low, a Fijian came to us and said: "That fellow, white fellow, all a-same a-you, long a-shore. Pleni sail. Pleni Melican flag."

We went to the beach, and there was Jude Van Blaricom, our American. We had left him in New Zealand at the Pink Terraces, bidding him an eternal farewell. We wished it so. But we had met him afterwards at Norfolk Island, and again at Sydney, and we knew now that we should never cease to meet him during our sojourn on this earth.

An hour later we were on board his yacht, Wilderness, being introduced to MacGregor, the captain, to Mr. Dagmar Caramel, C.M.G., his guest, and to some freshly made American cocktails. Then we were shown over the Wilderness. She looked as if she had been in the hands of a Universal Provider. Evidently the American had no intention of roughing it. His toilet requisites were a dream. From the dazzling completeness of the snug saloon we were taken aft to see two coops filled with fowls. "Say," said the American, "how's that for fresh meat?" Though a little ashamed of it, we then and there accepted the Chicagonian's invitation to take a cruise with him in the South Pacific. For days the cruise was pleasant enough, and then things began to drag. Fortunately there came a new interest in the daily routine. One day Van Blaricom was seen standing with the cook before the fowl coops deeply interested; and soon after he had triumphantly arranged what he called "The Coliseum." This was an enclosure of canvas chiefly, where we had cock-fights daily. The gladiators were always ready for the arena. One was called U. S., after

General U. S. Grant, and the other Bob Lee, after General Robert Lee.

"Go it, U. S. Lift your skewers, you bobtail. Give it to him, you've got him in Andersonville, U. S." Thus, day by day, were the warriors encouraged by Van Blaricom.

There is nothing very elegant or interesting in the record so far, but it all has to do with the annexation of Pango Wango, and, as Blithelygo long afterwards remarked, it shows how nations sometimes acquire territory. Yes, this Coliseum of ours had as much to do with the annexation as had the American's toilet requisites his hair-oil and perfume bottles. In the South Pacific, a thousand miles from land, Van Blaricom was redolent of new-mown hay and heliotrope.

It was tropically hot. We were in the very middle of the hurricane season. The air had no nerve. Even the gladiators were relaxing their ardour; and soon the arena was cleared altogether, for we were in the midst of a hurricane. It was a desperate time, but just when it seemed most desperate the wheel of doom turned backward and we were saved. The hurricane found us fretful with life by reason of the heat, it left us thankful for being let to live at all; though the Wilderness appeared little better than a drifting wreck. Our commissariat was gone, or almost gone, we hadn't any masts or sails to speak of, and the cook informed us that we had but a few gallons of fresh water left; yet, strange to say, the gladiators remained to us. When the peril was over it surprised me to remember that Van Blaricom had been comparatively cool through it all; for I had still before me a certain scene at the volcano of Kilauea. I was to be still more surprised.

We were by no means out of danger. MacGregor did not know where we were; the fresh water was vanishing rapidly, and our patch of sail was hardly enough to warrant a breeze taking any interest in it. We had been saved from immediate destruction, but it certainly seemed like exchanging Tophet for a slow fire. When the heat was greatest and the spiritual gloom thickest the American threw out the sand-bags, as it were, and hope mounted again.

"Say, MacGregor," he said, "run up the American flag. There's luck in the old bandana."

This being done, he added: "Bring along the cigars; we'll have out U. S. and Bob Lee in the saloon."

Our Coliseum was again open to the public at two shillings a head. That had been the price from the beginning. The American was very business-like in the matter, but this admission fee was our only contribution to the expenses of that cruise. Sport could only allay, it could not banish our sufferings. We became as haggard and woe-begone a lot as ever ate provisions impregnated with salt; we turned wistfully from claret to a teaspoonful of water, and had tongues like pieces of blotting-paper. One morning we were sitting at breakfast when we heard a cock-crow, then another and another. MacGregor sprang to his feet crying: "Land!" In a moment we were on deck. There was no land to be seen, but MacGregor maintained that a cock was a better look-out than a human being any time, and in this case he was right. In a few hours we did sight land.

Slowly we came nearer to the island. MacGregor was not at all sure where it was, but guessed it might be one of the Solomon Islands. When within a few miles of it Blithelygo unfeelingly remarked that its population

might be cannibalistic. MacGregor said it was very likely; but we'd have to be fattened first, and that would give us time to turn round. The American said that the Stars and Stripes and the Coliseum had brought us luck so far, and he'd take the risk if we would.

The shore was crowded with natives, and as we entered the bay we saw hundreds take to the water in what seemed fearfully like war-canoes. We were all armed with revolvers, and we had half a dozen rifles handy. As the islanders approached we could see that they also were armed; and a brawny race they looked, and particularly bloodthirsty. In the largest canoe stood a splendid-looking fellow, evidently a chief. On the shore near a large palm-thatched house a great group was gathered, and the American, levelling his glass, said: "Say, it's a she-queen or something over there."

At that moment the canoes drew alongside, and while MacGregor adjured us to show no fear, he beckoned the chief to come aboard. An instant, and a score of savages, armed with spears and nulla-nullas were on deck. MacGregor made signs that we were hungry, Blithelygo that we were thirsty, and the American, smoking all the while, offered the chief a cigar. The cigar was refused, but the headman ordered a couple of natives ashore, and in five minutes we had wild bananas and fish to eat, and water to drink. But that five minutes of waiting were filled with awkward incidents. Blithelygo, meaning to be hospitable, had brought up a tumbler of claret for the headman. With violent language, MacGregor stopped its presentation; upon which the poison of suspicion evidently entered the mind of the savage, and he grasped his spear threateningly. Van Blaricom, who wore a long gold watch-chain, now took it off and offered it to the chief, motioning him to put it round his neck. The hand was loosened on the spear, and the Chicagonian stepped forward and put the chain over the head of the native. As he did so the chief suddenly thrust his nose forward and sniffed violently at the American.

What little things decide the fate of nations and men! This was a race whose salutation was not nose-rubbing, but smelling, and the American had not in our worst straits failed to keep his hair sleek with hair-oil, verbena scented, and to perfume himself daily with new-mown hay or heliotrope. Thus was he of goodly savour to the chief, and the eyes of the savage grew bright. At that moment the food and drink came. During the repast the chief chuckled in his own strange way, and, when we slackened in our eating, he still motioned to us to go on.

Van Blaricom, who had been smiling, suddenly looked grave. "By the great horn-spoons," he said, "they have begun already! They're fattening us!"

MacGregor nodded affirmatively, and then Van Blaricom's eyes wandered wildly from the chief to that group on the shore where he thought he had seen the "she-queen." At that moment the headman came forward again, again sniffed at him, and again chuckled, and all the natives as they looked on us chuckled also. It was most unpleasant. Suddenly I saw the American start. He got up, turned to us, and said: "I've got an idea. MacGregor, get U. S. and Bob Lee." Then he quietly disappeared, the eyes of the savages suspiciously following him. In a moment he came back, bearing in his arms a mirror, a bottle of hair-oil, a couple of bottles of perfume, a comb and brush, some variegated bath towels, and an American flag. First he let the chief sniff at the bottles, and then, pointing to the group on the shore, motioned to be taken over. In a few moments he and MacGregor were being conveyed towards the shore in the gathering dusk.

Four hours passed. It was midnight. There was noise of drums and shouting on the shore, which did not relieve our suspense. Suddenly there was a commotion in the canoes that still remained near the Wilderness. The headman appeared before us, and beckoned to Blithelygo and myself to come. The beckoning was friendly, and we hoped that affairs had taken a more promising turn.

In a space surrounded with palms and ti-trees a great fire was burning. There was a monotonous roll of the savage tom-tom and a noise of shouting and laughter. Yes, we were safe, and the American had done it. The Coliseum was open, MacGregor was ring-master, and U. S. and Bob Lee were at work. This show, with other influences, had conquered Pango Wango. The American flag was hoisted on a staff, and on a mighty stump there sat Van Blaricom, almost innocent of garments, I grieve to say, with one whom we came to know as Totimalu, Queen of Pango Wango, a half circle of savages behind them. Van Blaricom and MacGregor had been naturalised by having their shoulders lanced with a spear-point, and then rubbed against the lanced shoulders of the chiefs. The taking of Pango Wango had not been, I fear, a moral victory. Van Blaricom was smoking a cigar, and was writing on a piece of paper, using the back of a Pango Wango man as a desk. The Queen's garments were chiefly variegated bath-towels, and she was rubbing her beaming countenance and ample bosom with hair-oil and essence of new-mown hay.

Van Blaricom nodded to us nonchalantly, saying: "It's all right--she's Totimalu, the Queen. Sign here, Queen," and he motioned for the obese beauty to hold the pencil. She did so, and then he stood up, and, while the cock-fight still went on, he read, with a fine Chicago fluency, what proved to be a proclamation. As will be seen, it was full of ellipses and was fragmentary in its character, though completely effective in fact:

Know all men by these Presents, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Seeing that all men are born free and equal (vide United States Constitution), et cetera. We, Jude Van Blaricom, of the city of Chicago, with and by the consent of Queen Totimalu, do, in the name of George Washington, Abe Lincoln, Grover Cleveland, and the State of Illinois, and by the Grace of Heaven, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, hereby annex the Kingdom of Pango Wango to be of the territory of the American Union, to have and to hold from this day forth (vide Constitution of the United States), et cetera.

Signed, JUDE VAN BLARICOM, TOTIMALU X (her mark).

"Beat the drums, you niggers!" he cried, and patted Totimalu's shoulder. "Come and join the royal party, gentlemen, and pay your respects. Shake! That's right."

Thus was Pango Wango annexed.

AN AMIABLE REVENGE

Whenever any one says to me that civilisation is a failure, I refer him to certain records of Tonga, and tell him the story of an amiable

revenge. He is invariably convinced that savages can learn easily the forms of convention and the arts of government--and other things. The Tongans once had a rough and coarsely effective means for preserving order and morality, but the whole scheme was too absurdly simple. Now, with a Constitution and a Sacred Majesty, and two Houses of Parliament, and a native Magistracy, they show that they are capable of becoming European in its most pregnant meaning. As the machinery has increased the grist for the mill has grown. There was a time when a breach of the Seventh Commandment was punished in Tonga with death, and it was therefore rarely committed. It is no rarity now--so does law and civilisation provide opportunities for proving their existence.

On landing at Nukalofa, the capital of Tonga, some years ago, I naturally directed my steps towards the residence of the British consul. The route lay along an arc of emerald and opal shore, the swaying cocoa-palms overhead, and native huts and missionary conventicles hidden away in coverts of ti-trees, hibiscus bushes, and limes; the sensuous, perfume-laden air pervading all. I had seen the British flag from the coral-bulwarked harbour, but could not find it now. Leaving the indolent village behind, I passed the Palace, where I beheld the sacred majesty of Tonga on the veranda sleepily flapping the flies from his aged calves, and I could not find that flag. Had I passed it? Was it yet to come? I leaned against a bread-fruit tree and thought upon it. The shore was deserted. Nobody had taken any notice of me; even the German steamer Lubeck had not brought a handful of the population to the Quay.

I was about to make up my mind to go back to the Lubeck and sulk, when a native issued from the grove at my left and blandly gazed upon me as he passed. He wore a flesh-coloured vala about the loins, a red pandanus flower in his ear, and a lia-lia of hibiscus blossoms about his neck. That was all. Evidently he was not interested in me, for he walked on. I choked back my feelings of hurt pride, and asked him in an off-hand kind of way, and in a sort of pigeon English, if he could tell me where the British consul lived. The stalwart subject of King George Tabou looked at me gravely for an instant, then turned and motioned down the road. I walked on beside him, improperly offended by his dignified airs, his coolness of body and manner, and what I considered the insolent plumpness and form of his chest and limbs.

He was a harmony in brown and red. Even his hair was brown. I had to admit to myself that in point of comeliness I could not stand the same scrutiny in the same amount of costume. Perhaps that made me a little imperious, a little superior in manner. Reducing my English to his comprehension as I measured it--he bowed when I asked him if he understood--I explained to him many things necessary for the good of his country. Remembering where I was, I expressed myself in terms that were gentle though austere regarding the King, and reproved the supineness and stupidity of the Crown Prince. Lamenting the departed puissance of the sons of Tongatabu, I warmed to my subject, telling this savage who looked at me with so neutral a countenance how much I deplored the decadence of his race. I bade him think of the time when the Tongans, in token of magnanimous amity, rubbed noses with the white man, and of where those noses were now--between the fingers of the Caucasian. He appeared becomingly attentive, and did me the honour before I began my peroration to change the pandanus flower from the ear next to me to the other.

I had just rounded off my last sentence when he pointed to a house, half-native, half-European, in front of which was a staff bearing the British flag. With the generosity which marks the Englishman away from home I

felt in my pockets and found a sixpence. I handed it to my companion; and with a "Talofa" the only Tongan I knew--I passed into the garden of the consulate. The consul himself came to the door when I knocked on the lintel. After glancing at my card he shook me by the hand, and then paused. His eyes were intently directed along the road by which I had come. I looked back, and there stood the stalwart Tongan where I had left him, gazing at the sixpence I had placed in his hand. There was a kind of stupefaction in his attitude. Presently the consul said somewhat tartly: "Ah, you've been to the Palace--the Crown Prince has brought you over!"

It was not without a thrill of nervousness that I saw my royal guide flip the sixpence into his mouth--he had no pocket--and walk back towards the royal abode.

I told the consul just how it was. In turn he told his daughter, the daughter told the native servants, and in three minutes the place was echoing with languid but appreciative laughter. Natives came to the door to look at me, and after wide-eyed smiling at me for a minute gave place to others. Though I too smiled, my thoughts were gloomy; for now it seemed impossible to go to the Palace and present myself to King George and the Heir-Apparent. But the consul, and, still more, the consul's daughter, insisted; pooh-poohing my hesitation. At this distance from the scene and after years of meditation I am convinced that their efforts to induce me to go were merely an unnatural craving for sensation.

I went--we three went. Even a bare-legged King has in his own house an advantage over the European stranger. I was heated, partly from self-repression, partly from Scotch tweed. King George was quite, quite cool, and unencumbered, save for a trifling calico jacket, a pink lava-lava, and the august fly-flapper. But what heated me most, I think, was the presence of the Crown Prince, who, on my presentation, looked at me as though he had never seen me before. He was courteous, however, directing a tappa cloth to be spread for me. The things I intended to say to King George for the good of himself and his kingdom, which I had thought out on the steamer Lubeck and rehearsed to my guide a few hours before, would not be tempted forth. There was silence; for the consul did not seem "to be on in the scene," and presently the King of Holy Tonga nodded and fell asleep. Then the Crown Prince came forward, and beckoned me to go with him. He led me to a room which was composed of mats and bamboo pillars chiefly. At first I thought there were about ten pillars to support the roof, but my impression before I left was that there were about ten thousand. For which multiplication there were good reasons.

Again a beautiful tappa cloth was spread for me, and then ten maidens entered, and, sitting in a semi-circle, began to chew a root called kava, which, when sufficiently masticated, they returned into a calabash, water being poured on the result. Meanwhile, the Prince, dreamily and ever so gently, was rolling some kind of weed between his fingers. About the time the maidens had finished, the Crown Prince's cigarette was ready. A small calabash of the Result was handed to me, and the cigarette accompanied it. The Crown Prince sat directly opposite me, lit his own cigarette, and handed the matches. I distinctly remember the first half-dozen puffs of that cigarette, the first taste of kava it had the flavour of soft soap and Dover's powder. I have smoked French-Canadian tobacco, I have puffed Mexican hair-lifters, but Heaven had preserved me till that hour from the cigarettes of a Crown Prince of Tonga. As I said, the pillars multiplied; the mats seemed rising from the floor; the maidens grew into a leering army of Amazons; but through it all the face of the

Crown Prince never ceased to smile upon me gently.

There were some incidents of that festival which I may have forgotten, for the consul said afterwards that I was with his Royal Highness about an hour and a half. The last thing I remember about the visit was the voice of the successor to the throne of Holy Tonga asking me blandly in perfect English: "Will you permit me to show you the way to the consul's house?"

To my own credit I respectfully declined.

THE BLIND BEGGAR AND THE LITTLE RED PEG

As Sherry and I left the theatre in Mexico City one night, we met a blind beggar tapping his way home. Sherry stopped him. "Good evening," he said over the blind man's shoulder.

"Good evening, señor," was the reply. "You are late."

"Si, señor," and the blind man pushed a hand down in his coat pocket.

"He's got his fist on the rhino," said Sherry to me in English. "He's not quite sure whether we're footpads or not--poor devil."

"How much has he got?" asked I.

"Perhaps four or five dollars. Good business, eh? Got it in big money mostly, too--had it changed at some cafe."

The blind man was nervous, seemed not to understand us. He made as if to move on. Sherry and I, to reassure him, put a few reals into his hand--not without an object, for I asked Sherry to make him talk on.

A policeman sauntered near with his large lantern--a superior sort of Dogberry, but very young, as are most of the policemen in Mexico, save the Rurales, that splendid company of highwaymen whom Diaz bought over from being bandits to be the guardians of the peace. This one eyed us meaningly, but Sherry gave him a reassuring nod, and our talk went on, while the blind man was fingering the money we had just given him.

Presently Sherry said to him: "I'm Bingham Sherry," adding some other

particulars--"and you're all right. I've a friend here who wants to talk with you. Come along; we'll take you home--confound the garlic, what a breath he's got!"

For a moment the blind man seemed to hesitate, then he raised his head quickly, as if looking into Sherry's face; a light came over it, and he said, repeating Sherry's name: "Si, señor; si, si, señor. I know you now. You sit in the right-hand corner of the little back-room at the Cafe Manrique, where you come to drink chocolate. Is it not?"

"That's where I sit," said Sherry. "And now, be gad, I believe I remember you. Are you Becodar?"

"Si, señor."

"Well, I'm damned!" Then, turning to me: "Lots of these fellows look so much alike that I didn't recognise this one. He's a character. Had a queer history. I'll get him to tell it."

We walked on, one on either side, Sherry using his hat to wave away the smell of garlic. Presently he said "Where've you been to-night, Becodar?"

"I have paid my respects to the Maison Dore, to the Cafe de la Concordia, to the Cafe Iturbide, senior."

"And how did paying your respects pay you, Becodar?"

"The noble courtesy of these cafes, and the great consideration of the hidalgos there assembled rendered to me five pesos and a trifle, senior."

"The poor ye have always with you. He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord. Becodar has large transactions with Providence, mio amigo," said Sherry.

The beggar turned his sightless eyes to us, as though he would understand these English words. Sherry, seeing, said: "We were saying, Becodar, that the blessed saints know how to take care of a blind man, lest, having no boot, he stub his toe against a stone."

Off came Becodar's hat. He tapped the wall. "Where am I, senior?" he asked.

Sherry told him. "Ah!" he said, "the church of Saint Joseph is near." Then he crossed himself and seemed to hurry his steps. Presently he stood still. We were beside the church. Against the door, in a niche, was a figure of the Virgin in stone. He got to his knees and prayed fast. And yet as he prayed I saw his hand go to his pocket, and it fumbled and felt the money there.

"Begad, he's counting it all," said Sherry, "and now he's giving thanks for the exact amount, adding his distinguished consideration that the sum is by three reals greater than any day since Lent began. He promises to bring some flowers to-morrow for the shrine, and he also swears to go a pilgrimage to a church of Mary at Guadaloupe, and to be a kind compadre-- By Jove, there you are! He's a compadre--a blind compadre!"

A little while afterwards we were in Becodar's house--a low adobe but of two rooms with a red light burning over the door, to guard against the plague. It had a table hanging like a lid from the wall, a stone for making tortillas, a mortar for grinding red peppers, a crucifix on the wall, a short sword, a huge pistol, a pair of rusty stirrups, and several chairs. The chairs seemed to be systematically placed, and it was quite wonderful to see how the beggar twisted in and out among them without stumbling. I could not understand this, unless it was that he wished to practise moving about deftly, that he might be at least disadvantage in the cafes and public resorts. He never once stirred them, and I was presently surprised to see that they were all fastened to the floor. Sherry seemed as astonished as I. From this strangeness I came to another. Looking up at the walls I saw set in the timber a number of holes cleanly bored. And in one of the last of these holes was a peg. Again my eyes shifted. From a nail in one corner of the room hung a red and white zarape, a bridle, one of those graceless bits which would

wrench the mouth of the wildest horse to agony, and a sombrero. Something in these things fascinated me. I got up and examined them, while the blind man was in the other room. Turning them over I saw that the zarape was pierced with holes-bullet holes. I saw also that it was stained a deeper red than its own. I turned away, questioning Sherry. He came and looked, but said nothing, lifting a hand in deprecation. As we stood so, Becodar appeared again in the doorway, bearing an olla of pulque and some tortilla sandwiches, made of salad and shreds of meat, flavoured with garlic. He paused, his face turned towards us, with an understanding look. His instinct was remarkable. He did not speak, but came and placed the things he carried near the chairs where we had sat.

Presently I saw some writing on the adobe wall. The look of it showed the hand of youth, its bold carelessness, a boy. Some of it I set down soon afterwards, and it ran in this fashion: "The most good old compadre! But I'd like another real." Again: "One media for a banderilla, two reals for the bull-fight, five centavos for the sweet oranges, and nothing for dulces. I threw a cigar at the toreador. It was no good, but the toreador was a king. Good-night, compadre the blind, who begs." Again: "If I knew where it was I'd take a real. Carambo! No, I wouldn't. I'll ask him. I'll give him the new sword-stick that my cousin the Rurales gave me. He doesn't need it now he's not a bandit. I'm stuffed, and my head swims. It's the pulque. Sabe Dios!" Again: "Compadre, the most miraculous, that goes tapping your stick along the wall, and jingles the silver in your pocket, whither do you wander? Have you forgotten that I am going to the cock-fight, and want a real? What is a cock-fight without a real? Compadre the brave, who stumbles along and never falls, I am sitting on your doorstep, and I am writing on your wall--if I had as much money as you I'd go to every bull-fight. I'd keep a fighting-cock myself." And once again: "If I was blind I'd have money out of the cafes, but I couldn't see my bulls toss the horses. I'll be a bandit, and when I'm old, and if Diaz doesn't put me against the wall and prod holes in me like Gonzales, they'll take me in the Rurales, same as Gerado."

"Who is it writes on the wall, Becodar?" asked Sherry of our host, as, on his knees, he poured out pulque for us.

The old man turned musingly, and made motions of writing, a pleased look in his face. "Ah, senor, he who so writes is Bernal--I am his compadre. He has his mother now, but no father, no father." He smiled. "You have never seen so bold and enterprising, never so handsome a boy. He can throw the lasso and use the lariat, and ride--sabe Dios, he can ride! His cousin Gerado the Rurales taught him. I do well by him as I may, who have other things to think on. But I do well by him."

"What became of his father, Becodar? Dead?" asked Sherry.

The beggar crossed himself. "Altogether, senor. And such a funeral had he, with the car all draped, and even the mutes with the gold braid on their black. I will tell you how it was. We were great friends, Bernal's father and me, and when the boy was born, I said, I will be compadre to him. ('Godfather, or co-father,' interposed Sherry to me.) I had my sight then, senors, out of the exalted mercy of the Saints. Ah, those were great times, when I had my eyes, and no grey hairs, and could wear my sword, and ride my horses. There was work to do then, with sword and horses. It was revolution here and rebellion there, and bandits everywhere. Ah, well, it is no matter; I was speaking of the boy and his father and myself, the compadre. We were all great friends. But

you know the way of men. One day he and I--Santiago, Bernal's father--had been drinking mescal. We quarrelled--I know not why. It is not well nor right for a padre and a compadre to fight--there is trouble in Heaven over that. But there is a way; and we did it as others have done. We took off our sombreros, and put our compadreship on the ground under them. That was all right--it was hid there under the hat. Then we stood up and fought--such a fight--for half an hour. Then he cut me in the thigh--a great gash--and I caught him in the neck the same. We both came to the ground then, the fight was over, and we were, of course, good friends again. I dragged myself over to him as he lay there, and lifted his head and sopped the blood at his neck with my scarf. I did not think that he was hurt so bad. But he said: 'I am gone, my Becodar. I haven't got five minutes in me. Put on your compadreship quick.' I snatched up the sombrero and put it on, and his I tucked under his head. So that we were compadres again. Ah, senior, senior! Soon he drew my cheek down to his and said: 'Adios, compadre: Bernal is thine now. While your eyes see, and your foot travels, let him not want a friend. Adios!' That was the end of him. They had me in Balim for a year, and then I came out to the boy; and since then for twelve years he has not suffered."

At this point he offered us the pulque and the sandwiches, and I took both, eating and enjoying as well as I could. Sherry groaned, but took the pulque, refusing the sandwiches almost violently.

"How did you lose your sight, Becodar?" asked Sherry presently.

Becodar sat perfectly still for a moment, and then said in a low voice: "I will tell you. I will make the story short. Gentle God, what a thing it was! I was for Gonzales then--a loyal gentleman, he called me--I, a gentleman! But that was his way. I was more of a spy for him. Well, I found out that a revolution was to happen, so I gave the word to Gonzales, and with the soldiers came to Puebla. The leaders were captured in a house, brought out, and without trial were set against a wall. I can remember it so well--so well! The light was streaming from an open door upon the wall. They were brought out, taken across the road and stood against a wall. I was standing a distance away, for at the moment I was sorry, though, to be sure, senior, it was for the cause of the country then, I thought. As I stood there looking, the light that streamed from the doorway fell straight upon a man standing against that wall. It was my brother--Alphonso, my brother. I shrieked and ran forward, but the rifles spat out at the moment, and the five men fell. Alphonso--ah, I thank the Virgin every day! he did not know. His zarape hangs there on the wall, his sombrero, his sword, and his stirrups."

Sherry shifted nervously in his seat. "There's stuff for you, amigo," he said to me. "Makes you chilly, doesn't it? Shot his own brother--amounts to same thing, doesn't it? All right, Becodar, we're both sorry, and will pray for his departed spirit; go ahead, Becodar."

The beggar kept pulling at a piece of black ribbon which was tied to the arm of the chair in which he now sat. "Senors, after that I became a revolutionist--that was the only way to make it up to my brother, except by masses--I gave candles for every day in the year. One day they were all in my house here, sitting just where you sit in those chairs. Our leader was Castodilian, the bandit with the long yellow hair. We had a keg of powder which we were going to distribute. All at once Gonzales's soldiers burst in. There was a fight, we were overpowered, and Castodilian dropped his cigar--he had kept it in his mouth all the time--in the powder-keg. It killed most of us. I lost my eyes. Gonzales

forgave me, if I would promise to be a revolutionist no more. What was there to do? I took the solemn oath at the grave of my mother; and so-- and so, senors."

Sherry had listened with a quizzical intentness, now and again cocking his head at some dramatic bit, and when Becodar paused he suddenly leaned over and thrust a dollar into the ever-waiting hand. Becodar gave a great sign of pleasure, and fumbled again with the money in his pocket. Then, after a moment, it shifted to the bit of ribbon that hung from the chair: "See, senors," he said. "I tied this ribbon to the chair all those years ago."

My eyes were on the peg and the holes in the wall. Sherry questioned him. "Why do you spike the wall with the little red peg, Becodar?"

"The Little Red Peg, senior? Ah! It is not wonderful you notice that. There are eight bullet-holes in that zarape"--he pointed to the wall--"there are eight holes in the wall for the Little Red Peg. Well, of the eight men who fired on my brother, two are left, as you may see. The others are all gone, this way or that." Sherry shrugged a shoulder. "There are two left, eh, Becodar? How will they die, and when?" Becodar was motionless as a stone for a moment. Then he said softly: "I do not know quite how or when. But one drinks much mescal, and the other has a taste for quarrel. He will get in trouble with the Rurales, and then good-bye to him! Four others on furlough got in trouble with the Rurales, and that was the end. They were taken at different times for some fault--by Gerado's company--Gerado, my cousin. Camping at night, they tried to escape. There is the Law of Fire, senors, as you know. If a man thinks his guard sleeps, and makes a run for it, they do not chase--they fire; and if he escapes unhurt, good; he is not troubled. But the Rurales are fine shots!"

"You mean," said Sherry, "that the Rurales--your Gerado, for one--pretended to sleep--to be careless. The fellows made a rush for it and were dropped? Eh, Becodar, of the Little Red Peg?"

Becodar shrugged a shoulder gently. "Ah, senior, who can tell? My Gerado is a sure shot."

"Egad," said Sherry, "who'd have thought it? It looks like a sweet little vendetta, doesn't it? A blind beggar, too, with his Gerado to help the thing along.

"'With his Gerado!' Sounds like a Gatling, or a bomb, or a diabolical machine, doesn't it? And yet they talk of this country being Americanised! You can't Americanise a country with a real history. Well, Becodar, that's four. What of the other two that left for Kingdom Come?"

Becodar smiled pensively. He seemed to be enduring a kind of joy, or else making light of a kind of sorrow. "Ah, those two! They were camping in a valley; they were escorting a small party of people who had come to look at ruins--Diaz was President then. Well, a party of Aztecs on the other side of the river began firing across, not as if doing or meaning any harm. By-and-bye the shot came rattling through the tent of the two. One got up, and yelled across to them to stop, but a chance bullet brought him down, and then by some great mistake a lot of bullets came through the tent, and the other soldier was killed. It was all a mistake, of course."

"Yes," cynically said Sherry. "The Aztecs got rattled, and then the bullets rattled. And what was done to the Aztecs?"

"Senor, what could be done? They meant no harm, as you can see."

"Of course, of course; but you put the Little Red Peg down two holes just the same, eh, my Becodar--with your Gerado. I smell a great man in your Gerado, Becodar. Your bandit turned soldier is a notable gentleman--gentlemen all his tribe. . . . You see," Sherry added to me, "the country was infested with bandits--some big names in this land had bandit for their titles one time or another. Well, along came Diaz, a great man. He said to the bandits: 'How much do you make a year at your trade?' They told him.

"Then," said he, "I'll give you as much a month and clothe you. You'll furnish your own horses and keep them, and hold the country in order. Put down the banditti, be my boundary-riders, my gentlemen guards, and we will all love you and cherish you.' And 'it was so,' as Scripture says. And this Gerado can serve our good compadre here, and the Little Red Peg in the wall keeps tally."

"What shall you do with Bernal the boy when he grows up?" added Sherry presently.

"There is the question for my mind, senor," he answered. "He would be a toreador--already has he served the matador in the ring, though I did not know it, foolish boy! But I would have him in the Rurales." Here he fetched out and handed us a bottle of mescal. Sherry lifted his glass.

"To the day when the Little Red Peg goes no farther!" he said. We drank.

"To the blind compadre and the boy!" I added, and we drank again.

A moment afterwards in the silent street I looked back. The door was shut, and the wee scarlet light was burning over it. I fell to thinking of the Little Red Peg in the wall.

A FRIEND OF THE COMMUNE

"See, madame--there, on the Hill of Pains, the long finger of the Semaphore! One more prisoner has escaped--one more."

"One more, Marie. It is the life here that on the Hill, this here below; and yet the sun is bright, the cockatoos are laughing in the palms, and you hear my linnet singing."

"It turns so slowly. Now it points across the Winter Valley. Ah!"

"Yes, across the Winter Valley, where the deep woods are, and beyond to the Pascal River."

"Towards my home. How dim the light is now! I can only see It--like a

long dark finger yonder."

"No, my dear, there is bright sunshine still; there is no cloud at all: but It is like a finger; it is quivering now, as though it were not sure."

"Thank God, if it be not sure! But the hill is cloudy, as I said."

"No, Marie. How droll you are! The hill is not cloudy; even at this distance one can see something glisten beside the grove of pines."

"I know. It is the White Rock, where King Ovi died."

"Marie, turn your face to me. Your eyes are full of tears. Your heart is tender. Your tears are for the prisoner who has escaped--the hunted in the chase."

She shuddered a little and added, "Wherever he is, that long dark finger on the Hill of Pains will find him out--the remorseless Semaphore."

"No, madame, I am selfish; I weep for myself. Tell me truly, as--as if I were your own child--was there no cloud, no sudden darkness, out there, as we looked towards the Hill of Pains."

"None, dear."

"Then--then--madame, I suppose it was my tears that blinded me for the moment."

"No doubt it was your tears."

But each said in her heart that it was not tears; each said: "Let not this thing come, O God!" Presently, with a caress, the elder woman left the room; but the girl remained to watch that gloomy thing upon the Hill of Pains.

As she stood there, with her fingers clasped upon a letter she had drawn from her pocket, a voice from among the palms outside floated towards her.

"He escaped last night; the Semaphore shows that they have got upon his track. I suppose they'll try to converge upon him before he gets to Pascal River. Once there he might have a chance of escape; but he'll need a lot of luck, poor devil!"

Marie's fingers tightened on the letter.

Then another voice replied, and it brought a flush to the cheek of the girl, a hint of trouble to her eyes. It said: "Is Miss Wyndham here still?"

"Yes, still here. My wife will be distressed when she leaves us."

"She will not care to go, I should think. The Hotel du Gouverneur spoils us for all other places in New Caledonia."

"You are too kind, monsieur; I fear that those who think as you are not many. After all, I am little more here than a gaoler--merely a gaoler, M. Tryon."

"Yet, the Commandant of a military station and the Governor of a Colony."

"The station is a penitentiary; the colony for liberes, ticket-of-leave men, and outcast Paris; with a sprinkling of gentlemen and officers dying of boredom. No, my friend, we French are not colonists. We emigrate, we do not colonise. This is no colony. We do no good here."

"You forget the nickel mines."

"Quarries for the convicts and for political prisoners of the lowest class."

"The plantations?"

"Ah, there I crave your pardon. You are a planter, but you are English. M. Wyndham is a planter and an owner of mines, but he is English. The man who has done best financially in New Caledonia is an Englishman. You, and a few others like you, French and English, are the only colony I have. I do not rule you; you help me to rule."

"We?"

"By being on the side of justice and public morality; by dining with me, though all too seldom; by giving me a quiet hour now and then beneath your vines and fig-trees; and so making this uniform less burdensome to carry. No, no, monsieur, I know you are about to say something very gracious: but no, you shall pay your compliments to the ladies."

As they journeyed to the morning-room Hugh Tryon said: "Does M. Laflamme still come to paint Miss Wyndham?"

"Yes; but it ends to-morrow, and then no more of that. Prisoners are prisoners, and though Laflamme is agreeable that makes it the more difficult."

"Why should he be treated so well, as a first-class prisoner, and others of the Commune be so degraded here--as Mayer, for instance?"

"It is but a question of degree. He was an artist and something of a dramatist; he was not at the Place Vendome at a certain critical moment; he was not at Montmartre at a particular terrible time; he was not a high officer like Mayer; he was young, with the face of a patriot. Well, they sent Mayer to the galleys at Toulon first; then, among the worst of the prisoners here--he was too bold, too full of speech; he had not Laflamme's gift of silence, of pathos. Mayer works coarsely, severely here; Laflamme grows his vegetables, idles about Ducos, swings in his hammock, and appears at inspections the picture of docility. One day he sent to me the picture of my wife framed in gold--here it is. Is it not charming? The size of a franc-piece and so perfect! You know the soft hearts of women."

"You mean that Madame Solde--"

"She persuaded me to let him come here to paint my portrait. He has done so, and now he paints Marie Wyndham. But--"

"But?--Yes?"

"But these things have their dangers."

"Have their dangers," Hugh Tryon musingly repeated, and then added under his breath almost, "Escape or--"

"Or something else," the Governor rather sharply interrupted; and then, as they were entering the room, gaily continued: "Ah, here we come, mademoiselle, to pay--"

"To pay your surplus of compliments, monsieur le Gouverneur. I could not help but hear something of what you said," responded Marie, and gave her hand to Tryon.

"I leave you to mademoiselle's tender mercies, monsieur," said the Governor. "Au revoir!"

When he had gone, Hugh said: "You are gay today."

"Indeed, no, I am sad."

"Wherefore sad? Is nickel proving a drug? Or sugar a failure? Don't tell me that your father says sugar is falling." He glanced at the letter, which she unconsciously held in her hand.

She saw his look, smoothed the letter a little nervously between her palms, and put it into her pocket, saying: "No, my father has not said that sugar is falling--but come here, will you?" and she motioned towards the open window. When there, she said slowly, "That is what makes me sad and sorry," and she pointed to the Semaphore upon the Hill of Pains.

"You are too tender-hearted," he remarked. "A convict has escaped; he will be caught perhaps--perhaps not; and things will go on as before."

"Will go on as before. That is, the 'martinet' worse than the 'knout de Russe'; the 'poucettes', the 'crapaudine' on neck and ankles and wrists; all, all as bad as the 'Pater Noster' of the Inquisition, as Mayer said the other day in the face of Charpentier, the Commandant of the penitentiary. How pleasant also to think of the Boulevard de Guillotine! I tell you it is brutal, horrible. Think of what prisoners have to suffer here, whose only crime is that they were of the Commune; that they were just a little madder than other Frenchmen."

"Pardon me if I say that as brutal things were done by the English in Tasmania."

"Think of two hundred and sixty strokes of the 'cat.'"

"You concern yourself too much about these things, I fear."

"I only think that death would be easier than the life of half of the convicts here."

"They themselves would prefer it, perhaps."

"Tell me, who is the convict that has escaped?" she feverishly asked.

"Is it a political prisoner?"

"You would not know him. He was one of the Commune who escaped shooting

in the Place de la Concorde. Carbourd, I think, was his name."

"Carbourd, Carbourd," she repeated, and turned her head away towards the Semaphore.

Her earnestness aroused in Tryon a sudden flame of sympathy which had its origin, as he well knew, in three years of growing love. This love leaped up now determinedly--perhaps unwisely; but what should a blunt soul like Hugh Tryon know regarding the best or worst time to seek a woman's heart? He came close to her now and said: "If you are so kind in thought for a convict, I dare hope that you would be more kind to me."

"Be kind to you," she repeated, as if not understanding what he said, nor the look in his eyes.

"For I am a prisoner, too."

"A prisoner?" she rejoined a little tremulously, and coldly.

"In your hands, Marie." His eyes laid bare his heart.

"Oh!" she replied, in a half-troubled, half-indignant tone, for she was out of touch with the occasion of his suit, and every woman has in her mind the time when she should and when she should not be wooed. "Oh, why aren't you plain with me? I hate enigmas."

"Why do I not speak plainly? Because, because, Marie, it is possible for a man to be a coward in his speech"--he touched her fingers--"when he loves." She quickly drew her hand from his. "Oh, can't we be friends without that?"

There was a sound of footsteps at the window. Both turned, and saw the political prisoner, Rive Laflamme, followed by a guard.

"He comes to finish my portrait," she said. "This is the last sitting."

"Marie, must I go like this? When may I see you again? When will you answer me? You will not make all the hopes to end here?"

It was evident that some deep trouble was on the girl. She flushed hotly, as if she were about to reply hotly also, but she changed quickly, and said, not unkindly: "When M. Laflamme has gone." And now, as if repenting of her unreasonable words of a moment before, she added: "Oh, please don't think me hard. I am sorry that I grieve you. I'm afraid I am not altogether well, not altogether happy."

"I will wait till he has gone," the painter replied. At the door he turned as if to say something, but he only looked steadily, sadly at her, and then was gone.

She stood where he had left her, gazing in melancholy abstraction at the door through which he had passed. There were footsteps without in the hall-way. The door was opened, and a servant announced M. Laflamme. The painter-prisoner entered followed by the soldier. Immediately afterward Mrs. Angers, Marie's elderly companion, sidled in gently.

Laflamme bowed low, then turned and said coolly to the soldier: "You may wait outside to-day, Roupet. This is my last morning's work. It is important, and you splutter and cough. You are too exhausting for a

studio."

But Roupet answered: "Monsieur, I have my orders."

"Nonsense. This is the Governor's house. I am perfectly safe here. Give your orders a change of scene. You would better enjoy the refreshing coolness of the corridors this morning. You won't? Oh, yes, you will. Here's a cigarette--there, take the whole bunch--I paid too much for them, but no matter. Ah, pardon me, mademoiselle. I forgot that you cannot smoke here, Roupet; but you shall have them all the same, there! Parbleu! you are a handsome rascal, if you weren't so wheezy! Come, come, Roupet, make yourself invisible."

The eyes of the girl were on the soldier. They did the work better; a warrior has a soft place in his heart for a beautiful woman. He wheeled suddenly, and disappeared from the room, motioning that he would remain at the door.

The painting began, and for half an hour or more was continued without a word. In the silence the placid Angers had fallen asleep.

Nodding slightly towards her, Rive Laflamme said in a low voice to Marie: "Her hearing at its best is not remarkable?"

"Not remarkable."

He spoke more softly. "That is good. Well, the portrait is done. It has been the triumph of my life to paint it. Not that first joy I had when I won the great prize in Paris equals it. I am glad: and yet--and yet there was much chance that it would never be finished."

"Why?"

"Carbourd is gone."

"Yes, I know--well?"

"Well, I should be gone also were it not for this portrait. The chance came. I was tempted. I determined to finish this. I stayed."

"Do you think that he will be caught?"

"Not alive. Carbourd has suffered too much--the galleys, the corde, the triangle, everything but the guillotine. Carbourd has a wife and children--ah, yes, you know all about it. You remember that letter she sent: I can recall every word; can you?"

The girl paused, and then with a rapt sympathy in her face repeated slowly: "I am ill, and our children cry for food. The wife calls to her husband, my darlings say, 'Will father never come home?'"

Marie's eyes were moist.

"Mademoiselle, he was no common criminal. He would have died for the cause grandly. He loved France too wildly. That was his sin."

"Carbourd is free," she said, as though to herself.

"He has escaped." His voice was the smallest whisper. "And now my time

has come."

"When? And where do you go?"

"To-night, and to join Carbourd, if I can, at the Pascal River. At King Ovi's Cave, if possible."

The girl was very pale. She turned and looked at Angers, who still slept. "And then?"

"And then, as I have said to you before, to the coast, to board the Parroquet, which will lie off the island Saint Jerome three days from now to carry us away into freedom. It is all arranged by our 'Underground Railway.'"

"And you tell me all this--why?" the girl said falteringly.

"Because you said that you would not let a hunted fugitive starve; that you would give us horses, with which we could travel the Brocken Path across the hills. Here is the plan of the river that you drew; at this point is the King's Cave which you discovered, and is known only to yourself."

"I ought not to have given it to you; but--"

"Ah, you will not repent of a noble action, of a great good to me--Marie?"

"Hush, monsieur. Indeed, you may not speak to me so. You forget. I am sorry for you; I think you do not deserve this--banishment; you are unhappy here; and I told you of the King's Cave--that was all."

"Ah no, that is not all! To be free, that is good; but only that I may be a man again; that I may love my art--and you; that I may once again be proud of France."

"Monsieur, I repeat, you must not speak so. Do not take advantage of my willingness to serve you."

"A thousand pardons! but that was in my heart, and I hoped, I hoped--"

"You must not hope. I can only know you as M. Laflamme, the--"

"The political convict; ah, yes, I know," he said bitterly: "a convict over whom the knout is held; who may at any moment be shot down like a hare: who has but two prayers in all the world: to be free in France once more, and to be loved by one--"

She interrupted him: "Your first prayer is natural."

"Natural?--Do you know what song we sang in the cages of the ship that carried us into this evil exile here? Do you know what brought tears to the eyes of the guards?--What made the captain and the sailors turn their heads away from us, lest we should see that their faces were wet? What rendered the soldiers who had fought us in the Commune more human for the moment? It was this:

"Adieu, patrie!
L'onde est en furie,

Adieu patrie,
Azur!
Adieu, maison, treille au fruit mer,

Adieu les fruits d'or du vieux mur!
Adieu, patrie,
Ciel, foret, prairie;
Adieu patrie,
Azur."

"Hush, monsieur!" the girl said with a swift gesture. He looked and saw that Angers was waking. "If I live," he hurriedly whispered, "I shall be at the King's Cave to-morrow night. And you--the horses?"

"You shall have my help and the horses." Then, more loudly: "Au revoir, monsieur."

At that moment Madame Solde entered the room. She acknowledged Laflamme's presence gravely.

"It is all done, madame," he said, pointing to the portrait.

Madame Solde bowed coldly, but said: "It is very well done, monsieur."

"It is my masterpiece," remarked the painter pensively. "Will you permit me to say adieu, mesdames? I go to join my amiable and attentive companion, Roupet the guard."

He bowed himself out.

Madame Solde drew Marie aside. Angers discreetly left.

The Governor's wife drew the girl's head back on her shoulder. "Marie," she said, "M. Tryon does not seem happy; cannot you change that?"

With quivering lips the girl laid her head on the Frenchwoman's breast, and said: "Ah, do not ask me now. Madame, I am going home to-day."

"To-day? But, so soon!--I wished--"

"I must go to-day."

"But we had hoped you would stay while M. Tryon--"

"M. Tryon--will--go with me--perhaps."

"Ah, my dear Marie!" The woman kissed the girl, and wondered.

That afternoon Marie was riding across the Winter Valley to her father's plantation at the Pascal River. Angers was driving ahead. Beside Marie rode Tryon silent and attentive. Arrived at the homestead, she said to him in the shadow of the naoulis: "Hugh Tryon, what would you do to prove the love you say you have for me?"

"All that a man could do I would do."

"Can you see the Semaphore from here?"

"Yes, there it is clear against the sky--look!"

But the girl did not look. She touched her eyelids with her finger-tips, as though they were fevered, and then said: "Many have escaped. They are searching for Carbourd and--"

"Yes, Marie?"

"And M. Laflamme--"

"Laflamme!" he said sharply. Then, noticing how at his brusqueness the paleness of her face changed to a startled flush for an instant, his generosity conquered, and he added gently: "Well, I fancied he would try, but what do you know about that, Marie?"

"He and Carbourd were friends. They were chained together in the galleys, they lived--at first--together here. They would risk life to return to France."

"Tell me," said he, "what do you know of this? What is it to you?"

"You wish to know all before you will do what I ask."

"I will do anything you ask, because you will not ask of me what is unmanly."

"M. Laflamme will escape to-night if possible, and join Carbourd on the Pascal River, at a safe spot that I know." She told him of the Cave.

"Yes, yes, I understand. You would help him. And I?"

"You will help me. You will?"

There was a slight pause, and then he said: "Yes, I will. But think what this is to an Englishman-to yourself, to be accomplice to the escape of a French prisoner."

"I gave a promise to a man whom I think deserves it. He believed he was a patriot. If you were in that case, and I were a Frenchwoman, I would do the same for you."

He smiled rather grimly and said: "If it please you that this man escape, I shall hope he may, and will help you. . . . Here comes your father."

"I could not let my father know," she said. "He has no sympathy for any one like that, for any one at all, I think, but me."

"Don't be down-hearted. If you have set your heart on this, I will try to bring it about, God knows! Now let us be less gloomy. Conspirators should smile. That is the cue. Besides, the world is bright. Look at the glow upon the hills."

"I suppose the Semaphore is glistening on the Hill of Pains; but I cannot see it."

He did not understand her.

A few hours after this conversation, Laflamme sought to accomplish his escape. He had lately borne a letter from the Commandant, which permitted him to go from point to point outside the peninsula of Ducos, where the least punished of the political prisoners were kept. He depended somewhat on this for his escape. Carbourd had been more heroic, but then Carbourd was desperate. Laflamme believed more in ability than force. It was ability and money that had won over the captain of the Parroquet, coupled with the connivance of an old member of the Commune, who was now a guard. This night there was increased alertness, owing to the escape of Carbourd; and himself, if not more closely watched, was at least open to quick suspicion owing to his known friendship for Carbourd. He strolled about the fortified enclosure, chatting to fellow prisoners, and waiting for the call which should summon them to the huts. Through years of studied good-nature he had come to be regarded as a contented prisoner. He had no enemies save one among the guards. This man Maillot he had offended by thwarting his continued ill-treatment of a young lad who had been one of the condemned of the Commune, and whose hammock, at last, by order of the Commandant, was slung in Laflamme's hut. For this kindness and interposition the lad was grateful and devoted. He had been set to labour in the nickel mines; but that came near to killing him, and again through Laflamme's pleading he had been made a prisoner of the first class, and so relieved of all heavy tasks. Not even he suspected the immediate relations of Laflamme and Carbourd; nor that Laflamme was preparing for escape.

As Laflamme waited for the summons to huts, a squad of prisoners went clanking by him, manacled. They had come from road-making. These never heard from wife nor child, nor held any commerce with the outside world, nor had any speech with each other, save by a silent gesture--language which eluded the vigilance of the guards. As the men passed, Laflamme looked at them steadily. They knew him well. Some of them remembered his speeches at the Place Vendome. They bore him no ill-will that he did not suffer as they. He made a swift sign to a prisoner near the rear of the column. The man smiled, but gave no answering token. This was part of the unspoken vocabulary, and, in this instance, conveyed the two words: I escape.

A couple of hours later Laflamme rose from a hammock in his hut, and leant over the young lad, who was sleeping. He touched him gently.

The lad waked: "Yes, yes, monsieur."

"I am going away, my friend."

"To escape like Carbourd?"

"Yes, I hope, like Carbourd."

"May I not go also, monsieur? I am not afraid."

"No, lad. If there must be death one is enough. You must stay. Good-bye."

"You will see my mother? She is old, and she grieves."

"Yes, I will see your mother. And more; you shall be free. I will see

to that. Be patient, little comrade. Nay, nay, hush! . . . No, thanks. Adieu!" He put his hands on the lad's shoulder and kissed his forehead.

"I wish I had died at the Barricades. But, yes, I will be brave--be sure of that."

"You shall not die--you shall live in France, which is better. Once more, adieu!" Laflamme passed out. It was raining. He knew that if he could satisfy the first sentinel he should stand a better chance of escape, since he had had so much freedom of late; and to be passed by one would help with others. He went softly, but he was soon challenged.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Condemned of the Commune--by order."

"Whose order?"

"That of the Commandant."

"Advance order."

The sentinel knew him. "Ah, Laflamme," he said, and raised the point of his bayonet. The paper was produced. It did not entitle him to go about at night, and certainly not beyond the enclosure without a guard--it was insufficient. In unfolding the paper Laflamme purposely dropped it in the mud. He hastily picked it up, and, in doing so, smeared it. He wiped it, leaving the signature comparatively plain--nothing else. "Well," said the sentinel, "the signature is right. Where do you go?"

"To Government House."

"I do not know that I should let you pass. But--well, look out that the next sentinel doesn't bayonet you. You came on me suddenly."

The next sentinel was a Kanaka. The previous formula was repeated. The Kanaka examined the paper long, and then said: "You cannot pass."

"But the other sentinel passed me. Would you get him into trouble?"

The Kanaka frowned, hesitated, then said: "That is another matter. Well, pass."

Twice more the same formula and arguments were used. At last he heard a voice in challenge that he knew. It was that of Maillot. This was a more difficult game. His order was taken with a malicious sneer by the sentinel. At that instant Laflamme threw his arms swiftly round the other, clapped a hand on his mouth, and, with a dexterous twist of leg, threw him backward, till it seemed as if the spine of the soldier must break. It was impossible to struggle against this trick of wrestling, which Laflamme had learned from a famous Cornish wrestler, in a summer spent on the English coast.

"If you shout or speak I will kill you!" he said to Maillot, and then dropped him heavily on the ground, where he lay senseless. Laflamme stooped down and felt his heart. "Alive!" he said, then seized the rifle and plunged into the woods. The moon at that moment broke through the clouds, and he saw the Semaphore like a ghost pointing towards Pascal

River. He waved his hand towards his old prison, and sped away.

But others were thinking of the Semaphore at this moment, others saw it indistinct, yet melancholy, in the moonlight. The Governor and his wife saw it, and Madame Solde said: "Alfred, I shall be glad when I shall see that no more."

"You have too much feeling."

"I suppose Marie makes me think more of it to-day. She wept this morning over all this misery and punishment."

"You think that. Well, perhaps something more--"

"What more?"

"Laflamme."

"No, no, it is impossible!"

"Indeed it is as I say. My wife, you are blind. I chanced to see him with her yesterday. I should have prevented him coming to-day, but I knew it was his last day with the portrait, and that all should end here."

"We have done wrong in this--the poor child! Besides, she has, I fear, another sorrow coming. It showed itself to me to-day for the first time." Then she whispered to him, and he started and sighed, and said at last:

"But it must be saved. By--! it shall be saved!" And at that moment Marie Wyndham was standing in the open window of the library of Pascal House. She had been thinking of her recent visit to the King's Cave, where she had left food, and of the fact that Carbourd was not there. She raised her face towards the moon and sighed. She was thinking of something else. She was not merely sentimental, for she said, as if she had heard the words of the Governor and Madame Solde: "Oh! if it could be saved!"

There was a rustle in the shrubbery near her. She turned towards the sound. A man came quickly towards her. "I am Carbourd," he said; "I could not find the way to the Cave. They were after me. They have tracked me. Tell me quick how to go."

She swiftly gave him directions, and he darted away. Again there was a rustle in the leaves, and a man stepped forth. Something glistened in his hands--a rifle, though she could not see it plainly. It was levelled at the flying figure of Carbourd. There was a report. Marie started forward with her hands on her temples and a sharp cry. She started forward--into absolute darkness. There was a man's footsteps going swiftly by her. Why was it so dark? She stretched out her hands with a moan.

"Oh! mother!--oh! mother! I am blind!" she cried.

But her mother was sleeping unresponsive beyond the dark-beyond all dark. It was, perhaps, natural that she should cry to the dead and not to the living.

Marie was blind. She had known it was coming, and it had tried her, as it would have tried any of the race of women. She had, when she needed it most, put love from her, and would not let her own heart speak, even to herself. She had sought to help one who loved her, and to fully prove the other--though the proving, she knew, was not necessary--before the darkness came. But here it was suddenly sent upon her by the shock of a rifle shot. It would have sent a shudder to a stronger heart than hers--that, in reply to her call on her dead mother, there came from the trees the shrill laugh of the mopoke--the sardonic bird of the South.

As she stood there, with this tragedy enveloping her, the dull boom of a cannon came across the valley. "From Ducos," she said. "M. Laflamme has escaped. God help us all!" And she turned and groped her way into the room she had left.

She felt for a chair and sat down. She must think of what she now was. She wondered if Carbourd was killed. She listened and thought not, since there was no sound without. But she knew that the house would be roused. She bowed her head in her hands. Surely she might weep a little for herself--she who had been so troubled for others. It is strange, but she thought of her flowers and birds, and wondered how she should tend them; of her own room which faced the north--the English north that she loved so well; of her horse, and marvelled if he would know that she could not see him; and, lastly, of a widening horizon of pain, spread before the eyes of her soul, in which her father and another moved.

It seemed to her that she sat there for hours, it was in reality minutes only. A firm step and the opening of a door roused her. She did not turn her head--what need? She knew the step. There was almost a touch of ironical smiling at her lips, as she thought how she must hear and feel things only, in the future. A voice said: "Marie, are you here?"

"I am here."

"I'll strike a match so that you can see I'm not a bushranger. There has been shooting in the grounds. Did you hear it?"

"Yes. A soldier firing at Carbourd."

"You saw him?"

"Yes. He could not find the Cave. I directed him. Immediately after he was fired upon."

"He can't have been hit. There are no signs of him. There, that's lighter and better, isn't it?"

"I do not know."

She had risen, but she did not turn towards him. He came nearer to her. The enigmatical tone struck him strangely, but he could find nothing less commonplace to say than: "You don't prefer the exaggerated gloaming, do you?"

"No, I do not prefer the gloaming, but why should not one be patient?"

"Be patient!" he repeated, and came nearer still. "Are you hurt or angry?"

"I am hurt, but not angry."

"What have I done?--or is it I?"

"It is not you. You are very good. It is nobody but God. I am hurt, because He is angry, perhaps."

"Tell me what is the matter. Look at me." He faced her now-faced her eyes, looking blindly straight before her.

"Hugh," she said, and she put her hand out slightly, not exactly to him, but as if to protect him from the blow which she herself must deal: "I am looking at you now."

"Yes, yes, but so strangely, and not in my eyes."

"I cannot look into your eyes, because, Hugh, I am blind." Her hand went further out towards him.

He took it silently and pressed it to his bosom as he saw that she spoke true; and the shadow of the thing fell on him. The hand held to his breast felt how he was trembling from the shock.

"Sit down, Hugh," she said, "and I will tell you all; but do not hold my hand so, or I cannot."

Sitting there face to face, with deep furrows growing in his countenance, and a quiet sorrow spreading upon her cheek and forehead, she told the story how, since her childhood, her sight had played her false now and then, and within the past month had grown steadily uncertain. "And now," she said at last, "I am blind. I think I should like to tell my father--if you please. Then when I have seen him and poor Angers, if you will come again! There is work to be done. I hoped it would be finished before this came; but--there, good friend, go; I will sit here quietly."

She could not see his face, but she heard him say: "My love, my love," very softly, as he rose to go; and she smiled sadly to herself. She folded her hands in her lap, and thought, not bitterly, not listlessly, but deeply. She wanted to consider all cheerfully now; she tried to do so. She was musing among those flying perceptions, those nebulous facts of a new life, experienced for the first time; she was now not herself as she had been; another woman was born; and she was feeling carefully along the unfamiliar paths which she must tread. She was not glad that these words ran through her mind continuously at first:

"A land of darkness as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death without any order, and where the light is darkness."

Her brave nature rose against the moody spirit which sought to take possession of her, and she cried out in her heart valiantly: "But there is order, there is order. I shall feel things as they ought to be. I think I could tell now what was true and what was false in man or woman; it would be in their presence not in their faces."

She stopped speaking. She heard footsteps. Her father entered. Hugh Tryon had done his task gently, but the old planter, selfish and hard as he was, loved his daughter; and the meeting was bitter for him. The prop of his pride seemed shaken beyond recovery. But the girl's calm

comforted them all, and poignancy became dull pain. Before parting for the night Marie said to Hugh: "This is what I wish you to do for me to bring over two of your horses to Point Assumption on the river. There is a glen beyond that as you know, and from it runs the steep and dangerous Brocken Path across the hills. I wish you to wait there until M. Laflamme and Carbourd come by the river--that is their only chance. If they get across the hills they can easily reach the sea. I know that two of your horses have been over the path; they are sure-footed; they would know it in the night. Is it not so?"

"It is so. There are not a dozen horses in the colony that could be trusted on it at night, but mine are safe. I shall do all you wish."

She put out both her hands and felt for his shoulders, and let them rest there for a moment, saying: "I ask much, and I can give no reward, except the gratitude of one who would rather die than break a promise. It isn't much, but it is all that is worth your having. Good-night. Good-bye."

"Good-night. Good-bye," he gently replied; but he said something beneath his breath that sounded worth the hearing.

The next morning while her father was gone to consult the chief army-surgeon at Noumea, Marie strolled with Angers in the grounds. At length she said: "Angers, take me to the river, and then on down, until we come to the high banks." With her hand on Angers' arm, and in her face that passive gentleness which grows so sweetly from sightless eyes till it covers all the face, they passed slowly towards the river. When they came to the higher banks covered with dense scrub, Angers paused, and told Marie where they were.

"Find me the she-oak tree," the girl said; "there is only one, you know."

"Here it is, my dear. There, your hand is on it now."

"Thank you. Wait here, Angers, I shall be back presently."

"But oh, my dear--"

"Please do as I say, Angers, and do not worry." The girl pushed aside some bushes, and was lost to view. She pressed along vigilantly by a descending path, until her feet touched rocky ground. She nodded to herself, then creeping between two bits of jutting rock at her right, immediately stood at the entrance to a cave, hidden completely from the river and from the banks above. At the entrance, for which she felt, she paused and said aloud: "Is there any one here?" Something clicked far within the cave. It sounded like a rifle. Then stealthy steps were heard, and a voice said:

"Ah, mademoiselle!"

"You are Carbourd?"

"As you see, mademoiselle."

"You escaped safely then from the rifle-shot? Where is the soldier?"

"He fell into the river. He was drowned."

"You are telling me truth?"

"Yes, he stumbled in and sank--on my soul!"

"You did not try to save him?"

"He lied and got me six months in irons once; he called down on my back one hundred and fifty lashes, a year ago; he had me kept on bread and water, and degraded to the fourth class, where I could never hear from my wife and children--never write to them. I lost one eye in the quarries because he made me stand too near a lighted fuse--"

"Poor man, poor man!" she said. "You found the food I left here?"

"Yes, God bless you! And my wife and children will bless you too, if I see France again."

"You know where the boat is?"

"I know, mademoiselle."

"When you reach Point Assumption you will find horses there to take you across the Brocken Path. M. Laflamme knows. I hope that you will both escape; that you will be happy in France with your wife and children."

"You will not come here again?"

"No. If M. Laflamme should not arrive, and you should go alone, leave one pair of oars; then I shall know. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, mademoiselle. A thousand times I will pray for you. Ah, mon Dieu! take care!--you are on the edge of the great tomb."

She stood perfectly still. At her feet was a dark excavation where was the skeleton of Ovi the King. This was the hidden burial-place of the modern Hiawatha of these savage islands, unknown even to the natives themselves, and kept secret with a half-superstitious reverence by this girl, who had discovered it a few months before.

"I had forgotten," she said. "Please take my hand and set me right at the entrance."

"Your hand, mademoiselle? Mine is so--! It is not dark."

"I am blind now."

"Blind--blind! Oh, the pitiful thing! Since when, mademoiselle?"

"Since the soldier fired on you--the shock. . . ."

The convict knelt at her feet. "Ah, mademoiselle, you are a good angel. I shall die of grief. To think--for such as me!"

"You will live to love your wife and children. This is the will of God with me. Am I in the path now? Ah, thank you."

"But, M. Laflamme--this will be a great sorrow to him."

Twice she seemed about to speak, but nothing came save good-bye. Then she crept cautiously away among the bushes and along the narrow

path, the eyes of the convict following her. She had done a deed which, she understood, the world would blame her for if it knew, would call culpable or foolishly heroic; but she smiled, because she understood also that she had done that which her own conscience and heart approved, and she was content.

At this time Laflamme was stealing watchfully through the tropical scrub, where hanging vines tore his hands, and the sickening perfume of jungle flowers overcame him more than the hard journey which he had undergone during the past twelve hours.

Several times he had been within voice of his pursuers, and once a Kanaka scout passed close to him. He had had nothing to eat, he had had no sleep, he suffered from a wound in his neck caused by the broken protruding branch of a tree; but he had courage, and he was struggling for liberty--a tolerably sweet thing when one has it not. He found the Cave at last, and with far greater ease than Carbourd had done, because he knew the ground better, and his instinct was keener. His greeting to Carbourd was nonchalantly cordial:

"Well, you see, comrade, King Ovi's Cave is a reality."

"So."

"I saw the boat. The horses? What do you know?"

"They will be at Point Assumption to-night."

"Then we go to-night. We shall have to run the chances of rifles along the shore at a range something short, but we have done that before, at the Barricades, eh, Carbourd?"

"At the Barricades. It is a pity that we cannot take Citizen Louise Michel with us."

"Her time will come."

"She has no children crying and starving at home like--"

"Like yours, Carbourd, like yours. Well, I am starving here. Give me something to eat. . . . Ah, that is good--excellent! What more can we want but freedom! Till the darkness of tyranny be overpast--overpast, eh?"

This speech brought another weighty matter to Carbourd's mind. He said:

"I do not wish to distress you, but--"

"Now, Carbourd, what is the matter? Faugh! this place smells musty. What's that--a tomb? Speak out, Citizen Carbourd."

"It is this: Mademoiselle Wyndham is blind." Carbourd told the story with a great anxiety in his words.

"The poor mademoiselle--is it so? A thousand pities! So kind, so young, so beautiful. Ah, I am distressed, and I finished her portrait yesterday! Yes, I remember her eyes looked too bright, and then again too dull: but I thought that it was excitement, and so--that!"

Laflamme's regret was real enough up to a certain point, but, in sincerity and value, it was chasms below that of Hugh Tryon, who, even now, was getting two horses ready to give the Frenchmen their chance.

After a pause Laflamme said: "She will not come here again, Carbourd? No? Ah, well, perhaps it is better so; but I should have liked to speak my thanks to her."

That night Marie sat by the window of the sitting-room, with the light burning, and Angers asleep in a chair beside her--sat till long after midnight, in the thought that Laflamme, if he had reached the Cave, would, perhaps, dare something to see her and bid her good-bye. She would of course have told him not to come, but he was chivalrous, and then her blindness would touch him. Yet as the hours went by the thought came: was he, was he so chivalrous? was he altogether true? . . . He did not come. The next morning Angers took her to where the boat had been, but it was gone, and no oars were left behind. So, both had sought escape in it.

She went to the Cave. She took Angers with her now. Upon the wall a paper was found. It was a note from M. Laflamme. She asked Angers to give it to her without reading it. She put it in her pocket and kept it there until she should see Hugh Tryon. He should read it to her. She said to herself as she felt the letter in her pocket: "He loved me. It was the least that I could do. I am so glad." Yet she was not altogether glad either, and disturbing thoughts crossed the parallels of her pleasure.

The Governor and Madame Solde first brought news of the complete escape of the prisoners. The two had fled through the hills by the Brocken Path, and though pursued after crossing, had reached the coast, and were taken aboard the Parroquet, which sailed away towards Australia. It is probable that Marie's visitors had their suspicions regarding the escape, but they said nothing, and did not make her uncomfortable. Just now they were most concerned for her bitter misfortune. Madame Solde said to her: "My poor Marie--does it feel so dreadful, so dark?"

"No, madame, it is not so bad. There are so many things which one does not wish to see, and one is spared the pain."

"But you will see again. When you go to England, to great physicians there."

"Then I should have three lives, madame: when I could see, when sight died, and when sight was born again. How wise I should be!"

They left her sadly, and after a time she heard footsteps that she knew. She came forward and greeted Tryon.

"Ah," she said, "all's well with them, I know; and you were so good."

"They are safe upon the seas," he gently replied, and he kissed her hand.

"Now you will read this letter for me. M. Laflamme left it behind in the Cave."

With a pang he took it, and read thus:

DEAR FRIEND,--My grief for your misfortune is inexpressible. If it

were possible I should say so in person, but there is danger, and we must fly at once. You shall hear from me in full gratitude when I am in safety. I owe you so many thanks, as I give you so much of devotion. But there is the future for all. Mademoiselle, I kiss your hand.

Always yours,
RIVE LAFLAMME.

"Hugh!" she said sadly when he had finished, "I seem to have new knowledge of things, now that I am blind. I think this letter is not altogether real. You see, that was his way of saying-good-bye."

What Hugh Tryon thought, he did not say. He had met the Governor on his way to Pascal House, and had learned some things which were not for her to know.

She continued: "I could not bear that one who was innocent of any real crime, who was a great artist, and who believed himself a patriot, should suffer so here. When he asked me I helped him. Yet I suppose I was selfish, wasn't I? It was because he loved me."

Hugh spoke breathlessly: "And because--you loved him, Marie?"

Her head was lifted quickly, as though she saw, and was looking him in the eyes. "Oh no, oh no," she cried, "I never loved him. I was sorry for him--that was all."

"Marie, Marie," he said gently, while she shook her head a little pitifully, "did you, then, love any one else?"

She was silent for a space and then she said: "Yes--Oh, Hugh, I am so sorry for your sake that I am blind, and cannot marry you."

"But, my darling, you shall not always be blind, you shall see again. And you shall marry me also. As though--life of my life! as though one's love could live but by the sight of the eyes!"

"My poor Hugh! But, blind, I could not marry you. It would not be just to you."

He smiled with a happy hopeful determination; "But if you should see again?"

"Oh, then. . . ."

She married him, and in time her sight returned, though not completely. Tryon never told her, as the Governor had told him, that Rive Laflamme, when a prisoner in New Caledonia, had a wife in Paris: and he is man enough to hope that she may never know.

But to this hour he has a profound regret that duels are not in vogue among Englishmen.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Preserved a marked unconsciousness
Surely she might weep a little for herself
Time when she should and when she should not be wooed
Where the light is darkness

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