

SIR HENRY MORGAN, BUCCANEER

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CHAPTER XV.

ONE hundred yards or so beyond the place of the ambush the road dropped sharply over the last cliff to the narrow strand which led to the west wall of La Guayra, distant half a mile away. They had all been under the deep shadow of the thick trees overhanging the way until this instant, but in the faint light cast by the moon just risen Alvarado could see that a great body of people were congregated before him on the road. Who they were and what they were he could not surmise. He was not long left in doubt, however, for the same voice whose commanding tones had caused his life to be spared now called for lights. The demand was obeyed with a promptness that bespoke fear, indeed, or discipline of the sternest, and soon the captives found themselves in a circle of lurid light sent forth by a number of blazing torches. The illumination revealed to Alvarado as villainous and terrible looking a body of men as he had ever seen. The first glance convinced him that they were not Spanish brigands or robbers. He was too young to have had dealings with the buccaneers of the past generation, but he realized that if any such remained on this side of the earth they must be like these men who surrounded him. He wasted no time in surmises, however, for after the first swift comprehensive glance his eyes sought Mercedes. She sat her horse free and uninjured, apparently, for which he thanked God. She was leaning forward over her saddle and staring in bewilderment and surprise at the scene and confusion before her.

"Donna Mercedes," cried Alvarado, turning himself about in spite of his bonds and the restraint his immediate captors endeavored to put upon him, "are you safe—unhurt?"

"Safe," answered the girl. "And then?"

"Well but for these bonds."

"God be thanked! Who are these men?"

"I know not, but—"

"Oh, sir," interrupted Senora Agapida, recovering her voice at the sound of the Spanish tongue. "What does this mean? Save us!"

"Senora," said that same sharp voice, but this time speaking in the Spanish tongue, as a tall man, hat in hand, urged his horse forward, "fear nothing; you shall be protected. And you, senorita. Do I not have the honor of addressing Donna Mercedes de Lara?"

"That is my name," answered the girl laughingly. "Who are you? Why have you shot my people and seized me prisoner?"

"For love of you, Mistress Mercedes."

"Just heaven! Who are you, I say?"

"I am Sir Harry Morgan, captain of the ship 'The Buccaneer'."

"The same," answered Morgan, turning to him.

"Sir Harry Morgan! Were you not governor of Jamaica last year?" asked Mercedes in astonishment.

"I had that honor, lady."

"Why are you now in arms against us?"

"A new king, Mistress de Lara, sits the English throne. He likes me not. I and these gallant seamen are going to establish a kingdom in some sweet island in the south seas with our good swords. I would fain have a woman to bear me company on the throne. Since I saw you in Jamaica last year I have designed you for the honor."

"Monster!" screamed the girl, appalled by the hideous leer which accompanied his words. "Rather anything!"

"Sir," interrupted Alvarado, "you are an Englishman. Your past rank should warrant you a gentleman but for this. There is no war between England and Spain. What is the meaning of this outrage? This lady is the daughter of the viceroy of Venezuela. I am his captain and the comandante of yonder city of La Guayra. You have waylaid us, taken us at a disadvantage. My men are killed. For this assault his excellency will exact bloody reparation. Meanwhile give order that we be unbound, and let us pass."

"Ho, ho!" laughed the buccaneer.

"Think you I fear the viceroy? Nay, not his majesty of Spain himself! I came here with set purpose to take La Guayra and then Caracas and to bear away with me this pretty lady, upon whom, I repeat, I design to bestow the honor of my name."

As he spoke he leaned toward Mercedes, threw his arm around her waist and before she was even aware of his intention kissed her roughly on the cheek.

"Lads," he cried, "three cheers for the future Lady Morgan!"

The proud Spanish girl turned white as death under this insult. Her eyes flashed like coals of fire. Morgan was close beside her. She was without weapon save a jeweled whip that hung at her wrist. Before the first note of a cheer could break from the lips of the

men she lifted it and struck him violently again and again full in the face.

"Thou devil!" cried the captain in fury, whipping out his sword and menacing her with it.

"Strike," cried Mercedes bravely, "and let my blood wash out the insult that you have put upon my cheek!"

She raised her whip once more, but this time young Teach, coming on the other side, caught her hand, wrested the jeweled toy from her and broke it in the struggle.

"Thou shalt pay dearly for those stripes, lady!" roared Morgan, swerving closer to her. "And not now in honorable wedlock!"

"I will die first!" returned Mercedes. Alvarado meanwhile had been struggling desperately to free himself. By the exercise of superhuman strength, just as Morgan again menaced the woman he loved he succeeded in freeing himself from his loosely tied bonds.

His guards for the moment had their attention distracted from him by the group on horseback. He wrenched a sword from the hand of one, striking him a blow with his naked fist that sent him reeling as he did so, and then flung out his other arm so that the heavy pommel of the sword struck the second guard in the face, and the way was clear for the moment. He sprang forward instantly, seized Morgan's horse, forced him away from Mercedes by a wrench of his powerful arm and stood at bay in front of the woman he loved. He said no word, but stood with his sword up on guard, panting heavily from his fierce exertions.

"Alvarado, you will be killed!" screamed the girl, seeing the others make for him.

"Here we have it," sneered Morgan. "This is the secret of your refusal. He is your lover."

"Seize him!" cried Teach, raising his sword, as, followed by the others, he made at Alvarado, who awaited them undaunted.

"Stay!" shouted De Lussan. "There is a better way."

Rudely showing Senora Agapida aside, he seized Mercedes from behind.

"Do not move, mademoiselle," he said in French, in his excitement, which fortunately she understood.

"That's well done," cried Morgan. "Captain Alvarado, if that be your name, throw down your sword if you would save the lady's life."

"Mind me not, Alvarado," cried Mercedes, but Alvarado, perceiving the situation, instantly dropped his weapon.

"Now seize him and bind him again! And you, dogs," Morgan added, turning to the men who had allowed the prisoner to slip before, "if he escape you again you shall be hanged to the nearest tree!"

"Hadst not better bind the woman, too?" queried the Frenchman gently, still holding her fast in his fierce grasp.

"Aye, the wench as well. Oh, I'll break your spirit, my pretty one," answered Morgan savagely, flipping the young woman's cheek. "Will pay me blows for kisses? Scuttle me, you shall crawl at my feet before I've finished with you!"

"Why not kill this caballero out of hand, captain?" asked Hornigold, savage from a slight wound, as he limped up to Morgan.

"No, I have use for him. Are the rest silent?"

"They will tell no tales," laughed L'Olonnois grimly.

"Did none escape back up the road?"

"None, Sir Henry," answered the other. "My men closed in after them and drove them forward. They are all gone."

"That's well. Now for La Guayra. What force is there, Senor Captain?"

Alvarado remained obstinately silent. He did not speak even when Morgan ruthlessly cut him across the cheek with his dagger. He did not utter a sound, although Mercedes groaned in anguish at the sight of his torture.

"You'd best kill him, captain," said L'Olonnois.

"No, I have need for him, I say," answered Morgan, giving over the at-

"Thou devil!"

tempt to make him speak. "Is any one here who has been at La Guayra recently?" he asked of the others.

"I was there last year on a trading ship of France," answered Sawkins.

"What garrison then?"

"About 250."

"Was it well fortified?"

"As of old, sir, by the forts on either side and a rampart along the sea wall."

"Were the forts in good repair?"

"Well kept, indeed, but most of the guns bore seaward."

"Have you the ladders ready?" cried Morgan to Brazilliano, who had been charged to convey the rude scaling ladders by which they hoped to get over the walls.

"All ready, captain," answered that worthy.

"Let us go forward, then. We'll bait just out of musket shot and concert our further plans. We have the governor in our hands, lads. The rest will be easy. There is plenty of plunder in La Guayra, and when we have made it into our own we'll over the mountains and into Caracas. Hornigold, you are lame from a wound. Look to the prisoners."

The rising moon flooding the white strand made the scene as light as day. They kept good watch on the walls of La Guayra, for the sound of the shots in the night air had been heard by some keen-eyed sentry, and as a result the garrison had been called to arms. The firing had been too heavy to be accounted for by any ordinary circumstances, and officers and soldiers had been at a loss to understand it. However, to take precautions were wise, and every preparation was made as if against an immediate attack. The drums were beaten, the ramparts were manned, the guns were primed, and such of the townspeople as were not too timid to bear arms were assembled under their militia officers.

The watchers on the west wall of the fort were soon aware of the approach of the buccaneers. Indeed, they made no concealment whatever about their motions. Who they were and what they were the garrison had not discovered and could not imagine. A prompt and well aimed volley, however, as soon as the buccaneers came within range apprised them that they were dealing with enemies, and determined enemies at that. Under cover of the confusion caused by this unexpected discharge Morgan deployed his men.

"Lads," he said, "we'll board you fort with a rush and a cheer. The ladders will be placed on the walls, and under cover of a heavy fire from our musketry we'll go over them. Use only the cutlass when you gain the parapet and ply like men. Remember what's on the other side!"

"Aye, but who'll plant the ladders?" asked one.

"The priests and the abess," said Morgan grimly. "I saved them for that."

A roar of laughter and cheers broke from the ruffianly gang as they appreciated the neatness of the old buccaneer's scheme.

"'Tis an old trick," he continued; "we did the same thing thirty years since at Porto Bello. Eh, Hornigold? How's that leg of yours?"

"Stiff and sore."

"Bide here then with the musketeers. Teach, you shall take the walls under the cliff yonder. L'Olonnois, lead your men straight at the fort. De Lussan, let the curtain between be your point. I shall be with the first to get over. Now, charge your pieces all, and Hornigold, after we have started, by slow and careful fire do you keep the Spaniards down until you hear us cheer. After that hold your fire."

"But I should like to be in the first rank myself, master," growled the old boatswain.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Morgan. "That's a right spirit, lad, but that cut leg holds you back, for which you have to thank this gentleman," bowing toward Alvarado with a hideous countenance. "You can be of service here. Watch the musketeers. We would have no firing into our backs. Now bring up the priests. And, Hornigold, watch Senorita de Lara. See that she does not escape. On your life, man, I'd rather hold her safe," he muttered under his breath, "than take the whole city of Caracas."

With shouts of fiendish glee the buccaneers drove the hapless abess and priests, who had been dragged along in the rear, to the front. The Spaniards were firing at them now, but with no effect so far. The distance was great and the moonlight made aim uncertain, and every time a head showed itself over the battlement it became a target for the fire of the musketeers, who, by Hornigold's orders, ran forward under the black shadow cast by the high cliff, where they could not be seen, and from this point of concealment, taking deliberate aim, made havoc among the defenders.

"Now, good fathers," began Morgan, "you have doubtless been curious to know why you were not put to death. I saved you not because I loved you, but because I needed you. I had a purpose in view. That purpose is now apparent."

"What would you do with us, senor?" asked Sister Maria Christina, the abess.

"A little service, my sister. Bring up the ladders, men. See, there are seven all told. That will be four apiece to four ladders, with one priest over for good measure and to take the place of any that may be struck down."

"And what are we to do with them, senor?" asked the leader of the priests, Fra Antonio de las Casas, drawing nearer to the captain.

"You are to carry them to yonder wall and place them against it."

"You do not mean," burst out Alvarado painfully, for he could scarcely speak from his wounded cheek, "to make this holy woman and these good priests bear the brunt of that fire from the fort?"

"Do I value the lives of women and priests, accursed Spaniard, more than our own?" questioned the captain, and the congenial sentiment was received by a yell of approval from the men.

"But if you are tender-hearted I'll give the defenders a chance. Will you advise them to yield and thus spare these priests?"

"I cannot do that," answered Alvarado sadly. "'Tis their duty to defend the town. There are twenty here; there are hundreds there."

"Do you hear that, mates?" cried Morgan. "Up with the ladders!"

"But what if we refuse?" cried one of the priests.

"You shall be given over to the men," answered Morgan ferociously, "whereas if you do as I order you may go free—those who are left alive after the storm. Do ye hear, men? We'll let them go after they have served us."

confronted the chief, turning to his men. "Swear that you will let them go! There are others in La Guayra."

"We swear, we swear!" shouted one after another, lifting their hands and brandishing their weapons.

"You hear!" cried Morgan. "Pick up the ladders!"

"For God's sake, sir, unsay your words! We cannot place the ladders which will give you access to yonder helpless town!"

"Then to the men you go!" cried Morgan ruthlessly.

"Death," cried the abess, snatching a dagger from the nearest hand and driving it into her breast, "rather than dishonor!"

She held herself proudly erect for a moment, swayed back and forth and then fell prostrate upon the sand, the blood staining her white robe about the hilt of the poniard. She writhed and shuddered in agony where she lay, striving to say something. Fra Antonio sprang to her side and before any one could interfere knelt down.

"I—I have sinned," she gasped. "Mercy, mercy!"

"Thou hast done well. I absolve thee!" cried the priest, making the sign of the cross upon her forehead.

"Death and fury!" shouted Morgan, livid with rage. "Let her die unshriven! Shall I be balked thus?"

He sprang toward the old man, stooping over the woman, and struck him across his shaved crown with the blade of his sword. The priest pitched down instantly, a long shudder running through him; then he lay still.

"Harry Morgan's way," cried the buccaneer, recovering his blade. "And you?" turning toward the other priests.

"Have you had lesson enough? Pick up those ladders, or—"

"Mercy, mercy!" screamed the frightened ecclesiasts.

"Not another word! Drive them forward, men!"

The buccaneers sprang at the terrified priests with weapons out. First

"Death rather than dishonor!"

one and then another gave way. The only leader among them lay upon the sand. What could they do? They picked up the ladders, and, urged forward by threats and shouts of the buccaneers, under cover of a furious discharge from Hornigold's musketeers, they ran to the walls, imploring the Spaniards not to fire upon them.

When the Spanish commander perceived who were approaching, with a mistaken impulse of mercy he ordered his men to fire over their heads and so did little danger to the approaching buccaneers. A few of them fell, but the rest dashed into the smoke. There was no time for another discharge. The ladders were placed against the walls, and the priests were ruthlessly cast aside and trampled down. In a little space the marauders were upon the ramparts, fighting like demons. Morgan, covered by Black Dog, with Teach, De Lussan and L'Olonnois, was in the lead. The desperate onslaught of their overwhelming numbers, once they had gained a foothold, swept the defenders before them like chaff. Waiting for nothing, they sprang down from the fort and raced madly through the narrow streets of the town. They brushed opposition away as leaves are driven aside by a winter storm. Ere the defenders on the east forts could realize their presence they were upon them also.

In half an hour every man bearing a weapon had been cut down. The town was at the mercy of this horde of human tigers. They broke open wine cellars, they pillaged the provision shops, they tortured without mercy the merchants and inhabitants to force them to discover their treasures, and they insulted the helpless women. They were completely beyond control now. Drunk with slaughter, intoxicated with liquor, mad with lust, they ravaged and plundered. To add to the confusion, fire burst forth here and there, and before the morning dawned half of the city was in ashes.

The pale moon looked down upon a scene of horror such as it had never before shone upon even in the palmiest days of the buccaneers.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE musketeers under Hornigold, chosen for their mastery with the weapon, had played their parts with cunning skill. Concealed from observation by the deep shadow of the cliffs and therefore immune from the enemy's fire, they had made targets of the Spaniards on the walls and by a close, rapid and well directed discharge had kept down the return of the garrison until the very moment of the assault. Hornigold was able to keep them in hand for a little space after the capture of the town, but the thought of the pleasure being enjoyed by their comrades was too much for them. Anxious to take a hand in the hideous fray, they stole away one by one, slipping under the cliff until they were beyond the reach of the boatswain, then boldly rushing for the town in the open, until the old sailor was left with only a half dozen of the most dependable surrounding himself and prisoners.

The rest would not have got away from him so easily had he not been so intensely occupied that at first he had taken little note of what was going on.

Mercedes and Alvarado had only opportunity to exchange a word now

and then. For extended conversation was prevented by the guards. Alvarado strove to cheer the woman he loved, and she promised him she would choose instant death rather than dishonor. He could give her little encouragement of rescue, for unless word of their plight were carried to the viceroy immediately he would be far on the way to the Orinoco country before any tidings could reach him, and by the time he returned it would be too late.

Again and again Alvarado strove to break his bonds in impotent and helpless fury, but this time he was securely bound, and his captors only laughed at his struggles. In the midst of their grief and despair they both took notice of the poor abess. Fra Antonio had not moved since Morgan had struck him down, but there was life still in the woman, for from where they stood, some distance back, the two lovers each marked her convulsive trembling. The sight appealed profoundly to them in spite of their perilous situation.

"The brave sister lives," whispered Mercedes.

"'Tis so," answered Alvarado. "Senor," he called, "the sister yonder is alive. Will not allow us to minister to her?"

"Nay," said Hornigold, brusquely. "I will go myself. Back, all of ye!" he added. "She may wish to confess to me in default of the worthy father."

He leered hideously as he spoke.

"Coward!" cried Alvarado. But his words affected Hornigold not at all.

Before he could say another word the guards forced him rudely back with the two women. The worthy Senora Agapida by this time was in a state of complete and total collapse, but Mercedes bore herself—her lover marked with pleasure—as proudly and as resolutely as if she still stood within her father's palace surrounded by men who loved her and who would die for her.

Rolling the body of the prostrate old man aside, Hornigold knelt down on the white sand by the form of the sister. The moonlight shone full upon her face, and as he stooped over he scanned it with his one eye. A sudden flash of recognition came to him. With a muttered oath of surprise he looked again.

"It can't be," he exclaimed. "And yet—"

After Fra Antonio's brave attempt at absolution the woman had fainted. Now she opened her eyes, although she was not yet fully conscious.

"Water!" she gasped feebly. And as it chanced the boatswain had a small bottle of the precious fluid hanging from a strap over his shoulder. There was no pity in the heart of the pirate; he would have allowed the woman to die gasping for water without giving her a second thought, but when he recognized her—or thought he did—there instantly sprang into his mind a desire to make sure. If she were the person he thought her she might have information of value. Unslinging the bottle and pulling out the cork, he placed it to her lips.

"I—die," she murmured in a stronger voice. "A priest!"

"There is none here," answered the boatswain. "Fra Antonio—he absolved you."

"But I must confess."

"Confess to me," chuckled the old man in ghastly mockery.

"Art in holy orders, senor?" muttered the woman.

"Holy enough for you. Say on."

"Fra Antonio, now," she continued, vacantly lapsing into semidelirium.

"He married us—twas a secret—his rank was so great. He was rich, I poor—bumble. The marriage lines—in the cross. There was a—What's that? A shot? The buccaneers. They are coming! Go not, Francisco!"

Hornigold, bending an attentive ear to these broken sentences, lost not a word.

"Go not," she whispered, striving to lift an arm. "they will kill thee! Thou shalt not leave me alone, my Francisco. The boy—in Panama!"

It was evident to the sailor that the poor woman's mind had gone back to the dreadful days of the sack of Panama. He was right then; it was she.

"The boy—save him, save him!" she cried suddenly with astonishing vigor. The sound of her own voice seemed to recall her to herself. She stopped; her eyes lost their wild glare and fixed themselves upon the man above her. His own face in the shadow as hers was in the light.

"Is it Panama?" she asked. "Those screams—the shots"—she turned her head toward the city—"the flames! Is it Panama?"

"Nay," answered the one-eyed fiercely. "'Tis twenty-five years since then and more. Yonder city is La Guayra. This is the coast of Venezuela."

"Oh—the doomed town. I remember—now, I stabbed myself rather than—place the ladders. Who art thou, senor?"

"Benjamin Hornigold," cried the man fiercely, bending his face to hers.

"Hornigold!" she cried

For a second the woman stared at him. Then, recognizing him, she screamed horribly, raising herself upon her arm.

"Hornigold!" she cried. "What have you done with the child?"

"I left him at Cuchillo, outside the walls," answered the man.

"And the cross?"

"On his breast. The captain!"

"The marriage lines were there. You betrayed me. May God's curse—my, I die. For Christ's sake—I forgive—Francisco, Francisco!"

She fell back gasping on the sand. He tore the inclosing coil from her face. In a vain effort to hold back death's hand for another second Hornigold snatched a spirit flask from his belt and strove to force a drop between her lips. It was too late. She was gone. He knew the signs too well. He laid her back on the sand, exclaiming: "Curse her! Why couldn't she have lived a moment longer? The captain's brat—and she might have told me. Bring up the prisoners!" he cried to the guards, who had moved them out of earshot of this strange conversation.

"The cross," he muttered, "the marriage lines therein. The only clew. And yet she cried 'Francisco.' That was the name. Who is he? If I could find that cross! I'd know it among a thousand. Hither," he called to the prisoners slowly approaching.

(To Be Continued.)

There is more catarrh in this section of the country than in other diseases put together, and until the last few years was supposed to be incurable. For a great many years doctors pronounced it a local disease and prescribed local remedies, and by constantly failing to cure with local treatment, pronounced it incurable. Science has proven catarrh to be a constitutional disease and therefore requires treatment. Hall's Catarrh Cure, manufactured by F. J. Cheney & Co., Toledo, Ohio, is the only constitutional cure on the market. It is taken internally in doses from 10 drops to a teaspoonful. It acts directly on the blood and mucous surfaces of the system. They offer one hundred dollars for any case it fails to cure. Send for circulars and testimonials.

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