

THE PALM IN THE PATIO.

BY JOHN WALKER HARRINGTON.

THE STORY OF A BEAUTIFUL CUBAN SEÑORITA, A FAITHFUL CURAN WATCHMAN, AND THE STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE OF SIX THOUSAND CENTENS.

RUSHING into my room, Simpson seized me by the sleeve of my dressing gown and dragged me to the window.

"It's all up with us," he said, pointing to a fallen palm in the center of the courtyard.

No further demonstration was required to convince me of the truth of Simpson's remark. I realized that the Cuban Iron Developing Company had lost six thousand *centens*, which we had buried for safe keeping in the middle of the patio.

"How about Hernando?" I asked.

"Come and I will show you," replied Simpson. "I'm afraid they've done for him."

We crossed the courtyard and walked down to the servants' quarters in the back part of the dwelling. Hernando, our faithful watchman, was lying upon the floor of his room bound and gagged, with an ugly cut on his forehead. There was a strange, wild light in his eyes, and he seemed to be suffering more from fright and exhaustion than from his wound. Simpson removed the gag from the old man's mouth.

"Kill me, señors," murmured Hernando. "I am no longer worthy that I should live. I struggled hard against them, but they threw me to earth and trampled upon me."

From what we could learn from the old man's disjointed account of the proceedings, he had seen two men digging at the base of the palm in the center of the courtyard. They discovered him at the same moment, and be-

fore he could make any outcry, they knocked him down, bound and gagged him, and fled with the contents of the iron box, which we had buried for safe keeping. In the dim light, Hernando saw a light wagon at the gateway of the courtyard, which the robbers leaped into and rapidly drove away.

We bandaged Hernando's head and propped him up with pillows, and then made a careful examination of the premises. The house, which was originally the residence of a Cuban planter, was a rambling one story structure, built in the form of a hollow square, with a patio in the center. Large double doors had originally closed the entrance to this courtyard, but the great hinges had made such a tremendous creaking that one day Simpson and I, imitating a certain performance of a visitor to Gaza, had taken them down. Our office was on one side of the entrance, and on the other was the stable apartment, where we kept our buckboard and two horses which we used constantly in making trips to the mountain above.

We had chosen this peculiar hiding place in which to bury the money, thinking that here it would be safe from attack by either Spaniards or Cubans. I had carefully counted it and placed the gold pieces in suitable rolls, after the manner of bank clerks. We both felt relieved when we had made this rather curious disposition of our employers' wealth, for there seemed to be no practicable policy just then but that of him who held that the napkin was as good as a safe deposit com-

pany. We felt that the money was now beyond the reach either of fire or pillage.

There had been troublous times at Quiribi since the United States had gone to war with the proud old land which had paid the bills for discovering her. The Cuban Iron Developing Company, by which Simpson and I were employed, had obtained important concessions several years before from the Spanish rulers of Cuba, and we were busily engaged in shaving down a mountain of iron ore and shipping it to the United States when the insurgents began to achieve independence after their own peculiar way. Our relations with the Spanish authorities were amicable enough as long as they had nothing more to attend to than the extermination of *pacificos*. The accommodating general who had charge of the program in Santiago province even sent a company of soldiers to guard our property. They established themselves in a block house on an adjoining mountain, and spent their time taking occasional shots at flying bands of Cubans, and in smoking cigarettes, with which they were bountifully supplied from the company's store. The gracious commander of the district, as thorough and as courteous a Spanish gentleman as I have ever met, helped himself to our tug on the plea that his need was greater than ours. Afterwards he made the loan permanent.

Rebellion or no rebellion, we were enjoying unexampled prosperity. Near the mountain in the valley a little village, composed of the cottages of our workmen, had sprung up. We had all the orders we could fill, and it was necessary to employ a large force of natives to handle the red ore and get it to the pier which we had built.

Then, one day, the Spanish general came to us and, with a tinge of inexpressible sadness in his voice, said that he deeply regretted to interfere with the business of his very dear friends, yet it pained him to say that our misguided

country had declared war upon Spain—news of which we received official confirmation, several hours later, from our New York office. Our friend, the Spanish commander, suggested that we stop work at once. We lost no time in complying, and the operations of the Cuban Iron Developing Company at Quiribi were indefinitely suspended. That was how it happened that Simpson and I were left in charge of a small railroad, numerous sheds and outbuildings, six thousand *centens*, and a mountain of hematite. We never ceased to breathe expressions of disapproval against the policy of Richard Danvers, the manager of the New York office, who had all along believed that Spain would never fight. Even when ultimata were flying in the air, Danvers had insisted on our remaining. When we saw signs of trouble brewing, however, we had withdrawn the *centens* from our Santiago bankers.

We were thinking of all these circumstances and inwardly reviling Danvers as we went around the premises. Near the tree we picked up a knife. At the entrance of the courtyard we saw footprints and evidences of hasty shuffling. Near the gate were the marks of the wheels of what was evidently a light wagon. We followed the track into the Santiago road, where it ran into a ditch, not more than one hundred yards from the house, but though we walked down the highway for a quarter of a mile, we could get no further trace of it. It seemed impossible that any wagon could make its way through the dense underbrush which lined the road. As we retraced our steps we saw faintly defined lines in the long grass surrounding the house, as though the wagon had passed there. They were about four yards in length.

"This is evidently the work of spooks," observed Simpson. "I think they must have emulated the example of the old witch who swept the sky. Seems to me, the best way out of this muss is to enlist in the Spanish army."

We were in neither a cheerful nor a sympathetic state of mind when we returned to the house to question Hernando further. The poor old chap was in a bad way, and for the first time we began to be alarmed about him. He was alternately moaning and entreating us to have mercy upon him. He insisted that he no longer had any desire to live.

"My daughter," he was saying—"will she not come to me now that my life is almost spent?"

We remembered then that the old man had a daughter in the village, where she was living with an aunt. Neither of us had ever seen the young woman, but I volunteered to go after her and to bring her to the bedside of her dying father. It was not a pleasant task, but any occupation was preferable to mourning over the disappearance of the money which had been intrusted to our charge.

Now, I am not of a romantic turn of mind. Having spent several years of my life as a reporter on one of the New York dailies, I had lost much of that abiding faith in human nature which tends to make a man subject to occasional flashes of sentiment. I freely confess, however, that the sight of the señorita banished all thoughts of the money, of poor old Hernando sick unto death, and even of the explanations which some day I must make in New York. She was the most beautiful creature I have ever beheld. When I told her, as gently as I could, of the accident which had befallen her father, she burst into tears, and then, as if by a great effort, controlled herself.

"I shall try to be brave," she said. "Poor father! He was so kind, so good! How I shall feel his loss! Life will hold nothing for me now."

I endeavored to comfort her, but under such circumstances a man can say little. We went to the house of the only physician in the village, but he had fled to Santiago, where it was impossible to reach him.

"There is no help," said the señorita sadly. "I will go to him without the physician. Poor father, I fear he suffers most from a broken heart! He idolizes you, señor."

Hernando was lying on the floor of the cabin, with his glassy eyes fixed upon the ceiling. At the entrance of his daughter he started up, and a look of joy came into his face. Simpson and I left them alone.

"This is a pretty state of affairs," observed Simpson. "In addition to being robbed, we have the life of this poor old chap to answer for, for he was practically murdered in trying to defend our property."

At that moment our attention was distracted by an unaccustomed sight in the offing. Warships of the United States had made their appearance. Simpson ran for his binoculars, by the aid of which we could make out a group of transports off shore. The army of invasion from the United States was to land at the pier from which we had been shipping Spanish iron ore, to be converted into good American stoves and armor plate.

"They're here sooner than we expected," remarked Simpson. "That reminds me also that we have something to think about besides the whims of a feeble old man who may be passing in his checks, and his picturesque but somewhat frowsy daughter."

Something which Simpson saw in my eyes caused him to stop abruptly.

"I beg your pardon, old man," he said. "I'd forgotten you were interested in that direction."

I was framing a vigorous retort when she who came so near being the cause of the first quarrel between Simpson and myself came towards us wringing her hands.

"Señors," she said, looking imploringly into our faces, "I must take the one whom I love to a place where he may have rest. I beseech you to lend me your horses."

Simpson placed his tongue in his

cheek and waited for me to reply. He seemed to be intensely jealous—so much so that he was surly.

"You shall have them, señorita," I said.

She knelt and imprinted a kiss upon my hand, then rose and hurried away as though shocked at her own temerity. I followed, and overtaking her, we paused for a moment in the lee of a line of ore cars. As I took her hand in mine, I felt it tremble in my grasp. We were silent a moment; then I spoke of the thoughts which had been in my mind ever since I had first met her. The words were few. I said I hoped that when the war was over she would remember the acquaintance we had made under such sad circumstances. She looked up at me shyly through her tears.

"The señor is so kind!" she said. "I shall never forget him. He is all that is manly and true and noble. I must go now to prepare my father for his journey;" and with that she hastened away.

I found Simpson standing on the pier. He glanced at me a moment and then said slowly and impressively: "McMasters, you're a fool." I sprang forward, but he pushed me back and then gravely handed me his glasses. Something in his manner checked me, and taking the binoculars I looked in the direction of the transports. Then an exclamation burst from my lips.

"It's Danvers!" I said. "I could tell him at a greater distance than that."

Of all men on earth, the last one whom Simpson and I cared to meet at that time was Richard Danvers. We saw it all. He had come as an official guide for the American forces; for no better landing place for a hostile expedition could have been selected than the pier of the Cuban Iron Developing Company at Quiribi. We knew the government had received charts of the neighborhood from the company, but we had supposed that we were to have a monopoly of the guiding industry.

We looked at the short, fat form on the bridge of Transport No. 14 standing among a group of officers. Danvers wore the inevitable pink shirt and blue serge. There was no mistaking him. Simpson waved his handkerchief in a despairing way, and then turned to me.

"The situation is a trifle unpleasant," he observed. "However patriotic may have been his motives in coming out here, Danvers will want to know about that money."

I left Simpson gazing out to sea while I hauled out the buckboard and hitched up the horses.

Then I hastened towards the cottage. The señorita had wrapped a shawl about old Hernando, who was sitting propped up in a chair. He wore his shoes.

"You come as my good angel again," said the señorita. "I have prepared my poor father. All is ready for our departure. May God bless you, señor, for your kindness to the unfortunate."

The señorita had tied up her father's effects into several bundles, which I lugged out to the buckboard. Simpson was bending over one of the wheels of the vehicle as if testing it when I placed the bundles under the seat, almost shoving him aside as I did so.

"It seems strong enough to carry two heavy men," he remarked. "Don't you think your flame and our friend Hernando might stay here and face the music? There will be an abundance of medical attendance on board the transports."

He spoke in Spanish, raising his voice perceptibly, as if also addressing the señorita.

"I beg that you will permit us to go in peace," said the girl. "My father could never stand the shock of seeing himself surrounded by the soldiers. In his delirium he would imagine that they were those who wounded him."

She leaned forward entreatingly and a bit of paper fluttered from her bosom

to the ground. Simpson picked it up, glanced at it, and then watched the young woman as she disappeared into the house.

"Why don't you give her back the paper?" I asked.

Simpson turned toward me with a sneer. "You are very particular," he said. "You needn't worry. Don't you think it rather foolish to have your initials regarded so tenderly? I'll hand it back to her, however, if you insist."

Just then Hernando came out of the house leaning upon the arm of his daughter. I stepped forward to help him, but Simpson sprang toward the watchman, and with a quick movement knocked him down.

"Grab the girl!" he yelled to me.

The señorita drew a revolver and fired, the bullet grazing my head. There was a brief struggle, and then we bound Hernando and the señorita hand and foot. The bundles under the seat of the buckboard contained some of the gold, and in the watchman's pockets and in a belt around his waist was the rest.

When we had found all, we removed the bonds of that precious pair and sent them towards the Santiago road. Simpson told them to lose no time in getting out of view, and by way of emphasis fired a shot over them as they took their departure.

"I didn't want to have your idol more harshly treated," said Simpson.

"How ever did you succeed in doing it, old man?" I asked, disregarding the unkind insinuation of his reference to the señorita.

"It's quite simple," he replied. "In the first place, I discovered that the wheels of the buckboard had fresh earth on them, although the rig had not been used for several days. From that I reasoned that the recently departed Hernando, now seeking health and strength in the vicinity of Santiago, had driven the vehicle a hundred yards or so on that eventful night when the alleged robbers attacked him, and afterwards brought it back to the house through the grass. He permitted several hours to pass, I should judge, and then wounded himself, and knotted a rope about his wrists—by the use of his teeth and a hook in the wall which I'll show you. The gagging process was comparatively easy. I was sure my suspicions were correct when that paper fluttered to earth, for it was once wrapped around a stack of gold pieces. The señorita was evidently not able to replace it, and had hurriedly tucked it away. This paper, which I now take great pleasure in showing you, is marked '100 *centens*, J. H. M.,' your certification that the contents of the package were correctly counted. I think that we may go to meet our friend Danvers now, for I see they are lowering boats from the transports."

THE FROST SPIRIT.

His breath is on the autumn air;
 From Ymir's realm he swoopeth down
 To nip the face of all that's fair,
 Till summer leaves him with a frown.
 The forests, when he comes, disrobe—
 His noiseless march excites no stir;
 Binding with gyves our northern globe,
 'Tis he unlocks the chestnut burr.
 At last when leaf and spire have fled,
 And ice and snow crown hill and plain,
 He rules a world new garlanded,
 And autographs the window pane.

Joel Benton.