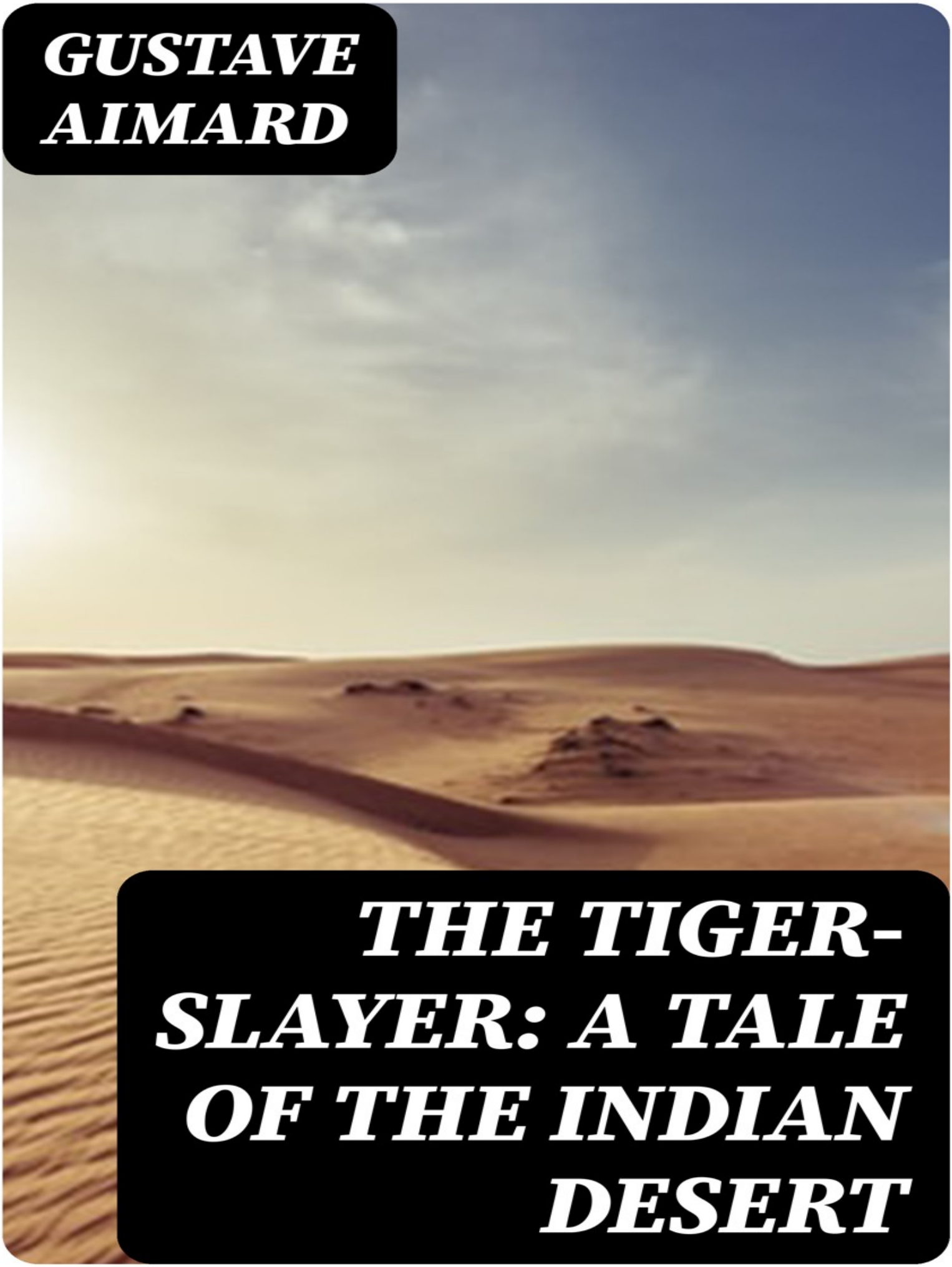

GUSTAVE AIMARD

THE TIGER-SLAYER: A TALE OF THE INDIAN DESERT

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The Tiger-Slayer: A Tale of the Indian Desert

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PREFACE.

It is hardly necessary to say anything on behalf of the new aspirant for public favour whom I am now introducing to the reader. He has achieved a continental reputation, and the French regard him proudly as their Fenimore Cooper. It will be found, I trust, on perusal, that the position he has so rapidly assumed in the literature of his country is justified by the reality of his descriptions, and the truthfulness which appears in every page. Gustave Aimard has the rare advantage of having lived for many years as an Indian among the Indians. He is acquainted with their language, and has gone through all the extraordinary phases of a nomadic life in the prairie. Had he chosen to write his life, it would have been one of the most marvellous romances of the age: but he has preferred to weave into his stories the extraordinary events of which he has been witness during his chequered life. Believing that his works only require to be known in order to secure him as favourable a reception in this country as he has elsewhere, it has afforded me much satisfaction to have it in my power to place them in this garb. Some slight modifications have been effected here and there; but in other respects I have presented a faithful rendering.

LASCELLES WRAXALL.

CHAPTER I.

LA FERIA DE PLATA.

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From the earliest days of the discovery of America, its distant shores became the refuge and rendezvous of adventurers of every description, whose daring genius, stifled by the trammels of the old European civilisation, sought fresh scope for action.

Some asked from the New World liberty of conscience—the right of praying to God in their own fashion; others, breaking their sword blades to convert them into daggers, assassinated entire nations to rob their gold, and enrich themselves with their spoils; others, lastly, men of indomitable temperament, with lions' hearts contained in bodies of iron, recognising no bridle, accepting no laws, and confounding liberty with license, formed, almost unconsciously, that formidable association of the "Brethren of the Coast," which for a season made Spain tremble for her possessions, and with which Louis XIV., the Sun King, did not disdain to treat.

The descendants of these extraordinary men still exist in America; and whenever any revolutionary crisis heaves up, after a short struggle, the dregs of the population, they instinctively range themselves round the grandsons of the great adventurers, in the hope of achieving mighty things in their turn under the leadership of heroes.

At the period when we were in America chance allowed us to witness one of the boldest enterprises ever conceived

and carried out by these daring adventurers. This *coup de main* created such excitement that for some months it occupied the press, and aroused the curiosity and sympathy of the whole world.

Reasons, which our readers will doubtless appreciate, have induced us to alter the names of the persons who played the principal parts in this strange drama, though we adhere to the utmost exactness as regards the facts.

About ten years back the discovery of the rich Californian plains awakened suddenly the adventurous instincts of thousands of young and intelligent men, who, leaving country and family, rushed, full of enthusiasm, towards the new Eldorado, where the majority only met with misery and death, after sufferings and vexations innumerable.

The road from Europe to California is a long one. Many persons stopped half way; some at Valparaiso; others, again, at Mazatlan or San Blas, though the majority reached San Francisco.

It is not within the scope of our story to give the details, too well known at present, of all the deceptions by which the luckless emigrants were assailed with the first step they took on this land, where they imagined they needed only to stoop and pick up handfuls of gold.

We must ask our readers to accompany us to Guaymas six months after the discovery of the placers.

In a previous work we have spoken of Sonora; but as the history we purpose to narrate passes entirely in that distant province of Mexico, we must give a more detailed account of it here.

Mexico is indubitably the fairest country in the world, and every variety, of climate is found there. But while its territory is immense, the population unfortunately, instead of being in a fair ratio with it, only amounts to seven million, of whom nearly five million belong to the Indian or mixed races.

The Mexican Confederation comprises the federal district of Mexico, twenty-one states, and three territories or provinces, possessing no internal independent administration.

We will say nothing of the government, from the simple reason that up to the present the normal condition of that magnificent and unhappy country has ever been anarchy.

Still, Mexico appears to be a federative republic, at least nominally, although the only recognised power is the sabre.

The first of the seven states, situated on the Atlantic, is Sonora. It extends from north to south, between the Rio Gila and the Rio Mayo. It is separated on the east from the State of Chihuahua by the Sierra Verde, and on the west is bathed by the Vermilion Sea, or Sea of Cortez, as most Spanish maps still insist on calling it.

The State of Sonora is one of the richest in Mexico, owing to the numerous gold mines by which its soil is veined. Unfortunately, or fortunately, according to the point of view from which we like to regard it, Sonora is incessantly traversed by innumerable Indian tribes, against which the inhabitants wage a constant war. Thus the continual engagements with these savage hordes, the contempt of life, and the habit of shedding human blood on the slightest pretext, have given the Sonorians a haughty and decided

bearing, and imprinted on them a stamp of nobility and grandeur, which separates them entirely from the other states, and causes them to be recognised at the first glance.

In spite of its great extent of territory and lengthened seaboard, Mexico possesses in reality only two ports on the Pacific—Guaymas and Acapulco. The rest are only roadsteads, in which vessels are afraid to seek shelter, especially when the impetuous *cordonazo* blows from the south-west and upheaves the Gulf of California.

We shall only speak here of Guaymas. This town, founded but a few years back on the mouth of the San José, seems destined to become, ere long, one of the chief Pacific ports. Its military position is admirable. Like all the Spanish American towns, the houses are low, whitewashed, and flat-roofed. The fort, situated on the summit of a rock, in which some cannon rust on carriages peeling away beneath the sun, is of a yellow hue, harmonising with the ochre tinge of the beach. Behind the town rise lofty, scarped mountains, their sides furrowed with ravines hollowed out by the rainy season, and their brown peaks lost in the clouds.

Unhappily, we are compelled to avow that this port, despite of its ambitious title of town, is still a miserable village, without church or hotel. We do not say there are no drinking-shops; on the contrary, as may be imagined in a port so near San Francisco, they swarm.

The aspect of Guaymas is sorrowful; you feel that, in spite of the efforts of Europeans and adventurers to galvanise this population, the Spanish tyranny which has weighed upon it for three centuries has plunged it into a

state of moral degradation and inferiority, from which it will require years to raise it.

The day on which our story commences, at about two in the afternoon, in spite of the red-hot sun which poured its beams on the town, Guaymas, generally so quiet at that hour, when the inhabitants, overcome by the heat, are asleep indoors, presented an animated appearance, which would have surprised the stranger whom accident had taken there at that moment, and would have caused him to suppose, most assuredly, that he was about to witness one of those thousand *pronunciamientos* which annually break out in this wretched province. Still, it was nothing of the sort. The military authority, represented by General San Benito, Governor of Guaymas, was, or seemed to be, satisfied with the government. The smugglers, leperos, and hiaquis continued in a tolerably satisfactory state, without complaining too much of the powers that were. Whence, then, the extraordinary agitation that prevailed in the town? What reason was strong enough to keep this indolent population awake, and make it forget its siesta?

For three days the town had been a prey to the gold fever. The governor, yielding to the supplications of several considerable merchants, had authorised for five days a *feria de plata*, or, literally, a silver fair.

Gambling tables, held by persons of distinction, were publicly open in the principal houses; but the fact which gave this festival a strangeness impossible to find elsewhere was, that monte tables were displayed in every street in the open air, on which gold tinkled, and where

everybody possessed of a real had the right to risk it, without distinction of caste or colour.

In Mexico everything is done differently from other countries. The inhabitants of this country, having no reminiscences of the past which they wish to forget, no faith in the future in which they do not believe, only live for the present, and exist with that feverish energy peculiar to races which feel their end approaching.

The Mexicans have two marked tastes which govern them entirely, play and love. We say tastes, and not passions, for the Mexicans are not capable of those great emotions which conquer the will, and overthrow the human economy by developing an energetic power of action.

The groups round the monte tables were numerous and animated. Still, everything went on with an order and tranquility which nothing troubled, although no agent of the government was walking about the streets to maintain a good intelligence and watch the gamblers.

About halfway up the Calle de la Merced, one of the widest in Guaymas, and opposite a house of goodly appearance, there stood a table covered with a green baize and piled up with gold ounces, behind which a man of about thirty, with a crafty face, was stationed, who, with a pack of cards in his hand, and a smile on his lips, invited by the most insinuating remarks the numerous spectators who surrounded him to tempt fortune.

"Come, caballeros," he said in a honeyed tone, while turning a provocative glance upon the wretched men, haughtily draped in their rags, who regarded him with extreme indifference, "I cannot always win; luck is going to

turn, I am sure. Here are one hundred ounces: who will cover them?"

No one answered.

The banker, not allowing himself to be defeated, let a tinkling cascade of ounces glide through his fingers, whose tawny reflection was capable of turning the most resolute head.

"It is a nice sum, caballeros, one hundred ounces: with them the ugliest man is certain of gaining the smiles of beauty. Come, who will cover them?"

"Bah," a lepero said, with a disdainful air, "what are one hundred ounces? Had you not won my last *tlaco*, Tío Lucas, I would cover them, that I would."

"I am in despair, Señor Cucharés," the banker replied with a bow, "that luck was so much against you, and I should feel delighted if you would allow me to lend you an ounce."

"You are jesting," the lepero said, drawing himself up haughtily. "Keep your gold, Tío Lucas; I know the way to procure as much as I want, whenever I think proper; but," he added, bowing with the most exquisite politeness, "I am not the less grateful to you for your generous offer."

And he offered the banker, across the table, his hand, which the latter pressed with great cordiality.

The lepero profited by the occasion to pick up with his free hand a pile of twenty ounces that was in his reach.

Tío Lucas had great difficulty in restraining himself, but he feigned not to have seen anything.

After this interchange of good offices there was a moment's silence. The spectators had seen everything that

occurred, and therefore awaited with some curiosity the *dénouement* of this scene. Señor Cucharés was the first to renew the conversation.

"Oh!" he suddenly shouted, striking his forehead, "I believe, by Nuestra Señora de la Merced, that I am losing my head."

"Why so, caballero?" Tío Lucas asked, visibly disturbed by this exclamation.

"Caray! It's very simple," the other went on. "Did I not tell you just now that you had won all my money?"

"You certainly said so, and these caballeros heard it with me: to your last ochavo—those were your very words."

"I remember it perfectly, and it is that which makes me so mad."

"What!" the banker exclaimed with feigned astonishment, "You are mad because I won from you?"

"Oh, no, it's not that."

"What is it, then?"

"Caramba! It is because I made a mistake, and I have some ounces still left."

"Impossible!"

"Just see, then."

The lepero put his hand in his pocket, and, with unparalleled effrontery, displayed to the banker the gold he had just stolen from him. But the latter did not wince.

"It is incredible," said he.

"Eh?" the lepero interjected, fixing a flashing eye on the other.

"Yes, it is incredible that you, Señor Cucharés, should have made such a slip of memory."

"Well, as I have remembered it, all can be set right now; we can continue our game."

"Very good: one hundred ounces is the stake."

"Oh no! I haven't that amount."

"Nonsense! Feel in your pockets again."

"It is useless; I know I haven't got it."

"That is really most annoying."

"How so?"

"Because I have vowed not to play for less."

"Then you won't cover twenty ounces?"

"I cannot; I would not cover one short of a hundred."

"H'm!" the lepero went on, knitting his brows, "is that meant for an insult, Tío Lucas?"

The banker had no time to reply; for a man of about thirty, mounted on a magnificent black horse, had stopped for a few seconds before the table, and, while carelessly smoking his cigar, listened to the discussion between the banker and the lepero.

"Done for one hundred ounces," he said, as he cleared a way by means of his horse's chest up to the table, on which he dropped a purse full of gold.

The two speakers suddenly raised their heads.

"Here are the cards, caballero," the banker hastened to say, glad of an incident which temporarily freed him from a dangerous opponent. Cucharés shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and looked at the newcomer.

"Oh!" he muttered to himself, "the Tigrero! Has he come for Anita? I must know that."

And he gently drew nearer the stranger, and presently stood by his side.

He was a tall man, with an olive complexion, a piercing glance, and an open and resolute face. His dress, of the greatest richness, glistened with gold and diamonds. He wore, slightly inclined over his left ear, a broad brimmed sombrero, surrounded by a golilla of fine gold: his spencer of blue cloth, embroidered with silver, allowed a dazzling white shirt to be seen, under the collar of which passed a cravat of China crape, fastened with a diamond ring; his calzoneras, drawn up round the hips by a red silk scarf with gold fringed ends and two rows of diamond buttons, were open at the side, and allowed his *calzón* to float beneath; he wore *botas vaqueras* (or herdsmen) boots of figured leather, richly embroidered, attached below the knee by a garter of silver tissue; while his *manga*, glistening with gold, hung tastefully from his right shoulder.

His horse, with a small head and legs fine as spindles, was splendidly accoutred: *las armas de agua* and the *zarapé* fastened to the croup, and the magnificent *anquera* adorned with steel chains, completed a caparison of which we can form no idea in Europe.

Like all Mexicans of a certain class when travelling, the stranger was armed from head to foot; that is to say, in addition to the lasso fastened to the saddle, and the rifle laid across the saddle-bow, he had also by his side a long sword, and a pair of pistols in his girdle, without reckoning the knife whose silver inlaid hilt could be seen peeping out of one of his boots.

Such as we have described him, this man was the perfect type of a Mexican of Sonora—ever ready for peace or war, fearing the one no more than he despised the other. After

bowing politely to Tío Lucas he took the cards the latter offered him, and shuffled them while looking around him.

"Ah!" he said, casting a friendly glance to the lepero, "you're here, gossip Cucharés?"

"At your service, Don Martial," the other replied, lifting his hand to the ragged brim of his beaver.

The stranger smiled.

"Be good enough to cut for me while I light my pajillo."

"With pleasure," the lepero exclaimed.

El Tigrero, or Don Martial, whichever the reader may please to call him, took a gold *mechero* from his pocket, and carelessly struck a light while the lepero cut the cards.

"Señor," the latter said in a piteous voice.

"Well?"

"You have lost."

"Good. Tío Lucas, take a hundred ounces from my purse."

"I have them, your excellency," the banker replied. "Would you please to play again?"

"Certainly, but not for such trifles. I should like to feel interested in the game."

"I will cover any stake your excellency may like to name," the banker said, whose practised eye had discovered in the stranger's purse, amid a decent number of ounces, some forty diamonds of the purest water.

"H'm! Are you really ready to cover any stake I name?"

"Yes."

The stranger looked at him sharply.

"Even if I played for a thousand gold ounces?"

"I would cover double that if your excellency dares to stake it," the baker said imperturbably.

A contemptuous smile played for the second time on the horseman's haughty lips.

"I do dare it," he said.

"Two thousand ounces, then?"

"Agreed."

"Shall I cut?" Cucharés asked timidly.

"Why not?" the other answered lightly.

The lepero seized the cards with a hand trembling from emotion. There was a hum of expectation from the gamblers who surrounded the table. At this moment a window opened in the house before which Tío Lucas had established his monte table, and a charming girl leant carelessly over the balcony, looking down into the street.

The stranger turned to the balcony, and rising in his stirrups,—

"I salute the lovely Anita," he said, as he doffed his hat and bowed profoundly.

The girl blushed, bent on him an expressive glance from beneath her long velvety eyelashes, but made no reply.

"You have lost, excellency," Tío Lucas said with a joyous accent, which he could not completely conceal.

"Very good," the stranger replied, without even looking at him, so fascinated was he by the charming apparition on the balcony.

"You play no more?"

"On the contrary, I double."

"What!" exclaimed the banker, falling back a step in spite of himself at this proposition.

"No, I am wrong; I have something else to propose."

"What is it, excellency?"

"How; much have you there?" he said, pointing to the table with a disdainful gesture.

"Why, at least seven thousand ounces."

"Not more? That's very little."

The spectators regarded with a stupor, mingled with terror, this extraordinary man, who played for ounces and diamonds as others did for ochavos. The girl became pale. She turned a supplicating glance to the stranger.

"Play no more," she murmured in a trembling voice.

"Thanks," he exclaimed, "thanks, Señorita; your beautiful eyes will bring me a fortune. I would give all the gold on the table for the súchil flower you hold in your hand, and which your lips have touched."

"Do not play, Don Martial," the girl repeated, as she retired and closed the window. But, through accident or some other reason, her hand let loose the flower. The horseman made his steed bound forward, caught it in its flight, and buried it in his bosom, after having kissed it several times.

"Cucharés," he then said to the lepero, "turn up a card."

The latter obeyed. "Seis de copas!" he said.

"Voto a brios!" the stranger exclaimed, "the colour of the heart we shall win. Tío Lucas, I will back this card against all the gold you have on your table."

The banker turned pale and hesitated; the spectators had their eyes fixed upon him.

"Bah!" he thought after a minute's reflection, "It is impossible for him to win. I accept, excellency," he then added aloud.

"Count the sum you have."

"That is unnecessary, Señor; there are nine thousand four hundred and fifty gold ounces."[1]

At the statement of this formidable amount the spectators gave vent to a mingled shout of admiration and covetousness.

"I fancied you richer," the stranger said ironically. "Well, so be it then."

"Will you cut this time, excellency?"

"No, I am thoroughly convinced you are going to lose, Tío Lucas, and I wish you to be quite convinced that I have won fairly. In consequence, do me the pleasure of cutting, yourself. You will then be the artisan of your own ruin, and be unable to reproach anybody."

The spectators quivered with pleasure on seeing the chivalrous way in which the stranger behaved. At this moment the street was thronged with people whom the rumour of this remarkable stake had collected from every part of the town. A deadly silence prevailed through the crowd, so great was the interest that each felt in the *dénouement* of this grand and hitherto unexampled match. The banker wiped the perspiration that beaded on his livid brow, and seized the first card with a trembling hand. He balanced it for a few seconds between finger and thumb with manifest hesitation.

"Make haste," Cucharés cried to him with a grin.

Tío Lucas mechanically let the card fall as he turned his head away.

"Seis de copas!" the lepero shouted in a hoarse voice.

The banker uttered a yell of pain.

"I have lost!" he muttered.

"I was sure of it," the horseman said, still impassible. "Cucharés," he added, "carry that table and the gold upon it to Doña Anita. I shall expect you tonight you know where."

The lepero bowed respectfully. Assisted by two sturdy fellows, he executed the order he had just received, and entered the house, while the stranger started off at a gallop; and Tío Lucas, slightly recovered from the stunning blow he had received, philosophically twisted a cigar, repeating to those who forced their consolations upon him,—

"I have lost, it is true, but against a very fair player, and for a good stake. Bah! I shall have my revenge some day."

Then, so soon as the cigarette was made, the poor cleaned-out banker lighted it and walked off very calmly. The crowd, having no further excuse for remaining, also disappeared in its turn.

[1] About £31,500 Fact.

CHAPTER II.

DON SYLVA DE TORRÉS.

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Guaymas is quite a new town, built somewhat from day to day according to the fancy of the emigrants, and hence no regular lines of streets have been maintained. However, we had better mention here that, with the exception of a few houses to which that name may be fairly given, all the rest are frightful dens, built of mud, and deplorably dirty.

In the Calle de la Merced, the principal, or to speak more truthfully, the only street in the town (for the others are only

alleys), stood a one-storied house, ornamented with a balcony, and a peristyle supported by four pillars. The front was covered by a coating of lime of dazzling whiteness, and the roof was flat.

The proprietor of this house was one of the richest *mineros* in Sonora, and possessor of a dozen mines, all in work; he also devoted himself to cattle breeding, and owned several haciendas scattered over the province, the smallest of which was equal in size to an English county.

I am certain that, if Don Sylva de Torrés had wished to liquidate his fortune, and discover what he was really worth, it would have realised several millions.

Don Sylva had come to live in Guaymas some months back, where he ordinarily only paid flying visits, and those at lengthened intervals. This time, contrary to his usual custom, he had brought his daughter Anita with him. Hence the entire population of Guaymas was a prey to the greatest curiosity, and all eyes were fixed on Don Sylva's house, so extraordinary did the conduct of the *hacendero* appear.

Shut up in his house, the doors of which only opened to a few privileged persons, Don Sylva did not seem to trouble himself the least in the world about the gossips; for he was engaged in realising certain projects, whose importance prevented him noticing what was said or thought of him.

Though the Mexicans are excessively rich, and like to do honour to their wealth, they have no idea of comfort. The utmost carelessness prevails among them. Their luxury, if I may be allowed to employ the term, is brutal, without any discernment or real value.

These men, principally accustomed to the rude life of the American deserts, to struggle continually against the changes of a climate which is frequently deadly, and the unceasing aggressions of the Indians, who surround them on all sides, camp rather than live in the towns, fancying they have done everything when they have squandered gold and diamonds.

The Mexican houses are in evidence to prove the correctness of our opinion. With the exception of the inevitable European piano, which swaggers in the corner of every drawing room, you only see a few clumsy *butacas,* rickety tables, bad engravings hanging on the whitewashed walls, and that is all.

Don Sylva's house differed in no respect from the others; and the master's horses on returning to the stable from the watering place, had to cross the *salón*, all dripping as they were, and leaving manifest traces of their passage.

At the moment when we introduce the reader into Don Sylva's house, two persons, male and female, were sitting in the saloon talking, or at least exchanging a few words at long intervals.

They were Don Sylva and his daughter Anita. The crossing of the Spanish and Indian races has produced the most perfect plastic type to be found anywhere. Don Sylva, although nearly fifty years of age, did not appear to be forty. He was tall, upright, and his face, though stern, had great gentleness imprinted upon it. He wore the Mexican dress in its most rigorous exactness; but his clothes were so rich, that few of his countrymen could have equalled it, much less surpassed it.

Anita who reclined on a sofa, half buried in masses of silk and gauze, like a hummingbird concealed in the moss, was a charming girl of eighteen at the most, whose black eyes, modestly shaded by long velvety lashes, were full of voluptuous promise, which was not gainsaid by the undulating and serpentine outlines of her exquisitely modelled body. Her slightest gestures had grace and majesty completed by the ravishing smile of her coral lips. Her complexion, slightly gilded by the American sun, imparted to her face an expression impossible to render; and lastly her whole person exhaled a delicious perfume of innocence and candour which attracted sympathy and inspired love.

Like all Mexican women when at home, she merely wore a light robe of embroidered muslin; her *rebozo* was thrown negligently over her shoulders, and a profusion of jasmine flowers was intertwined in her bluish-black tresses. Anita seemed in deep thought. At one moment the arch of her eyebrows was contracted by some thought that annoyed her, her bosom heaved and her dainty foot, cased in a slipper lined with swan's down, impatiently tapped on the ground.

Don Sylva also appeared to be dissatisfied. After directing a severe glance at his daughter, he rose, and drawing near her, said,—

"You are mad, Anita: your behaviour is extravagant. A young, well-born girl ought not, in any case to act as you have just done."

The young Mexican girl only answered by a significant pout, and an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders.

Her father continued,—

"Especially," he said, laying a stress on each word, "in your position as regards the Count de Lhorailles."

The girl started as if a serpent had stung her, and fixing an interrogatory glance on the hacendero's immovable face, she replied,—

"I do not understand you, my father."

"You do not understand me, Anita? I cannot believe it. Have I not formally promised your hand to the count?"

"What matter, if I do not love him? Do you wish to condemn me to lifelong misery?"

"On the contrary, I regarded your happiness in this union. I have only you, Anita, to console me for the mournful loss of your beloved mother. Poor child! You are still, thank Heaven, at that happy age when the heart does not know itself, and when the words 'happiness, unhappiness,' have no meaning. You do not love the count, you say. All the better— your heart is free. When, at a later date, you have had occasion to appreciate the noble qualities of the man I give you as husband, you will then thank me for having insisted on a marriage, which today causes you so much vexation."

"Stay, father," the girl said with an air of vexation. "My heart is not free, and you are well aware of the fact."

"I know, Doña Anita de Torrés," the hacendero answered severely, "that a love unworthy yourself and me cannot enter your heart. Through my ancestors I am a Christiano Viejo; and if a few drops of Indian blood be mingled in my veins, what I owe to the memory of my ancestors is only the more deeply engraved on my mind. The first of our family,

Antonia de Sylva, lieutenant to Hernando Cortez, married, it is true, a Mexican princess of the family of Moctecuhzoma, but all the other branches are Spanish."

"Are we not Mexicans then, my father?"

"Alas! My poor child, who can say who we are and what are we? Our unhappy country, since it shook off the Spanish yoke, has been struggling convulsively, and is exhausted by the incessant efforts of those ambitious men, who in a few years will have robbed it even of that nationality which we had so much difficulty in achieving. These disgraceful contests render us the laughing stocks of other people, and above all, cause the joy of our greedy neighbours, who with their eyes invariably fixed upon us, are preparing to enrich themselves with our spoils, of which they have pilfered some fragments already by robbing us of several of our rich provinces."

"But, father, I am a woman, and therefore unaffected by politics. I have nothing to do with the *gringos*."

"More than you can imagine, my child. I do not wish that at a given day the immense property my ancestors and myself have acquired by our toil should become the prey of these accursed heretics. In order to save it, I have resolved on marrying you to the Count de Lhorailles. He is a Frenchman, and belongs to one of the noblest families of that country. Besides he is a handsome and brave gentleman, scarcely thirty years of age, who combines the most precious moral qualifications with the physical qualities. He is a member of a powerful and respected nation which knows how to protect its subjects, in whatever

corner of the world they may be. By marrying him your fortune is sheltered from every political reverse."

"But I do not love him, father."

"Nonsense, my dear babe. Do not talk longer of that. I am willing to forget the folly of which you were guilty a few moments back, but on condition that you forget that man, Martial."

"Never!" she exclaimed resolutely.

"Never! That is a long time, daughter. You will reflect, I am convinced. Besides, who is this man? What is his family? Do you know? He is called Martial el Tigrero. Voto a Dios, that is not a name! That man saved your life by stopping your horse when it ran away. Well, is that a reason for him to fall in love with you, and you with him? I offered him a magnificent reward, which he refused with the most supreme disdain. There is an end of it, then; let him leave me at peace. I have, and wish for, nothing more to do with him."

"I love him, father," the young girl repeated.

"Listen, Anita. You would make me angry, if I did not put a restraint on myself. Enough on that head. Prepare to receive the Count de Lhorailles in a proper manner. I have sworn that you shall be his wife, and, Cristo! It shall be so, if I have to drag you by force to the altar!"

The hacendero pronounced these words with such resolution in his voice, and with such a fierce accent, that the girl saw it would be better for her to appear to yield, and put a stop to a discussion which would only grow more embittered, and perhaps have grave consequences. She let

her head fall, and was silent, while her father walked up and down the room with a very dissatisfied air.

The door was partly opened, and a peon thrust his head discreetly through the crevice.

"What do you want?" Don Sylva asked as he stopped.

"Excellency," the man replied, "a caballero, followed by four others bearing a table covered with pieces of gold, requests an audience of the señorita."

The hacendero shot a glance at his daughter full of expressiveness. Doña Anita let her head sink in confusion. Don Sylva reflected for a moment, and then his countenance cleared.

"Let him come in," he said.

The peon withdrew; but he returned in a few seconds, preceding an old acquaintance, Cucharés, still enwrapped in his ragged zarapé, and directing the four leperos who carried the table. On entering the saloon, Cucharés uncovered respectfully, courteously saluted the hacendero and his daughter, and with a sign ordered the porters to deposit the table in the centre of the apartment.

"Señorita," he said in a honied voice, "the Señor Don Martial, faithful to the pledge he had made you, humbly supplicates you to accept his gains at monte, as a feeble testimony of his devotion and admiration."

"You rascal!" Don Sylva angrily exclaimed as he took a step toward him "Do you know in whose presence you are?"

"In that of Doña Anita and her highly-respected parent," the scamp replied imperturbably, as he wrapped himself majestically in his tatters. "I have not, to my knowledge, failed in the respect I owe to both."

"Withdraw at once, and take with you this gold, which does not concern my daughter."

"Excuse me, excellency, I received orders to bring the gold here, and with your permission I will leave it. Don Martial would not forgive me if I acted otherwise."

"I do not know Don Martial, as it pleases you to style the man who sent you. I wish to have nothing in common with him."

"That is possible, excellency; but it is no affair of mine. You can have an explanation with him if you think proper. For my part, as my mission is accomplished, I kiss your hands."

And, after bowing once more to the two, the lepero went off majestically, followed by his four acolytes, with measured steps.

"See there," exclaimed Don Sylva violently, "see there, my daughter, to what insults your folly exposes me!"

"An insult, father?" she replied timidly. "On the contrary, I think that Don Martial has acted like a true caballero, and that he gives me a great proof of his love. That sum is enormous."

"Ah!" Don Sylva said wrathfully, "that is the way you take it. Well, I will act as a caballero also, *voto a brios!* As you shall see. Come here, someone!"

Several peons came in.

"Open the windows!"

The servants obeyed. The crowd was not yet dispersed, and a large number of persons was still collected round the house. The hacendero leant out and by a wave of his hand requested silence. The crowd was instinctively silent, and

drew nearer, guessing that something in which it was interested was about to happen.

"Señores caballeros y amigos," the hacendero said in a powerful voice, "a man whom I do not know has dared to offer to my daughter the money he has won at monte. Doña Anita spurns such presents, especially when they come from a person with whom she does not wish to have any connection, friendly or otherwise. She begs me to distribute this gold among you, as she will not touch it in any way: she desires thus to prove, in the presence of you all, the contempt she feels for a man who has dared to offer her such an insult."

The speech improvised by the hacendero was drowned by the frenzied applause of the leperos and other assembled beggars, whose eyes sparkled with greed. Anita felt the burning tears swelling her eyelids. In spite of all her efforts to remain undisturbed, her heart was almost broken.

Troubling himself not at all about his daughter, Don Sylva ordered his servants to cast the ounces into the street. A shower of gold then literally began falling on the wretches, who rushed with incredible ardour on this new species of manna. The Calle de la Merced offered, at that moment, the most singular sight imaginable. The gold poured and poured on; it seemed to be inexhaustible. The beggars leaped like coyotes on the precious metal, overthrowing and trampling underfoot the weaker.

At the height of the shower a horseman came galloping up. Astonished, confounded by what he saw, he stopped for a moment to look around him; then he drove his spurs into his horse, and by dealing blows of his chicote liberally all

around, he succeeded in clearing the dense crowd, and reached the hacendero's house, which he entered.

"Here is the count," Don Sylva said laconically to his daughter.

In fact, within a minute that gentleman entered the saloon.

"Halloh!" he said, stopping at the doorway, "What strange notion is this of yours, Don Sylva? On my soul, you are amusing yourself by throwing millions out of the window, to the still greater amusement of the leperos and other rogues of the same genus!"

"Ah, 'tis you, señor Conde," the hacendero replied calmly; "you are welcome. I shall be with you in an instant. Only these few handfuls, and it will be finished."

"Don't hurry yourself," the count said with a laugh. "I confess that the fancy is original;" and drawing near the young lady, whom he saluted with exquisite politeness, he continued,—

"Would you deign, Señorita, to give me the word of this enigma, which, I confess, interests me in the highest degree?"

"Ask my father, Señor," she answered with a certain dryness, which rendered conversation impossible.

The count feigned not to notice this rebuff; he bowed with a smile, and falling into a *butaca,* said coolly,—

"I will wait; I am in no hurry."

The hacendero, in telling his daughter that the gentleman he intended for her husband was a handsome man, had in no respect flattered him. Count Maxime Gaëtan de Lhorailles was a man of thirty at the most, well built and

active, and slightly above the middle height. His light hair allowed him to be recognised as a son of the north; his features were fine, his glance expressive, and his hands and feet denoted race. Everything about him indicated the gentleman of an old stock; and if Don Sylva was not more deceived about the moral qualities than he had been about the physical, Count de Lhorailles was really a perfect gentleman.

At length the hacendero exhausted all the gold Cucharés had brought: he then hurled the table into the street, ordered the windows to be closed, and came back to take a seat by the side of the count, rubbing his hands.

"There," he said with a joyous air, "that's finished. Now I am quite at your service."

"First one word."

"Say it."

"Excuse me. You are aware that I am a stranger, and such as thirsting for instruction."

"I am listening to you."

"Since I have lived in Mexico I have seen many extraordinary customs. I ought to be *blasé* about novelties; still, I must confess that what I have just seen surpasses anything I have hitherto witnessed. I should like to be certain whether this is a custom of which I was hitherto ignorant."

"What are you talking about?"

"Why, what you were doing when I arrived—that gold you were dropping like a beneficent dew on the bandits of every description collected before your house; ill weeds, between ourselves, to be thus bedewed."