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The Transcript,

Chestertown, Md.

Thursday, December 9, 1886.

THE STORY OF A MINE.

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CHAPTER I.

WHO SOUGHT IT.

IT was a steep trail leading over the Monterey coast range. Concho was very tired, Concho was very dusty, Concho was very much disgusted. To Concho's mind there was but one relief for these insurmountable difficulties, and that lay in a leathern bottle slung over the machillas of his saddle. Concho raised the bottle to his lips, took a long draught, made a wry face, and ejaculated:

"Carajo!"

It appeared that the bottle did not contain aguardiente, but had lately been filled in a tavern near Tres Pinos by an Irishman who sold bad American whisky under that pleasing Castilian title. Nevertheless, Concho had already nearly emptied the bottle, and it fell back against the saddle as yellow and flaccid as his own cheeks. Thus re-enforced, Concho turned to look at the valley behind him, from which he had climbed since noon. It was a sterile waste bordered here and there by arable fringes and valdas of meadow land, but in the main dusty, dry and forbidding. His eye rested for a moment on a low, white cloud line on the eastern horizon, but so mocking and unsubstantial that it seemed to come and go as he gazed. Concho struck his forehead and winked his hot eyelids. Was it the Sierras or the cursed American whisky?

Again he recommenced the ascent. At times the half-worn, half-invisible trail became utterly lost in the bare black out-crop of the ridge, but his sagacious mule soon found it again, until, stepping upon a loose bowlder, she slipped and fell. In vain Concho tried to lift her from out the ruin of camp kettles, prospecting pans and picks; she remained quietly recumbent, occasionally raising her head as if to contemplatively glance over the arid plain below. Then he had recourse to useless blows. Then he essayed profanity of a secular kind, such as "Assassin," "Thief," "Beast with a pig's head," "Food for the Bull's Horns," but with no effect.

Then he had recourse to the curse ecclesiastic: "Ah, Judas Iscariot! is it thus, renegade and traitor, thou leavest me, thy master, a league from camp and supper waiting? Stealer of the Sacrament, get up!"

Still no effect. Concho began to feel uneasy; never before had a mule of pious lineage failed to respond to this kind of exhortation. He made one more desperate attempt:

"Ah, defiler of the altar! lie not there! Look!" he threw his hand into the air, extending the fingers suddenly. "Behold, fiend! I exorcise thee! Hai tremblest! Look but a little now—see! Apostate! I—I—excommunicate thee—Mula!"

"What are you kicking up such a devil of row down there for?" said a gruff voice from the rocks above.

Concho shuddered. Could it be that the devil was really going to fly away with his mule. He dared not look up.

"Come now," continued the voice, "you just let up on that mule, you d—— d old Greaser. Don't you see she's slipped her shoulder?"

Alarmed as Concho was at the information he could not help feeling to a certain extent relieved. She was lamed, but had not lost her standing as a good Catholic.

He ventured to lift his eyes. A stranger—an Americano from his dress and accent—was descending the rocks toward him. He was a slight-built man with a dark, smooth face, that would have been quite commonplace and inexpressive but for his left eye, in which all that was villainous in him apparently centered. Shut that eye, and you had the features and expression of an ordinary man; cover up those features, and the eye shown out like Eblis' own. Nature had apparently observed this too, and had, by a paralysis of the nerve, ironically dropped the corner of the upper lid over it like a curtain, laughed at her handiwork, and turned him loose to prey upon the credulous world.

"What are you doing here?" said the stranger after he had assisted Concho in bringing the mule to her feet, and a helpless halt.

"Prospecting, Senor."

The stranger turned his respectable right eye toward Concho, while his left looked unutterable scorn and wickedness over the landscape.

"Prospecting, what for?"

"Prospecting, what for?"

"Gold and silver, Senor—yet for silver most."

"Alone?"

"Of us there are four."

The stranger looked around.

"In camp—a league beyond," explained the Mexican.

"Found anything?"

"Of this—much." Concho took from his saddle bags a lump of grayish iron ore, studded here and there with star points of pyrites. The stranger said nothing, but his eye looked a diabolical suggestion.

"You are lucky, friend Greaser."

"Eh?"

"It is silver."

"How you know this?"

"It is my business. I'm a metallurgist."

"And you can say what shall be silver and what is not?"

"Yes—see here!" The stranger took from his saddle bags a little leather case containing some half dozen phials. One, enwrapped in dark blue paper, he held up to Concho.

"This contains a preparation of silver."

Concho's eyes sparkled, but he looked doubtingly at the stranger.

"Get me some water in your pan."

Concho emptied his water bottle in his prospecting pan and handed it to the stranger. He dipped a dried blade of grass in the bottle and then let a drop fall from its tip in the water. The water remained unchanged.

"Now throw a little salt in the water," said the stranger.

Concho did so. Instantly a white film appeared on the surface, and presently the whole mass assumed a milky hue.

Concho crossed himself hastily, "Mother of God, it is magic!"

"It is chloride of silver, you darned fool."

Not content with this cheap experiment, the stranger then took Concho's breath away by reddening some litmus paper with the nitrate, and then completely knocked over the simple Mexican by restoring its color by dipping it in the salt water.

"You shall try me this," said Concho, offering his iron ore to the stranger; "you shall use the silver and the salt."

"Not so fast my friend," answered the stranger; "in the first place this ore must be melted, and then a chip taken and put in shape like this—and that is worth something, my Greaser cherub. No, sir, a man don't spend all his youth at Freiburg and Heidelburg to throw away his science gratuitously on the first Greaser he meets."

"It will cost—eh—how much?" said the Mexican eagerly.

"Well, I should say it would take about $100 and expenses to—to—find silver in that ore. But once you've got it there—you're all right for tons of it."

"You shall have it," said the now excited Mexican. "You shall have it of us—the four! You shall come to our camp and shall melt it—and show the silver, and—enough! Come!" and in his feverishness he clutched the hand of his companion as if to lead him forth at once.

"What are you going to do with your mule?" said the stranger.

"Look yer," said the stranger, with a grim smile, "she won't stray far, I'll be bound. I've an extra pack mule above here; you can ride on her, and lead me into camp, and to-morrow come back for your beast."

Poor honest Concho's heart sickened at the prospect of leaving behind the tired servant he had objurgated so strongly a moment before, but the love of gold was uppermost. "I will come back to thee, little one, to-morrow, a rich man. Meanwhile, wait thou here, patient one—Adios!—thou smallest of mules—Adios!"

And, seizing the stranger's hand, he clambered up the rocky ledge until they reached the summit. Then the stranger turned and gave one sweep of his malevolent eye over the valley.

Wherefore, in after years, when their story was related, with the devotion of true Catholic pioneers, they named the mountain "La Canada de la Visitacion del Diablo," "The Gulch of the Visitation of the Devil," the same being now the boundary lines of one of the famous Mexican land grants.

CHAPTER II.

WHO FOUND IT.

WILES.

CONCHO was so impatient to reach the camp and deliver his good news to his companions that more than once the stranger was obliged to command him to slacken his pace. "Is it not enough, you infernal Greaser, that you lame your own mule, but you must try your hand on mine? Or am I to put Jinny down among the expenses?" he added with a grin and a slight lifting of his baleful eyelid.

When they had ridden a mile along the ridge they began to descend again toward the valley. Vegetation now sparingly bordered the trail, clumps of chemisal, an occasional manzanita bush and one or two dwarfed "buckeyes" rooted their way between the interstices of the black-gray rock. Now and then, in crossing some dry gully, worn by the overflow of winter torrents from above, the grayish rock gloom was relieved by dull red and brown masses of color, and almost every overhanging rock bore the mark of a miner's pick. Presently, as they rounded the curving flank of the mountain, from a rocky bench below them, a thin ghost-like stream of smoke seemed to be steadily drawn by invisible hands into the invisible ether. "It is the camp," said Concho, gleefully; "I will myself forward to prepare them for the stranger," and before his companion could detain him he had disappeared at a sharp canter around the curve o the trail.

Left to himself, the stranger took a more leisurely pace, which left him ample time for reflection. Scamp as he was, there was something in the simple credulity of poor Concho that made him uneasy. Not that his moral consciousness was touched, but he feared that Concho's companions might, knowing Concho's simplicity, instantly suspect him of trading upon it. He rode on in a deep study. Was he reviewing his past life? A vagabond by birth and education, a swindler by profession, an outcast by reputation, without absolutely turning his back upon respectability, he had trembled on the perilous edge of criminality ever since his boyhood. He did not scruple to cheat these Mexicans—they were a degraded race—and for a moment he felt almost an accredited agent of progress and civilization. We never really understand the meaning of enlightenment until we begin to use it aggressively.

A few paces further on four figures appeared in the now gathering darkness of the trail. The stranger quickly recognized the beaming smile of Concho, foremost of the party. A quick glance at the faces of the others satisfied him that while they lacked Concho's good humor, they certainly did not surpass him in intellect. Pedro was a stout vaquero. Manuel was a slim half-breed and ex-convert of the Mission of San Carmei, and Miguel a recent butcher of Monterey. Under the benign influences of Concho that suspicion with which the ignorant regard strangers died away, and the whole party escorted the stranger—who had given his name as Mr. Joseph Wiles—to their camp fire. So anxious were they to begin their experiments that even the instincts of hospitality were forgotten, and it was not until Mr. Wiles—now known as "Don Jose"—sharply reminded them that he wanted some "grub," that they came to their senses. When the frugal meal of tortillas, frijoles, salt pork, and chocolate was over, an oven was built of the dark red rock brought from the ledge before them, and an earthenware jar, glazed by some peculiar local process, tightly fitted over it, and packed with clay and sods. A fire was speedily built of pine boughs continually brought from a wooded ravine below, and in a few moments the furnace was in full blast. Mr. Wiles did not participate in these active preparations, except to give occasional directions between his teeth, which were contemplatively fixed over a clay pipe as he lay comfortably on his back on the ground. Whatever enjoyment the rascal may have had in their useless labors he did not show it, but it was observed that his left eye often followed the broad figure of the ex-vaquero, Pedro, and often dwelt on that worthy's beetling brows and half savage face. Meeting that baleful glance once, Pedro growled out an oath, but could not resist a hideous fascination that caused him again and again to seek it.

The scene was weird enough without Wiles' eye to add to its wild picturesqueness. The mountain towered above—a heavy Rembrandtish mass of black shadow—sharply cut here and there against a sky so inconceivably remote that the world-sick soul must have despaired of ever reaching so far or of climbing its steel-blue walls. The stars were large, keen and brilliant, but cold and steadfast. They did not dance nor twinkle in their adamantine setting. The furnace fire painted the faces of the men an Indian red, glanced on brightly colored blanket and serape, but was eventually caught and absorbed in the waiting shadows of the black mountain, scarcely twenty feet from the furnace door. The low, half-sung, half-whispered foreign speech of the group, the roaring of the furnace and the quick, sharp yelp of the coyote on the plain below were the only sounds that broke the awful silence of the hills.

It was almost dawn when it was announced that the ore had fused. And it was high time, for the pot was slowly sinking into the fast crumbling oven. Concho uttered a jubilant "God and Liberty," but Don Jose Wiles bade him be silent and bring stakes to support the pot. Then Don Jose bent over the seething mass. It was for a moment only. But in that moment this accomplished metallurgist, Mr. Joseph Wiles, had quietly dropped a silver half dollar into the pot!

Then he charged them to keep up the fires and went to sleep—all but one eye.

Dawn came with dull beacon fires on the near hill tops, and, far in the east, roses over the Sierran snow. Birds twittering in the alder fringes a mile below, and the creaking of wagon wheels—the wagon itself a mere cloud of dust in the distant road—were heard distinctly. Then the melting pot was solemnly broken by Don Jose, and the glowing incandescent mass turned into the road to cool.

And then the metallurgist clipped a small fragment from the mass and pounded it, and chipped another smaller piece and pounded that, and then subjected it to acid, and then treated it to a salt bath which became at once milky—and at last produced a white something—mirabile dictu!—two cents' worth of silver!

Concho shouted with joy; the rest gazed at each other doubtingly and distrustfully; companions in poverty, they began to diverge and suspect each other in prosperity. Wiles' left eye glanced ironically from the one to the other.

"Here is the $100, Don Jose," said Pedro, handing the gold to Wiles with a decidedly brusque intimation that the services and presence of a stranger were no longer required.

Wiles took the money with a gracious smile and a wink that sent Pedro's heart into his boots, and was turning away when a cry from Manuel stopped him:

"The pot—the pot—it has leaked! look! behold! see!"

He had been cleaning away the crumbled fragments of the furnace to get ready for breakfast, and had disclosed a shining pool of quicksilver!

Wiles started, cast a rapid glance around the group, saw in a flash that the metal was unknown to them, and then said, quietly:

"It is not silver."

"Pardon, senor, it is, and still molten."

Wiles stooped and ran his fingers through the shining metal.

"Mother of God—what is it, then?—magic?"

"No, only base metal." But here, Concho, emboldened by Wiles' experiment, attempted to seize a handful of the glistening mass that instantly broke through his fingers in a thousand tiny spherules, and even sent a few globules up his shirt sleeves, until he danced around in mingled fear and childish pleasure.

"And it is not worth the taking?" queried Pedro of Wiles.

Wiles' right eye and bland face were turned toward the speaker, but his malevolent left was glancing at the dull, red-brown rock on the hillside.

"No!" and turning abruptly away he proceeded to saddle his mule.

Manuel, Miguel and Pedro, left to themselves, began talking earnestly together, while Concho, now mindful of his crippled mule, made his way back to the trail where he had left her. But she was no longer there. Constant to her master through beatings and bullyings, she could not stand incivility and inattention. There are certain qualities of the sex that belong to all animated nature.

Inconsolable, footsore and remorseful, Concho returned to the camp and furnace, three miles across the rocky ridge. But what was his astonishment on arriving to find the place deserted of man, mule and camp equipage. Concho called aloud. Only the echoing rocks grimly answered him. Was it a trick? Concho tried to laugh. Ah—yes—a good one—a joke—no—no—they *had* deserted him! And then poor Concho bowed his head to the ground, and falling on his face, cried as if his honest heart would break.

The tempest passed in a moment; it was not Concho's nature to suffer long nor to brood over an injury. As he raised his head again his eye caught the shimmer of the quicksilver—that pool of merry antic metal that had so delighted him an hour before. In a few moments Concho was again disporting with it; chasing it here and there, rolling it in his palms and laughing with boylike glee at its elusive freaks and fancies. "Ah, sprightly one—skipjack—there thou goest—come here. This way—now I have thee, little one—come, muchacha—come and kiss me," until he had quite forgotten the defection of his companions. And even when he shouldered his sorry pack, he was fain to carry his playmate away with him in his empty leathern flask.

And yet I fancy the sun looked kindly on him as he strode cheerily down the black mountain side, and his step was none the less free nor light that he carried with him neither the brilliant prospects nor the crime of his late comrades.

CHAPTER III.

WHO CLAIMED IT.

THE fog had already closed in on Monterey, and was now rolling, a white, billowy sea above, that soon shut out the blue breakers below. Once or twice in descending the mountain Concho had overhung the cliff and looked down upon the curving horse shoe of a bay below him—distant yet many miles. Earlier in the afternoon he had seen the gilt cross on the white-faced Mission flare in the sunlight, but now all was gone. By the time he reached the highway of the town it was quite dark, and he plunged into the first fonda at the wayside, and endeavored to forget his woes and his weariness in aguardiente. But Concho's head ached, and his back ached, and he was so generally distressed that he bethought him of a medico—an American doctor—lately come into town, who had once treated Concho and his mule with apparently the same medicine, and after the same heroic fashion. Concho reasoned, not illogically, that if he were to be physicked at all he ought to get the worth of his money. The grotesque extravagance of life, of fruit and vegetables in California was inconsistent with infinitesimal doses. In Concho's previous illness the doctor had given him a dozen four-grain quinine powders. The following day the grateful Mexican walked into the doctor's office—cured. The doctor was gratified until, on examination, it appeared that, to save trouble, and because his memory was poor, Concho had taken all the powders in one dose. The doctor shrugged his shoulders and—altered his practice.

"Well," said Dr. Guild, as Concho sank down exhaustedly in one of the doctor's two chairs, "what now?" Have you been sleeping again in the tule marshes, or are you upset with commissary whisky? Come, have it out."

But Concho declared that the devil was in his stomach, that Judas Iscariot had possessed himself of his spine, that imps were in his forehead, and that his feet had been scourged by Pontius Pilate.

"That means 'blue mass,'" said the doctor, and gave it to him—a bolus as large as a musket ball, and as heavy.

Concho took it on the spot, and turned to go.

"I have no money, Senor Medico."

"Never mind. It's only a dollar, the price of the medicine."

Concho looked guilty at having gulped down so much cash. Then he said timidly:

"I have no money, but I have got here what is fine and jolly. It is yours." And he handed over the contents of the precious tin can he had brought with him.

The doctor took it, looked at the shivering volatile mass, and said: "Why, this is quicksilver!"

"Concho laughed. "Yes, very quick silver, so!" and he snapped his fingers to show its sprightliness.

The doctor's face grew earnest. "Where did you get this, Concho?" he finally asked.

"It ran from the pot in the mountains beyond."

The doctor looked incredulous. Then Concho related the whole story.

"Could you find the spot again?"

"Could you find that spot again?"

"Madre de Dios, yes. I have a mule there; may the devil fly away with her!"

"And you say your comrades saw this?"

"Why not?"

"And you say they afterward left you—deserted you?"

"They did, ingrates!"

The doctor arose and shut his office door. "Hark ye, Concho," he said, "that bit of medicine I gave you just now was worth a dollar. It was worth a dollar because the material of which it was composed was made from the stuff you have in that can—quicksilver or mercury. It is one of the most valuable of metals, especially in a gold mining country. My good fellow, if you know where to find enough of it, your fortune is made."

Concho rose to his feet.

"Tell me, was the rock you built your furnace of red?"

"Si, Senor."

"And brown?"

"Si, Senor."

"And crumbled under the heat?"

"As to nothing."

"And did you see much of this red rock?"

"The mountain mother is in travail with it."

"Are you sure that your comrades have not taken possession of the mountain mother?"

"As how?"

"By claiming its discovery under the mining laws, or by pre-emption?"

"They shall not."

"But how will you, single handed, fight the four; for I doubt not your scientific friend has a hand in it?"

"I will fight."

"Yes, my Concho, but suppose I take the fight off your hands. Now, here's a proposition: I will get half a dozen Americanos to go in with you. You will have to get money to work the mine—you will need funds. You shall share half with them. They will take the risk, raise the money, and protect you."

"I see," said Concho, nodding his head and winking his eyes rapidly. Bueno!"

"I will return in ten minutes," said the doctor, taking his hat.

He was as good as his word. In ten minutes he returned with six original locaters, a board of directors, a president, secretary, and a deed of incorporation of the "Blue Mass Quicksilver Mining Co." This latter was a delicate compliment to the doctor, who was popular. The president added to these necessary articles a revolver.

"Take it," he said, handing over the weapon to Concho. "Take it; my horse is outside; take that, ride like h——l and hang on to the claim until we come!"

In another moment Concho was in the saddle. Then the mining director lapsed into the physician.

"I hardly know," said Dr. Guild, doubtfully, "if, in your present condition, you ought to travel. You have just taken a powerful medicine," and the doctor looked hypocritically concerned.

"Ah,—the devil!" laughed Concho, "what is the quicksilver that is in to that which is *out?* Hoopa, la Mula!" and, with a clatter of hoofs and jingle of spurs, he was presently lost in the darkness.

"You were none to soon gentlemen," said the American alcalde, as he drew up before the doctor's door. "Another company has just been incorporated for the same location, I reckon."

"Who are they?"

"Three Mexicans—Pedro, Manuel and Miguel—headed by that d—d cock-eyed Sydney duck, Wiles."

"Are they here?"

"Manuel and Miguel, only. The others are over at Tres Pinos lally-gaging Roscommon and trying to rope him in to pay off their whisky bills at his grocery."

"If that's so we needn't start before sunrise, for they're sure to get roaring drunk."

And this legitimate successor of the grave Mexican alcaldes, having thus delivered his impartial opinion, rode away.

Meanwhile, Concho the redoubtable, Concho the fortunate, spared neither riata nor spur. The way was dark, the trail obscure and at times even dangerous, and Concho, familiar as he was with these mountain fastnesses, often regretted his sure-footed Francisquita. "Care not, O Concho," he would say to himself, "'tis but a little while, only a little while, and thou shalt have another Francisquita to bless thee. Eh, shipjack, there was fine music to thy dancing. A dollar for an ounce—'tis as good as silver, and merrier." Yet for all his good spirits he kept a sharp lookout at certain bends of the mountain trail; not for assassins or brigands, for Concho was physically courageous, but for the Evil one, who, in various forms, was said to lurk in the Santa Cruz range, to the great discomfort of all true Catholics. He recalled the incident of Ignacio, a muleteer of the Franciscan friars, who, stopping at the Angelus to repeat the credo, saw Luzbel plainly in the likeness of a monstrous grizzly bear, mocking him by sitting on his haunches and lifting his paws, clasped together, as if in prayer. Nevertheless, with one hand grasping the reins and his rosary and the other clutching his whisky flask and revolver, he fared on so rapidly that he reached the summit as the earlier streaks of dawn were outlining the far-off Sierran peaks. Tethering his horse on a strip of table land, he descended cautiously afoot until he reached the bench, the wall of red rock and the crumbled and dismantled furnace. It was as he had left it that morning; there was no trace of recent human visitation. Revolver in hand, Concho examined every cave, gully and recess, peered behind trees, penetrated copses of buckeye and manzanita, and listened. There was no sound but the faint soughing of the wind over the pines below him. For a while he paced backward and forward with a vague sense of being a sentinel, but his mercurial nature soon rebeled against this monotony, and soon the fatigues of the day began to tell upon him. Recourse to his whisky flask only made him the drowsier, until at last he was fain to lie down and roll himself up tightly in his blanket. The next moment he was sound asleep.

His horse neighed twice from the summit, but Concho heard him not. Then the brush crackled on the ledge above him, a small fragment of rock rolled near his feet, but he stirred not. And then two black figures were outlined on the crags beyond.

"St-t-t!" whispered a voice. "There is one lying beside the furnace." The speech was Spanish, but the voice was Wiles'.

The other figure crept cautiously to the edge of the crag and looked over. "It is Concho, the imbecile," said Pedro, contemptuously.

"But if he should not be alone, or if he should waken?"

"I will watch and wait. Go you and affix the notification."

Wiles disappeared. Pedro began to creep down the face of the rocky ledge, supporting himself by chemisal and brushwood.

The next moment Fedro stood beside the unconscious man. Then he looked cautiously around. The figure of his companion was lost in the shadow of the rocks above; only a slight crackle of brush betrayed his whereabouts. Suddenly Pedro flung his serape over the sleeper's head, and then threw his powerful frame and tremendous weight full upon Concho's upturned face, while his strong arms clasped the blanket pinioned limbs of his victim. There was a momentary upheaval, a spasm and a struggle; but the tightly rolled blanket clung to the unfortunate man like cerements.

There was no noise, no outcry, no sound of struggle. There was nothing to be seen but the peaceful, prostrate figures of the two men darkly outlined on the ledge. They might have been sleeping in each other's arms. In the black silence the stealthy tread of Wiles in the bush above was distinctly audible.

Gradually the struggles grew fainter. Then a whisper from the crags:

"I can't see you. What are you doing?"

"Watching!"

"Sleeps he?"

"He sleeps!"

"Soundly?"

"Soundly."

"After the manner of the dead?"

"After the fashion of the dead!"

The last tremor had ceased. Pedro rose as Wiles descended.

"All is ready," said Wiles; "you are a witness of my placing the notifications?"

"I am a witness."

"But of this one?" pointing to Concho. "Shall we leave him here?"

"A drunken imbecile—why not?"

Wiles turned his left eye on the speaker. They chanced to be standing nearly in the same attitude they had stood the preceding night. Pedro uttered a cry and an imprecation, "Carramba! Take your devil's eye from me! What see you? Eh—what?"

"Nothing, good Pedro," said Wiles, turning his blank right cheek to Pedro. The infuriated and half frightened ex-vaquero returned the long knife he had half drawn from its sheath, and growled surlily:

There was a momentary struggle.

"Go on, then! But keep thou on that side, and I will on this." And so, side by side, listening, watching, distrustful of all things, but mainly of each other, they stole back and up into those shadows from which they might, like evil spirits, have been poetically evoked.

A half hour passed, in which the east brightened, flashed and again melted into gold. And then the sun came up haughtily, and a fog that had stolen across the summit in the night arose and fled up the mountain side, tearing its white robes in its guilty haste, and leaving them fluttering from tree and crag and scar. A thousand tiny blades, nestling in the crevices of rocks, nurtured in storms and rocked by the trade winds, stretched their wan and feeble arms toward Him; but Concho the strong, Concho the brave, Concho the light hearted spake not nor stirred.

CHAPTER IV.

WHO TOOK IT.

DR. GUILD.

THERE was presistent neighing on the summit. Concho's horse wanted his breakfast.

This protestation reached the ears of a party ascending the mountain from its western face. To one of the party it was familiar.

"Why, thank all, that's C[illegible] That d—— Mexican's lying drunk somewhere," said the president of the B. [illegible]

"I don't like the look of this at all," Dr. Guild, as they rode up beside the [illegible]nant animal. "If it had been an Ame[illegible] might have been carelessness, but no [illegible] ever forgets his beast. Drive ah[illegible] we may be too late."

In half an hour they came in sight of the ledge below, the crumbled furnace, and the motionless figure of Concho, wrapped in a blanket, lying prone in the sunlight.

"I told you so—drunk!" said the president.

The doctor looked grave, but did not speak. They dismounted and picketed their horses. Then crept on all fours to the ledge above the furnace. There was a cry from Secretary Gibbs. "Look yer. Some fellar has been jumping us, boys. See these notices."

There were two notices on canvas affixed to the rock, claiming the ground, and signed by Pedro, Manuel, Miguel, Wiles and Roscommon.

"This was done, doctor, while your trustworthy Greaser locater—d——n him—lay there drunk. What's to be done, now?"

But the doctor was making his way to the unfortunate cause of their defeat, lying there quite mute to their reproaches. The others followed him.

The doctor knelt beside Concho, unrolled him, placed his hand upon his wrist, his ear over his heart, and then said:

"Dead."

"Of course. He got medicine of you last night. This comes of your d——d heroic practice."

But the doctor was too much occupied to heed the speaker's raillery. He had peered into Concho's protuberant eye, opened his mouth, and gazed at the swollen tongue, and then suddenly rose to his feet.

"Tear down those notices, boys, but keep them. Put up your own. Don't be alarmed; you will not be interfered with, for here is murder added to robbery."

"Murder!"

"Yes," said the doctor, excitedly, "I'll take my oath on any inquest that this man was strangled to death. He was surprised while asleep. Look here." He pointed to the revolver still in Concho's stiffening hand, which the murdered man had instantly cocked, but could not use in the struggle.

"That's so," said the president; "no man goes to sleep with a cocked revolver. What's to be done?"

"Everything," said the doctor. "This deed was committed within the last two hours; the body is still warm. The murderer did not come our way, or we should have met him on the trail. He is, if anywhere, between here and Tres Pinos."

"Gentlemen," said the president, with a slight preparatory and half judicial cough, "two of you will stay here and stick! The others will follow me to Tres Pinos. The law has been outraged. You understand the court!"

By some odd influence the little group of half-cynical, half-trifling and wholly reckless men had become suddenly sober, earnest citizens. They said: "Go on," nodded their heads, and betook themselves to their horses.

"Had we not better wait for the inquest and swear out a warrant?" said the secretary, cautiously.

"How many men have we?"

"Five."

"Then," said the president, summing up the Revised Statutes of the state of California in one strong sentence, "then we don't want no d—d warrant."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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