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A MALE "TIGRE" OF ABOUT THREE HUNDRED POUNDS

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TIGER-MAN

An Odyssey of Freedom

By JULIAN DUGUID



Illustrated from Photographs

THE CENTURY CO.

NEW YORK

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ON

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FOREWORD

WHEN a man essays the biography of a living friend his path is strewn with gins. He may fly into raptures of hero-worship or bury the victim under a mound of pointless detail. My method is somewhere between the two.

I have chosen to claim artists' license in selecting my material and to adopt the form of the novel because I believe it to be truer to the spirit as well as being more readable. Some of the dialogue is not actual; it is an attempt to raise the atmosphere of twenty years ago; but it does express the sentiments of the characters. Many of those who appear in the narrative are still alive and their names have been altered for obvious reasons.

I may add that the subject has read the book and affirms that the incidents occurred precisely as I have written them; always excepting the exact wording of some of the conversations.

JULIAN DUGUID

FAREHAM, HANTS
July 1, 1932

PROLOGUE

SOMETIME, somewhere, a genius will isolate the wander-germ. He will be an odious, antiseptic little man, and the London County Council will embrace him. They will send their agents to Tilbury and Southampton, Plymouth and Leith and Liverpool, and, as each adventurer drops in, stab him, hypodermically. Then they will cram a bowler hat over his eyes and put him behind the netting in a bank. An authority that can paste across an empire's heart the insult "Safety First!" could inoculate Drake in the middle of the Armada.

But it is hard to believe that any medicine could permanently gripe Ulysses. There are sounds and smells and memories that bring greetings from the world's end. An orchestra of frogs in a marsh; the gleam of a forest pool; the rattle of a shaken bit; the sizzle of dripping grease and the tang that wood-smoke grants to roasted flesh . . . these are obtainable in England. Sooner or later the wanderer would revive: and when that happened he would smash the calendar with a coin-shovel and get back to his own tools.

This may explain the present book, which is an experiment in friendship involving a journey of about twenty thousand miles.

Early in May, 1929, an expedition returned from the

jungles of South America. Scientifically it was valueless. We had neither sought nor found a lost white race, old bones, or even a tick unknown to entomology. Yet, because we had asked no recompense beyond the privilege of adventure, we were paid above our dreams.

We discovered Tiger-Man.

Sacha Siemel, to give his name, was a Latvian, son of a bootmaker in Libau. He was tall and bearded, a Kit Carson of the South, though versed in the literature of the world, which he carried by sections in his mule-trunk. His forehead was high and intelligent. His eyes, blue and wide-set, were calmly watchful as the forests that had housed him for the past fourteen years. He killed jaguars for a living with a seven-foot spear of his own manufacture and read Tolstoy, Gogol, and Victor Hugo in the siesta-hour. In short, he charmed us, accompanied us, saved our lives.

The expedition over, we followed our destinies. It was his ambition to raise a company to film the animals of his beloved wilderness, and we left him in La Paz. I came back to England, but, the market for explorers being dull, reëntered the profession of a schoolmaster. It was nobody's fault that a laughing bearded face and the whisper of a dawn wind rose through the piles of French exercises. . . .

Meanwhile Sacha, master of five languages and a disgraceful correspondent in each, fed my nostalgia in his fashion. From Bolivia, Chile, Peru, Panama, Cuba, and the United States came a flock of homing post-cards marked with the word "greetings." A view of Manhattan, rather lavishly inscribed "The most curious jungle I ever saw," warned me

that his ambition was fulfilled. On Christmas Eve, 1930, a letter, actually a letter, stated that he and his men would sail from Hoboken, December 27. Here was my chance. I cabled:

"MAY I WRITE YOUR LIFE?"

He answered:

"YOU'RE WELCOME DESCALVADOS ANYTIME," and my chains dissolved.

Descalvados is a cattle-ranch in the Great Xarayes Marsh, close to the head-waters of the Rio Paraguay. Its owner, Mr. J. G. Ramsay, is an ex-sheriff of Texas who had a grand collection of dried bandits' ears until his wife destroyed them. So much I knew.

The globe rushed by. I dived through a revolution in Santos, pattered by train across Brazil, transferred to a row-boat when the swamp drew level with the bogey-wheels, and finished the journey by air (the expedition was luxuriously complete).

Sacha was unchanged. If the leopards of the royal arms of England had a ready smile and wore Stetsons at an angle of rigid uprightness they would be honored in a resemblance to the greatest hunter of the age. For the intimacy essential to take one hundred and nineteen skins in single combat has given him the broad, fearless expression of the big cats. After an interval for reminiscence he said:

"If you want to write my life you must see me in action. How about to-morrow?"

Now, I am not going to retail more than a fraction of that hunting trip. No maharaja with state elephants could have

given me finer sport, though I left my rifle at the ranch. Sacha rode ahead, his spear at the alert, often for twelve hours on end. He had also another weapon, which I carried, namely a bow and arrow. He had learnt this game in the United States and was very proud of it.

One day the hounds ran into a fresh trail at about noon. We galloped for ten minutes, tied the horses at the edge of the jungle, stripped spurs, and plunged in. It was curiously dark and we cut our way, stooping for the thorns, toward a musical bass growl and a chorus of yapping. Presently we emerged into a clearing, at the farther end of which an enormous tiger sat on his haunches at the foot of a great tree. A theatrical sunbeam poured like a spotlight through the branches and merged the black rosettes into the background. The hounds were barking in a circle.

The tiger was not angry. He was too big for that. His mentality was limited and he could imagine no animal powerful enough to disturb him. He roared a little between yawns, saying quite plainly:

"Keep back, you fools. I've had my lunch."

But one of the dogs, a brindled mongrel, outstepped the limit of even this forbearance. He strolled up and snarled under the royal nose. The reply was immediate but dignified. A huge sheathed paw moved sideways, and the offender rolled into a bush. There was no bloodletting. The dog was scarcely hurt. It was just a rebuke.

Sacha walked forward.

Two days previously a female with cubs had flung herself on Sacha's blade. This time it was more dangerous for

the hunter. The momentum must come from the spear. Warily, lest the paw should repeat the maneuver, Sacha approached. He held the weapon backhanded, far enough up the shaft to avoid the lash of claws. When the point was within a yard of the gaudy throat he lunged: and the tiger lost his boredom. It was a miraculous struggle, with the odds in favor of the beast, who had eighteen daggers in his toes and a mouthful of sabers. . . .

While the natives went for the packhorse that was to take the body into camp, Sacha removed the hide. Of a sudden he glanced up, reached for his bow, and pointed, laughing, into the upper branches of the tree. There, stretched along a bough, directly beneath a group of anxious vultures, was the tiger's painted wife. Sacha flicked an arrow across his thumb and ten seconds later she fell dead upon her lord.

During eleven days in the field he killed seven jaguars with a spear, roped three cubs, and with bow and arrow shot two jaguars and a puma.

So for six happy weeks I became once more his colleague. In the evenings, while I probed his life, the past lived again. Details, details, and yet more details, even to the mannerisms of acquaintances twenty years ago. Said he:

"Here is a story. A few months before I met you in 'twenty-eight I was in Germany for the first time in many years. I had my photographs and some skins and the receipt for two cubs I had sold to Hagenbeck.

"One night I was in a beer-garden in Munich. The young men were admiring my courage. They spoke the wildest

things. When they had gone a tired little dentist turned to me and remarked:

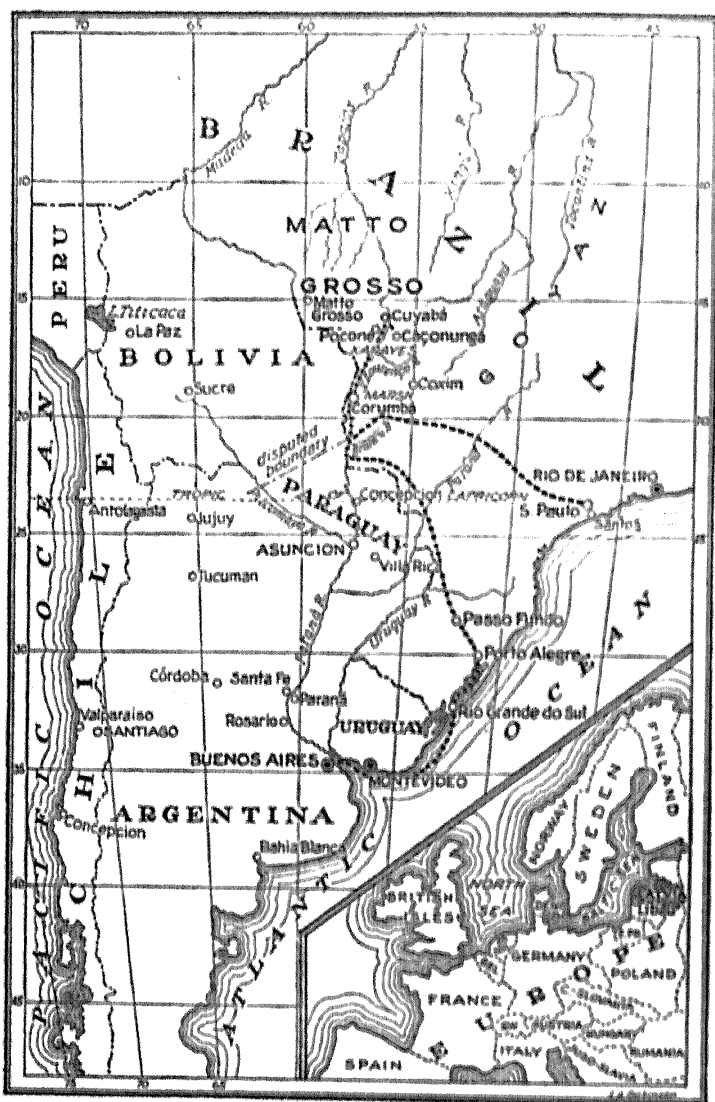
"All this is very interesting, and I too admire your pluck. But most of us older men were in the war. You were not: as a Latvian you had no call. Yet half the population of Germany have suffered greater hardship than you; and, as you say, Indians can spear tigers. No, my friend! What I like about you is that you hated civilization and had the bravery to leave it; that you have lived your life according to your dreams; and, most admirable of all, have occupied the wilderness without losing your self-respect. Most men would have subsided into tramps.' "

And that, to my mind, is the measure of Sacha's worth.

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TIGER-MAN



CHAPTER ONE

WHENEVER the apples were ripe or the wind blew freshly on the lake, Sacha used to borrow an hour from the curriculum and rely upon his tongue. But on this particular morning in August, 1906, the director of the Libau City School had forbidden him the class rooms. The distinction was unique . . . and vital.

Now, the presence of a school-boy in the streets between eleven o'clock and noon encourages the morbid side of gossip. Sacha, branded by a uniform and aware of the garrulity of women, dodged through a gap in the wide-eaved wooden houses and came out near the canal. Here he loosened his collar, glanced at the soft clouds above the buildings on the northern bank, and, picking his way among the drying fish-nets, began to walk up-stream.

The pale-green water of the channel split Libau like an axe. It was the outflow of the forest-skirted lake that ran parallel to the Baltic, which it joined at right angles. The townsfolk admired it because a log hewn in the backwoods or a cat deceased in the home could be floated to the harbor without expense. Two bridges spanned it, the more easterly of which (the coast lay north and south) was reserved for trains. It was toward this and the small boat with the neatly furled brown sail that Sacha was proceeding. As he

drew close a young man came anxiously to meet him.

"I got your note," said the youth. "Where's your sister?"

Sacha gripped his arm, pushed him over the gunwale, and clambered in.

"My letter was a fraud," he answered coolly. "I couldn't find you last night and there was no other method. I wanted to speak to you, Richard Jonsen, about something more important."

Jonsen, a Norwegian who had been in Libau only six months, gasped.

"More important than Selma?"

"Quite so. Me!"

Sacha removed his cap and ruffled his already shaggy hair, laughing.

"Not possible, you think? Well, listen! Yesterday I played with a pistol in school, a wonderful gun. Once I shot a fox with it."

"That's a lie," Jonsen said quickly. "Nobody would sell you gunpowder . . . not with your reputation."

"It's not a lie and they don't have to sell it. I make it: nitrate, sulphur, and charcoal, wetted up together and dried in the sun! Anyway, I was pointing it—unloaded, naturally—at the head of my best friend when the master entered. He took me straight to the director, who kicked me out. Also, he stole my pistol."

Jonsen was not impressed.

"And to tell me this you write that your sister wants me! I desert my office work and wait by a drafty ditch. . . ."

He was really angry and his vocabulary, to judge from the

intonation, was gifted. Most of it, however, was in Norwegian. Sacha, an indulgent smile in his blue eyes, allowed the gale to pass. Then, sweetly:

"Why didn't you see Selma at our house?"

The young man wriggled.

"For some reason, which I don't understand, your parents disapprove of me."

"Aha! And who took pity on a pair of lovers, carried their messages and flowers . . . ?"

The floor boards drummed under the fury of Jonsen's heels.

"You devil! So it's blackmail, is it?"

"Of course," said Sacha. "I'm desperate. I must have that pistol."

Jonsen leaned forward and prepared, very grimly, to attend. Sacha talked eagerly.

"You see, Richard," he said. "I like you and Selma to enjoy yourselves, but now it's your turn to be friendly. Father and Mother don't know about my trouble; nor have they discovered my other bad reports. I've been lucky."

"For a child of sixteen," Jonsen remarked acidly (he was himself twenty-two), "you seem to be a pretty practised criminal. How did you escape?"

"Easily. The City School is Russian. My parents are Latvian, speaking only Lettish or German. When a master writes a complaint I do the translation."

For the first time Jonsen grinned.

"Why can't you translate again?" he asked.

"It's too serious. Here is the letter. It requests my father

to be so good as to present himself at noon." He made a face at the stilted wording. "Ugh! Why are schoolmasters so much less interesting than hares?"

"They aren't, to themselves. How can I . . . ?"

Sacha looked cautiously round. He was thoroughly happy as a conspirator, and it was not until he had scrutinized the masts and funnels in the harbor, the concrete piles of the bridge, and the deserted foreshore that he explained. At his whisper Jonsen went pale.

"I can't. I'd lose my job."

"Very well," said Sacha, rising and moving to the bank. "Be your own postman."

Jonsen gave in, but, as the train from Vilna chose this moment to amble across the bridge, they were five minutes late at the school. When they arrived, the director and his staff were seated behind trestles, in the whitewashed judgment hall. Before them, one to each sober man, were eleven pieces of foolscap, with ink-pots and quill pens. They were curiously alike, these pedagogues, though some were fat and some were meager and some wore beards and some had tobacco-stained mustaches. They were dressed alike, too . . . frock-coats with gilt buttons, waistcoats that from time to time had been familiar with vegetable soup, black and shiny trousers. They were all poor, all earnest, all incorruptible; and such was the dignity of their bearing that their poverty was not apparent. If they had a fault it was that unlimited godship in a small community had sapped their imagination. They were pitifully easy to fool. The director, a heavy asthmatic man, stood up at Jonsen's entrance. Sacha, who looked

woefully forlorn (his pistol was not visible), shuffled in behind.

"Huh!" said the director, glaring from a height. "Huh! young Siemel. I thought I requested the pleasure of your father's company."

Jonsen stepped forward.

"Old Mr. Siemel has rheumatism," he said glibly. "And as I happened to be staying in the house, he asked me to represent him. Sacha has been misbehaving himself, I hear. Tut! Tut!"

The director scowled.

"Who are you, sir? What is your authority?"

"I am his mother's younger brother, Your Excellency. If you want a written authority I had better fetch it."

He turned to go, but the director stopped him, saying more amiably:

"Take a seat Mr. . . . er . . ." Jonsen bowed without disclosing his name. "Huh! This is a bad business."

He sat down, coughing, and began a highly colored rendering of Sacha's misdemeanors. He had robbed orchards, absented himself for whole days in the woods, merely because the sun was out. He did not work, he upset the other boys, he wrestled and boxed and swam when he ought to have been preparing his home work. The only thing in his favor was that he had never been caught in a lie. At this a little teacher, whose eyes were the brightest in the room, scribbled some words on the foolscap and pushed it along. The director cleared his throat.

"Huh! My colleague who teaches geography says that

the culprit is keen on that subject. Is that so, young Siemel?"

Sacha looked him in the face.

"Yes, sir."

"Why, might I inquire, is geography specially favored? Why not Russian verbs?"

"Well, sir, my brother Ernst is a mechanic in the Argentine Navy."

He did not add that this was the only master capable of holding his interest through a sunny hour. The director snorted.

"Your brother, huh! He left four years ago. I remember him. Worse than you are: noisier."

Jonsen rose. He was almost as dignified as the staff, and Sacha applauded silently.

"In your note to Mr. Siemel, Your Excellency, you mention the punishment of expulsion. As his representative I must protest. You did not expel Ernst: you cannot in justice expel Sacha. But, if you will grant him another chance, I will promise him the soundest thrashing in my power, and," he added thoughtfully, "if you deliver me the pistol I will throw it in the sea."

The director pondered, hand on heavy chin, then glanced along the line of masters summing their verdict. Each nodded—as gravely, Sacha reflected, as a lot of old hens among corn. The geography teacher alone seemed amused, though his features were stern enough.

So the pistol was unlocked from a cupboard and, amid the reserved stillness appropriate to correction, the con-

spirators withdrew. They were too awed by success to laugh, but Sacha waited for Jonsen to write a letter in pencil against the wall of a wooden house. Ten minutes later Selma, a demure, beautifully proportioned girl, received it in her bedroom, which, like the other rooms above the shop, was saturated with the genial smell of tanned leather. After reading, she said in her calm, pleasant voice:

"Bad news for you this morning, my friend. Our charming half-sister Hermine arrives next week. She is going to improve your education."

At that the world went dark for Sacha. His exultation was forgotten, and even the pistol-bulge in his trousers failed to comfort him. He walked to the casement.

"I hate her!" he cried suddenly. "Why should she plague me? What was it Ernst said? 'Give that woman a man to handle and in nine months he'll be a watch-chain and a belly!' I don't want her husband's oil-fields in Baku. Damn her!"

Selma touched his sleeve. She was five years his senior.

"You really feel like that?"

"Wouldn't you? The meddling cat!"

"I do," Selma said fiercely. "I loathe her. Sacha, if I were you I should wander in the forest this afternoon. Ideas grow there."

Then their mother called up the stairs, and they descended to a meal which Sacha never forgot. His father, a white-bearded, gentle, religious old man, was openly gleeful. His mother, gentle too, with finely shaped hands (which Sacha had inherited) and very white teeth, was less positive in her

joy, although content in her husband's satisfaction. Selma and Sacha gazed rather hopelessly across a blindingly clean table-cloth.

From the beginning it was evident that Hermine's visit had been arranged. She was twenty years older than Sacha and the only child of the first marriage. Mr. Siemel was dazzled by her rich connections, and during her patronizing raids repeatedly took her advice. Now he told his younger son in so many words that the sooner he went to the Technical Mining College in Baku the sooner he would become a respected citizen. Sacha, who could always keep his temper in a crisis, led him to speak of the plan, tested it by side allusions, and discovered no appeal.

"Just imagine, Sacha," beamed the old man. "In winter we shall be snow-bound and the lake will be stiff, but you, you lucky boy, will be earning your living in South Russia among oil-fields. Hermine is a good friend to us."

Sacha looked at his mother. Her placid face had not altered by a millimeter. He made, however, one attempt to smash the bars of respectability which were rising between him and the air.

"Yes, Father," he said. "What you say is true, but Ernst is happy in the Argentine . . . and I don't want to be rich."

Mr. Siemel regarded him warmly.

"Ernst is different," he answered. "He is restless and will never settle. *You* could. As to money or no money you cannot judge, my son. You have never been poor enough to be foodless. If you had you would take the first train to Baku."

His old eyes fastened on the boy's leaden mask, with a kind of hunger. He was ambitious for his child and Sacha knew it; and the knowledge hurt because it tied his hands. After the meal was finished he trudged to the canal. His feet were heavy on the sand and in his heart was none of the scared ecstasy of the truant. He was afraid of Hermine, namelessly, as a boy fears prolonged detention in a school-room. Before him lay a wreck of years too somber for contemplation.

He poled his boat under the railway bridge, up-stream, until he came to the open lake. There, with a gusty wind from the south to claim his skill, he shook out the brown sail and crouched at the tiller. At this point the lake was a mile wide, and he ran through the breeze toward the fringe of yellow rushes that concealed the bottom of the forest. Now and again he tacked, the water rattling past the bows as he avoided the rafts of scabrous red pine trunks which floated to the canal. The men in charge, balanced on the logs, hailed him and he cried back in the lifting of his gloom. By the time he plunged into the tall dry stems he was almost normal.

For several hours he dawdled among the trees. The soft crunch of the needles and the fir-scent accompanied him. By degrees his brain cleared. He knew what he must do, though it was a while before he admitted it to himself. He loved his parents as he loved the wild thickets of the woods . . . but each in their place. He saw the tragedy of his father's ambition, the eagerness that his son should have what he himself had been unable to afford. Yet he saw too, with

paralyzing clarity, the ineptitude of forcing a man to live another's life. Perhaps he would have given Baku a trial if there had been no Hermine. . . .

It was at the edge of a tiny tree-lined pool that his destiny was finally agreed. He had come to it quietly, as one accustomed to woodcraft . . . and the hare did not observe him. She was plucking the bright wet grass, mincingly, after the fashion of her race. Presently her wild sense told her that a stranger was at hand. Without a movement to show what she had guessed, she flattened her ears and scuttled for existence. Sacha laughed.

When dusk fell he returned, steering for the gap behind which the masthead lights were beginning to creep up. He went straight to his sister's room.

"Well?" said she, needlessly, for she had seen his eyes in the lamplight.

"*Martha* is the first ship to go," he answered.

Three days later he visited his friend the chief engineer of the *Martha*, a grain-tramp, plying coastwise between Libau and Königsberg. The wind was rising and the men were busy with departure. After a word of greeting he strolled into the empty fore-castle and, prising open a steel plate beneath the table, lowered himself into the chain-box, where the anchor chains were stacked.

All things considered, Jonah was by no means hardly used. His cabin, though stuffy, was soft and, moreover, placed in the most agreeable portion of the whale. The weather was calm, the vibration negligible, and any discomfort he may

have felt must have been brightened by revengeful plans against the merchantmen. For Jonah was an artist. Probably when his confinement ended on the third night he had already reckoned out the damages.

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49 Sacha had none of these reliefs. From the tourist point of view the chain-box was impossible. It was shallow and angular, wedge-shaped, extending from the inside of the bows to the after forecastle wall. It was cold, airless, and damp, and smelt equally of salt and rancid grease. There was no light; the edges of the plates were sharp; and the chains sprawled in disorder like a nest of anacondas. Nevertheless, while the *Martha* was in harbor and the men were hammering on deck, Sacha would not have treated with an emperor. Was he not free, and by his own initiative? Then the engines began to throb and for four disastrous nights and days he lost his peace.

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The first acknowledgment of movement was a faint sucking hiss. The sea lapped and bubbled behind the shell, which trembled at the wet touch. It raced and mocked and sang, gathering tone and volume as the vessel cleared the port, but when she turned south into the wind the motion changed. The nose explored some hillocks and was repelled by the spray. The cutwater dived in pursuit and was kicked abruptly by an outraged wave. The *Martha* reared like a colt on a training-rein, and the fight was on. Sacha wound his arms about the chains and was promptly sick.

In the hours that followed he was nearer death than it is right for man to venture. The gale swept under the ship, hurling her aloft, rolling and pitching her adroitly, side-

stepping with a leer and permitting her to bump into the trough. The wind screamed round the frame, whistled through the eyelet anchor-holes, jeered, expostulated, threatened, blew scorn upon the parentage of the tramp, mouthed lewd sallies at her figure, echoed the mutter of her screw.

The noise within the chain-box was hysterical, midway between an anvil competition and a symphony of brass instruments gone mad. The chains awoke and crashed into the plates. Tin mugs and dishes bounced about the fore-castle overhead. The machinery grated and clanged, communicating its anxiety along the keel. The cell was a revolving inferno of darkness and acrid stench. Sacha clung on. At one moment the blood was in his ears and his feet were wrenched by the falling of a loose chain; the next, he appeared to be climbing, mechanical-monkey fashion, up a stick. The slight westerly twist to the storm accounted for a sideways corkscrew action as well as the regular pitching by the stem. With no illumination except the colored spots before his eyes, he could not adjust himself until the ship had half completed her intentions. His clothes were ripped, his body was torn, and the salt flayed his cuts. It was only by exercising the utmost will power that he kept his senses. He knew that if he once loosened his embrace, the chains would cast him to eternity.

Presently Nature intervened. The first suffering caloused, and he acquired a mental second wind. He no longer feared the crushing sudden blows. His muscles braced themselves automatically, and he was free to think. Though he

could not explain the phenomenon, he had sunk in the animal scale, a few nerve-beats closer to the wild. For a time he was almost happy; but as the hours became days and nights he dozed.

This continued without incident during one hundred and two hours.

He was next aroused by a curious alteration in the movement. His limbs were less buoyant. His cheeks rested against steel and was not repulsed. Something gurgled beneath the keel and the wind had ceased. He fingered himself by sections, wincing at the agony of the salt. Then, realizing from the strain and creak of hawsers that the *Martha* was at a wharf, he achieved the apparently impossible and was again sick. After that he felt better. From the rags of his jacket he produced a waterproof case holding matches and a candle; and his prison assumed a form. Shadows like ravens' wings pounced into the corners. Little friendly drops ran down the slimy walls, winking, and immediately the atmosphere grew unbearable. He levered himself upright and pushed back the lid.

Before long he heard footsteps from the deck. They were different from the stamping vigor which belonged to the unloaders of cargo. They were swift, almost furtive, in effect. He drew in his head, snuffed the candle, and tried to replace the lid. But he was too late. The footsteps halted. Somebody whistled and in less than thirty seconds a rusty horn-paned lantern was lowered into the chain-box.

"Come out, you dirty anarchist," squeaked a voice.

Sacha lay still. After an interval the lantern was withdrawn and the voice raised excitedly, imploring reinforcements. It was joined by the hollow tramp of sea-boots.

"What's the matter, Franz?" a man asked gruffly.

"An anarchist, for certain. I saw a light under the table."

The lid was thrust aside, but this time a face appeared.

"You had better come," grunted a seaman, and Sacha, deady weary, obeyed.

The forecabin was crammed with men. They looked kindly at their captive, for they had all known hardship, and his case was palpable.

"Poor fellow!" said the man who had ejected him. "I'll get you some coffee."

"He is my prisoner," snarled Franz, "and a criminal. We should not aid the swine."

There was a growl at this, but Franz had the keener tongue.

"Would you expose the captain to a fine? A good captain like ours? I am going to ask him for a policeman."

He slipped through his mates and was already in the doorway when an officer's brass buttons came into the light. It was the chief engineer, a red-haired, sharp-featured man, plainly angry.

"Franz Liebermann," he snapped, "return at once to the engine-room. Your fire is low."

"Herr Ober," Franz retorted, smirking, "it is my official duty to report this anarchist stowaway."

The chief engineer laughed outright.

"Nobody pays rewards for a truant school-boy, my brave hero. Get back to your job."

He dismissed the seamen with an order for food and wheeled on Sacha.

"Well, young anarchist, how do you like starvation? Rotten, eh! Lie in that bunk and we'll talk."

He was amazingly sympathetic. He sat on the table and discussed, as between men, the slavery of Hermine and Baku. He admitted the necessity for flight, praised the endurance in the storm, yet, feeling himself bound by his acquaintance with Mr. Siemel, took pains to stress the bleak uncertainty of life. He called Sacha a child, demanded the name of the philanthropist who paid wages to the unskilled young, doubted whether a foreman of navvies would employ him, and hinted at a shameful return.

"What would you do if I sent you home?" he asked.

"Run away again."

The chief engineer, his obligations met, gave voice to a sentiment which Sacha remembered throughout his days of hardship.

"You are looking for freedom," he said, "and I believe that eventually you will find it. But consider! No bum is free; he is tied to his own tail for always. Real freedom, the kind that won't accept charity, is the hardest prize on earth, and the most worth gaining.

"We leave here to-night. To-morrow we reach Königsberg. Until then you are at liberty to sleep."

While the *Martha* was in Königsberg, Sacha retained an

illusion of security. In the intervals of plaguing contractors for a man's work and pay, he berthed at the Sailors' Institute and took meals in the forecabin. But directly the tramp steamed out for the north, he knew himself alone and hungry. It was a notable experience.

Three days and nights he starved. He wandered from road-gang to lumber-camp and back again to the docks. He offered his muscles to stevedores, who refused him at a glance. He learned the bitter irony of a cook-house smell and the loneliness of empty pockets; discovered that cobbles are harsh to tired feet. There came a time, indeed, when he envied the stray dog his power to absorb garbage. His own stomach lacked the essential genius. It was in this condition that he applied to a builder during the lunch-hour on the outskirts of the town. The men were eating.

"Job, eh?" said the foreman. "What can you do?"

"Anything."

Faint from the vision of plenty, he leaned against the unfinished wall. The builder regarded him.

"Here," he said suddenly, "eat this."

He hacked at a meter loaf and spread it with rough sausage. Sacha closed his eyes, tried to close his nostrils. His thoughts ran wildly. "No bum is free," they repeated and, "I can't fail straight away."

"I asked for work, not charity," he said aloud.

The foreman coughed.

"If that is all, my brother needs a helper. No, I'm not lying. Sit on these bricks."

Having fed him, the foreman borrowed the carpenter's

pencil and scribbled an address on an envelop. Sacha thanked him and sought among the lowly for his bread, finding it, appropriately, in a bakery. The baker, a vast, imposing man, held tight views on the moral education of his boys. He paid them twenty marks a month, encouraged their appetites, and required them to labor from half-past four in the morning until ten o'clock at night. He reminded Sacha of a genial edition of the Libau school-director. He was passionately fond of the country-side and a famous hunter of rabbits. Every Sunday he took his food into the woods, and when Sacha had been industrious he allowed him to carry the bag. This was a treat that more than once saved the boy from breaking down.

From August to December, 1906, Sacha came to realize his inadequacies. He soon acknowledged that an ability to out-box, out-swim, and out-wrestle his contemporaries was of little value: detected, in effect, the gulf between amateur and professional. Quite frankly he loathed the work, which was drudgery of the lowest intelligent kind. He had to procure the fuel for the ovens, lay and light the fires, cart flour from the wholesaler's, and stagger under baskets of loaves. As winter drew on he became inured to the swollen rigidity of frost-bitten fingers and the certainty that if he used pressure they would snap like carrots. On these occasions he rested his burden on outstretched forearms and nuzzled the bread. The pungent aroma of hot buns remained with him for years.

Through the odious dark months of initiation, pride alone sustained him. He ached to the hollow of his bones. At night

he retired full-clad so as to steal a few minutes of oblivion. His brain was as numbed as his hands; he saw all things from a distance. Even street noises appeared blurred. He remembered the Libau class rooms with affection; almost he regretted Hermine.

Yet, subconsciously, he had learned something from the chain-box . . . the elasticity of the human frame. He watched himself gradually emerge, noticed his muscles thicken and a bright sheen invest his skin; and the day he was sure that his body was working as a whole he burst into cracked song. It was the signal for departure. The baker applauded his ambition. He had no desire to clamp him to the bakery, and there was no hope of preferment. So, after one last pleasurable rabbit-hunt, during which he treated the boy as a man, he paid him his hoarded wages and they parted friends. Sacha returned smugly as a passenger.

For a while Ulysses basked. His parents had forgiven him. Selma was delighted with his strength. Richard Jonsen was an equal and his school-fellows babes unborn. Except for the fact that several fathers accused him of setting a fashion in adventure, the past was shelved.

Then, early in 1907, the sky-line called again. In the light-blue jacket of a steward of the second class he inhabited *S.S. Moskwa* . . . Libau-Rotterdam-New York . . . on three return voyages. Half-way through the fourth he deserted and took train for Chicago, where he served behind the counter in a candy-store until the proprietor discovered his mania for sweetmeats and administered the unique dismissal of his life. He was not perturbed. He drifted from waiter to liftman

and thence to operative in a wire-manufactory, peanut-vender, and assistant in the ladies' stocking department of a haberdashery store . . . everything and anything except the traditional boot-black and newsboy.

Meanwhile Ernst had been writing from Argentina. Prospects were good, he hinted, for a man of pluck. Sacha fired at the thought, but was prudent enough to wait for something definite. In the spring of 1909 it came, a heady optimistic letter suggesting a partnership in the diamond-fields of Brazil.

"Every forest trail," wrote Ernst, "is a finger pointing to El Dorado."

Sacha leaped. He signed as cook's mate on the *Saxon Prince* and worshiped for the first time the low, intoxicating grandeur of the Southern stars. He saw the coffee-colored majesty of the Amazon, a river still though fifty miles from land. Beyond the line he pondered the sloping wooded shoulder of Brazil, screened by a haze that danced above brilliant water. Crude log fishing-boats with shark-fin sails ducked in the swell. The fishermen were asleep. As an introduction to South America it was perfect.

Rio de Janeiro, Santos, Montevideo . . . these memories of the geography teacher loomed and vanished. When the steamer entered the estuary of the Plate, Sacha gathered his small possessions and made ready to desert again. He landed, mingled with an alien olive crowd, inquired the whereabouts of the navy. Yet, in the end, the war-ships were no use to him, because Ernst had narrowly escaped court-martial and had gone up-country, nobody knew where.

The shock was appalling but salutary. It revealed to him the basic truth that in a new country he must rely upon himself. Making the acquaintance of a Buenos Aires boarding house, he began to learn Spanish.

CHAPTER TWO

IT WOULD be pleasant to trace in detail Sacha's Odyssey of freedom: to linger among the tiny steps of destiny whereby he sloughed the rawness of his Libau days and acquired a young man's faith. How he journeyed through Argentina in a fruit-van to test a casual rumor about his brother. How he served at a cabaret in Rosario until an actress became familiar; and how he outwitted a thief in Paraná, only to miss Ernst by half an hour in the process . . . all these are good tales. But there are better. It must suffice to rush him along to the actual meeting with his brother and etch in two incidents which determined his conduct toward firearms.

One biting noon in May, about a year after he landed, Sacha emerged from a white bell-tent at a rail-head, bridge-construction camp in southern Argentina. His lips were pale and his body hard with rage. The corners of his eyes were wet from the frank simplicity of his passion. His dignity had been touched; he felt himself unworthy of belongings; somebody had stolen his revolver. Yet the minute he walked out into the wind he recognized his blunder. He had no friends. Any one of the men lounging near the cook-pots might be guilty. If he appeared in his present state he might never redeem his loss, for the criminal would be

wary. He retired behind the flap and wiped his face on the arm of his sheepskin jacket.

That rail-head was the most desolate place he had ever known. There were no landmarks. Neither tree nor house broke the leagues of waving grass that flowed from the horizon. The four-acre clearing was full of tents. Girders and bags of concrete lay tidily in piles. A crane-truck, coupled to an engine, stood by the rim of a thirty-foot yellowish ravine which was spanned by a skeleton bridge. And a single-trace, narrow-gage line ran between dun walls, northward to Buenos Aires.

Two distinct camps, one to each flank of the railway, proved the temper of this solitary outpost. On the east were Italians, on the west that conglomeration of nationalities which roosts about the Baltic. The reason was simple. The Italians found no glamour in a closed fist, and the Northerners could not fathom the artistry of a knife-blade sliding between ribs. Argentina was represented by a cook alone, because South Americans as a whole prefer foreigners to do the work while they attend to the exciting pastime of watching money breed. As Sacha marched toward the creosoted hardwood sleepers which were used for fires he noticed that the Italians were laughing.

"When I arrived," he said to the assembled Germans, Russians, Letts, Finns, and Scandinavians, "I imagined the country to be warm."

The cook teased the scum of a caldron with a wooden spoon.

"Warm?" he grumbled. "Here? In winter? Caramba, friend, have you never heard of Magellan's Straits?"

Sacha looked southward past the ravine and the fringe of girders. A strong wind was blowing in a sweep of gray cloud. He had a queer sensation of gazing at an incoming sea an inch or two below the level of his eyes. The long rollers curled at the gully's edge and leaned out over nothing.

"The wind is called pampero," said the cook, "from the pampa on which it rides. It begins far out in the ocean, hundreds of miles beneath Tierra del Fuego. It passes Argentina at a gallop, penetrates the Chaco and Brazil, and lays itself to sleep on the hot breasts of the Amazon."

He smiled, proud of his learning.

"If you jabbered less poetry we should have a longer siesta," remarked a big Norwegian affably.

He captured the spoon and ladled out the half-cooked puchero . . . the famous stew of the plains. The Argentine wagged his head, repossessing himself of his office.

"Patience, amigo, the law of the South! Where should we be without patience?"

"Throwing cocoanuts at white men, like your ancestors," said his tormentor, and the Scandinavians howled.

Sacha kept quiet. He did not believe that these cheerful, boisterous men were robbers, but he was not sure enough to confide in them. He stared across the No Man's Land of the rails. The Italians had their own cooks and outnumbered the Northerners by at least three to one. Sacha, dis-

trusting them acutely, wondered how he could raid their quarters on suspicion. A knife-thrust and a short trip on a bent back would sink him forever in the pampa. He decided to wait.

At that moment proof came to him with open shamelessness. A lean, intellectual-looking fellow, squatting in a tent-mouth, drew a revolver from his pocket. In a kind of dreamy reverence he raised the barrel to his lips and kissed it before tossing it like a banana-skin through the opening behind. Then, still lazily, he put out his tongue. A year, even eight months ago, Sacha would have charged him naked-handed, but his sojourn in Argentina had taught him many things. He grinned half-heartedly, as if he realized the folly of resistance, and went on with his meat. The Italian spat.

At two o'clock precisely a whistle blew. The foreman descended from a truck, where he had been sheltering, and drove his men to the ravine. The division of the nations was a purely social matter and was not allowed to interfere with work. If an Italian and a Swede were the best partners for a job they were detailed ruthlessly.

"Here, Mascari," the foreman said to Sacha's enemy. "Take this hawser over the gully. Eriksen will help you."

Mascari picked up the wire and began to move delicately across the skeleton bridge. Sacha took advantage of an instant's hesitation and followed him. They were some yards from the bank and thirty feet above the river before the Italian noticed the change. He stopped abruptly, clinging to a girder. His free hand slipped downward to his waist.

"Leave it," said Sacha, "or I'll jerk the rope."

"What do you want?" asked Mascari in a small voice.

"You know very well. Will you swear by the Virgin to give me my revolver; or must there be an accident?"

The Italian, after viewing the tumbled water at his feet and the vast distance to the farther side, swore by every saint he could remember, though not piously, that he was innocent. His friend, a large blond man from the Lombard plain, one Ferrugio, had done it. Was Sacha acquainted with the scoundrel? Sacha was; but he was also puzzled, because Ferrugio was the leader of the Southern gang and reputed honest.

"My gun is in your tent?"

"*Si, si, signor.*"

"I can fetch it now?"

"Of course. It was a joke . . . and a poor one."

During the afternoon Sacha found occasion to visit camp. He took his property from a heap of blankets and locked it in his baggage under the ironical eyes of the cook. At six o'clock the whistle blew again. It was obeyed with even greater zeal than had marked the end of the siesta. All tools were dropped, and a rather lawless community set about the amusements of the evening. Guitars and pipes, dice-boxes and cards, gallons of brandy were produced. Sheepskins closed up to the fires, and the sound of exiles chanting the sagas of their homes mingled with the perpetual wind.

Presently Sacha, who had oiled his gun in expectation of a night attack, was struck by an unusual bustle in the Italian lines. Groups were forming. Weapons of every type,

from plain, straightforward knives to a butcher's axe, were being passed along the ranks. The procession started. There was no shouting, but a wicked gloom in the dark faces. Evidently they had taken the cause to heart as a racial affair, demanding blood. A group of fifty crossed the rails, so swiftly that the Northerners could do nothing. Ferrugio was in front. He strode up to Sacha, a cleaver in his hand, and by a quick turning movement of his countrymen, surrounded him. His eyes were gray and cold.

"You took a revolver from one of our tents, I believe."

"Certainly."

"Why, if I might be so curious?"

"It was mine. Mascari stole it."

A ripple, like the impress of the wind on the grass, disturbed the silent crowd. Ferrugio gazed at Sacha and, finding neither weakening nor guilt, asked for an explanation.

"I lost it this morning," said Sacha, ignoring the multitude and speaking as if he were alone with a friend. "This creature taunted me at lunch."

Again that deadly ripple.

"But I don't understand. Was it never Mascari's?"

"Never. And, what is more, he told me you had taken it, yourself."

At that there was uproar. The clink of touching steel was heard among the tumult. Ferrugio spoke to his companion:

"Is this true?"

Two hands, one of them armed, flew high in protest.

"By the Virgin, no! I bought it last time I was in Buenos Aires."

Ferrugio stared calmly at them both and drew his conclusions. He had the quality of leadership.

"Come," he said, "we have made an error. Let us apologize."

He bowed to Sacha, who gravely returned the bow. The mob streamed back over the rails. Nobody was surprised that Mascari disappeared during the night. The grass continued to wave right up to the encampment. . . .

The occurrence left its mark on Sacha: never again did he leave a weapon unattended.

Just before darkness fell the weekly supply-train pulled in with tremendous puffs of steam and doleful clanging of its bell. From the single car a score of European laborers tumbled out their baggage. Like quicksilver they split, Italians to the east, Northerners to the west. Among the latter was a man who intrigued Sacha from the first. He was very broad, with immensely powerful arms and a thick chest. A tawny beard stuck out aggressively, though his eyes were blue and not at all offensive. He rolled a little in his stride, as one accustomed to the seas. His voice was extraordinarily gentle.

"Has any one seen my young brother?" he asked the bystanders.

Then Sacha knew him and ran forward with a cry. Five years had gone since Ernst left home, and the change in each was great. They talked for hours in the tent, making and breaking plans for the mere pleasure of toying with their lives. They spoke of their parents and the Baltic, of the Argentine Navy and the wild lands of Brazil. Toward morn-

ing, as they crouched in their sheepskins, Sacha asked a question:

"How does a diamond-digger exist when he can't find stones?"

Ernst did not know. For himself, he did not care. He was a skilled mechanic and could always earn money by repairing revolvers and farm implements. In that minute Sacha recognized his fate. He, too, must perfect his mechanical knowledge.

"I will go to Buenos Aires and work in a machine-shop," he said solemnly. "And then . . . and then I am longing for my freedom, Ernst. Even here is better than a town."

So they arranged it, joking, in the wind-blown tent. They left on the next train out, but after a week or two of his company the elder brother went north to spy out the land. They did not meet again for three years.

It was in Buenos Aires that the second incident took place. Sacha was living in a hostel with a number of Argentine youths. Their perennial chatter about women disgusted him, and he began to read in earnest. He discovered Sir Walter Scott and, later, Shakspeare. Usually he retired upstairs immediately after his dinner. His bedroom, at the extreme top of the house, was bare, containing nothing beyond some Indian clubs under the wash-stand and three or four beautifully kept firearms on the wall opposite his bed. His books were kept in a drawer.

One night, after reading, he turned out the gas and went to sleep. He was awakened in the early hours, not so much by a noise as by the conviction that something had recently happened. The room was quiet enough. Only the faintest

possible blur showed where the reflection of the dimmed jet in the passage outlined the crack of a barely opened door. Then he remembered why he was afraid. When last he saw it the door had been shut. Suddenly there was a movement. It was quite small. A flutter, a vibration, a minute displacement of the air; nothing so definite as a creak. Nevertheless he could feel when it came nearer, and that was just what it was doing.

He thought of the robberies which had recently swept over the city. Desperately he visualized the wall where his weapons hung; almost, in his embarrassment, he could see the supporting nails. He debated whether to risk a jump.

While he was thinking, the atmosphere was shattered by a noise so tiny that ordinarily it would have gone unheeded. A presence had touched his bed. Slowly and with growing horror he pulled his knees toward his chin. The feeling . . . it had stopped being a noise . . . kept pace with him. When his knees could go no farther, and he knew that in another second he would be caught, he lunged with the full strength of his hips. A moment's peace and then a hurricane of disordered sound echoed in the darkness.

"Miaow!" cried a shrill, indignant voice.

This tale has a sequel. He repeated it at breakfast, but, with a young man's shame, said that his gun was beneath his pillow. He was afraid, he added, that one of the boarders had come into the wrong room. A week afterward the house was burglarized. Every one lost something except Sacha, who at once changed his lodgings.

In the future, when in possibly unfriendly lairs, he slept with a revolver near his hand.

CHAPTER THREE

ONE legacy from the Baltic which Sacha never lost was the power to divine the essence of a community through his skin. It arose out of a solitude in the pine woods and was useful in choosing an abode; but it was not analytical. If he wished to probe the background of an instinct he had to use his mind.

Buenos Aires perplexed him from the first. There were avenues and palaces enough, with churches and bronze generals in the squares. More than a million people roamed the chess-board of the streets, which were named after the country's glories. The docks were magnificent, the center of a huge trade in beef and grain and hides, and the clearing-house of half a continent down the Rio Paraná. Seemingly three things only were lacking to the soul . . . bull-fights, a casino, and divorce . . . and these were obtainable by a ten-hour voyage to Uruguay on Nicholas Mihanovitch's steamers. Yet to a man of sensibility Buenos Aires was empty of tradition. It was as if nobody had ever lived or loved with sufficient earnestness to impress the stucco walls.

Sacha raked history for an answer. He studied in libraries and museums; followed the heroic trail from Pedro de Mendoza's sad colony of 1536 to the bloody cattleman-dictator Rosas's fall in 1852. He met conquerors in armor and quilt

doublers, adventurers, priests, and women, a few cowards. He watched the English disembark in 1806, fighting a losing battle through the town while the viceroy, Sobremonte, left a theater in a hurry and took horse for Cordoba. San Martin and Belgrano came out of the pages and, during fifteen immortal years, struggled for independence more desperately than the Americans of the North. By the end of his reading he was full of admiration for the Spanish race, but no nearer a solution of the failure to leave a mark. Then, in all innocence, an Argentine explained.

"Think you, señor, that Rio or Buenos Aires deserves the title 'Paris of the South'?"

Sacha, knowing his Victor Hugo, asked if he referred to Notre Dame.

"I have not heard of that," said the man. "My cousin, who won a lottery, has just returned. He spoke favorably of the Rue de la Paix and the Plaza Vendôme."

Sacha bought a guide-book, but was still unable to sympathize with a nation which, possessing a great story of its own, squabbled with a neighboring capital for the honor of resembling a dress-shop. It was into this atmosphere that he plunged in the autumn of 1910.

After a period as mechanic in a chilled meat-factory he went to "Caras y Caretas," the best weekly magazine in the city, where he worked three years. Here, in an underground apartment smelling of oil, ink, and wet paper, he had command of a machine for chopping the edges of the leaves. He was well paid; his fellow-laborers congenial. He was not unhappy. At the siesta-hour he climbed to the roof of

his boarding-house and lay naked in the sun lest his body should take harm from too much artificial light.

In those days there was no organized amusement for workmen. Cinemas, theaters, and the vicious pleasures of a big town were distasteful to him, so he founded an athletic club. He was joined by the Northern contingent of "Caras y Caretas," and they spent their evenings wrestling, boxing, and lifting iron weights. Hans Kellner, a gigantic straw-haired Bavarian, was his particular adversary and friend. On Sundays they took food to the Isola Maciel, an island near the South Dock.

"I think it rude," said Kellner one hot afternoon. "My wife has invited you three times."

Sacha turned on his back under the shade of a weeping-willow. At his feet was a ribbon of bright sand, beyond which the glazed brown estuary receded into heat mist. The scent of eucalyptus made him drowsy. Two liners passed in the channel.

"I am not used to women," he replied. "Why should she be interested?"

"She knows how you feel about cities. She, also, would like to get away."

Sacha consented reluctantly, but, when the next Sunday arrived, found it less burdensome than he feared. Kellner was a scrupulous and attentive host whose friendliness did not prevent him from showing formal courtesy. He clicked his heels in the doorway after the etiquette of first visits. He wore a tight dark suit, and his hair had been freshly watered.

His home was a long, tall-ceilinged room with a curtain across one end. A shaded oil-lamp stood on a table and revealed a quantity of pumpnickel and liver sausage. An unmistakable feeling of good-fellowship was apparent, even before a child began to laugh behind the curtain and the mother answered it.

"Come, Elsa," said Kellner. "Our guest is here."

Frau Kellner came smiling to the light. She was very young—younger, indeed, than Sacha, though more mature. Her face was a vivid oval, framed with a mass of blond hair which was fluffed at the temples and secured in a bunch at the neck. She had a charming air of importance appropriate to recent mothers. In a moment she had put him at his ease.

Dinner that night was a thing of wonder. Frau Kellner led him to speak of his ambitions, of his dreams about the marvels of Brazil. She flattered him cunningly, seeking his opinion on matters of common knowledge, testing him. Whenever the talk flagged Kellner piled up his plate or filled his glass with the native Mendoza wine.

"What do you think of city dwellers?" Frau Kellner asked presently.

It was his pet subject, and he warmed to it. He told her of the horrible gray skins of the elderly, of their haunted resignation. He enlarged on old men of forty, doctors' bills, and the lack of pensions. Commonplace questions enough, but, in the mouth of a passionate lover of the elements who was not in the town's thrall, disturbing and a little terrify-

ing. Through the heat of his words the future spoke to Frau Kellner from quite near.

"And the reason?"

Swift as *Jararaca*, the fer-de-lance of the North, fell the reply:

"Marriage!"

He blushed, stammered, apologized. She caught him up.

"You are right!" she cried. "Oh, I don't mean Hans and me; nor did you. We are happy . . . and we have the child. Soon we will go to the German colony in Rio Grande do Sul and make a business of our own. It is the others I pity."

Sacha, released from guilt, embroidered his tale. How much money, he asked, could a family save in a year? A few pesos, if they weren't in debt. Very well! Why not buy some land—or even wander? With a trade at one's fingers' ends one would hardly starve. A mule, a box of tools, and a revolver against bandits; a modern knight-errant with a screw-driver for spear! What more could one need? He remembered himself suddenly and added a second mule for the wife. Frau Kellner nodded.

"Not forgetting a pannier for the baby or a donkey to pull the pram."

They laughed a good deal that evening at simple things. Kellner was too slow-witted for the banter, but was pleased at his wife's enjoyment. It was midnight before they parted.

Alone in his barren room, Sacha thought over his experience. He had never realized the possibility of platonic friendship. It was an uncommon sensation, warming. At the machine-bench next day he was really happy for the first

time since arriving in Buenos Aires; not just contented so much as actively, musically happy. He had always taken a pride in his work, but to-day his inward self went singing among the knives and he forgot the closeness of the air. He thanked Kellner enthusiastically.

"You should come again," said the Bavarian. "Elsa was loud in your favor."

Gradually the meals drifted into a habit, which almost unconsciously began to dominate Sacha's life. He was in a perpetual state of looking either forward or back; and the drop-scene of his mind was a long, tall-ceilinged room with a woman in it. At Kellner's request he appeared at odd hours, after his labor or during the siesta. Kellner was always there, a gentle, encouraging foil to the rising intimacy. He invariably supported his wife's suggestions with a friendly wag of his massive head. His "Of course, Siemel, if you have no other engagement . . ." became a formula.

And then befell one of those incidents which in retrospect assume the majesty of a portent. Sacha had been overworking. For eighteen hours a day he had wrestled in the basement with the water of a burst pipe about his ankles, rushing the Christmas number through the press. This continued for nearly a week, and at the end, passed into raging fever. He retired to bed on full pay and permission to remain there a fortnight. His employers were uncommonly just. On the morning of the sixth day, when the illness had abated, Frau Kellner appeared in his room.

"Hans asked me to bring you some fruit," she said doubtfully.

The doubt spread to Sacha. He could not speak. He felt awkward, his throat dry. He reached forward for an orange, which gave him time to think. His first thought was for his weakness. Something in that must have broken their relationship. They looked at one another across the sheets . . . and knew that the candor was slipping. With each heavy minute her charms grew more embarrassing. He loathed himself as for a crime.

"Oh!" she said in a queer voice, and left him.

Sacha spent hours in the abyss. In one blinding instant of supreme agony he recognized the occurrence for what it was. His platonic aloofness fell like scaffolding and he saw his love, in all novelty, behind. That night the fever returned; yet, although she must have known of his absence from work, she did not repeat her visit.

By and by a scheme presented itself, a mixture of sorrow, pride, and a wish to see an ugly business to a fit close. The immediate need was for three theater tickets. He would have a party, and it should be the last. He would not be rude; but the position was intolerable and he would insist. When he recovered and went back to the magazine Kellner was delighted with the plan. His blunt face shone with real affection. Elsa had lately been out of spirits, he remarked. Clearly he suspected nothing.

The machines clanked endlessly all day, without a note of compassion. The subterranean dungeon was filled with a din that reduced Sacha's brain to a mere organ of suffering. His eyes were fixed and his hands as mechanical as his own charge. The noise pursued him to his lodgings.

His head was never empty. On the day of the performance he went during the siesta to the box-office. The clerk pushed some pink slips through the window and Sacha, reading the dates, questioned him.

"I want them for to-night," he said numbly.

"I am sorry, señor, we are full up. To-morrow . . ."

Sacha paid and moved off. It was Friday. "Caras y Carretas" was already on the book-stalls. He had no pressing work and he must tell his guests of the change before Kellner left the house. He strode in the sunshnie, past the blaring gramophone shops and the hawkers of lottery tickets, mounted three flights, and knocked. Elsa opened the door. Her sleeves were rolled up and her fingers soapy.

"Come in," she said, wiping them on her apron. "You look tired."

Sacha hesitated. He could see that his friend had gone, knew that he ought not to accept; but Elsa was so calm and unemotional that he allowed himself to be persuaded. She closed the door and brought him a glass of wine. While he drank it she chattered amiably of her baby's excellence, of the athletic club, of the visit to the theater. She asked for no replies and received none. At that moment Sacha's tongue was incapable of any motion whatsoever. Her presence, her cool beauty tortured him. He wondered how soon he might depart.

"I must go now," he muttered, when he had gained courage.

She held out her hand. Sacha gripped it, only to find himself a prisoner. She would not release him and, drawing

down his face, kissed him. Even then he did not understand. He thought she was consoling him in adversity and tried to escape. For answer she stepped nearer, her eyes burning. Somehow he discovered her in his arms, and the world dropped away.

"You are foolish," she whispered.

In after years neither of them could remember the details of the afternoon. They sat on the edge of the bed, stroking each other's fingers in a formless haze of astonishment. They laughed at the child's antics and at silly jokes of their own; resolutely avoided the future. At five o'clock Elsa became practical. She pulled out the table-cloth and laid three places, to Sacha's spoken horror. He was not afraid of Kellner, but he was ashamed of himself and wanted to clear his mind. Elsa was perfectly composed.

"I have more to lose than you have," she told him. "I can do it."

There was a hardness in her eyes that killed his protests. Kellner returned at six, glanced at his wife, noted the flush on Sacha's cheeks, and grunted. Nevertheless he did not question her explanation that the baby had been fretful and she had needed help.

"Naturally," he said in his slow way. "What else should he be doing?"

The evening dragged unbearably. Kellner was heavily inert, looking at nobody. Sacha responded whenever evasion was impossible; Elsa alone behaved as if nothing were the matter. Long before his accustomed hour Sacha picked up his hat and arranged that they should meet at the theater.

He spent the remainder of the night under the stars, ranging like an animal.

On the following day, at the appointed time, Sacha was waiting at the box-office. A demented brass band was playing in the square and the electric street lamps hurt his eyes. He devoured each tram as it approached, grinding round the corner, and managed to guard the pavement as well. When Elsa arrived, punctual to the moment, she was without her husband. Her expression was negative.

The curtain rose just as they claimed their seats. It was a performance of Gerhardt Hauptmann's "Before Sunrise," dangerous fare for people in their condition. They locked hands and stayed motionless till the interval.

"He knows," she said then. "He sent me to speak with you."

"Did he abuse you?"

"He was very kind. That made it worse. He offered a divorce."

A savage exultation fought inside him with a genuine sense of guilt. He felt like a thief who has gained an unimaginable prize. He wanted to cry. Elsa talked in a low voice, her head averted.

"It's no use, Sacha. I cannot leave him. You see, he was always so undemonstrative. He took me for granted, and I thought he didn't care. Last night showed me. I have no right to go, even if we hadn't a child. Oh, Sacha, I'm sorry!"

"The booking-clerk said that yesterday. Tell me this: Do you . . ."

Elsa came to his aid.

"Yes," she said, "I love you."

"Then why . . . ?"

During the rest of the interval she explained. She informed him that he had already been in Buenos Aires four years and that his impulse was in danger of settling down. She reminded him of his pity for elderly gray-skinned men without pensions. In a word, she refused to cumber him. To his protest that he would rather live with her than be the finest of knights-errant she said:

"In ten years we should hate each other. I am a townswoman who sometimes longs for the country; you are a creature of the woods who by accident lives in a town. Let us leave the matter."

After the curtain sank for the last time they walked into the streets. The trams were crowded, noisy, too well lighted. In the warm night air Sacha did everything in his power to make her swerve. He bullied, pleaded, coaxed, in a tempest of despair such as he had never believed possible and never knew again. But Elsa was unmoved. Only when they reached the door of her home and he told her that it was the last time they would meet did she waver. She clung a little to him, saying:

"Don't go."

He kissed her gently, freeing himself. If she could be hard, so, in a crisis, could he. The half-measures of ordinary social meeting were altogether beyond his endurance.

Later he accosted his friend.

"I love your wife," he said frankly. "I shall not come any more."

Kellner was not offended. He was stolidly puzzled that it could have happened to him. For a few days, maybe, he was anxious; but, with the removal of the cause, relapsed into his old good-fellowship. They never quarreled.

As for Sacha, he was broken like a plant. His solitary mode of life was a bar to his recovery. He lost his sleep, attempted suicide with a target pistol, and was barely stopped by a vivid resurrection of Elsa's final words. Then, conscious that his death would pain her, he followed routine for a while, at what expense of energy will not be known. Eight months he lingered in Buenos Aires, until pride in his athletic club evaporated and he bowed to fortune. He procured an introduction to a German farmer in Rio Grande do Sul and, on a bleak wet day in November, 1914, packed a haversack and with his revolver embarked for Brazil.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHEN Sacha imagined Brazil, he remembered the headland of Pernambuco in a glitter of sunlight and blue sea. It was his first sight of the country; and the romantic meeting, far out in the Atlantic, of the jungle and the ocean, gripped his perceptions in a claw. During the stuffy years in Buenos Aires the memory had swelled, until now he had forgotten the two provinces are not in the tropics at all. Rain, therefore, of the gentle European kind, came to him as a surprise while he paced the deck of a tramp off the low coast line of Rio Grande do Sul. Sky and water alike were a sodden brownish gray.

There were a number of things he had failed to grasp about the land that was to harbor him for fifteen years. Brazil is unique. It is two hundred and sixty thousand square miles larger than the United States, extending through thirty-eight parallels of latitude from Uruguay to the Guianas. Its extreme length and width, which are nearly identical, are equal to a distance between London and a point on the steppes three hundred miles to the east of Moscow; but it is not for size that Brazil is remarkable.

In the year 1500, Pedro Alvares Cavral dropped down the Tagus on a voyage to India. After the manner of sail, both then and since, he stood out southwestward into the Atlan-

tic, hoping to pick up the northwest trade which blows on a slant from Mexico to the Cape. He was well accustomed to the route, but overshot himself and nearly ran aground on the shoulder of South America. Thus, casually, as became an old explorer, he added Brazil to the map.

The new land was situated on the Lisbon side of the line whereby Alexander VI, the Borgia pope, split the unknown world between Portugal and Spain. Expeditions set out at once; yet, because no gold could be found, neither precious stones, nor any of the gaudy necessities of ancient conquest, the stream of adventurers dried up. Thirty-five years later the question was tackled again from the standard of colonization. Once more the scheme hung on the fringe of disaster. The colonists found that the native tribes were a warlike people, distrusting slavery. The brown men said as much and, naïvely candid, pointed their arguments with the spear. Then, at the moment of deadlock, some genius cruising in the Gulf of Guinea loaded his caravels with negroes and brought them to market in America. It was left, however, to Sir John Hawkins to become a wholesaler on the grand scale, to the delight of the settlers and the fury of pious historians; though these same arm-chair calumniators, if they care for results, can never have traveled in Brazil. For there the negroes are free and happy, having equal status with the whites. They may marry whom they please and can do whatever they wish within the law. Consequently, few Brazilians have pedigrees so pure that they can risk the insult "nigger." The retort courteous of "greetings, brother," is too often justified.

To-day, after four centuries of fusion, the Portuguese colonial blood has altered color. Tupi Indians from north and east, Guaraní from Paraguay, Syrians from Palestine, Negroes and Japanese, Europeans of every stock and temperament have blended into one dark whole. Within the boundaries live all ages of mankind, from stone axe to electric light; and the language is the sole concrete inheritance. They are brave and manly folk, these Brazilians, especially in country places. Their word may be trusted. They will not steal and, once the hand of friendship has been extended, will not turn back. They have the stamina of the Indian, the simplicity of the negro, the shrewd indolence of the Portuguese. White, brown, chocolate, and cinnamon, they answer to their nationality with legitimate pride of breed. This is why, among all peoples on earth, they are unique. They are a league of races.

Something of the accumulated silt of history which determines a country's breath was communicated to Sacha on that day in 1914. He sniffed the air with a growing sense of promise on the way up the enormous Lagoon of Ducks, between the sand-bar at Rio Grande do Sul and the wharfs of Porto Alegre. The sea-birds, crying in the rain, told him he had chosen wisely. The herons, knee-deep in the marsh rushes of the mainland, challenged him to penetrate their wilds. And who shall say that the smell of a strange land is a worse guide to the story of a nation than a learned book plentifully annotated?

The tramp berthed in the evening and Sacha disembarked, resolving to present his introduction on the morrow. The

landlord of a bug-ridden hotel, where his Spanish was not fully comprehensible, indicated that the German farm lay along the Passo Fundo road, ten leagues northwest of the town. He rose while it was still night and went his way. Dawn broke coldly in sullen mist and cloud; and the bare cattle-plains, mottled with tussock grass, swallowed the cart ruts in a blanket of steel-gray haze. The birds were too wretched to sing, and Sacha, hungry for Elsa, agreed with them. He turned up the collar of his town-made overcoat and trudged gloomily on.

Presently the dancing jangle of a bell issued from the vagueness behind him. A voice was high in song, and a patter of footsteps shuffled in the wet soil. He wheeled and was immediately surrounded by as queer a party as he had ever seen. In front was a big-boned Salta mule with a pair of leather trunks, like kettledrums, across its flanks. At its heels a small white donkey of reserved mien carried a man who appeared to have run his head through the top of a brown tent. He was wearing a crimson tarboosh; and the whole was ludicrously peaked by a tremendous red umbrella. The mule nudged Sacha, seeking in his pocket and ringing the cheerful bell. The three companions had the ease and charm of a family on a holiday.

"Good-day to you, senhor," said the new-comer, courteously ending his song. "You are beyond doubt soaked. Permit me!"

He leaped down, tore open one of the mule-trunks, and extracted a woolen garment precisely the shape of his own tent-like covering. Almost in the same moment he was back

on his ass, whence he regarded Sacha with exceedingly sharp black eyes.

"This is a poncho," he said, "as sold to the best Gauchos in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. It is woven in Manchester, a fact I should not tell to everybody. How much will you pay?"

Sacha fingered it, savored the warmth and the raw tang of the wool. He saw that his overcoat was hopelessly inadequate to his new life.

"Sixty pesos," he said.

The stranger's hands flowed outward. He dismounted angrily, stripped himself of his poncho, and held it by the gap. In a few seconds he had placed it on the ground, where it stood upright, rigid, from its own moisture.

"That is a sign of perfection," said the man proudly.

Sacha returned it, with the remark that he had no skill in bargaining. The huckster closed the deal, pocketing the money. His dark face was aggrieved.

"Mine is a lonely existence," he wailed. "I obtain much pleasure from arguments about price. Happily, such firmness as yours is rare."

Sacha laughed, hinting that he should talk of his livelihood if he really desired an audience. The fellow, who was a Syrian from Aleppo, and as free from rancor as a gay child, dived into his tale. South Americans called him a Turk; and he was indignant at this. As well call him an Armenian and have done with it! He was one of a brotherhood of wandering shopkeepers, whose mules were their stores and their hammocks their homes. It was a stern no-

madic life, the outcome of a grave need; for ranchers have neither the time nor the energy to travel fifty miles after clothes and gewgaws. It was also profitable. He added that he was soon going up-country into the tropics, before the chilly nights of Rio Grande do Sul buried him.

Toward noon the weather cleared. The Syrian jumped off his donkey, leaving it to graze. From his saddle-bag he drew a cluster of bananas and invited Sacha to a meal. They lay on their ponchos and listened to the awakening of the birds.

"That," said the huckster, cocking his head at a derisive noise in a near-by tree, "that is *bien te veo*. Hark to him: '*Bien te veo, bicho feo*'—'I can see you, wicked beast.' He is my kindest friend and speaks to me from Argentina to the Amazon."

Little by little, Sacha probed beneath the skin of this exotic wayfarer. He discovered a gallant soul, a man who would rather face the hardships of the trail than serve fatly behind a counter. For it was hard, this life of his choice, when the earnings of a twelvemonth might be raped in a minute by a thief of a Paraguayan. It had happened once, two years before, and he had never trusted Paraguayans since. He preferred Brazil, where at least robbers are known . . . and killed. The more they spoke the more Sacha appreciated the man. All through the afternoon the huckster acted as guide, pointing out here a scarlet bird, there a couple of long-striding gray emus on whose beaks a coin might have been balanced, so smooth was their action.

Suddenly, round the corner of a batch of trees, they chanced upon a solitary rider. He was watching cattle, but

threw the travelers a look; and in the instant before he resumed his business a search-light blazed. He was a tall, gaunt creature with a hide the exact shade of cured tobacco leaf. He sat like a wooden fetish that has been dried in smoke, immovable and inhuman. His spotless white shirt gleamed oddly against sky and plain; and his baggy blue trousers emphasized the silver-mounted saddle. His feet were bare; his big toes caressed the stirrups. Across his knees was an iron-heeled whip.

"There," said the Syrian, with the ecstasy of a poet, "is the spirit of the pampas, the Gaucho."

He burst into lyric tales of this fierce brand of cattleman; of fights with long-bladed knives which, after the death of enemies, were used for meat; of old-time killing by the long-drawn cutting of the throat; of battles when a whip-lash was held in two hands like a broadsword, with the butt for a flail; of their courage and hatred of ambush; above all, of a strange survival of the Conquest, where they charged each other on horseback at the steel tip of the lance. These and many another wild truth did Sacha hear before they approached the farm-house.

They perceived it from a distance. It was a one-storied building of the stark colonial type, bounded on three sides by a veranda. It stood well back from the road, on an eminence, whence the water drained in a flood; a bunch of horses whickered over the log railings. The air of dripping silence and the muddy swamp of the corral, in which pigs rolled and squalched, depressed Sacha. He determined to conceal his introduction.

They were received as wanderers are, cordially and with food which they ate in the guest-hut, a low, split-pine erection regarded as home by a regiment of threadbare hens. In the morning the Syrian left; and so began a list of men whom Sacha would fain have known better but, actually, never saw again. By degrees he grew reconciled to quick meetings and departures, even to favor their brevity. Yet he was slow to forget the brilliant tarboosh and umbrella of the Turk who loved nature.

When he had gone Sacha pursued his host into a bean-field. He was a leathery, gray-haired German with immensely weary eyes. His hands were worn, his nails grained in dirt, and his clothes pitiable. He looked like a farm laborer of sixty-five, though Sacha knew him to be forty-seven and passing wealthy. He compared him with the old men in the machine-room and concluded that the only difference lay in physical hardness. He demanded a job, and at once the dull eyes lighted in a glare of righteous pride.

"We hire no peons," said the farmer. "Do you think we are made of gold? I and my sons work the land; my wife and daughters the kitchen. One must save!"

So that was the reason of the uncouthness! Sacha marveled at the drudgery of mistaken zeal. This man was rich enough to retire. . . .

"To-day is our evening for recreation." The German spoke more kindly. "Will you eat with us at seven?"

Sacha thanked him, but, ignored within the minute, ventured on a journey of discovery. He paddled across the yard, striking west into the village where every centimeter

of ground was occupied. He walked down lanes of maize, long-stemmed and tasseled, mournfully rustling in the breeze. Patches of mandioca, the carrot-shaped substitute for potatoes, lifted many-fingered leaves. Cattle browsed in the infrequent pastures; pigs rooted out of sight among the corn. An occasional flock of screaming parrakeets reminded him that somewhere to the north lay the tropics. He moved swiftly, for Elsa's ghost was bitter company.

The village was a miserable collection of pine shacks, unredeemed by any quality whatever. As he splashed up the main street he was attracted by a noise of hammering and in a hovel found a blacksmith forging a horseshoe. He waited in the doorway until the man looked up.

"I have three years' experience as mechanic," he said. "I want employment."

The smith leaned his hammer-shaft on the anvil.

"Huh! Town-bred; soft; no good here."

"Try me," Sacha said confidently.

He was introduced to a sewing-machine and told slightly to heal it; but, although he labored two hours, he was beaten. The incident annoyed him, touching his dignity as a workman. The blacksmith, seeing his self-anger, thawed.

"High-paid specialists aren't wanted in the colonies," he said. "You must know how to repair everything, from a sewing-machine to a rifle or a plow. Still, if you care to learn, I'll pay you sixty milreis a month. Before long you'd earn it."

Sacha made a quick calculation from milreis to pesos and decided he was worth more. He returned to the farm.

At seven o'clock, when the light failed, he was summoned from his loneliness among the hens and introduced to the German family. There were eight in all—the parents, four sons, and two girls. The mother was lined and weather-stained, without much voice, and her eyes were as tired as her man's. The boys were in their early twenties and had long ceased from mental growth, as if in the dreadful knowledge of the starved futility of their lives. The daughters brightened on perceiving Sacha's power, but, receiving no encouragement, dropped back into apathy. Dinner began in silence round a trestle table and continued to the rasp of forks against tin plates. From time to time the women removed great bowls of rice, only to replace them with more rice, dried meal, and a glutinous mass of beans. A demijohn of white liquor passed rapidly among the men.

"Your glass!" cried the host. "You must drink *caxaca*. It is wickedly expensive because sugar-cane won't grow here. The frosts kill it."

Sacha, who was prepared to try anything once, sniffed; and a raw vapor tickled his nostrils. The first sip caught him by the throat; the second filled him with harsh breathlessness. The German guffawed.

"One soon gets used to that," he said. "The dear God created Saturdays on purpose."

Tongues became careless as the spirit mounted. Filthy stories with neither meaning nor wit jostled one another in the semi-darkness. Sacha felt ill; would have withdrawn altogether if the women had been absent, but they seemed inured and he feared to insult them. The fun increased.

The master of the house plunged gaily into an account of a street girl who had favored him in Porto Alegre. She was, it appeared, of a singularly graceful figure. The sons, fired by their parent's skill, mentioned different ladies of almost equal charm; for they were good boys. They respected him too much to hint that their own might be superior.

Sacha, troubled and angry, looked sideways at the wife. She was sitting with the candle-light in her face, and her eyes were without hope, nearly blind. Neither she nor her daughters wept; they were well drilled.

The bottle sped like a planet. At every round the tales grew more scandalous, until the rancher lurched at his guest, calling a toast.

"To the end of the week, the farmers' carnival!"

Sacha rose from his bench.

"I am tired," he said. "Please excuse!"

Out under the wet sky the bullfrogs sang endlessly in a strip of marsh. The crackle of their voices jeered at the scene he had just left. So this was the freedom of the soil! Slavery for men, degradation for women, the whole business strung together by the ceaseless labor of the family. He thought of Elsa as a colonist's wife and rejoiced that he had not brought her to such a pass.

Very early, before the Germans had recovered from the feast, he was away along the Passo Fundo road.

CHAPTER FIVE

NORTHWESTWARD to Passo Fundo the cattle-plains dissolved into shaggy, broken country rising to the table-land of São Paulo. Hundreds of steep, cold rivulets chattered round the angles of the hills, which were covered with a forest more remarkable in its way than the Amazon. Here Nature was in doubt as to a fitting garment for a province where the noon sun glows like metal, and icicles are not infrequent in the dawn. The result was a compromise so dramatic that Sacha forgot for a while the ache of his bereavement.

The groundwork of the forest was tropical. Palm trees and lapachos and enormous thick-stemmed ferns reared out of thorny underbrush threaded with looped rope-weed. Families of howler monkeys (the great black males would resemble apes if they were tailless) lounged through the upper pathways. Parrots and love-birds stared unfavorably down, commenting harshly on the intruder's appearance; and the toucan thrust out his horny bill and flew pheasant-wise, with quick wings. A diffused, pale-green light, familiar to divers on nearing the surface, mingled with the restless sun-bars.

So far Nature had been consistent; but her next move was inspiration. Heedful of the frosts, she had stolen a

Baltic pine-wood, modified its needles to bear warmth, and planted its roots in jungle; and now eighty feet beyond the tallest Southern growth was an army of dark umbrellas turned inside out. As a further concession to the heat they were provided with a crop of heavy cones, like pineapples.

For several months Sacha meandered from hut to hut, earning his food by casual labor for the settlers. He was frantic about Elsa, careless whether he lived or died, and he swallowed his meals tastelessly as a motor-car drinks petrol. The nights were interminable. It was in this frame of mind that he had an experience which formed the basis of a habit and, incidentally, almost killed him.

One afternoon he was walking along a track between two colonies in embryo. The thorn-brakes stood well above his head and were full of little puffs of wind which eddied the leaves on the ground. The horseflies were particularly troublesome, seeming unable to rest in the hot waves that passed upward from the foliage. Lizards flicked across the path with dry, brittle movements. The sense of breathlessness increased. Toward four o'clock other animals joined in the unease. Deer, monkeys, forest pigs showed for a moment and were gone. Spiders ran nervously in their webs. Birds flashed in the free space below the pine-tops; and Sacha noticed of a sudden that they all came from the west. He looked and saw the rim of a black cloud steadily mounting the horizon. In half an hour the blue sky had vanished from that quarter, and the experience began. For, as the cloud-bank rose to the zenith the sun dropped behind; and the edge of the terrific mass was tipped with

gold. The radiance spread downward over the surface, changing it to an enchanted plum-color. At the same instant a flock of small white cloudlets, hurrying from the south at a lower altitude, crossed sheer in the path of the onslaught, like nursemaids before traffic. The vision was miraculous, and Sacha caught himself desiring that even the outline could remain with him forever. Thus was the germ of his passion for photography born in him.

Meanwhile a rather sharper wind was taking the heaviness from the air. There was now no hint of life in the woods, for the animals were crouched in sheltered places. The world felt empty and treacherous, but Sacha was too occupied for alarm. He was watching the tree trunks assume different personalities against the darkness. They were curiously stranger and more real.

The first lightning-flame surprised him as it tore a gap in the advancing storm. Thunder, like a god's cough, followed at swift intervals; and thereafter question and answer ripped across the vault with the aptness of celestial repartee. When fire and tumult contradicted each other overhead, the cloud opened and the rain sluiced down. The wind, which had started to hum, was obviously anxious to get by.

Sacha was drenched within the second, and his haversack doubled in weight. Still delighted with the elements and unconscious of any danger, he strolled along the trail.

Presently he was aroused by a whistle extraneous to the wind and the loud crack of two bodies in collision. He peered among the bushes and was rewarded by a second explosion a little to one side. He was about to investigate when

something struck him on the thigh and he collapsed. Finding himself uninjured, he pursued the missile, which had rolled out of view. Then he saw he must be careful, because the storm was dislodging the great pine-cones, using them as thunderbolts. He crawled under the lee of a stout old pine . . . and the dead trees began to fall. They came easily, without snapping, and usually the only signal of their doom was the arc of their descension and the bounce of their arrival. He tucked in his legs and waited for this anger to subside; but, such is the hasty temper of the land, an hour later the firmament was blue and the wild creatures rejoicing in the clarity of the atmosphere. Sacha uncurled himself, and his agony returned.

A few minutes before sunset, on breasting a fold in the uneven ground, he came upon a plume of smoke, gray and vertical beyond a hillock. He quickened his step, for there was rice in his haversack, and his escape had made him hungry. His feet were soundless on the wet needles. Just as his eyes drew level with the homestead a woman screamed.

Below him, in a small hollow by a stream, was a hut. It was plainly new; the last boards of the roof were only recently in place. A number of rudely split logs were piled in the doorway, ready to supply the fire which already held a pot. Three or four axes were scattered in the clearing and a pair of trousers hung drying on a line. In the foreground two men and a woman were broiling. It was an odd affair, and Sacha stood back to watch. A dark youth of enormous girth and power was waving a machete with every appear-

ance of fury. He was attacked from two quarters . . . from the rear by a handsome, fair-skinned girl with thick hair to her shoulders, and from the front by an elderly grizzled man who was slapping his face with a branch. The giant swung his blade and cut the wood within an inch of his enemies' fingers. Then as the girl ran in and bit him on the forearm, he turned and administered three hearty blows with the flat. The old man picked up a knife and the woman jumped toward an axe. The fight was resumed more dangerously.

Sacha held strong views upon interference. He despised the story-book hero who votes himself the stranger's referee. Battles, in his opinion, were private; and the fact that a lady was involved mattered little ethically, though in practice it altered his behavior. He moved out of the pines and asked leave to cook his rice.

The request, uttered with the cool reasonableness that characterized his voice, was more effective than assault. The woman stared, the old man laughed, and the youth flung his weapon into the shack. Sacha put no question; he was growing skilled in his dealings with mankind; and at supper his curiosity was appeased.

His hosts were simple people, Poles from Cracow, who had a contract with the Brazilian Government for a section of the new colony road. Ladislaus Worowski, the young man, had been sent to Passo Fundo to fetch a laborer. On his return, tipsy in spite of a wetting, and without his charge, his uncle Ivan and his wife Sophia had combined to insult him.

"And after all," said Ladislaus, canvassing Sacha's aid,

"would you permit a female to kick your shins for greeting?"

"If I could have reached your eyes, my sweet one," retorted Sophia, "you would be missing them this minute."

Uncle Ivan smiled.

"We mean nothing by our quarrels. Sophia is like the weather of Brazil, changeable but on the whole friendly."

The girl shook out her hair and threw rice at him in crude affection. At night, lying on heaps of grass within the one-roomed hut, Uncle Ivan made an offer.

"That ox-cart road," he said, "we cannot manage it alone . . . there is not much money . . . you would share our food, of course. It would be a kindness."

The gruff voice ended, and Sacha, gazing through the door at the stars behind the branches, felt his manhood challenged. His status had declined since the machine-room days; he was in peril of losing his identity. He remembered the counsel of the chief engineer in the forecandle, "No bum is free," and impulsively accepted. Next morning they were up with the dawn and gulped the coffee that Sophia brewed. They discarded their boots, because leather slides on the needles, and chopped the undergrowth from the base of the first tree.

Logging is easy for an expert in the forests of Rio Grande do Sul. The great pines are absolutely straight and can be tilted in any direction merely by cutting them aright. But the clearing of a road is a harder task when it must follow the bends of the hills, and the contract stipulates for an open fairway. Then the trees must be crashed to an inch; a failure entails the removal by hand of each mistaken trunk.

Ladislau explained the principles, with the joy of one who was not often in a position to teach. It was apparently quite without difficulty. He lifted his axe and struck parallel with the ground; the next blow, coming slantwise from above, removed the chip. The motions were alternate and, after ten minutes of perfectly harmonious muscle-play, he beckoned to his pupil. Sacha gripped tightly and smote with all his force. The blade stuck in the tree. Removing it hurriedly, he aimed once more, and the steel, cannoning off the bark, sank into the ground a few inches from his toes. Uncle Ivan growled.

"No! No! softly. You are too eager."

"Less body-work," advised Ladislau. "Swing from the hips and let the weight of the head come through."

This time Sacha was more accurate, and the chips flew. Soon he was blowing hard.

"Breathe deeply before each stroke," called Uncle Ivan from a near-by victim. "Then you can last all day."

They continued until dusk and so on for many months, daylight to daylight, while the road took form beneath their zeal. During that period Sacha endured as much physically as he had previously suffered in mind. His hands were quickly blistered. The axe-haft burned like a heated bar against his palms. His feet were scratched by thorns and the wounds festered, refusing to heal. Horseflies swarmed to the feast. In the mornings his fingers were so stiff and raw that he had to relax them in the steam of the cook-pot. In the evenings he fell into his corner with the stricken finality of one of his own trees. His friends were kind to him, under-

stood; and he repaid their faith by staying on his legs. Sometimes it reminded him of the *Martha's* chain-box, though infinitely more prolonged.

On Sundays Uncle Ivan held a court. He was an astute teller of fortunes; and poor old women and hard-pressed weary men would flock from the colonies to be bluffed into happiness by his filthy pack of cards.

"What lady is so wrinkled that she can't recall a lover; and what man uncaring of future success?" he asked Sacha. "Why not help them?"

Sophia went on housewifely journeys into the forest. She sought the heavy pine-nuts, which are good eating, and the fruit of *jaboticaba*, which is unique. It is round and glossy, cherry-shaped, and it grows not in clusters but sticking out of the trunks like a breastplate of polished carbuncles. It is very sweet and has a whitish furry stone.

Ladislaus was bored when not actually at work. His tremendous strength desired an outlet for his energy. So he climbed for amusement the big-girthed pines in a manner which enthralled Sacha. He fastened a leather thong between his feet as a grip upon the stem. In his hands he grasped a stiff band of rope-weed with which he engirdled the tree. Using them alternately as lever and brake, he jerked his way upward and tossed down the cones.

"I hate rest," he said.

Then one night at supper the mist of lethargy was raised from Sacha's brain. Sophia made a joke and he capped it. Ladislaus jumped up.

"Bravo!" he shouted, and the forest echoed the relief. "Bravo! Now you will be free of pain. Look, amigo, your flesh is cured."

They patted him in the firelight, welcoming him to the ranks of proved workers, singing at his triumph. His agony behind him, he found a pride in his endeavors. When the contract expired they signed another; and the trees fell in an exciting fashion. At sunset they wrestled and Ladislaus was childishly disappointed that his bulk was of no use against Sacha's training. On these occasions Sophia would sit with passion in her eyes and her "Take care, my loved one, women prefer the conqueror," was just not in earnest.

Sacha appreciated the girl for her comradeship and efficiency in the kitchen. Once, while they were sitting alone, she did him a service.

"A woman drove you from the city," she said quietly.

Sacha blinked and for a full minute his thoughts failed to respond. A woman? What did she mean? Suddenly, and with annihilating force, he realized that he had forgotten Elsa. He had not been troubled by her memory since the beginning of his pain. For a number of weeks he had slept like a child, awaking without remorse. He had also enjoyed his food. Sophia smiled rather crookedly.

"You are fatter than when you came. I believe you have crossed the mountains. You will remember this woman; but hereafter none of us will touch you greatly."

At the finish of the second contract Sacha deserted the Poles. Keen to live this Brazilian life to the uttermost, he

traded a revolver for a colony and spent a year on the land. He cleared the forest, planted maize, reaped and sold it in the town; but, concluding that it was a bitter, purposeless existence, he recovered his firearm and set out again on the trail.

CHAPTER SIX

IN ALL the huge spaces of South America there is nothing so unreal as the towns. It is as if some large and sportive being had roamed a little in the wilds and, having swept a playground, amused himself with sun-dried earth and wattle. This, of course, does not deny the excellence of fifty cities of which Europe might be proud; but it remembers the unruly suburbs of Rio de Janeiro, where the vultures are the scavengers. A single pace beyond the last dwelling and the Conquest is a dream; the forest lies sleeplessly, nibbling the outskirts. And if anything should happen to the populace, rope-weed and monkeys would decorate the avenues within two years.

The inhabitants recognize this truth, though a stranger must shape it into words. They acknowledge it by aggressive green paint on the band stand in the plaza; by the white-washed majesty of the public buildings; by the solemnity with which the municipal orchestra sweats into its instruments, on Sunday afternoons. These defiances are the Latin equivalent of the planter's dress-suit, a challenge to the jungle; but are pale trifles beside the lust for electricity. From the famous eight-mile promenade of Rio Bay to the meanest one-mule settlement in the interior, darkness is saluted with light. Men feel more certain of tarantulas and

snakes when the rutted track of Main Street is flooded by a row of arcs. So, directly a collection of hovels can afford the cost, a foreign engineer is hired; and a thousand belts flip round on fly-wheels, that a continent may have sanctuaries.

Passo Fundo, where Sacha spent the next eighteen months, was just emerging into the electric class. With the formation of colonies at Erichim and Marcelino Ramos it was bound to attract a wide area of trade. For this purpose a German craftsman was living outside the town near a skeleton powerhouse. Sacha found him roving among isolated pieces of machinery with an unlit black cigar between his teeth.

"Work?" said Herr Klaue savagely. "Not this year. These Brazilians are impossible. They block my generators in Porto Alegre Customs and expect me to illuminate their wigwams on a dozen turbine pipes and a spanner."

"Do they plead *mañana* or *paciência*?" asked Sacha. "Both are worshiped locally."

Herr Klaue invited him to sit down and they passed an instructive hour deploring the indolence of the South. At the end the German felt better and struck a match for his cigar. Through a curtain of gray smoke came a volley of advice:

"Try the silversmith, young man. He is a good boss and desirous of some one strong. By the way, give me your name and when my machinery arrives I'll let you know. Siemel, eh? That's odd. A fellow called a few days ago; bearded chap; looked ill."

So Ernst was in Passo Fundo! Sacha cast back his mind

to the night in the bridge-construction camp and the brave schemes for the future there discussed. Since then the only fruit had been half a dozen letters from villages too small for the map; but he shared his brother's hatred of the pen and did not blame him. His heart sang at the prospect of reunion with the hero of his Libau escapades. The meeting was dramatic. Sacha asked a loafer in the plaza if he had seen a blue-eyed powerful man who swayed a little as he walked. The answer was a quick uncovering of brown teeth and a nod toward the Rua Cuyabá.

"Where should he be, senhor, except with his friends? Later you will hear him."

The street in question was worthy of the title simply because it separated two lines of houses. It was flat and red, without pavements, the scratching-place of a hundred inbred curs. One structure alone transcended the gaunt average . . . a third-rate, indigent hotel, which was the center of romance for a swarm of dirty children.

"Ah! but he is drunk, the foreigner," they whispered, nudging ribs.

Nevertheless they were wrong. Ernst was not drunk, nor even mildly unsober, but was combating his loneliness in his own way. When Sacha entered he was seated on a fragile chair, a glass in his left hand, beating time to a Russian love-song. Around him was a knot of quiet-faced Brazilians, sinister as a pack of jackals near a dying bull. They applauded sycophantically at the finish; and a waiter fetched a bottle. Ernst looked up.

"Sacha!"

His voice exploded in a roar of joy. He overturned an iron-topped table and flung out an arm.

"My dear boy!" he cried. "I thought you in Buenos Aires. How excellent is God!" He wheeled dynamically, saying, "Gentlemen . . . my brother."

The Brazilians rose and bowed. A small man with a bullet scar across his cheek filled a tumbler.

"Will the relative of the distinguished Dom Ernesto join me in a glass of *caxaca*?"

"Your pardon," Sacha replied coolly. "I am in training."

"Then a game of cards, perhaps? you cannot both be obstinate in a matter so entrancing."

"I am sorry. Neither of us plays."

No offense was intended and none would have been taken by a clear conscience. The Brazilian fondled his hip.

"You doubt my integrity, senhor?"

"No: my skill! Be good enough to excuse us, gentlemen. My brother and I are long parted."

And he retired, his arm through Ernst's. Out in the street he looked more closely at his hero. It was the same burly frame, the same immense width of shoulder; but there was an uneasy geniality that was new. Herr Klaue was right: the man was ill.

"What made you drink with those vermin, and why is your right arm stiff?"

To Sacha's embarrassment he halted in the middle of the road and unbuttoned his shirt. His beard twitched with amusement as he displayed the puckered corners of a star-shaped wound. He explained that it was a gift from the



ERNST

hasty-tempered province of Matto Grosso, where it is prudent to go armed before discovering a man in a lie. This had occurred to him; and the unchivalrous result was only lately healed. The incident had astonished him.

Now, Sacha knew instinctively what Ernst never troubled to learn—that is, South American psychology. He was well aware of the fierce pride in good manners, the stilted etiquette that flows straight from the hidalgo of the Conquest. A Brazilian may be three parts black, have naked feet that crease like an elephant's, live in an open shed on rice and beans and jerked beef to the end of his days, and still exact a courtesy appropriate to a high official at the court of Spain. Sacha agreed with this call of the blood . . . he was proud, himself . . . and he answered a man as he spoke. Ernst discounted it entirely, which was a pity, for his contempt was presently to cost him his life.

"Why do you associate with these people?" Sacha persisted.

"Why not? One cannot live alone."

At this remark something died in Sacha, leaving him curiously hurt. For a while he did not understand; and then it pierced him with the naked simplicity of a sword; his hero-worship, his almost fanatical respect was no more. He nearly cried, because the gap between those who can be happy alone and those who grow bored is spiritually deeper than the mountains. Gradually he formed a strange impulse of protection toward Ernst, and this feeling continued throughout their partnership. Oddly enough, their mutual love was unaffected, and the only difference was a conscious

leaning out across the gap when really they wished to take hands. Both recognized the rift; neither ever mentioned it in words.

That night, in the tiny house on the outskirts where Ernst kept his tools, they considered once more their future. Ernst had been traveling in the diamond-fields to the east of Cuyabá and was impressed by the possibilities. He dwelt on the tremendous tree-girt cattle-plains of Matto Grosso and the farms set on hillocks whence the owners venture in canoes during the rains. He pictured vividly the mighty smell of fish after the floods retired; and the jaguars which the natives hunted with dog and spear and nail-filled blunderbuss. He had proved by three years of labor that a vagrant mechanic could earn good money on the trail. But his single horse was recently dead and he was stranded. What should he do? he asked. Then, breaking into a laugh, he said:

"While my beast was alive I drank the best wine in the colonies. How did I do it? By craft! At each house I told them there was better stuff at the last place I visited. That made them disgorge their best."

Sacha thought for a long time. The flame turned to embers and the bats fluttered to rest before he answered. When his voice was heard it was full of a quiet authority that he never lost. Responsibility had come to him in a day.

"We will taste together these wonders of the North," he said. "Let us begin to plan. . . . At present we have money for one horse. We shall need four to carry our tool-chests on the long journey. You must ride this animal, Ernst, and

work among your vine colonies as mechanic. I will inquire at the silversmith's. Maybe it will cost us a year, but . . . *paciência.*"

Ernst whistled in the darkness.

"You are older very suddenly."

"I was in love," Sacha said reasonably. "It is over now."

As in the days of his sorrow he lay awake into the dawn, though Elsa did not disturb him. His mind was racing with the promise of fish in trees and the charge of boisterous jaguars. He was weary of drudgery; and the knowledge crept upon him warmly that the time was at hand when the mastery of his life should pass into his own keeping. He resolved to send to Buenos Aires for his half-ton weight of luggage . . . books and tools and firearms; henceforward Passo Fundo should be his base, a fair step closer to the wilderness. In the morning he approached the silversmith, a fidgety little man with artist's fingers and small business eyes, who peeped at him from behind a trestle work-bench. There was nothing in the bare earth walls and untidy floor to suggest that it was the richest hovel in the country-side.

"I don't want skill," he said, nodding toward an inner room. "I have already three handicraftsmen, feeble as parrots, the lot of them."

"In that case," answered Sacha, "good morning to you! I am not an ox."

The silversmith ducked under the counter and ran after him, plucking at his coat in the door. He was desperate for assistance, and his caution fled. He offered good wages on conditions less damaging to Sacha's pride, and, prevailing,

led him to a smoky annex at the extreme back of the shop. Here, except for a queer apparatus in the center, was a perfect forge. Anvil, charcoal fire manipulated by a foot-bellows, and a variety of hammers taught Sacha something new about the silver trade. He ignored the gossiping men and went straight to the machinery.

It was shaped like a big mangle, with the usual top roller but with two cylinders beneath; so that anything passing through undulated a little on the way. A long iron bar, capable of accommodating four men at once, stuck out from one end. The whole was made from the finest tempered steel and geared with a complicated system of cogs. He spoke his appreciation.

His master, however, was in a hurry. From a leather bag he took a number of spurs and stirrups and harness mountings and silver two-milreis coins (this was before the currency was watered), and threw them in a pile. He gestured to one of his helpers, who fetched a large gray pot from a corner and filled it with the collection of junk. Somebody stepped on the bellows; the fire awoke and the pot was buried in the charcoal. Presently the top was uncovered and a handful of white borax pebbles dropped into the stew. This absorbed the impurities of the silver, which gave forth an acrid, bitter stench. When a confused bubbling broke from the red-hot mound a fair-haired man picked up a ladle and removed the scum. The residue of the silver he poured into a row of cast-iron molds which were set along the anvil. In half an hour the forms were cool, and Sacha was invited to use his power. The silversmith clapped his hands.

"To the mangle, if you please, senhors. Push like the father of all bullocks."

Sacha took the inside position on the bar, where the strain would be greatest. The three helpers lined up, gripping tightly, with expressions of unimaginable ferocity. The master lifted a silver slab and drove it between the rollers.

"Heave!" he cried.

The cylinders began to move. The metal caught, stood upright from the grip on its end, slid patiently through. The helpers were groaning and twisting their bodies as if in a rage of exertion, but Sacha could feel that he alone was applying his entire force.

"Come on," he grunted, "harder!"

He was immediately aware of a sarcastic voice which rose from just beside him. The tones were low, yet carried as far as they were meant.

"It is the function of a draft animal to haul," it said.

Sacha glanced angrily at the man who had ladled the scum. He had sharp features and a high forehead: a blond edition of the thief in the bridge-construction camp. He was looking as if nothing had happened. The thin lips spoke again.

"If one could develop the brain as easily as the brawn you would have genius," they remarked.

Sacha was astounded. The man was a complete stranger; and he did not reply. The silver was rolling smoothly now, coming in a hard dull sheet; to be replaced by another and a third and a fourth until the supply of molds was exhausted.

"What shall I do now?" asked Sacha, when it was finished.

His neighbor of the mangle sidled up.

"Senhor Gonsalvez," he bit his words, "there is a revolver to be repaired. Doubtless the new assistant is accustomed to such brutalities. He seems over-big to handle watches."

He started to walk away, but Sacha called him and he turned fearlessly. His eyes were remarkably pale, like stones.

"Listen, little man," said Sacha, in the manner of a collie admonishing a pekingese. "You are weaker than I am. Possibly you are used to benefit from a large chap's kindness of heart. I, too, do not employ my strength . . . unless I am insulted. And then I am not particular; snakes, you know, have smaller muscles than mine."

The fair man bristled.

"I am not afraid of you, senhor."

"Why should you be? I am not a thief or a murderer. Only be a little careful with your tongue."

When he had gone the silversmith laughed.

"That is Marco Favelle, a French-Brazilian and a fine worker. He is jealous of physical power."

Sacha remained with Gonsalvez for six instructive months. The trade in silverware . . . stirrups, saddle trappings, spurs . . . was not great enough to justify a business run solely for these ends, and he learned the mechanism of watches and sewing-machines and an occasional typewriter. It was invaluable experience for Matto Grosso. Then, during the winter, he resigned his place to Ernst, whose

shoulder ached in the cold nights, and went to Herr Klaue's hydro-electric plant beyond the town. Pay was higher and the job more interesting.

It was while he was preparing himself in these ways that an incident occurred which killed any last desire to farm. One Saturday he took a vacation and rode out with Ernst over the ten leagues that separated the houses from the nearest colonies. Their flea-bitten country-breds were unshod. From time to time the bits jangled as the horseflies stung their necks; otherwise the silence was unbroken.

Suddenly they came upon a hut. It was incredibly badly built, even for a raw colonist. The window-slats were askew and the roof did not fit. Moreover, no trees had been felled in the neighborhood. Neither Ernst nor Sacha had ever seen a shack without a clearing; but, attracted by a faint noise of chipping, rounded a corner of the dwelling. Once there, they sat rigid with pity and embarrassment.

Before them was a tree, the largest in that part of the forest. At its foot was the odd figure of a middle-aged, skinny man in steel-rimmed spectacles, breathing painfully. At intervals he reached upward, striking at the trunk, but his axe was too heavy and the blows glanced away. Over an area of several square feet the bark was scarred as if a regiment of squirrels had been riotously dining. Then, even as they looked, he dropped his tool and burst out weeping.

His sobs, especially in such a lonely place, were terrible. They ran up his throat, struggling so bitterly to be free that the brothers were ashamed. They wheeled their animals and withdrew. Quietly retiring for a hundred yards, they turned

again and sang at the full compass of their lungs. When they got back the man had mastered himself.

"Welcome, friends," he said, smiling industriously. "I have just begun my farm. As you can see, I am unskilled."

"That is nothing," said Sacha, dismounting. "A few months ago I was in your position exactly. Here, give me the axe."

After an hour's solid labor the tree-top quivered and the long body crashed into the undergrowth. The colonist gazed at the stump.

"You are kind," he said quietly, and then, not ungratefully but despairingly: "There are a good many left. I have a blister."

He sucked his hand, and his brow darkened; he appeared to be considering. Soon his lips were opened and his heart stood revealed. He was a bank-clerk from Dresden who had hearkened to the sky-line's call as it rushed on the wind past the gilded netting. His wife and three children were with friends in Passo Fundo until, unaided, he should have conquered the wilds. His weak eyes shone behind his glasses.

"It is an odd feeling, gentlemen, to be actually and in a physical sense living on one's savings. We shall, of course, remain forever!"

On the way back Ernst, impressionable, passionate, generous, worked himself into a frenzy at the cruel plight. Sacha listened without comment. He recognized the harshness of the world, but he could not help. Why rail against the inevitable? It only made one sour.



STRANGLER

CHAPTER SEVEN

UNTIL Carlos Rodriguez, the thief-taker, spoke to him of Brazil, Sacha was unaware of a philosophy. Hitherto he had been content to act instinctively in a crisis, leaving ethics to profounder men. But an hour beside the fire of this incorruptible old killer showed him his attitude to mankind, new-shaped, like a statue from the mold. By a strange coincidence he had recently grown a beard.

Dom Carlos was famous. His thin, tough body and single brilliant eye (a bandit had gouged the other while Dom Carlos slept and had died by the victim's own gun before the offense could be repeated) were feared across a territory as wide as France. His stiff white hair, though not precisely blessed by criminals, was at least respected; while his collection of human ears, which he dried in the sun and kept nailed to his door-jamb, was the finest to the south of Matto Grosso. Every tint in the spectrum of Brazilian hide was worthily apparent . . . and not one of the owners had been guiltless. Sacha, who knew Dom Carlos well, came to him for hints about the wilderness and tales of his profession.

In a country where a robber has only to step outside a town to be lost in jungle, plain, or swamp, uniformed policemen are valueless. So an auxiliary breed of hardy unofficial men follows a rascal while the trail is still warm. Sometimes

they succeed that night; more often they pass a month upon the road. A few betray their privileges by accepting money to shoot the innocent, but these are rare in Rio Grande do Sul. On the other hand there was once a thief-taker of Matto Grosso who bought an account-book and jotted down the date, manner, and fee of the sixty-four murders he had achieved. He was killed by the fifteen-year-old brother of a girl he had disgraced, and appropriately expired on a dung-hill.

Now, a gigantic moral distinction lies between, say, the Canadian North-West Mounted and his Brazilian counterpart. The Canadian proceeds under orders, knows little of the rights or wrongs of the affair, arrests his own brother maybe, and returns with him to the fort. The undisciplined South finds such detachment impossible, because the instrument of justice is the organ of public opinion. If the crime committed be not unpopular, if it fall within the unwritten statute book, he loses his horse or the track or his gun—and the farce of an acquittal is avoided. Similarly, as the trophies on the door-post proved, it is equivalent to an immediate sentence of death to be taken on the run. "Resisting arrest" is the traditional explanation of the scarcity of prisoners. Dom Carlos explained the inwardness of such matters over coffee near his blaze of pine logs. His voice was soft and reasonable as a woman's.

"We have two kinds of law in Brazil," he said: "the kind we show to English travelers, who are prudish about blood, and the more elastic code reserved for ourselves."

He blinked amiably and fondled the ears of his pet mon-

grel, a creature which to friendly eyes appeared to suggest a cross between an alligator and a hog.

"Amigo Lobo knows, don't he, my love? How many murderers have we mislaid in the forest, little orphan?"

The dog squeaked joyously at the sky. Dom Carlos broke his argument and looked shrewdly at his guest.

"You are bearded now, my friend. Does the power rise in you? Are you on the edge of great deeds?"

Sacha laughed.

"One more mule, senhor, and my brother and I turn our backs on the Southern Cross."

"As it should be with the young," said the old man softly. "But to resume our talk on the customs you will meet: what is the lowest crime on earth?"

"Theft," replied Sacha promptly.

"Why?"

"A thief has no self-respect."

Dom Carlos leaned forward and nodded with passionate earnestness.

"Remember this, my friend: the law of Matto Grosso is a forty-four Smith and Wesson. Shoot a thief as you would Lobo here if he were wounded, for such men are diseased. Shoot also the creature who insults you or brings dishonor to your house. Think well before you spare, because pity is mistaken for weakness."

"I think I should ask him to repeat himself," said Sacha. "He might be drunk."

"Ah! you Northerners!" cried Dom Carlos. "Your coldness is superb! But revenge is a necessity in Brazil . . . thus."

His hand fell in a smooth, fluid movement, almost too quick for sight. In the same instant a six-chambered revolver shone pure black in the firelight. Dom Carlos grinned; it was his one vanity. He had been taught the knack by an American outlaw, too proficient even for Texas, and had practised daily since. He replaced the weapon at his hip with the pride of a self-conscious child. Sacha left him playing with his dog.

Wrapped in his blankets that night, Sacha traced for the first time the concrete scaffolding of his new philosophy:

1 Mind your own business always.

2 A fool is entitled to his own foolishness unless he hurts you by his act.

3 Do not provoke; give a man a chance to apologize; but, if he is obstinate, punish him.

4 Learn to shoot quickly.

He fingered his beard, savoring the dignity of a set of axioms. Dom Carlos had been right. The power was rising indeed, and the world lay open to his tools.

A few weeks later a Paraguayan strong-man swooped upon Passo Fundo. He was a colossal, bulging figure in town-made clothes cut purposely too tight. His face was the color of a pale-tan glove and was plucked smooth of hair after the fashion of Indians. Wherever he went he smiled gently at the crowd; and his business manager, a yellow, wrinkled Jew, trotted a pace or two behind him. To each request for an exhibition this tiny watch-dog thrust his nose

up like a tortoise and refused, observing that they were not a side-show.

The inhabitants understood them easily. There was no pressure for a display, only a good-humored acceptance of the lines along which publicity must be run. They knew that the theater would be rented when the interest was at the peak. Meanwhile they bowed in the plaza, cracked jokes, flattered. The Paraguayan enjoyed himself, for he liked to be admired. 2

Then, one morning, Passo Fundo awoke to a stage in the center of the square. It was built of six-inch pine logs boarded with white planks, and a rude stairway led up to it. This was the sole intimation of the Jew's plans, yet life follows such simple tracks in South America that by noon the platform was surrounded. When Sacha rode in about one o'clock the air was bright with festival. Under the bracing sunshine of Brazilian winter a large concourse of people was doing nothing at all. It was not a mob; it was not even a crowd. It was a gathering of dark-skinned, cigarette-smoking, shabbily dressed individuals, broken up into friendly groups, which hoped to divert itself like a gentleman. For, except in political matters, when he clamors for rivers of blood, a South American does not lose his identity in a herd. He is still Manoel Maria Gutierrez, however many Gonsalvezes, Garcias, and Gomezes he may be touching.

The municipal band was already in full train. Its members, uniformed to the jowl, were throwing themselves bodily into the fight. Beneath their green-roofed stand they looked like so many hot hobgoblins swaying under a mushroom.

They were rendering, with particular attention to the brass, a tune which had once been a waltz on Broadway and was now a tango from Buenos Aires. Sacha, gazing out across the bobbing heads, noticed that no women were present. The omission surprised him until he remembered that the Paraguayan would certainly perform in undress. The Latin races do not encourage their females to study anatomy outside the walls of the home.

Presently he felt that somebody was staring at his back. The sensation was unmistakable. He turned and saw Favelle, whose eyelids drooped over his hard eyes as he minced forward.

"Good morning, Senhor Siemel," he said in his high voice. "Or perhaps it should be 'Herr,' or the Russian word for 'Mister'?"

"'Senhor' is enough . . . for both of us."

"Why are you not fighting?" sneered Favelle. "Europe is at war."

Sacha curbed himself; this recent philosophy forbade him to provoke.

"My father was born Latvian; my mother of German origin. We owe nothing to either side. But it pleases you to meddle in my affairs?"

The French-Brazilian stroked his pallid face like a research student puzzling over a phenomenon.

"Your brother is easier to arouse. This morning he offered to kill me."

"Probably you insulted him. Take warning, my friend. One day our patience will break."

Favelle shook angrily and waved the hair from his forehead.

"I am not afraid of strength. A tongue is worth more than muscles."

Sacha moved his horse. He was sorry for the man; recognized that his weakness was intolerable; but he was soon attracted by the band which courteously blared into the hymn that Paraguayans reserved for serious occasions. The verses concerned death and liberty, and the tune is a lilting jig. The crowd, knowing the great moment to be at hand, continued to smoke its cigarettes as if it had assembled by accident. So brilliant was the impersonation of lethargy that a stranger might have conceived the exhibition a failure.

The procession, which started from the leading hotel, was headed by the Paraguayan himself. He was magnificent, clad in black tights and a jaguar-skin, the head of which nestled on his shoulder. The huge fellow . . . his neck and torso were really wonderful . . . walked in little strutting paces and smiled at his acquaintances. His teeth were animal and very white, so powerful that they were not eclipsed by the adjacent tiger. He was followed at a short distance by the Jew promoter, and this severely business man did not smile at all, but looked as though he would withdraw his charge at the first whisper of disapproval. His stumpy fingers were bright with rings which an excited fleet of children assumed to be garnished with diamonds. Lastly, some way behind, the negro blacksmith of Passo Fundo stalked with his hammer. Four large mates bore triumphantly an anvil that somehow resembled an altar. When the entire party had mounted the

steps to the platform it was lowered to the planks, which bounced under the strain.

Meanwhile the bandsmen were nearing apoplexy, and were obviously delighted when the Jew frowned at them to stop. They removed their lips from the brass mouthpieces half-way through a phrase and prepared to listen to a shrill noising of wares.

"Shenhores," cried the Jew, "we have here the strongest creature in South America. Jaguars flee from him; anacondas dive into rivers."

"Bravo! *Viva* Marcelo Caceres!" said the concourse politely, and the big man beamed.

"Lie down, my little one," continued the promoter with some wit. "Show the gentlemen your force."

Marcelo the Strong unstrapped his tiger-skin and flung it into a corner. He stood erect, flexing and relaxing his great muscles until they knotted, flowed, dissolved with all the poetry of a wild beast. The feeling exhilarated him, made him drunk on the wine of his own power; and the blacksmith had to remind him of his task. He subsided on to his back and received the anvil, unsoftened by any cushion, square on his mighty chest. His breathing was not affected. An inch-thick iron bar and a cold-chisel was added to the pile. The Jew called for a helper, and Sacha, looping his bridle over a post, vaulted to the stage, where he was presented with a sledge-hammer.

"Now, shenhor. You understand your part? Our friend will hold the chisel and you will strike through the bar."

Clack!

The metal rang. Marcelo exhaled and grinned. The crowd, losing something of its well-bred aloofness, pressed against the structure. Five times the hammer descended before the iron split and the ends fell to the floor. The Jew spread his rings and motioned the negro away. Then Marcelo wound his arm about the anvil's waist and rose without conscious effort. Once more he stood upright, his chin resting on the flat, facing the people; and a murmur of sincere applause rippled across the square. It was indeed prodigious strength, but Sacha had observed a certain clumsiness in the strong-man's bearing, and reserved judgment.

Just at this moment a klaxon sounded from the Rua Cuyabá, and a light touring-car ran quickly toward the stage. Four men were in it, waving their hands and shouting. At the foot of the steps the driver called to the Paraguayan to come down. He explained, amid friendly laughter (the Jew was a good organizer), that they were going on a trip across the Andes and were desirous of proving the motor on a worthy hill. Marcelo took a cushion and laid himself on the red earth; two long planks were rested against his form at a distance of the car's wheels; and slowly the obstacle was passed. For one horrid second the entire weight of chassis, occupants, and engine was balanced on his body. Sacha marveled at the endurance, and the crowd sighed.

Even this was not the height of Marcelo's excellence. He borrowed a wooden chair from the band stand, rested it on the platform, and invited Sacha to sit down. Within a minute he had grasped the rear of the seat between his teeth and, neck rigid, walked twice round the plaza.

The inhabitants were enthusiastic now, ripe to declare him a dictator. They cheered and bravoed and vivaed until the innkeepers knew that a bumper thirst was likely and set out the glasses in the bars. The Paraguayan returned to his base.

"Splendid!" cried Sacha, jumping from the chair. "Such power is incredible. Are you a wrestler?"

"I have little skill, but what need, with my arms?" He patted his flesh as one who fondles a god.

"Dom Marcelo," Sacha said quietly, "I have the honor to challenge you to a match."

The strong-man blinked in the sunlight, reached for his tiger-skin. His kindly face was genuinely troubled. His eyes, accustomed to weigh in terms of strength, studied professionally the lines of Sacha's body. What he saw did not convince him; he refused point-blank.

"I am not a murderer," he said.

Sacha did not blame him. He knew that he appeared deceptively slight and innocuous, but he wanted this encounter as he had never wanted anything; it would be the first real adventure of his life. The Jew bustled up just as he had called the Paraguayan a coward. Marcelo laughed; he was not a fool. He saw that it was not meant insultingly so much as a rather pointed challenge.

"Where," asked the promoter quickly, "and on what terms?"

Sacha looked down into the tortoise face and demanded that the winner should sweep the board. Marcelo generously

burst in, crying that even a sparring partner was worth something. The Jew snarled.

"*Eshstupido*," he hissed. "Let the boaster pay."

And then, swinging his arms above his head so that the false gems blazed, he shouted that a match had been arranged between the famous Marcelo Caceres, winner of more championships than he had teeth, and a young gentleman whose name the manager did not know but who thought himself clever. Time, 9:30 P.M. on the following Saturday. Place, the local theater.

When the night of the battle arrived . . . it was to be an affair of two ten-minute rounds, Græco-Roman style, with a three-minute interval . . . the theater was packed. Smoke from five hundred cigars and cigarettes ascended in thin feathers, merged, grew into a cloud, and drifted across the footlights like a screen of war. Behind the haze, looking through it, were an equal number of white eyeballs and gleaming rows of teeth. A few harlots represented their sex. To the bare flaking dressing-room came the noise of a swarm of bees.

Sacha, dressed in boxing-drawers and light boots, his cape flung about his shoulders, was talking pleasantly to his foe. He liked the Paraguayan who was so naïvely proud of himself, so evidently glad to wind bars round his arms. Once, in a street deserted except for a small boy, he had crunched a beer glass to fragments in his jaws from sheer good nature. His manager was rude to him for wasting publicity on such meager fare; yet the tale had spread, increasing the strong-

man's popularity. In cold fact, he was better liked than Sacha, whose books kept him from hotels.

At half-past nine the owner of the theater, a nervous, lanky man, entered the dressing-room. He was accompanied by the Jew, who at once took exception to the genial atmosphere.

"Is there any reason," Sacha asked mildly, "why we should not speak of forests? That tiger-skin . . ."

"A large male," said Marcelo eagerly. "I shot it myself under a tree."

The Jew barked at the theater-manager:

"Start this bout immediately. They will be kissing soon."

The strong-man thumped Sacha on the back. He was in high confidence and promised leniency, but Sacha became grave and begged him to be serious. He mentioned that he had had experience of champions. Marcelo smiled.

The match took place on a large padded square in the middle of the stage; and it frankly disappointed the audience. They had come with the idea of seeing a braggart thrashed, and, knowing little of the finer points of wrestling, expected continual violence—something short, noisy, and deadly, after the manner of revolver-play.

Sacha faced the Paraguayan across the mat. At a signal from the referee Marcelo tucked his head into his shoulders and charged like an old bull. Sacha, perceiving he had no science, captured an arm and used impetus and bulk to throw him heavily to his face. He rose and came again . . . and again . . . and again, and at each essay grew clumsier, more muscle-bound. But at the fifth crash he bunched himself on

the floor, elbows to sides, hands rigid at the throat so as to prevent a lock. Sacha tapped him lightly and the referee commanded him to his feet. Then Marcelo grew careless, for such treatment was beyond his range. He left himself open, and this time he was imprisoned. Sacha wrapped his arm about the waist and held on, pressing his body against the chest, trying to force down the shoulders. Marcelo, in desperation, adopted the bridge position: that is, he shaped himself like the wood of a bow, heels flat, back clear of the floor, weight resting on a stiff neck. So, defensively, he remained until the end of the round. Nevertheless the sympathies of the audience were changing. Dom Carlos, who was seated in the front row beside Ernst, cheered ecstatically.

The second round was more tedious, from the spectacular point of view, than the first. There was no quick movement, for Marcelo had resigned himself to inaction; and the terrific muscle-strain went unsung. The crowd, forgetting its manners now it was under a roof, broke into catcalls and hisses. A bullet whipped through the tiles; a street woman shrieked affectedly. The whole force of opinion was united to decry the loss of three milreis per head for such a colorless display.

And then a really astounding thing happened. Sacha, after three minutes of pressing himself against Marcelo's neck, found that he was choking. The tobacco smoke was curling in waves into his lungs, and he knew that he must break his grip if it were not abandoned. He could not move his limbs without spoiling his advantage, so he jerked up his beard and raised his eyebrows at the audience. The din ceased.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he coughed. "I am sure that you are kind. Your smoke is taking my breath."

Whereat five hundred rowdy Latins, bored and resentful as they were, reverted to the courtesy of their ancestors and stubbed out their cigarettes. Moreover, from that time until the end, they tried to appreciate the fray. And when Sacha at last prevailed, jamming the Paraguayan's shoulders to the mat with a minute and a half to spare, they clapped genially.

Two incidents alone did Sacha remember out of the blur . . . the querulous outcry of the Jew and a sudden glimpse of Favelle's white face in the shifting mass of the crowd.

Marcelo Caceres, unable to support his tarnish, left early in the morning; and, as a memento of the fight, Sacha caused a shield to be devised, a silver plaque, with the raised image of two wrestlers in gold-leaf. It was part of the strange character of Favelle, to whom the work was intrusted, that it should have been executed perfectly.

It was about six months afterward that one Leon Beduino, a Turk, halted in Passo Fundo on his way north to the rich audiences of São Paulo. He was among the last of that humorless but formidable band of janissaries whose spear-point, Mahmont, was defeated in the United States by Frank Gotch in 1911. He belonged to a period, now dead as a winter leaf, when every lusty emigrant from the Bosphorus was surnamed "Terrible." The comic newspapers killed the vogue in a gale of ribaldry, yet Leon Beduino was a real danger in Rio Grande do Sul.

Dom Carlos, who smelt scandal before it was fairly hatched, told Sacha that the invader would enter the town at eight o'clock on Sunday evening. Accordingly they collected Ernst and dined in good time, because, as the thief-taker remarked, Beduino had smashed an Englishman's neck from bravado and might easily forget himself. In the plaza the faithful band was monopolizing thought. The new arc-lights, product of Herr Klaue's energy, lit up the pock-marks on the negroes' cheeks as the head-lamps of a car reveal the inequalities of a road. Men and women were promenading South American-wise, in opposite directions round the square; and Dom Carlos's single eye glanced austerely away whenever a girl caught it. He disliked publicity.

Into this scene of hat-lifting provincial contentment came Beduino. He was a huge man, sixteen stone of well-developed muscle; and he rode a small gray donkey to emphasize his bulk. His was a cruel face, supremely arrogant and assured, with crescent-shaped mustaches reaching almost to his eyes. His head sloped upward like a dark pear; and across his breast was a crimson sash hung with medals and gilt prizes that jingled at the trot. He smiled, and the people whispered:

"Que bruto és o dourado," for his teeth were solid gold.

Dom Carlos approached.

"Now Beduino," he said fiercely. "No nonsense here. We all know about your murder."

The Turk's lips began the motions of a sneer, but somehow closed themselves. Dom Carlos had a subtle way of indicating his revolver without actually unfolding his arms.

"I came only for a fight," said Beduino, "if so be you have any one brave enough."

Sacha looked at him carefully. He was plainly vicious, stronger than Marcelo and less muscle-bound; but it is unusual for a wrestler to be a boxer too; Sacha was eager for adventure. He offered to wrestle two rounds in the theater provided the Turk would box ten rounds on the next night. As he considered the proposition a devil crept to the front of Beduino's eyes and was promptly banished.

"The bearded one is gracious. I accept."

Sacha read his meaning and countered it. Turning to Dom Carlos, he asked if it would be possible to prevent a man from sneaking out of the town. Beduino went green under the arc-lights and kicked his donkey in the ribs.

"*Até a volta,*" he snapped. "Until we meet again."

A good many heads were slanted as he jogged toward a drink-shop; and a number of women sighed. Such chest measurement and upright carriage! It was tyranny to keep them from the hall! That night several husbands of long standing complained of nagging.

All Passo Fundo brought revolvers on the evening of the struggle. Some did it on principle; others at a hint from Favelle; a few because Sacha had become suddenly popular and the Turk was a killer. Dom Carlos and Ernst assembled in the barren dressing-room and spoke comfortably of their plans.

"If he tries to strangle you," said the thief-taker, "I shall aim at his fat thigh."

"No, please," Sacha said curtly. "I can thrash him myself when he gets dangerous."

Before long Beduino entered. He bowed as sarcastically as he dared, throwing off his clothes with the superb gesture of a savage. Then he presented his back and stretched himself regally. It was an insolent movement and would have drawn a bullet from the impetuous Dom Carlos had not Sacha touched his sleeve. The Turk noticed the by-play, grinned evilly, and drew a loin-cloth over a fraction of his nakedness. His skin was of that deep coffee brown which is the natural mate of crimson. Sacha accompanied him to the stage.

This time there was no smoke; nor was there much fight. From the very outset Sacha knew himself outclassed and wriggled to the edge of the mat whenever possible. For not only was Beduino faster than Marcelo; he was a wrestler of almost the front rank. His methods, however, were brusque to the point of rudeness. After a minute's scuffle he sank his gold teeth into his opponent's ear and, helped by the unusual grip, was just proceeding to a neck-lock when Sacha drove his fist into his belly. The flesh ripped as they scrambled clear.

"Do that again," said Sacha, "and I'll use my knuckles."

Beduino passed his tongue along his lips, appreciating the taste, and charged. There was a quality in the tense breathing and a flame in the black eyes that said, "Give me your neck for but half a second and I'll risk a lynching."

Then it was that the audience took a hand. Favelle jumped

on a chair and, firing his revolver through the tiles, shouted, "*Viva Turco!*" in a voice of ecstasy.

"*Viva Ruso!*" roared Dom Carlos, and the fusillade began.

Favelle had intended the challenge as a personal battle-cry, a banner of encouragement to the Turk. Dom Carlos had replied in kind. Both had forgotten that Brazil was at war with Turkey; and that in Rio Grande especially German sympathies ran high. Their carelessness nearly provoked a massacre. At the first shot Beduino fled, a brown crouching streak in a loin-cloth. Sacha let out a yell and the firing ceased.

"Gentlemen," he said, "thank you for your help, but I am quite able to defend."

Somebody laughed, and the bitterness went out of the atmosphere. The owner of the theater raced on to the stage.

"I won't have it!" he screamed, his hands flicking with anxiety. "My building is not for gun-play. There will be no boxing to-morrow."

A large, good-tempered colonist, whose revolver was still at his side, climbed over the footlights.

"Amigos," he called, "our host is right. This is a peaceful house. To-morrow we will leave our firearms behind. Is it well?"

"It is well," growled the throng, and dispersed.

Back in the dressing-room the Turk was in a fury. He grinned like an idol come to life and danced horribly round a chair. He was weary of Passo Fundo and refused to fight. Sacha repeated his warning, told him he deserved to be shot

for cowardice, and was disgusted beyond speech when the bully crumpled to his knees.

"I am no boxer, senhor, only a wrestler and strong-man."

"There will be no guns among the crowd," said Sacha, "and I won't hurt you."

Beduino's face grew cunning.

The men of Passo Fundo were honorable enough. They were faithful to their promise in that one man alone brought a revolver, and he was evicted by Dom Carlos. They relieved their feelings by yelling to Sacha to knock the Turk out of the theater.

The fellow had been drinking. The aura of Brazilian rum has a long range of offense, and Sacha was prepared. The sparring began lightly, but the circular motion of a couple of boxers in a ring irritated Beduino. He opened his mouth and rushed . . . on to the point of a rigid glove.

"Steady!" whispered Sacha in a clinch.

But Beduino had lost his head. The cheering riled him in the inner pride of his soul. He stood still, lowered his guard, and fumbled with the laces of his gloves.

"Stop it!" said Sacha quickly. Beduino dropped his face into the leather, bit at the strings.

"I'll kill you," he panted.

Then Sacha realized that he must act. If the Turk's hands were free and his own muffled he might be thrown into the crowd and maimed. He stepped forward and hit him on the chin; and when Beduino turned, chewing desperately, drove a wicked right to the kidneys and straightened him up. After

that it ceased to be a game. It was a race, undignified but essential to avoid a tragedy. Actually it was a dead heat. Beduino's gloves came off at the precise moment that Sacha, having maneuvered for position, put his full weight into a blow which landed at the extreme edge of the jaw, slightly to one corner. Big as he was, Beduino left the floor and collapsed at Dom Carlos's feet.

The owner of the theater, hearing something of a din, carried the takings to his home. The audience was still yelling when he returned.

Sacha bought a large black mule out of his earnings, and called it Beduino.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ERNST sat before the doorway of their house in Passo Fundo, watching a flock of vultures circle above the meat-factory.

"I do not want to kill," he said, "but once I touch Favelle, my temper will snap. Of this I am sure."

Sacha ran a cleaning-rod through his revolver. His movements were deliberate, his face passionless behind the beard; only in his eyes were certain shadows which might have been the reflection of a fear.

"Come," he said presently, "let us visit Dom Carlos."

Ernst turned slowly in his chair. That particular hard, dead tone was new to him; and for the first time since they began to share their lives he recognized in his brother a capacity for hate. Then, true to his character, he shelved the thought with an expansive lift of his wide shoulders. He had troubles enough of his own.

They found Dom Carlos at his hut. He was pulling the ears of his unlikely-looking mongrel and whistling a sorrowful tune. He was a lonely man, and business was at an ebb.

"We want your help," Sacha said bluntly. "Things may go wrong."

The white head moved. The single eyelid lowered to a crack, and the blind socket gaped. Dom Carlos was viewing

them narrowly, no longer a friend but an unofficial thief-taker, professionally alert.

"Explain," he snapped, and Ernst replied:

"It was a small matter, maybe, senhor, yet last of a series. I work, as you know, at the silversmith's, where we feed together at noon—boss, family, assistants, and all. By accident I occupied Favelle's seat on the form. 'Shift yourself, son of a bitch,' he said. 'Be a little careful,' I warned him, but he would not. I told him to come into the patio, away from the ladies, if he wanted a fight. There he snapped his fingers; he is no coward, Dom Carlos. I am peaceable, myself: I walked out."

"You did well," said the thief-taker piously.

Sacha laughed with such meager humor that Lobo growled.

"I have a plan," he announced. "Ernst has some work to finish at the shop. I shall complete it for him. He will take our animals and baggage, except my mule Beduino, and wait beyond the Rio Uruguay, two days from here. I shall not provoke Favelle, but if he insults or sneers or tries to play with steel I shall not bother about my temper. What are your views, Dom Carlos?"

The old man was prompt and very grim:

"If you kill Favelle, Lobo and I will trail you and, God willing, add your ears to my museum."

Ernst broke out with an oath and started to talk of friendship. Sacha, knowing more about Brazil, checked him.

"Where will you be, Dom Carlos, at the time of the affair?"

"Seated among the graves at the northern corner of the cemetery; where else?"

"You will hold Beduino's bridle?"

The old man was shocked.

"In sacred ground, my friend? You forget yourself! But my countrymen are superstitious about graveyards, especially on a dark night."

"If Beduino should find himself tied to a railing you would not interfere?"

"Clearly; but the law must be appeased. I can arrange a delay of three hours. The rest is to you. It is essential that you reach the Santa Catarina boundary ahead of me. Is it understood?"

The brothers departed, for much remained to be done. During their eighteen months in Passo Fundo they had amassed a quantity of possessions unsuitable to the backlands of Matto Grosso. So they packed their tools and photographic materials (Sacha was experimenting in the commercial uses of a camera) into four leather trunks. The more valuable of his books were piled into two more. Everything else was stored by Herr Klaue, who kept his trust so faithfully that when Sacha returned nine years later neither moth nor rust had corrupted his belongings.

On the third day, hours before dawn, Sacha threw some logs on the fire. When the flames rose he saw the whites of the animals' eyes as they strained at their heel-ropes. They blinked at him fretfully, twitching their ears and stamping.

"*Que bravo!*" he said, patting them individually. His voice soothed them.

From the interior of the house he took a bundle of straw blankets open across the top, six to each beast. It is the rarest accident in South America to find a mule or a horse with a clean spine. Sacha had cured their troop with salt and water and was resolved that never again should they know the agony of a festered sore. Soon he was ready. Ernst was shaken from his bed and, together, they secured the trunks, like panniers, with twisted rawhide ropes. On the neck of the foremost beast, a respectable old mare, they hung a bell.

Ernst, an enormous figure in his poncho, lounged over to the fire and lit a cigarette from a brand. He boiled himself some coffee, which he drank at a gulp, and stooping, buckled on his spurs. Then, with a final grumble at the ungodliness of the hour, jerked into the saddle. His square body rose and fell to the horse's action, dwindled beyond the glare, vanished. Sacha was asleep before the bell was out of earshot.

All that day he worked at the silversmith's. He spoke with nobody except for politeness, keeping himself to the farthest end of the big room at the back. To the noise of files and scrapers and hammering on soft metal, the hiss of blow-lamps and the chatter of the men, he stayed indifferent. He was determined that no word or deed of his should force a crisis. At lunch-time he ate moodily apart. In the evening Dom Carlos came to him.

"So we are to lose you to-morrow," he said. "I am sorry."

He sat for a long while staring into the gloom.

"Favelle brings it on himself," he muttered, "but I could wish he was a coward."

He left soon afterward, having promised to take Beduino

to the cemetery at eight o'clock on the following night. For Sacha had decided that under no circumstances would he delay longer in Passo Fundo.

Next morning he packed his clothes into a saddle-bag and dressed himself in a new set which for many years became a landmark in Matto Grosso. Thick boots, well greased and dull, leather gaiters, dark breeches, and a brown shirt ended in a rigidly upright Stetson so prominent in a land of straw head-gear. Into the pocket of his rough jacket he dropped a pair of spurs.

A few minutes later he was in the shop. Ernst, who rarely completed a task, had deserted a clear half-dozen jobs; and these remained as a debt. Sacha, alone among the benches, chose his tools from the common stock and settled to his work. He mended the striking-pin of a revolver, replaced the hair-spring of a watch, regulated another, and filed the foresight of a rifle that was shooting high. Then he turned his energies to a silver stirrup owned by an outlying Gaucho. It was snapped in three places and needed soldering. Presently, as he was bending over the vise, somebody entered the room. He paid no attention, because silver solder melts just one fraction of a second before the metal itself. The cattleman was known to him and he wished to make a particularly good join; these men have few possessions.

"Give me my file," said a voice behind him.

He poured solder into the crack, smoothed it flush, wheeled to confront Favelle.

"Tools are common property," he answered. "You know that."

"I have used that file ever since I came here . . . which was years before you peered over the horizon."

"Very likely. Your tongue impresses some people. You will find plenty of others in the rack."

Favelle darkened, but he was unarmed; and Sacha's face was not encouraging. He retired sulkily to the far end of the bench. At noon the company of workmen and apprentices crowded into the dining-room. Two large plates of chicken and a roast sucking-pig stood on a brand-new table-cloth. The silversmith was pouring brandy into each man's glass, and his wife and children were beaming amiably. Evidently it was a feast. When every one was sitting Gonsalvez knocked with a fork.

"Our friend and helper Senhor Siemel is leaving Passo Fundo to-day," he said, fidgeting in a nervous manner. "It is by no means my custom to praise unduly, but I feel that he upheld the honor of the town in the recent invasion of strong-men. Senhor Siemel, I drink your health. May you become rich in the provinces of the North."

It was Favelle who started the clapping, though in such an ironical way that Sacha felt foolish. Gonsalvez smothered the outburst, offering a theater ticket for that evening. When Sacha refused, saying he must join his brother, the silversmith turned to Favelle.

"I," said the French-Brazilian, "shall be delighted to accept the gift. It will distract my mind from the departure of such a distinguished citizen."

An apprentice tittered and the meal broke up in haste.

Sacha worked during the entire afternoon, patching,

mending, regulating. By six o'clock the last man had gone, and the building had acquired the desolate, cold emptiness of a busy place at rest. The smell of food crept into the reek of kerosene and the clatter of tin plates heightened the loneliness. Time passed and then Gonsalvez, newly fed, strolled in. He was in that blessed condition where the sleekest glutton feels himself a rover. He referred, sadly enough, to the journey; he wished he could accompany.

Suddenly the door into the patio opened and Favelle bustled in. Sacha glanced at him, saw immediately that he had keyed himself to a part which he was overacting, and continued to file.

"Ah!" cried Favelle. "I am relieved to find you here, Senhor Gonsalvez."

And posted himself at his bench. The silversmith, losing a little of the bold cavalier and relapsing into the anxious tradesman, sidled up to him.

"Why have you returned?" he whispered.

Favelle pitched his voice on exactly the right note. It contrived to reach Sacha and, at the same time, to appear to be a confidence. It was a perfect example of a stage aside.

"I was afraid he would steal my tools. It would be difficult to trace them in Matto Grosso."

Sacha laid down his file. The decision had been taken from him. He did not blame Favelle, who was acting according to his nature; but he had been accused of the meanest crime in the vocabulary, and it called for blood. Brushing the filings from his clothes, he strode toward his enemy.

Favelle snatched up a scraper, a wicked, triangular rasp

with cutting edges, much favored in South Brazilian duels. In his pocket was a bulge that could mean only one thing. But Sacha walked past him as if he had not heard. He had just remembered the first rule of politeness in the land of his adoption: "Thou shalt not kill in thy neighbor's house." He shook hands with Gonsalvez, who thanked him with his eyes.

"Well, senhor, you will find my tasks complete. My mule will be stiff if I wait longer. Adios!"

He ignored his accuser, picked up his hat, and went into the road, where he stood in a bar of shadow cast by a pine tree on to the opposing wall. For a time he gazed earnestly at the door whence Favelle must emerge to the theater. It was new and unstained, the one pale object under heaven, because the lamps were reserved for the plaza and the moon was not yet up.

There are few places so dead as a byway in a small Brazilian town. A mangy dog or two, the complacent flutter of a pigeon, the shuffle of footsteps in the loose earth—these are adventures in the narrow cañons of houses. Moreover, even this distraction was absent to-night, for Passo Fundo was lingering over its dinner. Sacha, whose nerves were like taut catgut in the cold glitter of the stars, began to feel horribly alone.

An hour dragged by. The church clock struck, eight heavy blows of destiny, then passed to the comparative softness of the quarter. The reflection of the cooking-fires glowed orange, leaping at the addition of a log. A bat swooped low, turned in its own length, and flashed away. Somewhere a

dog squealed under a kick. Sacha wished he had brought his poncho; June is midwinter in Brazil.

Of a sudden his mind, which had noted each of these signs and noises, halted abruptly. He poised himself on his toes, and, a full heart-beat before the white door swung, recognized the scrape of a leather boot. His face cleared and, as the wood moved, he sprang.

"Bandido!"

Favelle screamed and his pistol shot up. Sacha grabbed it by the barrel and beat him on the head with the stock. He was still calm, an executioner more than an avenger. Yet the circumstance did not aid the man. It made Sacha hit straight. Favelle crumpled; and Sacha, after flinging the weapon in the dust, sighed and walked away.

Ten minutes later he was kicking among the tree stumps round the wire fence of the graveyard. At the extreme northerly point Dom Carlos rose sheer out of the ground and whispered something. The answer seemed to perturb him, for he clicked his teeth and coughed. A bridle was unhitched, spurs jingled, a form appeared astride Beduino.

"Good-by, my friend," said Sacha, leaning down. "I regret nothing . . . but thank you."

He rode swiftly for some hours toward the colonies of the North. When he entered the forest he kept rigidly off the beaten track; he knew that Dom Carlos was in earnest and he must not be caught. Presently the moon was out, sliding up the trunks till it was perching overhead, rimming the crowns with light. And at once the silence deepened; the scent of resin increased. At the birth of the dawn wind he

dismounted, feeling in his saddle-bags for a razor. He made a paste of leaf-sap and dew; clipped his beard; shaved painfully.

He stayed ahead of the thief-taker through two long days of riding, and then, before sunrise on the third, reined in at the edge of a red cliff. At his feet the broad waters of the Rio Uruguay flowed like steaming coffee in the early mist. To his right a patch of embers shone dim and the silhouette of a dwelling bulked against the sky. On the opposite bank he could just make out a solid row of pines, with feathered heads, like palms. Thus, by a trick of lighting, he gained his first hint of the tropics.

With the coming of day he hired a balsa, a craft of three canoes nailed together with boards, and two ferrymen paddled him across. Beduino swam alongside. On the farther shore he looked back on his past; and there, hatless by the landing-place, was Dom Carlos, tactfully late. Sacha raised an arm, and his friend drew a revolver. Three valedictory shots whined over the river.

Sacha heard afterward by a roundabout channel that Favelle was not dead. The news failed to move him.

CHAPTER NINE

"HAMMOCK, *a hanging bed or couch, perhaps derived from the hamack tree, the bark of which was used by the natives of Brazil to form the nets, suspended from trees, in which they slept.*" (*Encyclopædia Britannica.*)

If an ordinarily intelligent admiral were asked why the lower deck sleep in hammocks he would probably refer to comfort, convenience, and economy of space. He might add that the navy had employed them since the time of the Dutch wars and that they were part of a tradition. He would, of course, be right.

But if one were hardy enough to repeat the question, to inquire why a lot of sun-soaked Indians should bother to plait bark when their brethren to the south lay contentedly on the ground, the chances are that the subject would be dropped. For the origin of hammocks lies deep as nature, in an element far from the sea, and is one of the ironic romances of South America. It is the tale of a tick.

Sacha first met the scourge in the village of Encarnação, in the south of Matto Grosso; and he never forgot its effect. Incidentally it changed his life for him, in that it provided him with a friend who served him loyally for five adventurous years.

The garapata, the large common tick, is more of a

nuisance than a peril. When empty it is the size and color of a boiled pea, squashed flat. It hangs, with thousands of friends, on the palm trees; and the slightest quiver from below brings a deluge of bloodsuckers, armed with grappling-irons and a probe. If left to itself on flesh, it will assume the circumference of a robin's egg within three days.

Carrapato do chão, on the other hand, is vitally dangerous to those who take no care. It is a grayish, transparent creature, turning to pink as the meal proceeds. It lives in the dust of houses and, unlike its ambitious cousins, does not cling; it only sucks. And the irritation is so terrible that an affected man should strap his hands before he sleeps. The results of scratching are well illustrated in the medical museum of Butanton, the snake-farm of São Paulo; where legs that are half decayed, of every tint from filmy violet to raw beef-steak, are ranged in cases for a sign to the light-hearted.

During the fifteen months that followed the passage of the Rio Uruguay, Sacha and Ernst had gained in fortune and experience. They had crossed the tropic of Capricorn . . . which is also roughly the garapata line . . . in the province of Paraná. They had photographed the famous Horseshoe Falls and Devil's Throat of Iguasú, a drop of two hundred and fifteen feet in the heart of a lonely forest. Sacha, who had seen Niagara in winter and summer, preferred Iguasú because the complete absence of any work of man raised the solitary bent of his mind to a peak of happiness unknown to him before. He just stood, hour after hour, absorbing the majesty of noise in the cool veil of spray. To him it was religion, mighty and swamping, elim-

inating earthly need. Even when Ernst, bored by the solitude, clamored for lunch, the spell remained. He had ridden sixty miles out of his way to see this thing, and the leaping thunder of the pit of water justified him. They camped on the brink.

From there they cut into Paraguay, but, disliking the national character, slipped over the boundary to Matto Grosso. Here they earned their living, riding from farm to village, repairing the firearms of the inhabitants. Their fee was fifty milreis a day . . . twenty-five shillings in those days . . . and they always got it. Here, too, they changed their idea of a home. From now onward hammock, mosquito-net, and a waterproof poncho slung on the back of a horse were all they needed.

As they wandered northward the country altered. The pine woods of Santa Catarina, the cattle-runs of Paraná, and the steaming marshy undergrowth of Paraguay fell away. In their place the *campo cerrado* . . . shut plain . . . of the central Brazilian wilderness closed about them. This *campo cerrado* is often more dangerous than forest. It is a block of territory five hundred miles long by four hundred miles across, reaching from the outskirts of Paraguay to the confines of Goyaz. It is formed by a multitude of sterile trees, gnarled for the most part, and gray, with leaves so rough that they are used for emery-paper. They are shaped like apple trees—indeed, the whole effect is that of an orchard—and the bitter similarity of the view casts a physical load upon the soul. Sacha would have found it unendurable had it not been for his store of books. He was wont to imagine

conversations between Alyosha Karamazov and Anna Karenina and a hundred other characters more real than human beings.

There are few animals beyond cattle. Tigers occasionally appear, and a disillusioned stag; but parrots, vultures, tarantulas, and ticks are the real owners of the land. Nothing is easier than to get lost, for the trees are so alike that there are no landmarks. In the rainy season, when the clouds out-ride the sun, the cattlemen often squat by their horses till the sky clears. They say that an empty stomach is better than a full buzzard.

One afternoon in September, 1918, Ernst and Sacha rode toward Encarnaçao. Ahead the lead-horse was jangling its bell; the pack-mules grunted and stumbled in the loose sand. A white persistent heat flamed upward, and a few puffs of hot wind, such as a dentist squirts into a tooth, blew out of the trees. Ernst moved in his saddle; the leather burnt him.

"It is time we went to the diamond-fields," he said. "The Rio das Garças is cool."

"You shall bathe in another half-hour," said Sacha, blinking in the glare.

He had long since recovered his beard, and the sun had browned him; the skin on his forearms shone. Ernst was fatter; the climate pleased him. He took no more exercise than would have been proper in Europe, and the Southern idleness was eating into the bone.

Suddenly, almost before they were aware of the village, confusion broke. A tumultuous pack of interbred, bandy-ribbed, half-starved mongrels with slit ears poured among

the mules and sprang, yelling, at their flanks. The bell-horse reared and the animals prepared to bolt. Sacha drove his mount at the dogs, chasing them back to the huts. Then the cavalcade trotted into Encarnaçao, a hamlet of some fifty open-sided thatched houses, and a herd of children surrounded it. Sacha addressed a big-eyed olive boy.

"Is there a place we can hire, *chico*?" he asked.

"*Não sei.*"

The child giggled and squirmed, rumpling the sand with his toes.

"Who has a house to let? Come on, my brave ones, we know a nigger's blanket is his fire; but we aren't niggers. We want a roof."

All Brazil loves a proverb. An apt quotation aptly turned has opened many a prison. The children brightened.

"Dom Eusebeo has an empty shed, senhores," said a little girl.

They found Dom Eusebio, a negro who would have been black and inferior in Africa but who was brown and courteous in Encarnaçao. The Brazilian sun, though fierce, is not a killer, and the blue-black shade of the darker continent is unknown.

He took them to a hut at the far corner of the single square. It had four posts and a palm roof, and it stood beside the church, which was little more. Dom Eusebio bowed them in.

"The rent?" asked Sacha.

The light-brown palms flew outward like a Jew's.

"You are traveling engineers, is it not so? How do I

know? News travels in Brazil, like *Urubú*, the vulture. My rifle will not fire; mend it and you shall live free."

He turned, then swung back.

"It is said the senhores carry medicine. I have a sick guest, a Gaucho from Rio Grande do Sul. He stepped among garapatas and his legs—"

"Is there a stream here, Dom Eusebio?" asked Ernst, slinging his hammock.

He meant no rudeness by his interruption, for Sacha attended the sick, but he could never remember that a negro is less black in Brazil. Their host closed his lips for a moment before replying:

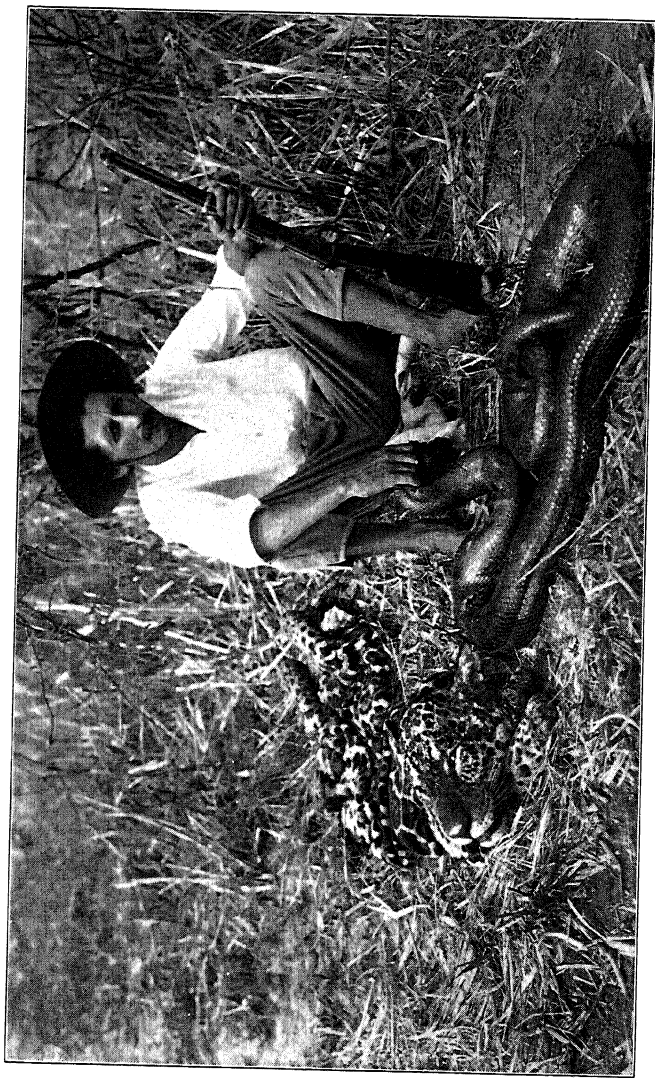
"Certainly, senhor. Behind the church."

"Then I'll bathe. Sacha, help me down with the mule-trunks. You can look after the Rio-grandense."

Together they stripped the cargo, placing it in the middle of the hut. The animals were undressed and wandered out to pasture. Sacha unpacked his medical outfit and accompanied Dom Eusebio.

Apparicio Pinheiro (the Pine Tree) lay gloomily in his hammock. He was a long, dark saber of a man, about thirty years of age, cadaverous at all times, but now pinched with anguish. He was dressed, quite simply, in a shirt; and his legs stuck out like boughs. They were wrapped in leaves and swathed about with cotton. He was inhaling rapidly the smoke of a vile cigar which he blew against a covey of horseflies that were seeking entrance through the bandage.

"What is your trouble?" asked Sacha, after they had been formally introduced.



APPARIO, TIGER-SKIN, AND SNAKE

"Trouble?" the thin mouth opened in a snarl. "These provincials of Matto Grosso cannot keep their floors clean. A week ago I stepped out of my hammock to light a cigarette at the fire, and in the morning my legs were itching. I scratched them, naturally. We of Rio Grande have only fleas. These we scratch, again naturally. And now my flesh festers like a dead cow."

It was a terrible business. The leaves and cotton were stuck and the wounds were almost gangrenous. Yet Sacha noticed that although Apparicio had snarled in the beginning, he neither winced nor cried under the pain. He breathed a little faster; no more.

When it was done and the pits cleaned with peroxide of hydrogen and filled with zinc ointment—for they were deep—Apparicio thanked Sacha. He was sweating, but his brilliant eyes were steady.

"Your fee, senhor?" he asked.

Sacha explained that he had bought a stock of medicine, and, having been repaid by rich farmers, did not care to make a profit. It was the duty of all travelers, he thought, to carry such provision against adversity. He only sold photographs and mechanical knowledge. The cowboy grimaced.

"These men of Matto Grosso . . . there are eighty-seven in this village . . . love firearms, but they keep them like bits of wood. No oil, no cleaning-rod. You should reap the price of a couple of mules in Encarnaçao."

He pointed to where his iron-shod stock-whip and .44 Smith and Wesson dangled from a beam.

"No one but a Rio-grandense knows how to treat a gun."

Sacha agreed, so far as Brazilians went, and they spoke of adventure in matter-of-fact voices until the roar of the bullfrogs and the screaming whistle of the crickets awoke them to reality. It was daylight when Sacha left Apparicio; night fell as he was crossing the square.

As the cowboy had predicted, some eighty-seven men brought firearms for repair during the next few days. Quite one half were rusted beyond dreams; and a large number not worth a milreis. Still, the brothers did what they could, and charged according to each man's pocket. By and by Sacha noticed that, whoever else was absent, a certain ragged *caboclo* (a Brazilian is a *caboclo* when even his father is uncertain as to the proportion of negro blood) always hung about their hut. He was an ugly creature, apparently without employment, for his patience and his maize-leaf cigarettes alike were unbounded.

"You want something?" Sacha asked him in a lull of business.

The man licked his cracked lips and glanced round him.

"The sheriff is on your trail, senhor. Your papers are in order?"

"Perfectly. He is at liberty to look whenever he chooses."

The *caboclo* shuffled away, to return later, drunk and hectoring.

"It is essential that I see your papers. You may be Germans and our glorious country is at war. I am, in a way, His Excellency's deputy."

"His Excellency is to be congratulated," Sacha said gravely. "When he comes he shall see."

The man burst out swearing, threatening to raise the populace to lynching-point, and stopped only when he saw Sacha fondle his gun. That evening Sacha went to Apparicio.

"Who is that funny little beggar with a patch on his trousers?"

"That? It's the sheriff."

Sacha caught sight of him at that moment scuffling in the sand like a lonely dog. He accosted him straightaway.

"I apologize for my rudeness," he said, and the *caboclo* drew back. "Why did you not tell me who you were? My papers, of course, are at your service."

The sheriff looked ashamed, grunted, and disappeared. Sacha returned, to find Apparicio and Dom Eusebio coughing with laughter, which with Southern courtesy they tried to conceal. They succeeded for perhaps ten seconds, then:

"You offered to show him papers?" Dom Eusebio rolled his black face into his hammock and gasped. "Oh, senhor! I am sorry for my manners, but . . . he cannot read."

A fortnight passed, and Sacha found that he was spending more and more of his leisure with Apparicio. He admired the taut sturdiness of the man, his passionate disapproval of every province but his own. As the legs healed and the cattleman spoke of departure, Sacha realized that he would miss their conversations. So he asked the cowboy if he would consent to having him go along as a helper. Apparicio simply nodded, and it was not until days afterward that they mentioned the question of wages.

Neither regretted the bargain during five long years.

CHAPTER TEN

ON THE palm-fringed bank of a laughing amber stream the results of Apparicio's presence grew to a logical end. Ernst had been moody for days. He was neither ill nor weary; but his mind suffered, betraying itself in nervous gestures, and once by a refusal to help load cargo in the dawn. The crisis came during the siesta when Sacha, realizing that the matter called for surgery, invited the ex-Gaicho to shoot a jungle-cock. Their new friend understood, disentangled his long legs, which were now cured, and sauntered into the forest. Sacha watched him merge into the sun-spots.

"Well, Ernst?" he said.

Ernst drove his heels into the ground. A vast disillusion masked his eyes; he looked older than his thirty years. His voice sounded thick.

"Let us be plain," he answered. "You and I have no intimates besides ourselves. I believe we would die for each other . . . yet it would be easier if we liked the same things."

He jerked out an arm that embraced the biting splendor of the midday sun, the pale-blue metallic glitter of the sky, and the marvelous variety of green among the leaves. Under the stress of feeling he became still more emotional:

"The streams talk to you; I have seen them; and I have



RIO ARAGUAYÁ AS FAR AS THE FISH CAN SWIM

seen you reply. I have heard you laugh in the night when you walked alone in the woods. Oh, yes, you were made for this land."

His words rose a full tone:

"I have tried to appreciate, but I can't. The silence bores me. I want to speak, and you want to listen . . . not to me, your brother, but to a darned trickle of water running over the earth. I can't stand it, I tell you; I must have company."

Sacha was quiet for a long time. He loved his brother and recognized the jealousy that came from Apparicio's knowledge of the wilds, knew that Ernst should never have left Europe for Brazil, where there was no real necessity to labor. Affection was not sufficient. Let him return for a space to his drinking parties and unreliable acquaintances. He would soon tire.

"Very well," he said. "In a few days we reach Coxim. You stay for a bit while I go north with Apparicio. You will find plenty of work."

He blamed himself for the quick spasm that passed over Ernst's face, yet reflected that nobody was in the wrong. They parted, with sincere unhappiness on both sides, in the little dust-choked town; and henceforward met as friends, knowing the limitations of brotherhood. Sometimes they made trips together, though never consecutively.

Meanwhile Sacha and Apparicio struck northeast toward the frontier of Govaz. Here they encountered the edge of the *campo cerrado* shot with patches of deep forest, as it rolled upward to the head-waters of the Rio Araguayá, the most southerly tributary of the Amazon. Hundreds of tiny

brooks rattled down steep-cut channels, bustling to join the parent river on its journey over the equator to Pará. Sacha remembered the wide brown river in the midst of ocean which he had noticed on the *Saxon Prince* and smiled at the romance of things. The country was cooler and more rocky than that about Encarnaçao. Deer were more numerous; and tigers, though these last were never visible. The greater proportion of native Brazilians have never met a jaguar—for reasons he was to learn before the month ran out.

One evening, when the air was alive and noisy, spangled with parrots and macaws flying back to roost, they rode up to a little colony of huts; open palm-thatched affairs as are the majority of Matto Grosso dwellings, with fire and cook-pot before each. Behind, on a small hill up the flank of which curved the ribs of a stockade, was a fine house brooding like a feudal castle above a medieval village. It was square and high, mud-built and whitewashed; and a corral faced the main door. In the glare of the setting sun it seemed to have emerged from a pink bath. Sacha reined in.

"Be so kind as to tell me the name of this fazenda."

A blue-trousered, thin-shouldered Gaucho glanced up from a terrified calf on which he was kneeling. He felt the edge of his blade, made the sign of the cross with the flashing point, slit the weak throat.

"'Bananal,' senhor," he said. "'The Banana grove.'"

"And the owner?"

"Dom João Cajango."

Sacha thanked him and rode on. Apparicio pricked along-

side, taking care that his remarks should be inaudible in the calm air.

"Did you notice his spurs?" he crooned. "Dirty iron, rusted almost through! Matto Grosso again!"

Although usually a silent man, he hummed joyfully to himself all the way up the hill. Opposite the door, and a good thirty paces distant, Sacha conformed to Brazilian usage.

"*Oh de casa!*" he shouted. "Oh! you in the house!"

He was answered immediately by an old man with the hoop legs of a horseman and the back of a grenadier. A froth of white beard, wonderfully combed, spread over his chest; and his skin was the color of wet tobacco. After a moment of hard scrutiny he bowed.

"João Cajango, at your service, gentlemen. Please dismount yourselves; that empty shack near the corral will hold your baggage. When you have unloaded I shall look forward to your company at dinner."

An hour later they were seated on benches at a trestle table where an oil-lamp smoked and stank and the mosquitoes circled, whining. Two dark and sulky youths brought the dishes from the kitchen, for the host did not approve of exhibiting his women. He had no objection, however, to their peeping through the door. Sacha heard the rustle of their whispering among the shadows.

"I live simply," said Cajango, covering his beard with a stained handkerchief. "I tell these sons of mine [here he glared at the tongue-tied boys] that rice and beans and

jerked beef made the cattleman what he is; and where in all the glorious history of Brazil can you find his equal for endurance?"

He proffered a dish of sticky, sauce-piled brown beans; then a mound of rice and a plate of charqui, which looked and tasted like sweet leather.

"Where indeed?" asked Sacha, who disliked the fare.

"Yet, would you believe it, senhor, these pups demand their meat new-killed each day. Not that they get it," he added.

Sacha, to avoid embarrassment, inquired how many cattle ran free on the estate.

"Who knows?" said Cajango. "No one has ever counted; so many hide in the forest; but thirty thousand certainly—maybe fifty."

Apparicio stirred. As a Gaucho of Rio Grande do Sul he was accustomed to fresh meat. He had seen a calf made ready, and he wished with all his soul that he could change the master's house for the hovels at the foot of the hill. Only a rigid sense of etiquette and the real terror of causing pain, which underlies the Southern formality, kept him silent. When he and Sacha were alone in their hammocks he asked leave to sup in the future with his co-mates, though they were of an inferior province. Sacha refused. The fazenda had all the air of a profitable fortnight and it would be a shame to offend for a dish of beans.

After coffee next morning Cajango led Sacha to an inner room. With the proud gesture of a Balboa at Panama the old man pointed to five sewing-machines which lay in a

wreck upon the floor. The steel was flaking and the wooden bases were warrens of insect-holes. Two were beyond repair; and a third snapped in the lifting.

"My wife does not understand machinery," he said. "How should she, whose business is with softer things? and how should I, a rancher? So my mules travel three hundred miles for a new machine when she breaks something. What is your fee, senhor?"

"Seventy milreis a machine," Sacha said promptly, guessing at his man.

Cajango's white beard heaved.

"You jest!" he cried, and laughed tempestuously.

The Southern urge for bargaining was upon him. He no longer spoke with a guest; and it was half an hour before they compromised on fifty milreis, the usual price. From time to time, at odd moments, the suspicious farmer drifted in. He poked his head round the door, whistled, asked how the work was progressing, and retired. At his seventh appearance Sacha hailed him:

"Senhor Cajango, does it occur to you that I am not to be trusted?"

"I was wondering . . . just wondering."

Sacha placed the sewing-machine between his feet.

"I do not hire myself on those terms," he said coldly. "Good day!"

The old man blocked his path.

"Come, Red Beard," he said, "I did not mean to offend you. Sit down and oblige an old cow-puncher who rarely sees a guest."

Sacha complied; and a few days later Cajango approached him while he was reading at siesta-time.

"Friend Red Beard," he said, lowering himself into Apparicio's hammock, "a tiger has been killing my cattle. I am too old to hunt on foot. Will you accompany my sons?"

Sacha jumped up excitedly, mentioned that his camera and rifle were prepared, and asked when they should start. Cajango rolled a maize-leaf cigarette, remarking that Sacha could take his photograph on the return of the body.

"Not of the living beast," said Sacha.

The rancher sat up.

"A living beast? That has not been done in Brazil. I have hunted all my life and I do not approve of risks."

Sacha marveled at the old man's idea of safety. He had seen his gun, a hoary Damascus blunderbuss, welded from iron and steel wire. It had a bell mouth and a defective hammer. Personally he would have preferred a sturdy club, although its owner swore that a handful of powder and a double charge of nails would disrupt a tiger easily.

"Every monkey to his own branch," said Sacha. "Give me a Winchester carbine and a bayonet."

On the following day, toward one o'clock, the party assembled near the corral. Cajango's two sons, each armed with a muzzle-loader and a powder-horn, glowed triumphantly from mule-back. Ten mangy but ambitious hounds leaped and yapped. Sacha tied his hammock and mosquito-net to the croup; and, as he mounted, his host drew near.

"Let me implore you, hothead, to postpone your photography. I cannot spare you till my firearms are mended."

Now, George, the elder son, had handled dogs before; and Sacha wished to see how it was done. So he checked his horse and set himself to observe. For a long while nothing happened. The dogs, after the first hymn of exaltation, trotted soberly, sniffing the undergrowth. The sun, less vivid in the hill country of the East, flamed in the clearings. A few lizards dodged across the path; macaws burst out of the foliage, calling "Rah—rah—rah," in blue-and-yellow pairs; but for the most part the glazed somnolence of a tropical afternoon breathed over everything. Presently George beckoned.

"My father is a skilled hunter," he said. "The kill is four leagues away. If he had sent us at dawn we should have roused the tiger about now . . . and have lost his scent in the heat. As it is, we shall camp at his back door and pursue to-morrow."

Within an hour he was proved wrong. An old brindled bitch threw up her head. One by one her companions took the trail. First a whicker, then a yelp, then the full romantic clarion of a pack in full song. Sacha drove in his heels and plunged between the trees. It was both easier and more difficult than he had expected. The noise was so riotous that there was no question of losing the direction; but the tangled underbrush and swinging loops of rope-weed forced his cheek against his horse's neck. He used his machete freely, yet a quarter of a mile farther on he was compelled to yield. Tying his animal to a branch, he stripped his spurs and made off, running like a deer. In some queer way he felt at home. By and by he realized that the clamor was

stationary. He leaped across a fallen tree trunk, rotten and foul, the abode of snakes, and twisting, slicing, and perspiring, came at last to an open space beneath a fig tree, whose pale-green body pierced through the forest roof. The dogs were bouncing round a hole.

Before long George, profane with exercise, jogged into the clearing. When he saw his charges he went mad. He tore down a stick and beat them unmercifully, swearing in the dialect of the back-lands. Free from Cajango's influence, he was an altered being, angry, passionate, alive.

"*Caytetú!*" he fumed. "The small jungle-pig. Mother of God! was there ever such a pack of misbegottens?"

The dogs cowered back. George followed viciously till they were glad to sit in a ring twenty yards away. Suddenly a grin split his face.

"We are in luck," he said. "My father gave us only charqui, and here is real meat."

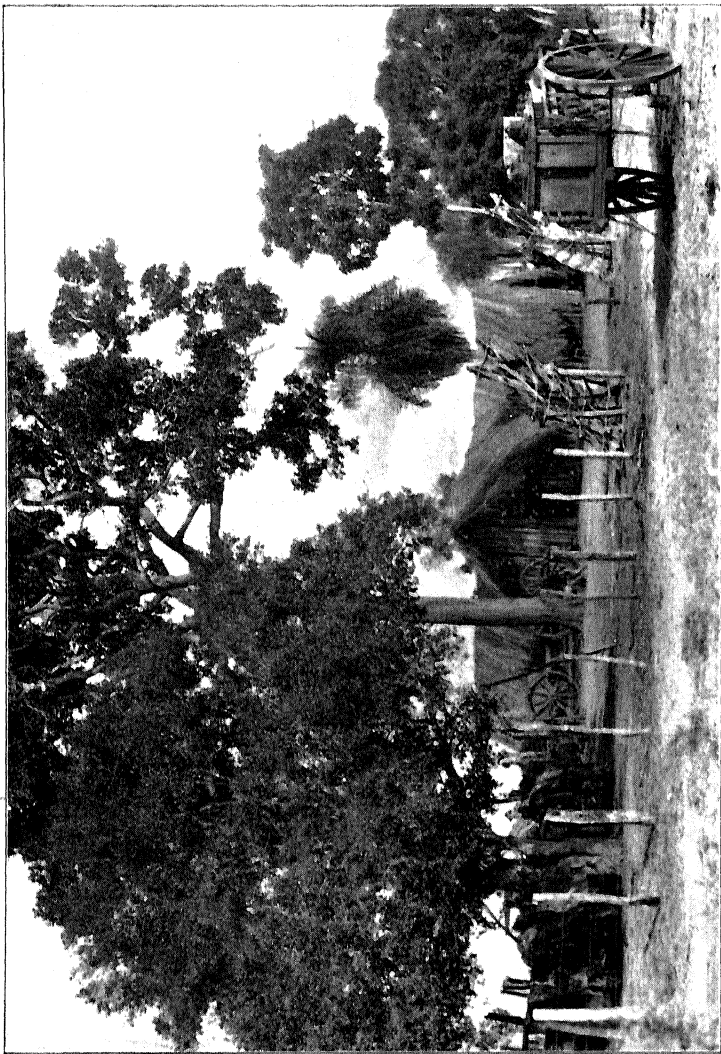
He ranged through the forest collecting dead wood. Bernardo, his young brother, a delicate, sensitive child, helped him, with ecstatic barks, while Sacha looked on. Soon a palisade of branches was dragged over the hole; a match was struck and the flames climbed, curling in red spirals.

"Shoot when he bolts," yelled George.

Sacha faced outward. A curious low sound issued from beneath his feet, and an indignant clucking rose with the smoke.

"His teeth," whispered Bernardo.

The noise mounted to a furious grinding of ivory. The earth shook; there was a rush and *Caytetú*, gathering his



CATTLE RANCH IN THE "PANTANAL," XARAYES MARCHES

courage, dived out of the blaze. Sacha had a whiff of singed bristles and a vision of a narrow-backed, pepper-and-salt colored animal with a white chevron on its shoulders, and a mincing step. Three guns roared and Bernado rubbed his chin.

"Now for the others," he chanted, tilting the powder from his horn.

He was wild with the Latin blood-lust and implored George to wait until he had loaded. Sacha ejected his cartridge, bent to examine the carcass. Only one shot had touched it, his own. George was too much employed driving off the dogs to notice a sedate little procession of a sow and three piglets tripping out of the flames. Sacha eyed them pleurably. Why harm except for food?

When *Caytetú* was strapped to the haunches of Bernado's mule, the hunters rode off. The dogs were ashamed of their conduct and not a little sore; and jumped guiltily at George's voice. Therefore they were easily persuaded to abandon a fresh tiger trail which George found at the sandy margin of a pool. As the sun went down and the immense bulk of forest heaved out of the ground they pitched camp and roasted the pig.

It was not until after the cheerful, pungent odor had vanished that fear came. The dogs were uneasy, lying in a group by the fire and facing into the breeze. Their heads were between their paws, their hackles rising as they peered into the shadows. Now and again they whimpered, drew closer together, wrinkled their lips in a contempt they did not feel. Bernado began to snivel.

"I must get inside my mosquito-net," he said at last. "It is safe there."

Sacha and George sat back to back beside a tree, following the swoop of the fireflies. They had rifles within reach, but they were not going to show their concern by handling them. They spoke of the morrow's hunt.

"Please cover yourselves quickly," cried Bernado in muffled distress. "You'll be eaten . . . I know you will."

"You're juicier than we are," said his brother. "Why should you be left?"

"The tiger cannot see my head. No tiger ever kills if he is unable to see the head. He is scared."

And the child proceeded to launch into a tale, which Sacha heard confirmed later, of a tragedy in the forests of the North.

"Far away from here," said the boy, "a Brazilian went hunting with three natives. They camped for the night (just like us) and the Indians slept without nets. In the early morning, when it was black, one of them heard a scuffle. He leaned out of his hammock and a tiger clawed his face. He yelled and his mates ran up a tree; where they shouted to the beast to stop chewing their friend."

Bernado swayed till the ropes creaked, unaware that he was enjoying himself.

"The Brazilian awoke. Nobody else had a gun, but he wasn't a fool; he said to himself: 'Stay where you are, little one, and no harm will befall you.' So he listened to the tiger's jaws and the grunts and the bones cracking and the cries of the men in the tree. By and by the tiger got weary

of the noise. He dropped his dinner and ran to fetch another. When he was quiet he returned for the last, who was weeping all by himself. It is a true story, amigos. My father told me."

He sighed, exhausted by his powers of narrative. Then, after an interval, came a whisper like the wind in grass.

"If the same thing happened to-night," it said, "I should, of course, protect you."

"Naturally," Sacha said gravely. "Are you not *cabalheiro*?"

Nevertheless, in spite of Bernado's advice, Sacha and George were still on guard, cramped and wide-eyed, when the cold mists of dawn soaked their clothing. And it was with profound relief that they saddled their animals with the light. As a penance for his slumbers Bernado was impressed as camera-bearer.

With the brilliant morning sun the dogs recovered. They cocked their heads and maneuvered into attitudes which said: "Please forget the darkness and the fear. We will bite the tiger's tail all right."

At nine o'clock they kept their word. The same old bitch that had bayed to *Caytetú* howled at a tiger's footprints. In a moment the pack had joined her, noses down, sterns quivering as they ran into a thick belt of forest. Riding was impossible from the outset, and so was vision. The three dismounted, advancing at a trot, tearing their shirts in the thorn-bushes and bleeding from a score of little cuts. Presently they halted, listened to the far-off tale of woe. To the left the contralto battle-hymn of the leader trembled

in the leaves; to the right a more conglomerate baying marked the presence of the younger dogs.

"Come with me," George told Sacha. "Bernado, catch the others and bring them back . . . if you are not afraid."

The child, stung to the heart, burst out crying and ran as fast as he could. Sacha, wildly exultant, forgot his camera and abandoned himself to pursuit. In one hand was his rifle, in the other his Stetson hat; and he raced with all the power of his well-trained legs. George was outdistanced from the start.

Of a sudden a dog screamed. It was not a pleasant sound, for it represented a moment of such primeval horror that Sacha himself was momentarily frightened. He pressed forward, ripped aside the last veil of clinging tracery, and ran into a glade. There, dying, with a fearful gash over its breast, was a white hound which wagged its tail at the sight of him. He shot it at once, before wheeling to two others which were throwing themselves against the trunk of a medium-sized tree.

He looked up and beheld the self-anointed Lord of the South American jungle, very much at his ease on a wide bough thirty feet up.

It was a moment which he remembered.

At first his sensation was of beauty—awful, perhaps, but too majestic for fear. The great beast sat so quietly in his mottled coat of black and gold; his head was wide and intelligent, his eyes round. Against the back-cloth of blue sky and sun-spots and deep eternal green he looked as if he had sprung, full-grown, from the playground of the

gods. The hounds were puny, their bark irritating; and Sacha caught himself wondering how he had fancied he was strong. Then, without any move on the tiger's part, he began to tremble. Fear was upon him; not panic, but the natural humility that any man must feel at his first audience with unguessed power. His knees shook, and he sat down near the dead dog. In a minute or two George appeared.

"Don't shoot," Sacha said quietly. "I want a picture. Go and find Bernado."

Alone with the tiger, his fear went by. He leaned his rifle across his feet and began the foundation of a knowledge unequaled among the white men of South America. He observed that His Lordship was not at all distressed; that he lay along the branch in a mood that could only be termed polite; just such a mood as a hostess might reveal when her guests had overstayed their welcome.

Now, seven tigers out of every ten will do this; and the reason is as simple as everything in nature . . . once it is understood. In the forests of Brazil roam great herds of wild pig, peccary, larger than *Caytetiú* and much fiercer. They will destroy anything on four legs or two which presumes to stand in their path. Consequently, when a tiger has cut off stragglers, all he has to do is to jump into a tree and exhaust their patience. But his reasoning does not go far enough. He cannot perceive the difference between a pig, a man, and a gun. Sacha had heard the explanation from Cajango; and the performance thrilled him.

After a while the tiger raised his head and stared into

the trees behind Sacha. Minutes passed and then a truant dog slunk into the clearing. At once the head was lowered. This happened six times during the re-formation of the pack; and Sacha wondered at the miraculous sensitiveness of the ear which makes it impossible for any one to hunt a jaguar without dogs.

Half an hour later George and Bernado arrived. They were palpably out of temper and he forbore to ask questions. He unshipped his camera; cut down two small trees and a number of bushes that obscured his view, sighted, and snapped the flex. But a picture at twenty feet did not satisfy him. Calling to George to help him, he climbed into the lower rungs of a tree that grew behind his quarry. He took the camera and moved higher. The tiger was indifferent.

"Turn your face, animal," he shouted.

Still it lay calm, remembering the peccary made rude noises, too. Sacha plucked a stick, prodding the beast in the ribs. This was too much. The peccary must not be allowed liberties. The mottled body swung and a clawed pad flew. A shutter clicked, and the royal image was transferred to glass. Sacha clambered down, to be met by the astounded brothers.

"Such a thing is impossible," they stammered. "Let us fire together before he charges."

"Nonsense," said Sacha. "Look at his paws."

They were couched on the branch like those of a sphinx, and their owner was once more regal, aloof.

"Shoot!" urged Bernado.

Sacha lifted his rifle unwillingly. His hour in the noble company had taught him to respect the easy condescension; and he felt he was destroying a life for the sake of a fur coat. He aimed between the eyes; and the beast became clay. After all, Sacha reflected, he had his duty to Cajango, of whose cattle the tiger stole seventy or more in the year.

The dogs tore at the carcass, but no creature can mangle a tiger-hide; the rancher was grateful for the trophy. As a mark of his appreciation and, influenced by the boys' exaggerated heroics, he asked Sacha to call him White Beard.

It was an accolade.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

DOM JOÃO CAJANGO was usually impressive, but when he assumed for his own ends the vacuity of a half-wit he was unique.

It was high noon. The vertical sun flowed down the tree trunks, casting no shade. In the corral, near by, the cattle heaved like bellows; yet the cheese-paring old ruffian stood blandly without a hat while his knuckles bulged through his trousers pockets.

"We shall be sorry to lose you, Red Beard," he said for the twentieth time.

Sacha, weary from a three-hour haggle, marveled at the innocence of the face. Though Cajango had scarcely moved since nine o'clock, the hooped legs still upheld the rigidity of the grenadier's back. His guest turned and stared at the place in the woods where he had last heard the jangle of the lead-bell. The hint was too obvious to be missed.

"Let me see," said the rancher. "I owe you three hundred and twenty milreis."

"Four hundred," Sacha replied patiently. "Now, White Beard, I must be going."

From the gray-cotton tomb of his pocket Cajango drew a wildcat-skin purse. Nestling at the bottom were a number of bank-notes so filthy that Sacha jeered:

"Did you find them in the creature's belly? They look well digested."

"You will ruin me," sighed Cajango; "but, at any rate, I beat you down."

"That is just where you are wrong, old man. You reduced me to my proper wage."

Cajango laughed, a great bull's roar of approval.

"Red Beard, you cheat! Be off, bandit . . . and come again."

He rushed into the house, emerging with a cup of coffee.

"Drink this," he bellowed. "And you can tell Apparicio you are the first man to rob me these ten years."

Sacha had to dismount so that they might pat each other good-by. The thunder of the farmer's merriment followed him past the huts of the Gauchos. At the bottom of the hill he rode northwestward to Ueré, a ranch to which he had introduction. It was famous tiger country . . . alternate cattle-plain and deep forest . . . and, as he jogged along, his brain grew big with pleasure. The memory of the hunt rose charmingly, and he peered into a future that promised as much contact with wild nature as his body would be able to withstand. In the excitement of his dreams the afternoon flame was quenched unnoticed. The evening cool arrived. It was brilliant starlight, with the Milky Way a soft gauze veil, before he checked at Apparicio's fire beside a stream. There, stretched across palm fronds laid flush with the embers, were tender deer-steaks, grilling perfectly.

"Did you lose by Cajango's arguments?" asked his helper.

"Not a ye. He is reasonable if you give him time."

Apparicio spat into the fire.

"He's a devil . . . by Rio Grande morals. I was talking to his cowboys. He had an older son, José, a consumptive; and what must he do but marry him to a leprous Garcia. Poor Anita Garcia! She has no brothers, she will inherit Abobral."

"They have children?"

"Eight. You can spur a leper till the blood runs and he won't so much as buck, but they're good breeders."

Sacha had seen a leper; he felt suddenly unwell.

Three days later they arrived at Ueré in the glare of the midday sun. As they swept out of the forest across the sandy clearing past a banana grove, Dom Feliciano Alvarez, the owner, came to greet them. After a grave salute he ran a cattleman's eye over the mule-trunks.

"Any friend of Cajango's is welcome in my house," he said, with a lordly motion toward a group of palm huts. "But he will be doubly so should he possess medicine."

He led the way to a rude ox-cart whose eight-foot wheels towered out of the earth. It stood firmly upright, leaning on its pole, beneath a single monstrous tree. On its boards was a man, wrapped in a cloak, his face covered with a straw hat. He was shivering like one who has bathed in a winter sea.

"Ah! the cold!" he cried. "Another coat, Feliciano amigo. For the love of the Virgin, another coat."

Sacha opened a trunk.

"Do you keep no quinine?" he asked Alvarez.

"What is the use?" said the thin rancher. "It is the will of God."

Sacha pulled away the hat. The sun fell into the sick man's eyes; but though he blinked furiously, he continued to babble for warmth. Sacha gave him a full gram. Then laid his cape across the yellow throat.

"In a few hours you will burn," he said. "Until then and afterward, courage."

The dry lips writhed.

"Manoel Ribeiro, at your service." The words were just audible. "I will repay you."

For the next ten days, till Ribeiro had recovered, Sacha went hunting. It was disappointing because Alvarez's master-dog chased everything from wildcat to armadillo. Still, Sacha exercised himself and saw a number of odd animals. A coati, a long-tailed, sharp-nosed independent soul, with a striped back and flame-colored belly, trotted on its hind legs out of the grass and slashed any hound that became familiar. *Armadillo laranja*, the orange armadillo, so called from its resemblance to that fruit when curled, ran stiffly like a mechanical toy between thickets. Sacha picked one up and was amazed at its construction. It had the face of a pig, the tail of a rattlesnake, the claws of a griffin, and the walk of a wood-louse. He set it down gently and it made off, knocking its armored head against the trees, for its eyes are placed like a hare's; it can see anywhere but straight in front.

One evening, while Sacha was soaping himself in the green tranquillity of a forest pool, Ribeiro came wearily to the brink. He was lean and ravaged, and his body trembled as he lowered it to a stump. He lit a cigarette.

"Tell me how to repay you," he said quietly.

Sacha was just about to answer that he required no payment when something nuzzled at his legs. He looked down through four feet of amber water and discovered a shoal of tiny fishes, rising at the suds, swishing their tails in a pandemonium of silent curiosity. Then, having poked him, they vanished like a cloud of arrow-points. For some reason this rounding off of detail and ordered proof of artistry in nature impressed him more than any cataract.

"I beg your pardon," he said, tossing the raw fat soap on to the bank. "I was interrupted."

Ribeiro blew through his nostrils a jet of smoke so foul that even the mosquitoes retired.

"If you would care for hunting," the veined hands spread, "my friend Zorico has the finest tiger-dog from here to Cuyabá. Let me ride ahead and prepare my house for you."

Sacha would cheerfully have forgone the ceremony . . . Ribeiro was not fit to ride alone . . . but the little man was proud.

"In two days," he said, "my servant, Antonio Paulista, comes for my ox-cart. He will guide you. Besides, I am Rio-grandense, like Apparicio, and we of the South can sit our horses when our very bones are smashed."

Thus spoke Manoel Ribeiro, descendant of negroes, Indians . . . and Conquistadores. Courteous and indomitable, he left next morning, lurching a little in the saddle. Apparicio watched him go.

"Excellent fellow," he said. "I hope his servant is as good, but—

“Paulista; nem fiado, ni avista”—

(Men from São Paulo are too cunning
to be dealt with in credit or cash).”

“So Rio Grande do Sul is packed with gentlemen and the other provinces with mud,” Sacha chaffed him.

Apparicio did not move. His long horseman’s body was rigid with loyalty and he spoke without humor:

“Of course. I thought you knew.”

A few days afterward the matter came up again. Apparicio entered their hut, drove off a hen that was sitting in the tool-chest, and announced:

“The servant comes, amigo. Riding on a bullock. Now we shall see if I am right.”

Sacha went outside, blinked a moment in the brilliance, and heard the call of “*Ob de casa*” echo from the corral. He followed the sound and saw a youngish, square-cut man of negro ancestry, slide from a minute saddle on the back of a large ox. His blue trousers were crumpled with long riding.

“A monkey that jumps too much wants lead,” muttered Apparicio, whose eyesight was exceptional.

Sacha turned on him.

“You have no right to sneer when you know nothing.”

Apparicio jingled his spurs.

“How do you know I know nothing? I know all that is necessary. He is as hairy as a male howler. Look at his pelt, blowing through his shirt, and the black carpet of his arms. His eyebrows meet across his nose. No, senhor, I have good negro friends and good Italian friends; but the combination is always devilish.”

Sacha walked away impatiently. He was fond of Apparicio, respected the quality of his courage and the honesty whereby a purse was invulnerably safe with him. But in the Gaucho's outlook there was a cynicism that often jarred him.

He himself was independent of all men, even of Ernst. If the whole population of Brazil were suddenly to die off, leaving him alone in the jungle, he would still be happy. For his mind drew its strength from the reserves of silence in the wilderness. Yet he was more sympathetic to his fellows than Apparicio, who knew none of these depths. Neither human nor animal ever called on Sacha in vain. His medicines and mechanical abilities were open to the poor. He always preferred to run the risk of deceit than to go his way without listening to distress. So, on this occasion, he went up to Paulista and introduced himself. He considered the man to have been slandered in his absence.

"Your master wished you to guide us to his ranch," he said. "My name is Siemel."

Paulista . . . the hair bar above his nose looked formidable at close quarters . . . broke into a grin that was half negro and half Naples.

"Siemel? The mechanic and photographer? Now indeed I am in luck."

He unbuckled the girth, smacked the bullock on the rump, and fell into step. His right arm gestured with the saddle, which he waved in a triumphant curve.

"I promised my wife a pleasure, senhor," he chattered. "When I left home I said to her: 'Marietta, I will ask the

gentleman, should we meet, to take a picture of you and the little ones.' We have seven, and all healthy. Can you crowd so many into one view?"

His round face was awash with perspiration and anxiety. Sacha promised, and suggested that they leave on the morrow. The man became immediately professional:

"Certainly. The moon will be full at eleven o'clock tonight; oxen should not travel by day; you can follow my wheel-tracks in the morning."

Punctually at eleven Sacha was awakened by the creak of the ox-cart as the beasts took the strain. Paulista's whip sang a song of its own that ended in a blunt cough like a bullet entering a tree. Sacha put on his boots to avoid *Carrapato do chão* and stood in the doorway, with the shadows black behind him and the ghastly metal radiance of the moon pouring on the departure. The cart lurched and bumped, heeling its wheels alternately like the paddles of an ancient steamboat in a swell.

"There goes your villain, Apparicio," he said. "A punctual servant, a kind husband and father. Why are you so acid?"

"We Brazilians have a proverb: 'The man who was careful of his company died of old age, the cynic is still alive.' For me, I would not sleep alone in a wood with that monkey."

They slept into the dawn, but when the horses came to be saddled one had strained a leg so badly that it had to be left at Ueré. Sacha and Apparicio took turns to walk, which soured the Rio-grandense for the whole day. A true Gaucho, he was suspicious of his feet, though he did not

dispute the matter. Instead he revenged himself on Paulista, when they passed at midday, by seeming not to notice him.

"The way to Dom Manoel's ranch?" said Paulista cheerfully to Sacha. "Certainly, senhor (you are fortunate in knowing my master, who is *cabalheiro*). Follow this valley for three hours, cut across the hill, and you will see it like a vulture from a height. Please tell Dom Manoel I shall arrive during the night."

All through the afternoon they toiled up the valley, driving the animals before them. A golden mist of sand hung about them in wreaths until they choked. Their eyes burned, their mouths thirsted, the water in their bottles, new-changed at the halt, was brackish. Grimly and in utter silence they clambered over the last ridge and gazed down upon Ribeiro's home.

It lay, some four hundred feet below them, in a gash among trees. A great horn had been cut from the forest, and patches of bananas and growing corn shone out in pale contrast to the scenery. Behind, stretching away for many leagues to the horizon, was land that had not been touched since the Conquest. A crooked stream meandered across the clearing and lost itself in the unclaimed immensity of green. Then the sun fell to the level of the sky-line and the green became purple. Apparicio coughed.

"I have been angry," he said. "It is a fault. Be so good as to excuse."

Sacha forgave him, but was far too drunk on beauty and sheer nakedness to appreciate the full abasement of the Gaucho's pride.

They dropped over the hill and in a little while Dom Manoel came to meet them. He had recognized the bell and had brought a torch to guide them. In the harsh and jumping light the creases in his face resembled ditches. His skin was of the color where an artist, having decided to paint a Chinaman, has mixed a shade too much green into the yellow. Yet his eyes seemed more at peace.

After dinner he took chairs into the open and talked till the moon got up. It was a queer story that he told, an epic of frontier courage, with values that changed before the end. His voice was expressionless and it challenged the croaking of the bullfrogs.

Fifteen years ago Manoel Ribeiro was a poor cowboy in Rio Grande do Sul. He grew tired of his lot, of the beans and rice and mandioca flour, and he longed for an orange orchard of his own. That was the ambition of his life. So he rode his horse into Matto Grosso, where they know less about such things, selling it at a profit. He bought more horses and presently added mules. When he had saved ten pounds, he cleared a piece of forest with a new axe. A mortgage followed, and yet another, until he owned a fair-sized county. He turned cattle loose, leaving them to breed undisturbed. His herds increased; so did his orange grove; so did his horse-coping business. Then the Chavantes, wild Indians of Paraguay, burnt his house and lopped his trees and massacred his cattle; and he began again from the beginning. Now he was worn out but rich; and his thoughts went back to Rio Grande.

"Think for yourselves," he said sadly. "My health is not

what it was. I shall not long be able to enjoy the wife whom I propose to marry in the South. It is an ill thing, amigos, to plot and save and cheat these Matto Grosso fools for fifteen years . . . and to gain one's ambition. Even an orange tree can pall."

He stooped, picking an orange from the sand. His arm swung back, and the fruit described an arc in the moonlight, falling at last among the roosting fowls on the bars of the corral.

"So much for ambition," he said dryly. "Good night, my friends."

When he had gone Sacha strode out into the open, his being lit with the words that had just passed. Here was a man, poor and ill-educated, probably unable to write his name, who had made a fortune. Sacha looked back along the avenue of his life, and was profoundly restless. It was thirteen years since he had left home. He was a skilled mechanic, a noted athlete, and more versed in the great literature of the ages than many a university-bred man. What good had it done him? What did he possess? Some tools and cameras and books and a half-share in seven flea-bitten animals. He was a ne'er-do-weel, a loafer (no, not that, he amended swiftly), a bum. In the agony of his hour he decided to accumulate, to sweep away the trees from the bright path of his axe, to settle into a farm and have children. The vision glowed. And then he began to laugh, quietly, as at a joke between himself and the primeval woods. For he had suddenly remembered a Russian folk-tale of his youth:

A crow sat on the decayed body of a cow. To him, swooping from a mountaintop, came an eagle.

"Rascal!" said the King of Birds. "Why do you live three hundred years while I live thirty-three?"

"My diet is more suited to longevity," pompously replied the crow.

So the eagle dipped his beak, savoring the rankness of the putrid flesh. After a peck or two he spread his wings and spoke to his tempter from on high.

"Give me," he said, as the breeze ruffled his pinions, "thirty-three years of sweet new blood and you can keep your centuries!"

And never again did he sigh after the carrion of other men.

At the end of three days Apparicio returned to Ueré for the injured horse. Sacha, having photographed the ranch and its master from every angle, including a tree, steered eastward with Ribeiro's friend Zorico. Dom Manoel, whose spirit was light at the prospect of Rio Grande, insisted that they take a green watermelon, signed at an early age with his initials, and now indelibly impressed. He and Paulista stood side by side, waving their hands and shouting the traditional "Good voyage, senhores," a phrase still meaningful in this country of sudden death.

Now, Zorico was different from any Brazilian whom Sacha had ever met. He was a lithe, long fellow, rather like Apparicio in build, though much gayer. His reins lay on his horse's neck, for he wanted his hands for speech.

He was something of a genius. Alone among Brazilians, he had recognized the possibilities of Abraham's mode of life. The beginning of the tribes seemed to him a good era; the handmaidens of Sarah a pleasant addition to that state. So, where his countrymen were content to take one wife and people the land with her increase, he took three sisters at a time.

"For why should one wait to populate a district when there is so much fine ground?" he asked genially.

Sacha, rover of strict principles, could see many reasons, but Zorico went on:

"The families live comfortably together, yet (would you believe it, senhor?) my eldest child, a boy of five, addresses his stepbrothers as bastards."

Late next night, when they sat talking in the moonshine, Sacha looked up.

"A horse," he said, "moving fast."

Zorico listened.

"You have been hearing, senhor. Maybe the dogs are scratching ticks."

The noise grew until even Zorico was convinced. His brows pulled together.

"Galloping . . . at this hour . . . men don't gallop at night unless. . . ." He jumped up. "Here is bad news."

They gazed down the white slash of path. Presently a dot appeared, to become with surprising rapidity a blur, then a smudge, and then a rider flung into the clearing. The steam from his beast's flanks almost obscured him.

"Dom Manoel Ribeiro . . ." he called. I fear he has been murdered."

He dropped from the saddle. His horse stood, knees bent, gasping. Zorico shouted for his second wife, who hurried with some brandy. The stranger's head went back three times and he shivered.

"He disappeared yesterday, just after you left. I came upon his hat by the side of the forest trail; and I saw the marks where his horse spun round. That was before I reached his ranch. When I got there, Paulista was busy with an ox-cart. His wife and children were in it. He himself had a saddled mule tied to the corral. I asked him about Ribeiro and he did not deny the case. He said he had seduced his wife and vengeance had fallen. I had no evidence, so I galloped here."

Zorico, who had not taken his eyes from the man's face, interrupted:

"You do not believe this tale of seduction?"

"Ribeiro had a mistress of his own, and Senhora Paulista is ill-favored. But the surest disproof is the behavior of the horse. I am certain he was ambushed."

Sacha had heard of *tocaya*, the terrible ambush of Matto Grosso, a form of death unknown in the braver Rio Grande do Sul. He asked a question:

"Why did you not look for signs of a marksman?"

The stranger turned:

"Darkness was near. I had no time. I was afraid Paulista would kill me."

Zorico raised his voice.

“João! José!”

Two cowboys in leather aprons, with iron spurs on their bare feet, waddled across the sand. They nodded when Zorico told them to return with Gutierrez, the police officer, before three o'clock in the morning. It was then eleven.

“Now,” said the host, when the dust had settled. “Let us rest ourselves; we shall need our strength.”

Sacha went to his hammock, but could not sleep. He lay with his hands behind his head, while his imagination ranged the shadows that cloaked Ribeiro's fate. Presently the sound of music sounded from Zorico's hut. It was a single phrase played on six notes of a guitar, endlessly repetitive and very sad; so melancholy that the farm dogs sat in a row and howled. Sacha got up and, at the same moment, Zorico came out.

“I was wrong about sleep,” he said. “We must think.”

He spoke in a weary singsong that blended with the twanged gut. He traced Paulista's journey; how he would take his wife and children to her father's ranch. This Barbosa was the most dangerous man in Matto Grosso. He boasted of having killed twelve men. For years he had practised rifle-shooting and had spent the price of a farm on bullets. Zorico testified to a bet in which Barbosa pierced five consecutive oranges thrown into the air.

While they were talking a cloud pushed over the moon and they knew that the night was cold. Zorico shooed the women out of his bedroom, inviting Sacha to enter. They stayed together until the noise of a shaken bridle sent them running to the corral.

"Is that you, Gutierrez?" Zorico's voice resounded in the blackness.

"Yes! I hear Ribeiro is dead."

They blundered into each other and shook hands. One of Zorico's wives brought coffee, which they drank in haste, warming their fingers on the tin. They mounted quickly and trotted off, the stranger alongside. Nobody said a word. From time to time the dark wall of trees threw out feelers that touched their faces as they passed. Leather trappings creaked; a stirrup-iron rang; an animal whickered or a man sighed; nothing more. The rest was utter stillness and the heavy, animal scent of a forest.

Dawn lifted like a shutter. Gutierrez, who appeared for the first time, was a small, resolute man with quick movements, commanded the stranger to lead them to the place. Toward eight o'clock they rode through Ribeiro's farm. A dog barked, some pigeons flapped out of the maize; and the atmosphere of desolation impressed them so much that they cantered for an hour. Then:

"Here are the marks," said the stranger, pulling his beast into the undergrowth. The party dismounted, Gutierrez waved them back and spent a long five minutes stooping over the trail.

"Here is the story," he said, rising. "Ribeiro's horse was following this path. It saw or heard something and reared. See how the hind feet have sunk. It swung clean round and bolted through the trees . . . there, where they are thinnest. Now we must find the ambush."

They separated and methodically beat over the ground.

Soon Zorico called them and they poked into a nest behind a fallen tree. The earth was beaten flat; five or six butts of maize-leaf cigarettes were visible among the leaves. Gutierrez dropped with a cry and picked two spent cartridges from under the edge of a bush.

"Mount," he said sharply.

They rode in absolute silence along the horse's spoor. A broken twig, the faint outline of a hoof (no animal is shod in Matto Grosso) carried them through the belt of forest until they emerged into a wide stretch of *campo cerrado*.

"The trail is hard to observe," snapped Gutierrez. "Get a hundred meters apart and keep your eyes open."

They pursued this order until the sun was directly overhead. It was pure guesswork with never a sign to help; the coarse, tussocky grass maintained its secrets. Nor did hoof-prints in the sand help them, for it is impossible to tell the age of a mark unless the ground be wet.

Toward half-past two the police officer raised an arm and his companions closed in. Then it was that a thrill entered into their hearts, striking them cold and sore. For, even as they gazed, a vulture lumbered heavily from the underbush, joining another vulture on a bough. The light glinted on their feathers. Gutierrez drove in his spurs.

They found what was left of Ribeiro, in the shade of a big tree. There was just enough to make it certain that two bullets had struck him, one in the thigh, the other in the chest.

A flock of vultures attended the burial, hissing loudly with

the liquid sound of their kind. When it was over, all four men were pale. Zorico spoke:

"We must cut them off before they reach the border. Your jurisdiction ends there, Gutierrez."

They cantered for two hours at Zorico's heels, dodging the branches automatically. At the end they halted and crouched into a thicket, hiding their animals in the rear.

"Now," said Gutierrez, "we must all shoot at Barbosa. Then Paulista will be easy."

"Paulista is the murderer," said Sacha. "I shall kill him first. It is not sporting to take revenge on the wrong man."

Gutierrez asserted his authority with a quiet force.

"Young man," he remarked, "we are not here for sport. As an officer of the law you are under my command. I order you to shoot Barbosa."

Sacha was silent, recognizing the principle, but his anger was so bitter that he reserved for himself the right to kill Paulista.

The day wore on. Although the country-side was vast and surprise impossible, they talked in whispers. They discussed the matter vengefully from all angles and decided that Paulista's story would have been unbreakable if his aim had been sure . . . or if he had been courageous enough to follow the wounded man. The motive was clear. He wanted possession of the farm.

At five o'clock Gutierrez yawned; at half-past he looked doubtfully at the sun and thought of his food; but at a quarter to six two shots rang out three hundred yards away.

In a moment revolvers were drawn and cocked, and a cruel, satisfied expression touched the corners of Gutierrez's mouth. It was a long time since he had taken a criminal. Then, from quite near, a man began to sing, and Sacha listened. He had heard that voice before . . . and it was not Paulista's. Of a sudden he laughed. Gutierrez, thinking the strain had warped him, jerked his arm; and a bullet flew humming through the leaves.

"Ohé!" cried the voice. "Be a little careful with your weapon."

Apparicio, driving the once injured horse, trotted into view. His long face opened as he saw the ambush.

"Are you mad?" he called.

"No," said Gutierrez, lowering his gun. "Was it you who shot?"

"Of course. I saw a rattlesnake. Here is the skin."

He lifted a wet mottled thing from the croup.

"Paulista?" he asked in response to a question. "Yes, he passed me early this morning. He was with an elderly, bad-looking man. They were in a hurry."

It is to his credit that on hearing the news he forbore to rally Sacha on his judgment of character—when they were alone he was careful to explain that the inhabitants of Rio Grande do Sul were loyal to their friends.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WHEN Paulista's escape was no longer doubtful a strange revulsion swept over the men. There was an instant of blind anger, half thwarted blood-lust, half knowledge of the futility of revenge; and then they awoke. They heard, as for the first time, the evening whistle of the crickets; saw with dismay the rushing downward path of the sun; remembered they were foodless and eight leagues from Zorico's ranch. Gutierrez broke the tension.

"Ribeiro was a good friend in life," he said soberly. "He would not grudge us shelter, nor a haunch of meat."

He pointed to a herd of semi-wild cattle, which had bolted at Apparicio's shots and were now gazing suspiciously from a distance of a quarter of a mile. He pointed also to a bar of purple cloud that climbed steadily to meet the sun. Soon they would be joined.

"Rain!" he added grimly.

At the mention of cattle Apparicio took command. He knew that both Zorico and the stranger were cowboys . . . the plaited rawhide lassos on their saddles told him that . . . but in his religion people from Matto Grosso were not fit to be trusted even with a calf. He wheeled his horse and loped toward the herd.

The animals stood within a hundred and fifty paces of

the forest. Already the old red bull was pawing the ground and considering his retreat. Apparicio uncoiled his rope, holding it low on the side farthest from his prey and setting his course so as to pass them by. With an expression of immaculate innocence on his sober face he looked earnestly at the grass, at the spaced fingers of the *carandá* palm leaves, at anything and everything except the fat yearling he had marked for his dinner.

He was still fifty yards away when the bull threw up his heels. Simultaneously Apparicio's spurs bit deep and the horse leaped at right angles. In some extraordinary manner his lasso became alive, spinning round his head in a blurred halo, humming a gentle tune and then plunging straight as a hungry anaconda for the calf's neck. A flurry of dust from the checked hoofs and it was over, a beautiful piece of work.

"Let us hurry to avoid the storm," he said, returning.

And now all nature seemed to be perturbed. The insects quickened their note; birds flew hastily to the denser sections of trees; an occasional snake flicked past with never a look at the riders; and a number of blue butterflies went jerkily to and fro, like flustered women knowing a catastrophe at hand. The party galloped without shame.

Soon a puff of wind blew against their backs as if the wilderness had sighed. There came a short holding of breath, a partial vacuum that was quickly filled when the air brushed by. The sound deepened. A locomotive appeared to be doing something clumsy with its wheels; and brittle fallen leaves

ran races in the sand. The cloud blocked out the sky, grew plum-colored. The sun died.

For an appreciable space of time the elements pondered, and the unshod hoofs drummed through a silence that was tangible. Into this caldron of suspended activity the lightning dived, cutting an edge across the cloud, and illuminated the speed of the men. Twenty seconds later a loose rumble of thunder girdled the heavens.

The storm was now in being. The pauses between flash and rumble diminished, merged, and the radiance shone green. When they met overhead in an orgy of wild flame and din the rain began. Such rain! It was eager, impetuous, excitable. Each drop wished to be the first bearer of refreshing news to a parched land. An endless column of sweet water shut out the rest of the world. Within a minute big gouts of mud were splattering the horses' bellies. The thunder moved away to the horizon.

An hour afterward the party drew into Ribeiro's farm. It was still raining, but an overpowering freshness made Sacha's nostrils tingle. The men assembled, wet, hungry, and tired, in the guest-chamber among the fowls. Since Paulista fled a dozen eggs had been laid and these were impounded for the common weal. Sacha, ravenous for his supper, found the fire a morass of dead ashes. His matches were sodden, and his efforts useless till Apparicio lent a hand. Taking a machete and a near-by branch, the Rio-grandense sliced off the outer wood, reaching the dry heart which he flaked into chips. Then he extracted a cartridge from his revolver,

pulled out the bullet, and sprinkled half the powder on the chips. He reloaded and fired; flames devoured the splinters and the blaze grew. The calf tasted magnificent.

It was not until the stranger thought of it that the company remembered that no one had slept at the ranch since Ribeiro's murder. Instantly the atmosphere changed. Instead of the rain being a kindly forerunner of crops it became an eerie thing that made small, unaccountable noises. It dripped and mourned and bubbled. The wind caught it and splashed it against trees. Voices, which may or may not have been those of bats, chattered in the darkness when the moon obscured herself behind the flying wrack of clouds. The conversations faltered, ceased. The men lay in their wet hammocks and pretended to doze.

Ever since the coming of the rain Sacha had been thinking. He had been as angry as his comrades at Paulista's escape, but now he realized suddenly the essential impertinence of justice . . . that is, the word "justice," the setting up of one sinner in judgment above another. He understood organized revenge, knew that a killer or a thief must be put away for the good of the herd. Yet it was only in the damp folds of this particular hammock in this particular camp that his principles hardened. Strangely enough, it was the memory of Apparicio's remark at Ueré that decided him: "An Italian negro is always devilish." Well, argued Sacha, if this be so, what chance has the poor man to become less devilish, let alone sprout wings? As his custom was, he turned his mind to the beasts, his touchstone. They represented the basis of elementary behavior, shorn of frippery . . . the tiger, hungry,

strong, flesh-eating . . . the deer with its herb-destroying teeth.

"One does not blame a tiger for eating meat," he said to himself. "Why should one praise the sheep for cropping grass?"

From that moment, although he took care that no criminal should hurt him, he spat at no man's character. It simplified his outlook.

Presently the rain stopped, and the moon smiled through a watery ruff. The silent men within rose and went out, for some element in the dead rancher's belongings disturbed them. They wandered restlessly about the clearing, and once again the stranger made a discovery. His fretful eye caught a movement among the woods and his shaky forefinger pointed.

"Ribeiro has returned," he stammered.

Sacha looked closer. The fellow was right. There was a displacement of branches, a cracking of sticks in the undergrowth; even a sound of whimpering. The note stiffened to a cry, and the stranger fled. Sacha and Apparicio (ghosts do not whine in Rio Grande) strode forward, revolvers cocked and at the hip.

"Come out!" they called urgently. "Come out!"

The bushes parted. A sad dark face, framed in coarse hair, grinned nervously, and a woman stepped into the moonlight. She was fat and middle-aged, and the rain had impressed her cotton frock against the oval lines of her form. The high cheek-bones glistened.

"Ribeiro is dead?" she asked. "*Ay de mim*, it was my

fear. I never trusted Paulista . . . may his daughters become harlots! But oh, senhores, I am weary. Three days I have fasted. I was frightened to return."

She was fed, and later Zorico employed her to grind maize. Her relief was pitiable.

After a few days at Zorico's farm Sacha gathered his troop and journeyed northwestward to the Rio São Lourenço. He sent a message to Ernst in Coxim, asking him to head for the diamond-fields, and left the rest to fate. The shining quality of the Brazilian air ran through his veins, telling him that punctuality was of no account. What did it matter when he reached the fields? He had his living and a perpetual lease of the greatest untamed playground in the world. He sought adventure.

He found it with an Indian . . . a smooth-skinned, impassive man whose shoulders, in the manner of his tribe, bent forward until his torso had the appearance of unformed woman's breasts. His face was bare except for a dozen cat's whiskers that stuck out at odd angles. He was lazy, this Joaquim Guató, and very drunk, a nuisance to the sugarcane farmer, his master. But he possessed the priceless knowledge of his Guató ancestors, the use of the spear. With it he killed tigers hand to hand, alone but for his dogs, in the dim jungle glades.

Sacha met him in his hut, an erection beside which all others appeared palaces. It was old and rotten. Termite ants built runways up the props; and the roof had not been rethatched for many years. Guató was lolling in an ancient

hammock when Sacha rode by, and a bottle of *canha* lay empty on the floor. His round eyes fell away at the corners and were wet with spent liquor. Sacha noticed his spear.

"Are you the famous hunter?" he asked tactfully. (Every one knows about his neighbors within a hundred-mile radius in Brazil.)

The man straightened. His pride had been tickled and, though his words were a little thick, he explained himself.

"Dom Alonso, my master, would long ago have dismissed me," he said, "if I was not the finest hunter in the world."

He hiccupped gravely, wiping his fingers on his nose.

"This," he continued as he waved the seven-foot massice spear, "has killed thirty-nine tigers in single fight. That is a great many cattle saved, *senhor*?"

Sacha considered the fellow, noted the feline power in the pale-brown limbs, the reverence with which he spoke of his profession. Instinctively he knew that he must not offer money.

"Joaquim," he said softly, "your fame is abroad in the land. Thousands of people have told me about you. I should like to see you at work."

The wet eyes shone.

"To-morrow, *senhor*, with pleasure. To-day I am tired."

He indicated the bottle; then bent to feel his legs.

"I have ants in my calves," he said. "I must go to the witch-doctor, who is a great man. He beats on a drum and dances round me, puts his lips to the place where it hurts, sucks a while, and behold! he spits out the ants."

It was Sacha's first encounter with this form of sugges-

tion. The insects, naturally, are transferred to the sorcerer's mouth before the ceremony begins. Joaquim raised his voice.

"Dragão!" he shouted. "Dragão!"

There was a scurry among the trees and a small red dog burst forth, jumping against his friend and slobbering.

"One day when Dom Alonso had guests," crooned the Indian, "they wanted a master-dog, *no?* But they could do without Joaquim; so they offered a hundred milreis. Blackguards! Two hundred. Fools! Four, five, seven, a whole *conto de reis*, more money than poor old Joaquim knew existed. Yet they did not ask politely and we refused, eh Dragão?"

He was rapidly becoming maudlin. Sacha left him and pushed on to Dom Alonso's ranch. Over dinner the farmer laughed.

"That old miscreant!" he said. "He is never sober between hunts; but he is the bravest spearman in the country."

At about four o'clock next morning Sacha heard a noise. It was no more than a light scuffle, such as a bare foot makes on earth, yet he awoke immediately. He whisked off his mosquito-net and flashed the electric torch that he always kept in his hammock.

"Good morning," said Joaquim.

There was an amazing change in the little man. He was calm, dry-eyed, almost stately in his savage purity of outline. The tip of his great spear towered above his head, winking.

"We will walk," he announced. "I have seen the track

of a puma. How can I see in the dark? Through the eyes of Dragão's nose. Hurry and bring your rifle."

Now, Sacha could cover five miles in a measured hour without trouble. Joaquim Guató, whose shoulders were not erect, who shambled like a bear and wore no boots, had continually to check his pace, although his pupil tried desperately to keep level. When the light came he found Dragão reproaching him. Why could not this sluggard move? The expression was plain as the breaking day. Sacha hitched his camera more adroitly and went on.

They fell across the trail at the corner of a palm wood near Joaquim's hut. It was only a single paw-mark in a mud-hole, but it was enough. The edges of the toes were firm and were not covered with dew. Therefore the beast had passed during the night. Dragão, gulping down a breast-high scent, did not linger. His patience snapped; his red form disappeared. With a "Pardon, senhor, I must aid my hound," Joaquim drifted through a fringe of leaves.

The next half-hour was lived at speed that caused Sacha's heart to thunder, but affected the spearman not at all. Sacha had a memory of a few square inches of naked back and then the forest was empty save for a swinging rope-weed and Dragão's clamor. It was a humiliating experience. All his life he had conquered physically, and now he was left like a child by a drink-swamped native with a lizard's movements. Yet, though his pride was sore, he was wise enough to profit by the lesson. As he rushed through the dimness he noted many things that were useful to him later. He

learned, by example, the first hard rule of the chase: a hunter must stand by his dog. For a murderer is a freshly washed saint beside the man who abandons a friend. He would have known this instinctively, but the proof of Joaquim's manhood pleased him.

Presently, as in most hunts, the barking became stationary. It was still a long way off, and the thorns grabbed Sacha. He was terrified lest the creature should charge without him. His breath was painful.

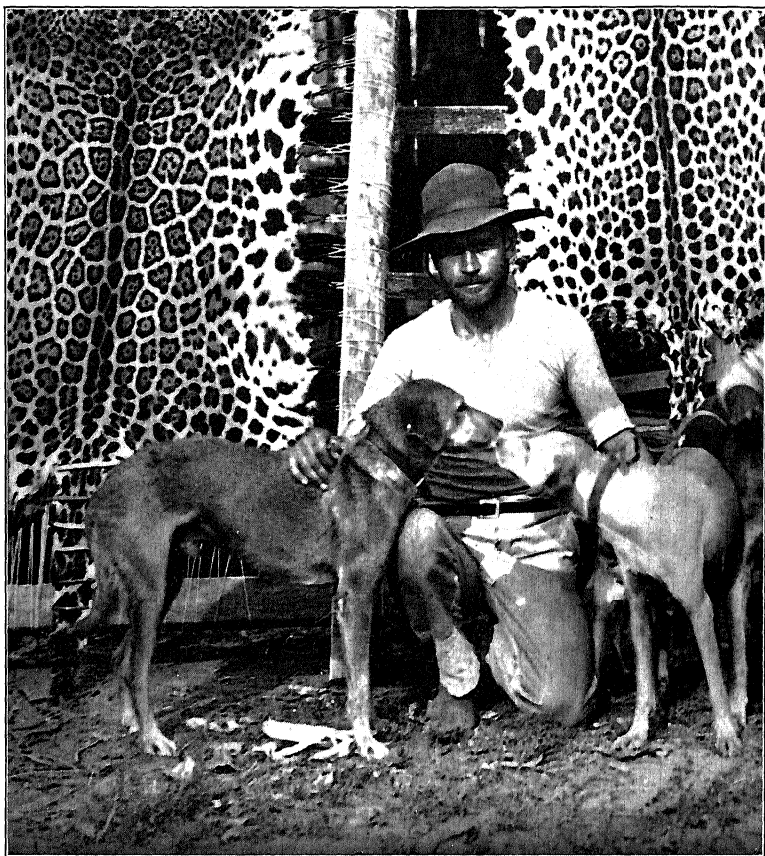
"There is no hurry," said a quiet voice beside him. "*Suçuarana* has climbed."

He looked round, surprised. Naught had moved; there had been no sound. . . . He separated Joaquim from a background of foliage and thanked God that the days of Indian warfare were over for Matto Grosso. They walked more slowly; no longer was there need to cut at the lianas.

They found Dragão, blown out with self-importance, at the foot of a tall *lapacho*. The leaves had fallen and the beautiful purple flowers were not yet come; so no greenery obscured Sacha's view of the queerest animal he had ever seen. It was a puma, spotted brown on fawn, with a long dark stripe along its spine; but it was built so heavily that it might have been a two-hundred-pound tiger. The head was thick.

"The lords of the jungle have mated," said Joaquim.

Sacha produced his camera and yelled. The beast was too high to photograph, and he hoped to maneuver it into position. The result was perfect. *Suçuarana* cocked a yellow eye and jumped in a splendid arc on to a tree that was both



"VALENTE," WHO GAVE ME SIXTY-FOUR TIGERS, AND "PARDO," HIS HELPER

lower and to one side. For sheer poetry of motion it was magical, more like a bird than a cat.

"Be careful," said Joaquim, following Dragão. "Shoot if he charges."

Sacha tucked his rifle under his arm. When he was near enough he made ready, but quickly altered his mind. *Suçuarana* had shifted his feet . . . into an easy angle for attack. His ears flattened, his gums were laid bare and, with a horrid growling snarl, he hurled himself toward Sacha.

A great deal happened in the next ten seconds . . . and the end was tragedy. While *Suçuarana* was yet in the air Sacha crumpled his breast-bone with a shot. He landed on his nose, recovered, leaped over Joaquim's spear, and ran straight for Sacha's legs. Dragão, mad with anger, sprang at his throat . . . but Joaquim was too skilful. His weapon curved inward, vicious as a bereaved snake, and poor, faithful, courageous Dragão crashed fair on to the point. He died without a cry, even before the puma was killed with a second bullet.

For a moment all was quiet. Joaquim held the shaft, stupidly, as if his loss were too great to be realized. Then he lowered it to the ground, pulled Dragão into his arms. The bent shoulders utterly caved in, and the dark face was convulsed. Sacha, after a look at the two carcasses and the bereaved man, walked home.

Next day Joaquim came to the ranch. He had two dogs on a lead and seemed to have forgotten his grief. His first words contradicted this assumption:

"Here is a master-dog, senhor. The larger is fast and

reliable, but runs mute; you would have to know the country to use him. Valente, the other, is steady. He has a good nose and shouts all through a hunt. I should take him. . . . I have failed you," he added. "I wanted to give you a picture. But Dragão is dead, and I weep in the night for him. Return later and I will make up."

Sacha thanked him, knowing that success or failure rests with the master-dog, and chose Valente . . . the Valiant One. He was a brown animal, short-coated, the size of a well-bred Airedale, with a fine deep chest and a narrow waist. There was plenty of character in the sharp face as he pondered his new owner doubtfully. The chestnut eyes, just one shade brighter than the gleaming coat, seemed to drawl, "I should not wonder if you let me down in a crisis." It was three months before he would yield his friendship.

He came as a gift and in return Joaquim received a double-barreled .32 pistol. The bargain, as between gentlemen, was complete.

Thus, quite unwillingly, Valente slipped into Sacha's life.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

IN THE far northwest of Matto Grosso lies the Great Xarayes Marsh. It is a foul and odious presence, rank with ooze, a vast primeval sponge, absorbing the yearly floods of the Rio Paraguay. To the westward it extends to the Bolivian boundary, to the east nearly to Coxim; and its inhabitants are cattle and tigers, alligators, snakes, and fish; while the capibara, or river-hog, who is properly a rodent, stares down his curved nose in foolish curiosity. The few men who live there keep dugout canoes in their back yards.

Millions of birds circle through its wastes, preying on fish or on the luscious berries that grow among the swamp flowers, as the nature of their stomachs dictates. *Tuyuyú*, the stork, is the biggest, standing five feet in his black-and-white glory. His solemn, heavy-lidded eyes direct his monstrous beak, and his bare neck, black and scarlet, wobbles as he moves. Egrets flash their plumage by the river banks; cormorants sit on boughs above the incredible stillness of the pools; delicate-tinted herons preen the exquisite glimmer of their feathers; and *Biquatinga*, the snake-bird, keeping his body beneath water, darts his slender neck and green suspicious eyes for all the world like a whip-snake on the prowl. Ibises cry to one another reedily from dead trees; Muscovy ducks clatter up nearly a mile away. Toucans, macaws, parrots,

snipe, plover with spurred wings, crested screamers, oven-birds . . . all these and a thousand more, besides the eternal ducks and vultures, swoop or wheel or screech against the background of perpetual quietude.

The atmosphere is wet and musty, pungent; and is one degree more desolate than the musty, dry smell of a virgin forest in summer.

The marsh has a tragic history. In 1525 one Juan de Ayolas, the first Conquistador to venture far from Asuncion, was lost with a company of his men. They died horribly, from sores and Indians and exhaustion. Here, too, an ancient civilization passed, leaving but a trail of stones in the dry places. Beneath these stones are large jars, and huddled within are the crouched bones of a vanished race. No man knows whence they came or why, or even when they perished; but any one with a spade may rape their graves.

Sacha came to the marsh, not knowing that for ten years he would scarcely leave its bounds. The spirit conquered him at once, took him by the throat, almost made him sick. For the rainy season was over as he rode among the mud, and unnumbered fishes, trapped by the sun's action on the sponge, lay rotting. A large *piranha*, the flesh-eating terror of the Rio Paraguay which swarms in thousands and whose teeth the Indians use for hair-clippers, winked its skeleton from half-way up a bush. And the ground was white with marauding, hungry egrets. Riding from pool to pool were several horsemen with bows and arrows. Sacha and Apparicio asked questions.

"Yes, senhores," said a horny-handed cowboy, tossing a

golden-scaled fish into a basket, "there is undoubtedly a smell; but if all the land be stinking whither shall we turn? Besides, our master sent us to collect fish for drying and salting. His wife is far gone in labor, her first-born, and will appreciate a fresh *dourado* when she is better."

By and by the whole company splashed back to the farm. In the dusty yard at the edge of the living quarters a small crowd had assembled round the slats of a hut. From within, cracked and wavering like that of a tortured animal, came the voice of a girl. The cowboys joined the group . . . sensation is rare in the marsh . . . but Sacha and Apparicio went into the guest-house, which they found occupied. A hammock was slung across the angle; some baggage lay on the floor, and a tall man of immense distinction paced angrily to and fro. As they entered he lowered his hawk's face to consult a battered watch.

"My name is da Costa," he said shortly. "Miguel da Costa from Cuyabá. I came here at eleven this morning. It is now five. Yet not one word as to food. Do you think they will offer us supper?"

His eyes bent suddenly on Apparicio, who grunted. Sacha remarked mildly that the business of little strangers was ticklish. Da Costa glared.

"Courtesy is the rule of our land," he snapped. "If such a thing happened at my home, meals would continue as usual. There are twelve women here; I counted them, myself. One is enough to cook rice."

He passed into the open while Sacha unloaded cargo, and his ramrod figure stalked proudly but noticeably through

the crowd. No one, however, glanced at him. A son might be coming, an heir; and that would mean drink. The occasion was sacred.

Later in the guest-house a bitter silence prevailed. Every now and again da Costa struck a match, noting with rancor the footsteps of the hours—eight, nine, and ten o'clock—each slower than the last. The moon got up, smearing a yellow glaze on the water-soaked country-side; and black shadows crept into the hut. By half-past ten it was impossible to guess who was asleep. The bulges in the hammocks hung motionless. Presently the soft flap-flap of sandals on clean earth cut across the bed-song of the frogs. The owner of the farm burst in. His voice was ragged, and the fear of youth was upon him.

"Your pardon, senhores," he sobbed. "My wife is dying." Does any one know of a charm?"

Da Costa rose at once. Beckoning to Sacha to hold a candle, he stooped over a mule-trunk. A pencil was produced and a bit of paper and a tanned fragment of wildcat skin. His countenance was wolfish as he began to write. When he had done he sewed the message into the skin.

"Here," he said. "This is a great charm. In my district alone seventy-four women have recovered through it. Tie it on a string, hang it round her neck, and, above all, tell her of its magic. She will be delivered in an hour."

Toward one in the morning her husband returned. He was smiling and apologetic; and his agony had left no mark. He offered food; but the three were so hungry that they could do no more than peck at the meat. On the way back

to their hammocks Sacha asked da Costa to explain the charm. The gentleman from Cuyabá closed one fierce eye thoughtfully.

"I wrote thus," he said: "'Woman of a thousand devils, unload yourself or die. I want my dinner.'"

Years later Sacha heard that the cat-skin was still used throughout the marsh. It never failed, men said, to call forth a child punctually and with safety.

The journey to Cuyabá was difficult and lonely. There was no road, just a vague direction and a vast number of deep isolated pools. These had to be avoided, for the imprisoned *piranhas* would have surely upset any animal with a wound and devoured the riders at their will. Valente the Valiant One ignored the water-fowl and *Jacaré*, the alligator, who was pretending to be driftwood. He was an aristocrat trained to despise anything but cats. At night they slung their hammocks in *capones*, the wooded humped islands which look like couchant porcupines. Of humans the country was bare. They steered by compass.

As the days were absorbed into the weeks the air changed. It was cooler, more bracing. The winter was upon them, and for three whole days the sun gave place to clouds. The temperature dropped forty points within an hour and the tail-end of the bitter Argentine pampero hurried to lay its blast across the watershed of the Amazon. On those nights Sacha and Apparicio buried themselves in horse-blankets and Valente pushed his nose into the fire.

Before long the ground began to rise; the floods took on

a slant. In the distance, a light-gray serrated stencil along the horizon, was the range of mountains that separates the Rio Paraguay from the jungles of Amazonas. And Sacha knew that he had been moving uphill from Buenos Aires solely to this end. The ascent had been gradual . . . eight hundred feet in more than two thousand miles . . . but the natural north-and-south division of South America stared him between the eyes.

It was evening when they arrived at the amber shallows of the Rio Cuyabá. To the right was the town, capital of Matto Grosso Province . . . a loose-limbed city sprawled across several hills. Except for a plaza, which was superb . . . two rows of one-hundred-foot royal palms and a white cathedral . . . it was as poor as any inland Brazilian town. Dusty little streets, down which the wind blew in whorls, separated lines of one-storied houses. Sacha and Apparicio, uncertain whether Ernst had arrived and too weary to inquire, passed through and camped among trees some mile away.

Next morning Sacha paid a visit to the drink-shops and, as he had hoped, found Ernst. He was surrounded by the usual gang of vulturine sponges; but was otherwise well. He was delighted to see his brother, and they retired to camp.

Ernst, remarking the erect angle of Sacha's Stetson, the punctilious neatness of his clothes (he never folded his own), said that he had not altered. In this he erred; for Sacha had died and been mentally born again at the time of Ribeiro's murder. His power for sympathy had been trebled and he was now entitled, from every point of view, to call himself

a man. Carefully, and with an inward shock of pity, he considered Ernst.

Ernst was a man, too, in a different way. He had never begged. He was an expert mechanic and reasonably diligent in his trade. He was courageous, gentle when not excited, and devoted to children. Yet his eyes were unhappy, appearing to be searching for something just beyond his reach. Sacha knew that he was desperate for companionship, aching to be generous to people who would appreciate the sacrifice. Herein lay the reason for his vulture friends.

Even as he looked at this massive bearded man, Sacha wished with all his heart that Ernst would return to Europe. He was out of place in Brazil. The natives did not understand him, nor he them; and the knowledge fretted him. Again, he did not love nature. A forest was a forest to him, a mere assortment of trees. He could never feel the beating, vivid pulse, or the slow breath of it. The animals were so much food; the birds a grating noise; he was miserable if left alone. If Sacha had told him that he could make himself a king in a green palace, he would have laughed. The gulf between them had widened and the younger brother, gazing into the depths, was sadder than he had ever been in his life. He knew that they could never meet, except bodily.

So they spoke of material things and decided to journey to Caçonunga, sixty miles southeast of Cuyabá. There they would make their fortunes. But it was Ernst, the optimist, who really believed that dream. Sacha watched a parrot flying by and tried to imagine how a diamond would increase its beauty.

They spent a fortnight on the trek, riding through ravines which led to the main Amazon tributaries. When they arrived at Caçonunga they were disappointed. Just twenty huts by the banks of a tier of waterfalls. Surely an odd Golconda! Rio das Garças was a river, heron river, though never a heron did Sacha see the whole time he was there.

On second sight the encampment was not so barren. Scores of hammocks hung amid the trees; scores of smoke plumes rose in the bright air; and men lined the banks of the noisy river until it faded behind the bluff. Sacha guessed that the houses were only the nucleus and that the colony extended for many leagues from pool to pool.

As they rode up, there was a volley of firing.

The new-comers drew their revolvers. They could imagine no reason for the scene, but they thought they knew the morals of a diamond-field. Their horses and cargo were valuable. From the shelter of a hut an old negro guffawed.

"Pardon," he said. "I did not mean to be discourteous, but we are not thieves here. Murderers, perhaps; card-sharpers, maybe; jealous of women, certainly; but not thieves. That shot meant the discovery of a diamond."

They tied their animals to the old man's corner posts and accompanied him down a gradient to the stream. About thirty men, naked and fierce, their finger-nails yellow with the cold, were crowded round a pale-skinned youth, whose face was alight with joy. At his feet was a deep-bellied wooden tray, long smoothed by water and the rasp of gravel. In his hand was an oval pebble.

When the excitement had passed, and Sacha had been

shown how a diamond gleams in water, the negro introduced the company. The naked washers bowed, losing none of their dignity thereby. Whereat they returned to the element whence they hoped to snatch wealth; and the painstaking acquisition of gravel continued all day. In the evening the fire shone and the stillness was disturbed by the cries of drunken men.

During the next months Sacha perceived the folly of diamond-digging in Brazil . . . from the viewpoint of the diggers. He saw the buyers arrive from Rio, São Paulo, and Bahia, purchase the stones, and ride off; the power of the storekeeper who kept all men in debt; and the meanness of the life. Ten hours a day, either diving in the pools or scraping in the pebbles on the chance of earning enough to pay the food-bills . . . it was too like slavery. For himself, he sold photographs and mended guns, as was his wont, and he made money.

One day, after he had been there some weeks and was a recognized member of society, tragedy came to Caçonunga. There was no noise, no outcry, but in the morning an axe's edge was bloody and a man's head split. From the first it was obvious who had done it, and the woman was brought before a council, whose president was one Joaquim Reis. Sacha was asked to attend.

The trial took place in the store. The self-appointed judges leaned against sacks of flour, squatted on the ground, smoked maize-leaf cigarettes and foul black cigars. The storekeeper cleared a seat for himself on a trestle table near some rolls of flowered silk. It was all very informal. Then

Joaquim Reis made a speech. He was a little man, hard-bitten and tawny, three parts Indian; and his sentiments were clear.

"This is a respectable diamond-field," he said. "Those who kill here must have reason for their killing. This woman was ungrateful. She sinned against the hospitality which our late friend gave her. She must die."

"How?" Sacha asked uncomfortably.

"Does it matter, senhor? A bullet or a rope; it is of small importance."

A ripple of applause passed over the inquisitors. They tugged their mustaches and grunted. Reis called out:

"Hey, Man-o-el! Bring the woman."

Through the open side of the hut they watched her as, flanked by two negroes, she shuffled in the dust. The sunlight fell on her poor clothes and absorbed figure. At her entrance the judges glowered, for she was old. Reis sprang up.

"Lucia Bonilha," he thundered, "did you kill your protector?"

Lucia freed her arms, gently, without passion. Her body came erect and her dull black eyes ranged over the store. They stopped for a full minute on Sacha, but even then she was not moved. Years ago, he decided, she might have been beautiful. Now she was wrinkled; the bones in her hands stood out like the ribs of a dead leaf and blue veins ran hither and thither in the thin flesh; and her olive face was raddled with pure-white flour. She was ghastly.

"Kill my protector, Dom Joaquim?" she said slowly. "But of course. He was living with another."

Reis stamped violently. Perhaps he had hoped for a denial, cross-examination, the cruelties of reprisal. Sacha was not sure. It was never easy to tell if a Brazilian was over-acting on purpose. Reis made a gesture and the trio withdrew.

"Now," said Reis, when she had gone. "Your verdict, gentlemen."

"Send her to Santa Rita do Araguayá," said one. "The police officer can shoot her at his will."

Sachia thought quickly. In that one look of Lucia's he had seen the whole beastliness of harlotry. His imagination leaped. He saw her launched, a shy, slim child of eleven, by a procuress in Rio; the horror of the initiation; the short-lived gaiety when her profession was at her fingers' ends and she knew power; the gradual loss of the sense of degradation, which is the ultimate numbing of the soul. He followed in his mind the slow tour of cities as her beauty waned. After Rio she would try São Paulo, the paradise of business men. Then the seaports again; Santos, Pernambuco, Bahia. Then inland and up-country, where no one is rich in money and prostitutes must be content with a few shillings. Corumbá, Cuyabá, the rough outposts of the Rio das Garças. Murder. She was human enough to feel jealousy, but nothing else. He shuddered physically, as one who steps barefooted on a toad. Suddenly he found himself talking with controlled eloquence, pictured her life to

these men of the wilds, heaped detail upon detail until the entire structure was laid open.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I ask one thing. Her existence. It is all she has ever known."

A mortifying silence greeted him. One by one the dark faces turned away. The tobacco smoke increased and Reis coughed.

"Our friend is eloquent," he said dryly. "Your votes, friends. Does she go to Santa Rita . . . or do we keep this fallen flower amongst us?"

"Santa Rita . . . Santa Rita." The words came swiftly and were in no sense an invocation. Sacha walked out of the hut.

Toward evening the population left the river to see the last of the murderess. Five hundred naked men stood in a horned half-circle and gazed at her. She was seated athwart a donkey, while, towering above her on mules, were her negro jailers. The crowd hissed. Then the procession moved and grew dim, vanished at a bend in the track. A hand plucked at Sacha's arm; and Reis grinned up at him, benevolently.

"You are young," he said. "You do not know all about Brazil. Women, for instance. We rarely kill them, but it would have been scandalous to acquit her. Remember this! The way is long and she has her trade. She can make her bargain."

The negroes returned within a week. They said that the prisoner had escaped.

There came a day when sheer slavering madness invaded Caçonunga. A negro began it by reeling into camp with a smashed forearm and a babbled tale of diamonds downstream. He was instantly engulfed by a raging mob which an Italian doctor of disreputable habits but good courage was trying to check. The doctor shouted that the man would die and the stones be lost forever if they did not draw back. Luckily the crowd was unshod.

Joaquim Reis brought the news to Sacha shortly after dawn. He suggested—for they had grown friendly of late—that Sacha, Ernst, and himself should make a trio. The biggest rush of his experience was about to start. Of this he was sure and . . . if anything he could do, being old in the country . . . Sacha accepted the hint. The little man had a kindly heart and was good company in the evenings.

It was midday before anything was known. Winter had gone and the liquid fire of the summer heat, plus the attentions of the crowd, three days of exposure without food, and the beginnings of gangrene had fainted the negro right away. When he recovered he looked at his bandaged arm quite coolly. Then he blinked once and denied all knowledge of his words. This lasted until lynching was mentioned, when he said he was enjoying a little joke. The mob smiled politely before rapping him of details.

Sixty hours to the northward, he explained, was a ranch. It was Amazon territory, very thick and steep, except for a few square miles of cattle-plain. Here lived three men, father and sons, reputed killers. They had found him be-

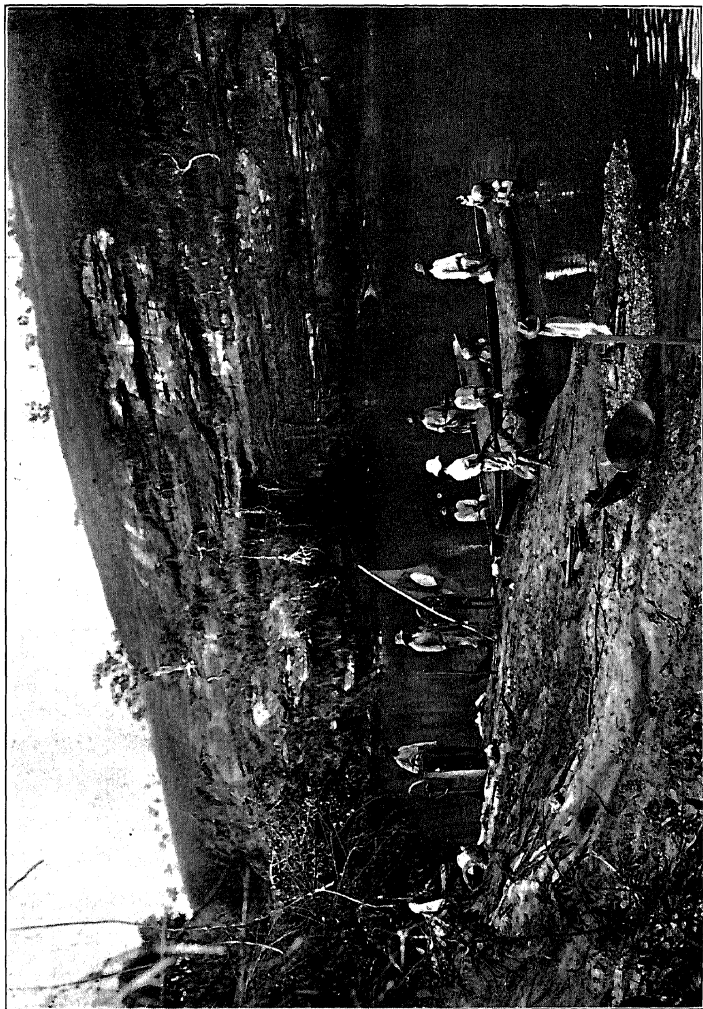
neath a cascade, where the stones are biggest, and had shot at him. He had run into the forest and returned to tell his friends. The diamonds were enormous.

The diggers sighed as one man, left an armed escort to guard his slumbers, and gave him just fifteen hours to rest.

The rush began next morning when the light arrived. Through the last dark hours a multitude of sounds had competed with the voice of the river. Tin plates clanged on the rocks, spurs jingled, loose horses, neighing lustily, drove past their tethered mates, who reared and plunged in sympathy. Revolvers barked like dogs; and over and above this cheerfulness was the crazy mournful tinkle of a drunkard playing a guitar.

Sacha mended eighteen guns between dusk and dawn.

At the first upshooting of the sun the way was clear; and Sacha marveled at the variety of the human race. The wounded man was perched on a donkey and upheld by the scrapings of a continent. Indians, negroes, and half-castes, European bums, prostitutes, diamond-buyers, and store-keepers were encouraged to a trot by the Italian doctor, who was waving the blue-green-and-yellow of the Brazilian flag. Some wore patched boots, others ran barefoot, never heeding the stones, one had a pair of cracked patent-leather shoes. Each man carried a bundle with hammock and blanket, charqui, beans, and rice. A few had cook-pots in their hands; while two wits placed them on their heads like black, fantastic morions with handles for chin-straps; but quickly removed them on reaching rough ground.



THE FIRST DIVING APPARATUS IN THE RIO DAS GARÇAS

Sacha shook hands with Apparicio and patted Valente, who was tied up and resented it almost to tears.

"You won't change your mind?" he asked. "My tools are safe enough."

Apparicio's dark face tightened.

"Bring me a diamond if you will," he said. "I stay here. We are in the land of *tocaya*."

He never learned the difference between ambush and theft. He was not a subtle man.

Just as the three of them—Sacha, Ernst, and Joaquim Reis—were about to start, a terrifying yell echoed through the empty camp. They wheeled, expecting murder, but were hailed instead by a small bright man with a ruff of corn-colored beard, riding a large horse. Before him were several mules loaded with machinery, and, perched between the trunks of a pack-animal, was the rounded, windowed shape of a diver's helmet. It looked like a decapitated octopus.

"Say!" he called in accents that Sacha had not heard since he left the candy-store in Chicago. "Say! What's the fun?"

The gay and nasal quality of his tone sounded queer on the Amazon watershed; but he was a naïve creature, openly expectant of wealth, and a good traveling companion. As they jogged through the descending wilderness he supplied them with the history of his family, prospects, misdemeanors, and business acumen.

The little man smiled, pulling at his beard and gloating over the helmet as it bobbed to the trotting of the mule.

Moreover, his eloquence and fresh-mindedness were so infectious that the party, after translation, felt that they knew his wife and family and were happier for the acquaintance. Laughing and jesting, they passed the ruck of the foot-sloggers before the sun had reached its height. They camped in a brake of palm trees, but next morning they were out early and rode far. After dinner that night Sacha had an idea.

"We stay here," he announced. "We don't want to shed blood, and those three killers would ambush a small party. If they see the country-side moving, maybe they will let us alone."

So they waited by the stream. The American was restless, frankly as his custom was. He spoke of progressive Yankees and his contempt for gun-play. Sacha humored him by suggesting a photograph and the entire bird-life of a prolific area flew back and forth (so it seemed to Sacha) to jeer parrot-fashion at the bulbous, resplendent figure of an explorer in a diving-suit. Blue-and-red macaws dipped and screamed, their fighting beaks within a foot of the helmet. Reis, who was literal-minded, said that their nests were near. Sacha preferred his own explanation.

Early on the third day the first quiver of the advancing tide rolled up to them. Men with torn flesh that had stiffened and bled again; women (harlots must be thorough in Rio das Garças) with slashed shawls and unnaturally natural complexions; the man with the patent-leather shoes, now tied round his neck. Sacha halted them, marshaled them, encouraged them. The waves increased with the hours.

For three whole days, from dawn to eventide, this ragged, irregular swarm marched forward. Now that the time had come, Sacha found leadership instinctive. An explanation, the obvious truth that he might have outdistanced them all, the age-old response to a firm hand on the rein steadied the mob. In their way they were grateful for the authority. Their meals were more assured.

When they arrived on the ground the ranch was quite deserted.

Once on the bank of the stream, the army scattered. With proud declamations the negro who had stumbled on the find rode his donkey into the water and asked if he had done well. Although nothing had yet been proved, a roar of approval answered him and he was given the pool as a reward. Sacha took his camera to a cliff. The white cascade slipping over the rocks behind the negro satisfied his craving both for contrast and beauty. A new Brazilian picture was added to his album. Three hours later not a yard of river within two leagues, up-stream or down, was unoccupied.

Wherefore the old Caçonunga vanished from the map and another grew in its stead. But it was the women who built the houses.

Before many weeks had passed, the diamonds began to trickle in. From every pool, fall, and backwater came the report of stones. Pale gold, violet, green, and blue . . . though these were rare . . . dirty yellow, flamed, first-water, and black; there was hardly a shade that was not on view. The American, a chamois leather bag in his trouser pocket, spoke exultantly.

"Fifteen stones," he crooned, "and not here a month. Oh! boy! What about it?"

Sacha eyed him gravely.

"You really want an answer?"

"Why, sure."

"Then go home to your wife. A strike like this does not happen in ten years. You will have eaten your capital in six months, with perhaps no more coming in. I do photography."

The American pondered.

"Guess you're right," he said soberly. "I am a motor engineer back in Springfield." He sighed. "Well, this will just about pay for my trip."

Sacha watched the proceedings with the buyers. It amazed him to see the tattered regiment of the so-called dregs of Brazil, knowing that wealth was at their elbows, and yet no theft. Each man was armed. The country was ideal for ambush, but in the memory of the oldest prospector there had been only three killings because of theft.

But if theft was barred, other things were not. Sacha spent five weeks in the encampment and five men died. Four were discovered in embarrassing circumstances with women; and the Italian doctor, wildly unpractical, accused a man of cheating at cards. Here again a queer mass outlook was enforced. All five killers were asked to go away, not because of their deeds . . . the community approved in theory . . . but because they might seem boastful.

Sacha himself was nearly slain by a noted shooter-in-the-back. He was walking near the huts with Ernst and Joaquim

Reis when this trained assassin drew his gun and aimed at a Brazilian. Sacha leapt on to his arm. The bullet flew clear and a crowd assembled to see the fun. The man was plainly drunk.

"Robber!" he shouted, lurching toward his revolver, which Sacha quietly unloaded and returned. "Did I not give you an order for photographs? Answer me, you thieving foreigner!"

"Certainly. I gave you the prints this morning."

The man leered at the crowd and winked.

"You do not know, perhaps, that it is due to my position to receive six copies free? Very well! You know now. If they are not at my house by this evening you will know what to expect."

The people tittered. They had never seen Sacha in a crisis, and wondered if he would shoot. Brazilian honor demanded some such penalty. He turned to them politely.

"Gentlemen," he said, "our friend is a little drunk. I take him to his hammock, and you will oblige me if you will accompany me there to-morrow morning."

He bowed according to Southern punctilio, and escorted the killer to his shack. He removed his boots, opened the hammock wide, and slipped him in. The next morning the crowd was waiting. They noted audibly the conspicuous readiness of Sacha's gun and they followed him in a herd.

"Now," he said to the man, "yesterday you insulted me publicly. I ask you to-day one question: Was it you or the *canha* that spoke?"

“Senhor,” said the Brazilian, “I am sorry. I was very drunk. I ask pardon.”

Sacha did not relax.

“Your pardon is granted, but,” he moved suddenly, “if it should happen again I should know that you were ambushed behind the liquor and I should shoot.”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

IN THE month of June, 1923, Ernst yielded to his loneliness. For the past ten weeks he and Sacha and Apparicio had pushed their trade among the ranches of the Great Marsh. Now he was hungry for a town, and the lamps of the fire-flies mocked him. His craving was so urgent that he hunched his shoulders to his ears and gloomed like a creature with a festered paw. He also was jealous.

The trouble lay deep. Neither he nor Sacha could quite forget their childhood. If they had met as men they could have spoken as men, with no rasped feelings on departure. But the paralyzing forced loyalty that irritates those members of a family not utterly in accord barred them as a range of mountains. Ernst could not rid his mind of a hardy little boy, four years his junior, whom from motives of pity he occasionally included in his games. Sacha remembered a buccaneer, on his toes for adventure, a vital being who had somehow been mislaid with the years. It only needed Apparicio's success in companionship to make tragedy inevitable. Yet, far down, beneath the race of cross-currents, they loved each other.

So matters rested on the third day of their work for Dom Francisco Andrade, of Abobral.

The afternoon had been hot. It was the season of dead

fish, and Ernst gulped and sweated over a rusty hammer gun as he brushed the mosquitoes from his eyes. Presently he kicked away a chair, ran his fingers through his beard, and swore. The occurrence was so rare that Apparicio, who was greasing a bridle, looked up. Sacha went on tinkering. The atmosphere infuriated Ernst.

"Damn this smell!" he said passionately. "Damn it, I say! Damn it!"

He snatched up his hat and strode out of the guest-house. Sacha nodded.

"He must return to Cuyabá," he said. "We have been riding too long for him."

Apparicio, though sparing of words, was a man of sympathy.

"'Little village, big hell,' " he said, quoting a proverb. "Three is a bad number. Now tell me, friend, why does a man who speaks of a drink-shop when looking at a sunset come into the wilds at all?"

He did not condemn; he had asked a reasonable question and expected a reasonable answer. Sacha passed an oily rag along the barrel of a Smith and Wesson.

"My brother loves me, Apparicio. He never drinks when I am there . . . he doesn't like it; but he longs for talk and gaiety that I can't always give him."

Ernst was still in the marshes when the sun fell and Francisco Andrade summoned them to dinner. This Andrade was a short, round man, with a polished bald head and a habit of mopping himself on green neckerchiefs. He peered at the dismembered firearms.

"And will they really shoot straight?" he chirped. "I aimed at a swamp-buck at thirty meters and the ball splashed under his body. He mocked me with his heels. It was abominable."

Sacha lectured him politely on the care of weapons in the tropics. He accused him of neglecting the rifles; told him how a barrel starts to corrode within twenty-four hours of a shot; and added that, as father of a family, he was sinfully wasteful of bullets. Andrade sighed, looking across the empty, shadowed marsh, past the idle cane-press and the dugouts in the sedge.

"There is so little time in Brazil," he explained.

Even now, after eight crowded years, Sacha recalls each sound and scent and incident of that evening. Ernst returned while they were talking, flung down his hat, and marched ahead of them to the table, which was set under a tree. He seated himself in the darkness, as far as possible from the single candle, and leaned his forehead on his hands. Then he asked for a drink and when the younger of Andrade's two sons had gone to the kitchen to fetch it (as usual, no women were about) remarked that the moths bothered him. His voice sounded dull.

Andrade glanced at him curiously, handing the tin soup-tureen to Sacha, who filled his plate. Apparicio did the same, and the elder boy, but Ernst after one disgruntled sniff growled, "Fish again," and pushed it to his host. Now, according to Brazilian ethics, this was atrocious manners, yet Dom Francisco took no notice. He was dealing with foreigners and was courteous enough to suppose that their hab-

its might be different from his own. Ernst crumbled a slab of maize bread until the child came back with the brandy. One sip and he began to speak.

He called attention to the stench which, on the dissipation of the heat, was creeping outward from the mud. Dom Francisco, a trifle more brusquely than was necessary, ordered his son to remove the soup and bring meat. Ernst continued, his tones rising to a peak of ill humor. He threw out his arms and wished aloud that he was in Europe. He announced that he was unloved, that the sun had eaten him to the bone. He was prisoner to a climate that he could neither appreciate nor give up. Rising dramatically, he poked a finger at the sky and cursed the fluttering stars.

"I have made up my mind," he cried. "If I must die in Brazil I will die happy. I will take a wife . . . a nice uneducated girl who will not bore me with sunsets and philosophy."

He sat abruptly, reaching for his glass. Sacha was too astounded to move. He perceived that Ernst was sober, that the heat had but loosed his tongue into confessing the bitterness of years. He blamed himself for not foreseeing the disaster and returning to Cuyabá. All this happened in a moment. Simultaneously he was aware of a change. The bullfrogs were undeniably less noisy; the moths had disappeared. The very trees seemed to be bending their tops to listen. In the kitchen an earthenware pot crashed . . . and the ensuing silence was the weightiest he had ever heard. Almost he could feel the agony of caught breath and the skirts imprisoned to avoid rustling. He stood up.

"Dom Francisco," he said gravely, "we are tired. Permit us to withdraw."

His eyes sought his brother's, and for a second their glances held. Then the three went back to the guest-house, where they lay without a word. An hour later Dom Francisco, quiet as an owl, rounded the door.

"Dom Ernesto?" he whispered.

A hammock creaked.

"You wish to talk with me?"

"If you will."

When the footsteps of the two men grew faint, Apparicio lit a cigar.

"This is the end," he said. "At this moment he is bowing to his mother-in-law-to-be, a fat woman. His future wife, who eventually will also be stout, is trying to look surprised."

"I know," said Sacha. "The women were listening. We ride before dawn."

"He will not accompany us. Each beast has a place where it is slaughtered. Ernst has found his."

Sacha raged about the hut, making and discarding plans, while the tip of Apparicio's cigar glowed and faded alternately.

"Be calm, amigo," said Apparicio. "His spirit cannot rest. He would be sad in heaven."

Presently Ernst returned with a candle before his face. His hand was shaking a little, and the shadows danced. Sacha went up to him.

"Well?" he asked fiercely. "Did they rope you?"

Apparicio yawned, mentioning an engagement with the horses. Ernst smiled wistfully after him.

"You are lucky," he said. "Now, if *I* had a friend . . . but listen, Sacha. We are fond of each other, you and I. We remember the same things. It is no pleasure to jar. Let us be sensible and part before we quarrel openly."

They stared across the candle. This time there was no weakening in Ernst. His eyes were steady, his head upright. Something of the old buccaneering vitality of his Libau days shone in his bearing. However mistaken he might be, whatever regrets he might incur, he was his own master and resolved. Characteristically Sacha did not attempt to persuade him.

"We have seven animals, Ernst," he said affectionately. "Three horses and four mules. Will you take my share of the odd horse as a wedding-gift? Also I have a gun."

Ernst sprang forward. The light tilted, and a daub of wax burned against Sacha's ear. Then they were gripping in the darkness; and a warm current of sympathy united them, even if only for an hour. When Apparicio came whistling from the corral they were talking with the freedom of boyhood. Nobody referred to the girl.

Next morning Sacha was introduced to the Andrade females. Dom Francisco, dabbing his forehead with his neckerchief, bustled him to the kitchen. It was a tall, wide room built round an earthen stove formed like a huge beehive; and a haunch of new-killed calf lay upon fresh palm leaves on the floor. Dona Rita, Andrade's wife, fat as Apparicio's prophecy, shambled to greet him. Her face had been re-

cently floured, and a dirty weeping child caught at her skirt.

"Welcome, senhor," she giggled. "Our family will soon be your own. Maria!"

A figure moved behind the stove, and Ernst's betrothed stood forth. She was a sturdy, well-formed girl, of perhaps fifteen years, dressed in a long blue smock. Her sleek hair was oiled until it glowed, twisted in a knot at the back. Her broad face, with its high cheek-bones and clear dark eyes, impressed him. She bowed reservedly.

"Good day, young lady," he said, gravely saluting her. "My brother's wife is already my friend . . . if she cares to be."

She answered as coolly, a circumstance that astonished Sacha, who had expected her to be coy. Women who never address strangers ought to be tongue-tied, he considered. He had forgotten the kitchen slats, between which a Brazilian maiden may hear and learn a great deal from the conversations of guests.

"When we have a house in Cuyabá you must visit us," she said.

The tone was modest, courteous, virginal, but Sacha, meeting suddenly her eyes, knew he would be unwelcome. This he understood. Was not Ernst jealous of Apparcio? He turned to the mother and asked if arrangements had been made.

"Indeed yes," she answered, squirming with pride. "José, my first-born, rode early for the priest, the Padre Marco of Coxim, whose visitation will cost us five yearling heifers."

"And if you were poor, senhora?"

"They would live unwed. The Church is busy."

Once, at a farm, Sacha had met the Archbishop of Cuyabá, who was traveling on horseback to São Paulo. He had a strong, intellectual face, with sweet lines about the mouth; and Sacha longed to have speech with him. After breakfast, in a flurry of brisk secretaries, a chair was placed beneath an orange tree that was slowly dripping blossoms. Hundreds of cowboys, from a radius of a hundred miles, bowed their heads and kissed the ruby on his finger. Sacha, freemason of the woods, clasped the extended hand, shaking it firmly, and the archbishop did not blink. An hour later a secretary appeared, rather thin as to the lips, and prelate and mechanic spent a rapt forenoon bending over photographs and discussing Shakspere. The owner of the ranch was too scandalized to protest.

This archbishop was literally the only member of his calling with whom Sacha had spoken in Brazil. He had seen in the towns, from time to time, long-skirted men with beads and book and sandals. He knew their reputation, and failed to blame them. In his opinion chastity was a virtue to be attained only by the loftiest after years of meditation. It was surely unfair to a great institution to chain this burden to the rank and file, especially in a land of fertility.

The Padre Marco was no exception. Thin, wiry, unshaven, with calculating gaze and a rough manner, he took immediate possession of Abobral. He expressed perfunctory sorrow that Ernst was not a Catholic, inspected his fee in the corral, and disappeared into the kitchen. He was not seen again

until the evening. Dom Francisco went shooting in the marsh.

On the night before the wedding Sacha did not sleep. Old memories of Libau, his flight in the *Martha*, Elsa, Dom Carlos and Favelle, Cajango and his first tiger herded through his mind with the persistence of half-forgotten friends. He thought of Ernst, of the sadness of his nature and how impossible it was to help. In some queer way he felt responsible, as though he had induced him to come to Brazil against his reasoning. Toward morning he dozed, but was instantly awakened by the creak of strained leather and the voice of a whip. He stood under Ernst's hammock and went out.

"*Ohé!*" called the younger Andrade son. "This is cold work. Come and talk to me."

He shivered a little, for his coat was tropical and the sun yet asleep. The youth was standing by the cane-press, among a pile of fresh-cut stalks, which he forced between wooden rollers. A pair of yoked oxen leaned inward on the bar, grunting and pushing. The gleam of a fat candle illumined the tips of their horns, emphasizing the shadows under the boy's eyes. The five-foot lengths of cane crackled with a wet, luscious sound. The juice oozed into a bucket.

"Why so early?" asked Sacha.

"Bullocks," said the boy wearily. "They slobber in the heat."

Sacha relieved him and, for an hour or more, fed the machine. Then he halted the animals and sat himself on

the bar, contemplating. It seemed to him, in the fragrance of this dawn, that the ceremony was somehow wrong. If the couple could have been married by a man who was worthy of the sacrament, well and good. But the Padre Marco was a business man, joining the rich and leaving the poor to sin. By no jugglery of imagination could it be deemed higher than a contract, performed and sealed by a notary. The heifers were his witness. He wished that Ernst would take the girl into the forest and do the matter cleanly, in the way of nature.

Sacha belonged to no creed. The silence of the woods, the cry of the birds, and the splash of a deer in a pool were too real to him. He needed no goad to a self-respecting life. What did it matter whether one bowed to the east or genuflected or listened to a sermon on a Sunday? To him, if these rituals meant anything at all, they were aids to a frame of mind which he already owned, to the appreciation of earth's beauty and the blatant ugliness of certain types of sin. And who could teach that better than Nature herself? He sought his breakfast, determined to watch the marriage lest his absence might distress the bride.

The ceremony took place at about ten o'clock in the Andrades' bedroom. On a rude chest of drawers was a shrine . . . a plaster image of the Virgin, dressed in cotton, set with swamp grasses and small pebbles. To one side was a cardboard picture, dealing exhaustively with the wounds of Saint Sebastian; to the other was an illustrated placard of a firm of German chemists, obviously left by a huckster.

A visitor from Mars would have found some difficulty in discovering which was to be worshiped.

The service began. Neither the prayers nor the Latin words nor the holy water could wipe the triumph from Dona Rita's face. This moment was the apex of a dull career and she did not care who knew it. Dom Francisco, torn between the loss of his daughter and discomfort in the presence of the priest, sweated dolefully; while the children enjoyed the show. Maria, clad in a long white-cotton frock of admirable purity, responded both for herself and Ernst, to whom the ritual was meaningless. The Padre Marco did not linger. Within ten minutes Sacha had acquired a sister-in-law and a tearful list of her accomplishments from a lady he never wished to see again, nor ever did. They passed into the sunlight. Sacha expelled a breath (fowls and piglets lived in the bedroom) and thanked God for the cleanness of the firmament. In complete silence they watched the Padre Marco hitch his gown to his knees and lift into the saddle. His seat was excellent; and the ease with which he handled his frisky emolument would not have shamed a cattleman. Apparicio strolled up.

"I think a little tiger-hunting would be good for us," he said. "I have it in mind that a certain drunken spearman promised you an outing. By now Dragão will be a memory."

They left that night. And the last they saw of Ernst for two long years was a strangely docile, shaggy figure waving beside his wife.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THEY rode southwestward for many weeks, through quickly drying swamp. Before long the smell decreased; and it was no longer possible to trip across *jacaré*, half-buried in the weeds. Infinitely delicate bones of fish reposed on the caked mud flats . . . and Valente sulked. Over and over again his nose informed him of red-hot catty scents, of great war-like males and females encumbered with young. Each time he crossed a trail his head went back, and a crash of melodious song rang among the reed-beds. He eyed his master proudly, adventurously, but Sacha called him off and he could not understand. To him cat was cat, be it noon or midnight, and the gently spoken "Sorry, my brave one; we must gather a pack or you will be killed," utterly enraged him. He took to sneering over his shoulder, lips curled, as though he scorned to do more than hint at his contempt. Sacha never laughed on these occasions. They expressed his own views; relief would come to both with Joaquim Guató.

One sinfully hot afternoon the grass caught fire. It was not a pampa blaze, fanned by the south wind that drives across Argentine plains like a galleon with red sails. It was a sprightly, humorous fire, darting from clump to clump, halting, licking, savoring, as if flirting with a jest. Sacha, knowing that cattle-horses are trained to these emergencies,

set his animal at the line. But his mount thought otherwise. It jumped and reared and snorted in such a panic of mad fear that he desisted, concluding it had been reared in the highlands of the watershed, where fires are unusual.

They sat for a while looking at the birds that crowded on the edge of the flames. *Carancho*, the hawk-vulture, bandit and coward, who will steal a chicken or gulp offal with equal zest, sat on the dead arms of trees and stared gloomily at the blackened ground. A score of small red eagles, socially above *Carancho*, gazed with unwinking yellow eyes. *Urubú*, the undertaker, called from the sky by the smoke, perched and craned his neck.

Suddenly an eagle stooped. An instant later there was a rustle in the grass, and the quick body was again on its bough, clutching a snake in its talons. The technique was perfect, for the flat head was powerless, gripped close behind. Another rustle and another; field-mice, little rats, more snakes . . . the watchers caught the gleam of the polished black top and bright-yellow stomach of *Mussurama*, the snake that eats poisonous snakes . . . and the branches were full of birds gorging themselves, blessing the accident of the flames. It was a fascinating spectacle and was ended only when the horses grew restless, dragging against the bit. They plunged into a deep pool while the fire sizzled at the brink.

"Let us rest in that palm wood," said Sacha. "The burnt land will cool during the night."

They splashed through the somber water, plowed a trail among the rushes, emerged. Before them was a block of

forest, absolutely without undergrowth, calm as the interior of a Norman church. Sacha dismounted to investigate; and Valente superciliously followed him.

It was formed of *acurí* palms. Their thick rough stems, glazed over with lichen, rose straight for about fifteen feet. Above, the fronds shot upward and outward like an inverted shuttlecock, excluding entirely the harsher rays of the sun. The atmosphere was still, with the stillness of suspended life, the kind of feeling discernible in a room that has just been vacated by a strong and kindly personality.

Presently Sacha was struck by a phenomenon. A huge, firm-set tree, the color of tulip leaves, reared through the canopy of palm. On one side of the trunk was an excrescence, a round filigree of laced boughs. Sacha was puzzled until he saw the crumbled remnant of a dead *acurí* at his feet. Then he knew and went searching for more evidence. The tree was a fig, with glutinous white blood that spurted under a knife. He rubbed some on his fingers and it became like liquid rubber. It began as a shoot, thin as the slenderest rope-weed, wound about the body of a palm. Elsewhere the limbs were thicker, but still clasping their prey; and he realized that he was looking at sheer brutal murder that was by no means less impressive for being beyond the range of his ears. There, before his eyes, palm after palm was being strangled; and he thrilled to the callous power by which Nature has ordained that her children shall prevail. A great urge was born within him to fight it as a man to man. The blood rose to his head.

"It is only fair," he explained to Apparicio later. "Look

at the earth; all life is sponged out by the palms. It is but just that a fig shall climb to safety . . . if it can."

They found Joaquim Guató as they had left him, drunk. It was a perpetual miracle to Sacha how this man with bent shoulders and sagging breasts should be able to face a tiger clean-eyed. For, in spite of his laziness and dirt, he was a fine spearman when the time came. They pitched camp near the aged hut without troubling the rancher, and Sacha applied himself to learning . . . not the whole art of a *tigrero*, because that is a life's work . . . but enough to enable him to go hunting on his own. In this manner, over a fire, with Valente hopeful once more, he ranged through Guató's mind and emerged with priceless lore.

"Never look for a trail in the open," said Guató, his cat's whiskers aquiver. "Search at the edge of pools, where a paw-mark may chance to be. If the water be muddy above a track in the swamp, the tiger has passed within three hours. If the ridges of the toes be wet in mud, he is near. But in soft dry sand or grass one can tell only if the spoor be covered with dew.

"A tiger is quiet in a tree," said Guató. "He roars when at bay on the ground. Seven out of ten will climb; three will charge. Why do they charge, senhor? Who knows? Except, perhaps, they are brave or lazy or fat or in pain from a wound. A female always, of course, when she is hindered by cubs.

"How can one tell the age of a trail by the behavior of a dog, senhor? It is easy. When it is more than a day old the dog will sniff and worry out the scent, carefully and

grumbling; but if it be fresh . . . why, the howl is out of his mouth and his tail in the air almost before he reaches it."

By and by Sacha emerged from theory to practice. The Indian made him stand comfortably, firm-footed but loose-kneed, so as to recoil a fraction on impact. Three hundred pounds of tiger at twenty miles an hour would be fatal without this "give." The six-foot spear, with a cross-piece like a pike, was gripped horizontally about half-way along the shaft . . . just far enough to avoid the terrific in-swing of the paws when the beast felt the steel in his chest. The impulse of a tiger is to withdraw after impalement; and it is a point of honor for the *zagayero* to follow a wounded animal. In other words, he spits himself, and it is up to the hunter to steer the blade into the heart.

Sacha also learned the most important rule of spearmanship. Tigers do not attack alike. Some rise on hind legs, heraldically, and spring in a curve, hoping to land on their tormentor. Others, more dour, run in and bite like a dog. Wherefore, since the creature decides only when he is ten feet away, the spear has to be handled, upward or downward, with something of the speed of electricity.

It was in a belt of *acurís* that Sacha witnessed his first spear fight. Valente, delirious leader of five swashbuckling friends, was jumping and snapping and jumping clear again of a bad-tempered, flurried male who was trying to kill them all at once. The beast might just as well have fought with quicksilver, because directly one hound was in danger from a paw, another bit him behind and he was forced to turn. Then Guató approached, and the kaleidoscope was shaken.

The Indian looked like a cat himself, a monstrous Puss-without-Boots, with his stray whiskers and bare feet and sleek, muscle-concealing skin. The dogs became possessed.

For a moment the tiger was still, crouching beneath a palm, motionless except for that tail-twitching which a cat can never quell, and the tensing of his claws against the ground. His eyes were very wide, very yellow, very malicious. Guató came nearer. Twenty feet, fifteen, ten. He made no sound; nor did the tiger; and Sacha, clutching his rifle and bayonet in the background, could hardly breathe. Whereat Guató's foot shot out and a flutter of leaves and earth burst in the golden face. It was the insult supreme. With a sudden spitting cough in which the roof of his mouth and the base of his throat were equally concerned, the tiger rose, as from the dead.

At that it became a wrestling match, a fantastic, haunted affair, with the spear for a prize. They clawed and swung, feinted and shifted their feet exactly like Hackenschmidt and the Terrible Turk maneuvering for a hold. The tiger snarled and whistled . . . his windpipe was affected . . . and Guató clung desperately to the ground lest he be tilted to the skies. Then . . . Sacha did not know how it occurred . . . the beast was on his side and the Indian had slipped the blade out and in before it could stir. This time it pierced the heart; and a great battle had been won.

It was the signal for Valente and his crew to squeal like children and bite and worry at a hide that was too tough to suffer hurt.

Guató, after one long glance, straightened his shoulders

as far as they would go, smote his free palm against his breast, and hopped on to the carcass. His cry of victory, full-throated and intense, had the melodious completeness of a great poem.

Sacha, trembling, found occasion to assure himself that what this Indian could do he too could achieve.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ELEVEN faded letters on each side of her prow informed the passing herons that her name was *Aventureira*, "Adventuress": though whether she had been named in bitter jest at her solidity or from mere ignorance of detective fiction, Sacha never learned. He did not, in fact, inquire. For he fell immediately in love with the motherly old barge, and after some labor possessed her.

When first they met she was stranded in a creek off the Rio Cuyabá. Her clumsy, rounded lines were deep in a bed of water-lilies. The rope which should have tied her to the bank had long since disrupted into mold; but the eager press of the lily stems still held her, as if she had been anchored with chains. A battalion of exploring swamp plants festooned the upper woodwork with tendrils and pink flowers. She looked like an honest washerwoman, made drunk with guile, and garlanded by impish children.

Sacha dismounted and, from the opposite shore, regarded her. He liked the long compartment which rose in a humped superstructure, like a deck-house. An iron brazier, red with rust, adorned the stern and was obviously the kitchen. The hull was so obscured by weeds that he could not tell if she were river-worthy. He undressed and prepared to swim the creek. Apparicio stopped him dryly.

"*Piranha* is an angry fish," he said, "and *Jacaré* is always ready for a meal."

This was true, but Sacha was a closer observer of things natural. He had asked the Indians.

"Hold Valente," he called over his shoulder. "*Piranha* won't find a man whose flesh is clean of blood; nor will *Jacaré* attack unless you tread on him."

He swam within fifteen paces of the arched, observant eye of an alligator floating on the surface, and landed above the lily-patch. Then he jumped on to the planking and parted the marsh flowers.

"Two cabins," he shouted to Apparicio, who was wrestling with Valente. "One for each of us. Plenty of hammock-room and only a pool of rain-water. That means she's tight. Ohé, amigo, what is this? Throw me a stick at once."

A curious noise was issuing from the forward compartment, a faint ticking that swelled with the echo of the boards and then died down, rather like an alarm-clock buzzing without its bell. He caught the stick and, bending into the cabin, struck once. The buzzing ceased and there were sounds as of a loose body flapping against wood.

"*Cascavel*," he said, reappearing. "A rattlesnake fell into the bottom and could not get out. Lucky they are talkative!"

He climbed on to the broad roof and laid himself out to dry. The heat drugged his mind, the song of the crickets soothed him and he remembered the past. He had been born in a wooden house, had returned to it for his meals until the day of his escape in the *Martha*. Since then, with the ex-

ception of his sojourn in the United States and his years in Buenos Aires, he had lived in a hammock or mud-and-wattle huts. Now the feel of a strong foundation appealed to that part of him that was bred in the Latvian pine forests. As he swam back through the cool water he knew that the *Aventureira* must be his.

The first difficulty was to find the owner. There was neither village, settlement, nor farm for twenty leagues around, almost to Cuyabá; and even then he could scarcely plague the inhabitants on the streets. He could, of course, purloin her; she had all the marks of disuse, but that would be worse than murder in Matto Grosso etiquette. So they rode along the river and hoped for a stranger.

One day they heard a shot. It was such an unusual event that they turned their horses and, in the fullness of time, came upon an egret-hunter. He was a tiny, bright-eyed man, utterly alone but for a shot-gun and a hammock. He was standing in a grove of high *abobreiras*, whose floor was white with droppings. Above him the egret colony wheeled brilliantly, screaming in a harsh manner suitable to the ferocity of their black bills. In a corner, under a tree, was a pile of feathers. Sacha asked about the boat.

"*Aventureira*, senhor? Most certainly, all the river knows her. She belongs to Dom Franciscó Pinto de Oliveira of Aricá. No, you cannot ride to his farm. Even now, in November, four leagues of swamp lie between it and the land."

He offered his canoe, with the courtesy native in Brazilians.

Sacha accepted and, for that evening, inquired of his profession. He had heard of the cruelty of egret-killers; but this little hunter corrected him.

"Listen!" he said. "Each of us has his own colony. José from Corumbá has the next to mine; Miguel from San Luis de Caceres the next, and so on. Think you it would pay us to reduce our stock? We tend our birds as a *vaqueiro* tends cattle. No, it is the merchants of ribbons who poison the minds of the rulers. How much more cruel is it to shoot a bird than to leave an animal in a steel trap for days on end? Answer me!"

He sat back, ruffled as one of his egrets in a temper; and Sacha, looking at the colony in the morning, had to admit that there were no starving youngsters nor lack of birds. He recollected, too, that this species is not vegetarian like a pigeon, but a voracious killer of fish.

Two days later, having mastered something of the balance of a thirty-foot dugout canoe, he paddled to the landing-stage of Aricá.

Dom Francisco Pinto de Oliveira was one of those rare men who can look dignified on a weekly shave. He was tall, lean, and gray, so that when Sacha presented himself on a Friday evening it seemed as if thin steel wires were sprouting from his hatchet face. Within the limits of a natural wariness, he was friendly.

"You want the *Aventureira*?" he said, in the slipped speech of Cuyabá. "What have you to offer?"

"Two horses and a mule; perhaps a gun . . ."

Dom Francisco smiled.

"A barge is expensive, senhor. Have you nothing else?"

"My skill as a mechanic. If you have sewing-machines or rifles . . ."

The rancher, during one exciting moment, lost his caution.

"Then you are a gift from God! The machinery of my cane-presses is broken; none have the knowledge to repair."

Together they visited the palm-thatched sheds, where the plant was settled on a timber base. The machinery was old; here and there a rod had snapped through. For a long hour Sacha poked and tested. Finally he spoke.

"I can mend it without difficulty," he said, "and run it, too, if you wish. What are your terms?"

Dom Francisco waved deprecating hands like a diplomat asking more than he hopes to obtain.

"Work for me until the season ends in September, and the *Aventureira* is yours."

Sacha agreed, stipulating for his food and Apparicio's and the use of the boat in the meantime.

"By the way," Dom Francisco added suddenly. "You are, of course, entitled to your full ration of *canha*. Three glasses a day and a whole liter on Saturday."

Sacha looked at him blankly; never had he heard of such a grant. It sounded mad.

"How many men have you?"

"Seventy, and forty women."

"Do you ever have a riot?"

"Every week," said the tall man gravely, "but it does not matter. We have their firearms."

All the way up-stream Sacha pondered upon Aricá. There

had been something in the atmosphere that puzzled him. He had smelt it on landing, sensed it among the little sullen groups that hovered in the background; though he had been too much preoccupied with the *Aventureira* to investigate. Then he pushed it from his mind in the effort of paddling against a three-knot current, but once in the egret camp, he put his question. The hunter's eyes gleamed and blinked like a pair of fireflies.

"Dom Francisco did not tell you?"

"I did not ask."

"You will discover in God's time."

Seeing him obdurate, Sacha and Apparicio left him to his feathers and rode back to the *Aventureira*. It was a two-day task in swamp for men and beasts to disgorge her from the lily-bed to the river. Even then their labor was incomplete, because the horses could not walk to Aricá and dared not swim. So the roof was stripped from the cabin and a gap sawed in the woodwork. When their terror at the bottom of their hoofs against the planking had subsided, Apparicio cut two saplings and the craft was poled into the stream.

The Rio Cuyabá twists like the pattern of the Jhelum River on a Kashmir shawl. At every bend a growth of sedge collects, only to sweep down in islands at the rains. On each bank tall rows of trees mirror themselves in the opaque brown water. Here one may learn of the stillness of death or slumber. League upon league of utter calm, smashed at rare moments of drama by a rising fish. In such a depth of silence the twitter of a cricket a hundred yards inland assumes the personality of a cathedral bell.

Late on the following Saturday, in theatrical moonlight, the *Aventureira* was still adrift. Sacha crouched dreamily in the bows, using his pole at intervals and talking to Valente. Apparicio was leaning by the stern. The broad prow was cleaving the metallic surface with hardly a ripple. Suddenly Valente barked, not in his tiger voice, but indignantly as if his pride were touched. Sacha could hear nothing. A full quarter of an hour afterward they swung round an acute bend, and a faint, vaguely disreputable noise came to them. It was accompanied by a low glare in the sky. As they tied up at the wharf, Apparicio whispered:

"Have you taken service in hell?" rather respectfully.

A huge fire was jumping and crackling near the machine-sheds, under the shadow of the forest that separated the buildings from the open marsh. Round it, past it, and apparently over it a crowd of naked drunkards were running with wild cheers. The outlines of their figures were quite easily discernible upon the red screen of flame. Their voices were high and droning, Indian-fashion, and their remarks were crude. Sacha disembarked immediately and, leaving Apparicio to cook their evening meal, went up to the ranch-house.

Francisco Pinto de Oliveira was of a very different breed from the rough Goyaz borderers. He had visited São Paulo and, impressed by the emancipation of urban women, had slackened the reins in his own family. He saw no reason, for instance, why his wife should not meet a stranger openly. Wherefore Sacha was plunged straight into the heart of a gathering in an airy, earth-built room, lighted by electricity

and protected by mosquito-wire across the windows. At his entrance a lady rose.

"My wife," said Francisco, presenting a charming elderly woman with white hair, "and my daughter." A little girl with a bright scarf round her neck smiled without coyness or embarrassment, and a pleasant-voiced, olive-skinned young man shook hands.

"Well," said the rancher, waving Sacha to a chair. "How does our weekly orgy strike you?" He laughed at Sacha's bewilderment, and proceeded to outline as pretty a scheme of benevolent slavery as Brazilian ingenuity could devise.

As an illustration of the Matto Grosso point of view it was perfect. Dom Francisco was governor of an informal prison camp. Into it were crowded the dregs of four towns: Corumbá, Cuyabá, San Luis de Caceres, and Pocoré. Whenever a man or woman became obstreperous they were shipped up-river and dumped at Aricá. There, with an impenetrable swamp on three sides and a river on the fourth, they were safe for the rest of their days.

"For imagine to yourself," Dom Francisco said earnestly. "In a small town one cannot afford a drunkard; he corrupts the young. So he is given useful work on a sugar ranch, and once a week as much brandy as he can drink. Mother of God, it is the wastrels' heaven!"

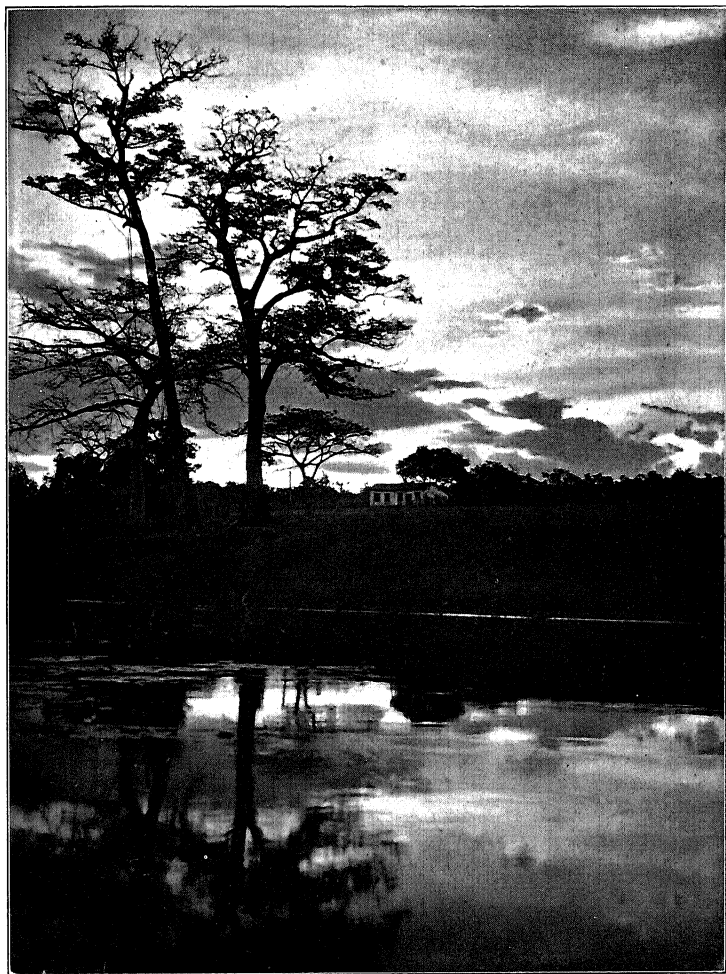
"And if he attempts to escape?"

"He is flogged."

"If he resists?"

"He is shot down."

"When may he return to his people?"



SUNSET AT "SÃO LOURENÇO"

"One year, two years, perhaps three . . . always assuming that he owes nothing at the store."

So that was the game. A life sentence. Sacha knew the Brazilian, who cannot resist credit.

As the months passed he observed the system. There was little hardship. Meals were as regular as the labor in the cane-brakes, and the prisoners seemed content to keep their thirst for the grand liquidation on Saturday. Also they had women.

One day an aged rascal from Corumbá approached him with a monkey. It was a full-grown Capuchin male, of the organ-grinder type, a black-and-brown inquisitive creature with an impertinent face. It deserted its master at once, springing into Sacha's arms, where it curled up and stroked his beard. The man smirked.

"Chico loves you already, senhor. Two bottles of *canha* and he is yours."

Sacha ran his thumb beneath Chico's jowl and the monkey purred. Five bronze coins changed hands and he had bought a friend.

Chico accompanied him to his work, strolled among the machinery, cuffed the tame parrot, and hurled banana skins at Valente, who growled humorously, pretending to gobble him up. This was the signal for a gallop round the sheds, during which Chico used Valente's ears for reins and rode him like a cattleman. They never quarreled. At night they slept in the same corner of the cabin and in the dawn Sacha would be prodded by a nose and tweaked by a paw, simultaneously. But there came a time when Chico grew dirty.

His passion for rolling in the earth and then drinking from the river gave him a muddy ruff which disgraced the cleanly soul of the *Aventureira*. His master, who knew something about animals, and had no intention of risking a friendship with soap and water, told Apparicio to wash him.

When he returned to lunch after the first bath Chico was chained to the rudder-bar. He was soft and sweet-smelling and very cross; but directly he heard Sacha he jiggled up and down, wringing his hands and crying.

"Chee-chee-chee," he sobbed. "Now you have come home, I can tell you about that . . . friend of yours."

"Monkeys could talk," said Apparicio sourly, "if they were not afraid of being made to work."

Sacha petted Chico till he could face the world again. Henceforward the bath, like Dom Francisco's shave, was a weekly matter . . . but it was the hated bully Apparicio who carried it out. Sacha, rather meanly, reserved to himself the post of comforter.

Sunday was Chico's day. Sacha disliked the aftermath of the brutal orgies so much that he borrowed a canoe and set out with the light. He never took a gun, for he had food enough, and was satisfied with lying on his back or observing the wild life of the swamp. In the backwaters, where the surface had the depth and power of an old Venetian mirror, he would linger for hours with only Chico and Valente and the silence for company. Sometimes he read, but even this aid to peace was not necessary; to him the Xarayes Marsh was a place of rest.

During February of that year the rains were particularly

vicious. The swamp rose like baking bread and the *Aventureira* floated sixty meters toward the ranch. Cane-fields were awash, and the prisoners grumbled and shivered in their huts. Sacha, knowing his machinery must be idle, obtained a month's leave and, taking the canoe, set forth alone.

For a long while past he had been collecting Indian manufactures. He collected them as he collected photographs and memories . . . because he loved Brazil to the uttermost queerness of her boundaries. He had feather-work of all kinds, exquisite head-gear, stomachers and fans; strange alligator-tooth bracelets and tiger-claws set in crowns like chaplets of rough thorns. But he still lacked the famous Bororo tiger-tooth charm: big canines in the center, flanked by small canines and winged by molars . . . the charm which in those days was not for sale.

The Bororo Reservation on the Rio São Lourenço is the work of General Candido Mariano da Silva Rondon. He deserves an international reputation, both for courage and humanity, yet, outside the geographical societies, he is unknown. He is three parts Indian, five feet of energy and whalebone strength, the man who accompanied Roosevelt down the River of Doubt at the wish of the Brazilian Government. It is no disgrace to that fine gentleman and fighter to say that, without Rondon's help, the party could never have got through, starting as they did at the beginning of the rainy season.

A few decades ago there was a movement in Brazil for the abolition of the wild Indian. The Argentines had done

it; no longer could the pampa Indian be seen standing on his horse to find his bearings in the grass ocean. He was dead or migrated to the Chaco. Peruvians, Chilians, and Bolivians had driven the forest native into the recesses of the Amazon basin. So the pundits in Rio de Janeiro decided to be civilized too. Rondon stood out, saying it was a crime to punish these creatures with the sword. They were gentle enough when left alone. Why should not they live their lives in the far jungles? He, personally, would answer for their behavior.

"Very well," said these rulers, in effect, "but the Virgin have mercy on you if our settlements are burned."

Rondon went back to his wilderness. He gathered an army of scum—killers from Cuyabá, thieves in peril of their skins, men without property or hope—and he drilled them into the finest auxiliary peacemakers that the continent had ever seen. True, he had to shoot a fair proportion before they learned that Indians must not be slaughtered; but they did learn, and the natives worshiped him for a god. By and by the ministers remembered him. At their entreaty he rode to the coast, twelve hundred thirsty miles, and showed his diaries. Not a single rancher murdered, nor a single farm ablaze. The pundits gasped.

"But of what use are Indians?" they asked plaintively, determined that even the marsh creatures should pull economic weight.

"How about a telegraph line from São Paulo to Cuyabá, perhaps to the Amazon main stream at Manaus?" answered Rondon.

Here was an argument that officialdom could interpret. Whole departments moved. All Brazil rejoiced in the idea of commercializing the Indian. The game began. A little money oozed from the treasury; and for some years Rio heard but spasmodically of Rondon. To-day, if one should happen in the path of it, one may behold the dream crystallized in telegraph poles. Through swamp and thicket, jungle, mountain, and cattle-plain that line cuts the map as cleanly as the Borgia pope's ruler. For close on to two thousand miles the feat endures, with a hundred-foot clearance on each side lest a storm-killed tree should impair the receipt of news.

Nor does that finish the activities of Rondon. Setting out casually one autumn, he walked from Matto Grosso to Pará, ferried the Amazon, and continued his march into British Guiana, where he plotted the frontier. On the way he made friends with the savages, spoke to them in their tongue, and promised them safety if they did not kill or burn. And they loved him. They had seen him kill his own men when these abused the hospitality of the woods, just as if he considered the murder of an Indian a crime. At intervals they sent messages from the steamy gorges of the Amazon, asking for his advice.

As an explorer he is untouched. Nine out of every ten expeditions are in the nature of smash-and-grab raids. The party lowers its head and rushes madly through, picking up what data may be possible on the way. Rondon lived in the Amazon. Methodically and quite without thought of gain (he is a poor man) he mapped the course of each tributary

in that stupendous basin, until there is only one to find. His charts are the stand-by of geographical societies the world over.

Now he is in disgrace. His inflexible large-mindedness nauseated the ambitious jacks in office, who resented his refusal to annihilate. Yet he is not discouraged. His name will survive in legend when the bureaucrats are no more than signatures in forgotten pigeonholes. A century hence, when the Tapajos and Xingú rivers are settled and farmed, Candido Mariano da Silva Rondon will be something more than a memory. This small, erect, indomitable man will be cherished.

Sacha encountered his work when he landed at the reservation, a national park where a once great hunting tribe could end its evolution in security. The Bororos are nomads, famous as archers and spearmen. They believe themselves descended from deer, which is a nobler ancestry than the one-celled amœba of civilization. *Cervo*, the swamp-buck, and *Veado*, the wood-deer, are sacred and must not be eaten. Fish and birds, capibara, tapir, and wild pigs are their diet, helped out by the maize which they plant in their temporary encampments and which must on no account be cooked green.

They are a manly tribe, broad and very muscular, keeping their bodies elastic by the weaving motions of their dances, which take place at night. Their ethics are crude, shorn of all trimmings, for the narrow margin of error will not afford sentiment. The witch-doctor is the arbiter of manners, and he decrees that all dead flesh must be treated first

by him. The spirit of the animal, he says, is still within the body. Thus religion is assured of the prime cut, and rightly. Any one who can bluff the soul of a tiger into thinking that somebody else shot it, is worthy of his hire.

Old men and women fall strangely ill among the Bororos. They call in the witch-doctor, who cures them forever by wrestling with the devil within them. A rope is knotted round the chest of the patient, a stick is inserted, and he is garroted. Funerals are piously attended.

Those children who are born before the previous member of the family can walk also are strangled. This sounds cruel, but with hunting nomads whose lives may depend on a swift change of ground it is inevitable. The mother is traditionally the bearer of all sleeping-mats, cook-pots, gourds, and feather ornaments. A second child would be beyond her strength.

Young women need not be chaste before their marriage; nor is an early baby discouraged; but once a woman has taken a husband she must be more circumspect than Cæsar's wife.

The rain ceased the day after Sacha's arrival. By noon the great dancing-ground was almost dry. Its surface was crumbled ant-heaps and the porous beaten material drained like gravel. Groups of Bororos, with their fine Indian heads midway between the fierce North American redskin and a wise old Chinese, were lounging in conversation. They were quite naked. At the sight of the tiger-teeth which Sacha had brought to be made into a charm they burst into loud glee, hopping like Chico on the barge. Yet when he conveyed by

interpreter that they were not for sale, a glassy silence fell. Several turned away. An elderly warrior alone seemed interested, holding out a wrinkled hand.

"May I touch?" he asked courteously, palming the big canines.

Within a minute he was puzzled. He gazed up at the sky, peered at the barren ground, chatted anxiously with the half-dozen of his friends who had not departed, and addressed the interpreter.

"It is queer," he said, "very queer indeed. I have lost the teeth."

His eyes were astoundingly frank.

In after years Sacha never thought of this incident without laughter. Now he was furious and impotent. These seven full-grown savages, stark naked, on a baked level area which could not have concealed a mosquito's egg, squinted and hunted and wrung their hands in an agony of hospitable woe. They moved aside to show they were not standing on the treasure, requested him even to poke into their hair lest the incredible should have happened. When asked for an explanation, they waved vague fingers, saying that spirits were everywhere.

"Very well," Sacha said brusquely. "I will go to the chief."

Instant commotion broke out. The gentleman was not angry? They could not bear a guest to feel insulted. No, answered the gentleman, he was not angry, only amazed. The Indians dispersed without haste.

The chief was a personage of dignity. A hundred genera-

tions of fighting, scheming blood mantled him like ermine. His face was seamed with the experience of his ancestors, his eyes as profound as a Buddhist philosopher's . . . or Chico's. Sacha, upright before him, had no wish to smile at the parrots' feathers which stuck out at right-angles to his nose. Dressed as a buffoon he would still have been a chief. He listened politely.

"Does the gentleman say he can pierce a tooth in an eye-blink?" he asked. "For us it needs a moon with a sharp stone."

Sacha unpacked his drill, wedged the tooth against a hut pole, and presented the result. The chief sent command unto his tribe.

"Let every man bring his trophies," he called. "Here indeed is magic. If the stranger will pierce but a small number he shall have his charm."

Gradually Sacha became aware of the old man who had mislaid the canines. He was squatting at one side, in an aura of mental purity; and the teeth were in his palm. There could be no doubt of the identity, for they were stained in a peculiar way. Sacha glared.

"It is queer," said the Bororo, unperturbed, "very queer indeed. I have found them. They were lying on the earth."

His expression was so candid that Sacha permitted unrighteousness to triumph. He reflected that no European had ever possessed the fetish, and, moreover, that they had witnessed a unique display of conjuring. He paid ungrudgingly in teeth.

At the end of a fortnight Sacha took leave. Back in Aricá,

Apparicio greeted him with news, while Valente wriggled and leaped. Chico, distrusting the company into which he must have fallen, mounted his shoulder and parted his beard for fleas.

"Six prisoners escaped," said Apparicio. "They have just been caught. They will be thrashed to-night."

Sacha asked why they had gone.

"The men were bored. They stole a canoe and were foolish enough to take drink. They were discovered blind drunk three leagues away. The women . . ."

"Women?" said Sacha. "Are women going to be thrashed?"

"Of course. I don't, myself, approve, but it is the rule. It was hard luck on them. Dom Francisco's daughter had a João Pinto, a black-and-yellow song-bird, very tame. One of the prisoners' cats killed it. Dom Francisco was angry at his daughter's tears and ordered every cat to be shot. These women had one, not the guilty animal, and that died with the rest. They ran away as a protest. But they grew hungry and returned. I should have thought Bororos would have more stamina."

Sacha laughed.

"Bororos? Come, Chico, let us talk to Dom Francisco."

In the big dining-room an indignation meeting was in full cry. Just before he knocked Sacha heard the white-haired lady say vigorously, "But you cannot beat them, Francisco!"

Then Sacha entered, and the conversation swung to safer topics. He remained for half an hour, speaking of his holiday. In the doorway, as he left, he said inaccurately:

“By the way, I have a message from General Rondon. He is coming to pay you a visit to see how his erring women are thriving. Good night.”

He was conscious of a sudden hush.

The screams which he heard on the *Aventureira* that evening were purely male.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

IN THOSE enchanted lands where *Urubú*, the vulture, has licensed himself scavenger, undertaker, and emergency coffin all in one, men are less apt to be impressed by death than are those who live within the borders of a district council. Maybe the Northern emphasis on the gravity of passing tends to prolong the fight; maybe the Southerner is lazy; but whatever the cause, dying is a simpler business in the South. Sacha observed this twice during his stay in Aricá.

One siesta-hour, when he was apologizing to Chico for Apparicio's manners, somebody coughed near by. He looked out and beheld a middle-aged prisoner, standing phlegmatically on the wharf.

"You have medicine, senhor?"

"Certainly. What kind?"

"It is like this. José, my brother, and I . . . my name is Pedro . . . were resting after our meal. Into his hammock, from the roof, dropped *Jararaca*. He was angry and bit José and, when I tried to remove him, bit me. He is now dead."

"Who? Your brother?"

"No, *Jararaca*. I held his tail and beat his head against the door-post until he died."

Sacha cursed him for a sluggard and bolted into the cabin. *Jararaca* is one of the most dangerous snakes in Brazil, the

fer-de-lance, and speed is vital. He opened his mule-trunk, extracting a hypodermic syringe and three serum cartons; one for those times when the breed of snake is uncertain, one for the rattler, and one for all others; and the fierce rhythm of the names on the labels was a saga of evil. "Cascavél," "Capitão do campo," "Jararaca," "Jararacuçu," "Surucuçu," "Cruzeiro," they stared from cardboard as if with fangs alert.

"Come, I will inoculate you," he said.

The prisoner advanced on to the barge, remarking: "I want to live; I am not so sure about José."

Sacha turned him round, drove the needle between his shoulders because the dose was large and the swelling would injure an arm. Then he ran from the river, up past the machine-sheds, to the native huts.

"This way," cried several voices. "Here he is!"

José, a younger edition of Pedro, was sitting on the edge of his hammock with his fingers to the ball of his thumb. His olive face was very flushed, but he displayed no fear.

"Is death quite certain?" he asked.

"Not a bit. Turn round."

The man did not move.

"A dose of that stuff would cure me?"

"Of course. Be quick."

"What will happen if I don't take it?"

Sacha grew impatient, but controlled himself to speak calmly:

"The poison will break your blood-vessels. The blood will leak through your body as the water from the Rio Cuyabá

spreads over the marshes after the rains. You will go purple and die in agony."

A pair of tired, disillusioned eyes wandered from the palm roof to the dead snake and thence to Sacha.

"I thank you for your trouble, but I would rather die."

"Don't be a fool," Sacha said angrily. "This prick will save you."

José twitched a little as the pain caught him.

"You do not understand. In my church a man burns in hell when he takes his own life; but the priests say nothing about not trying to save it. Your pardon, senhor."

He tucked his feet into his hammock and lay back. Sacha spoke once more:

"You are decided, José? It is a serious matter."

There was no sign beyond a tiny sideways motion of the head.

Sacha had lived in the kingdom of *Urubú* for long enough to respect his neighbor's ideas. If the fellow had been crazy or drunk he would have injected him, but he was not; he was just weary of his own company.

"Listen," he said quietly. "I will leave the syringe on this banana leaf. If you change your mind in twenty minutes you may live."

"Thank you, I shall not need it. Good journey!"

Later in the day Sacha passed the funeral. The body was the color of raspberries. Pedro, on the other hand, was as lively and obstreperous as ever under the influence of the next orgy.

By the end of April the rains were over, and Aricá was

plunged into the sugar season. Long before daybreak the marshes echoed to the thud of bill-hooks, and the soft leaves of the falling cane stems rustled as if the wind were in them. At five o'clock, when Sacha came on duty, a huge pile of stalks lay ready to be crushed. The water rumbled in the boiler; the negro assistant grinned. As the lever was pulled down the belt slapped on the fly-wheel, the rollers turned, and the canes squelched through, dripping the juice into the vats. This continued all day and far into the darkness.

It was now that Sacha's care of the machinery was put on trial. The old steam-engine whooped and spat, blowing hot whiffs at unexpected angles and rusting as she dried. She was wayward, humorous, and tyrannical, chortling in gasps at her tricks. Her compression was fickle, her respiration vile, her joints creaked under tow bandages; and she burned as much fuel as a self-respecting paddle-boat. Sacha, entering into the spirit, erected a forge with rawhide bellows and dared her to explode. Every night, for at least two hours, he oiled and tightened and praised, and the flirt in her enjoyed the treatment. Dom Francisco was delighted and paid visits to the miracle, when Chico bombarded him with oranges. Sacha was rewarded by the laden barges descending to Corumbá with sugar-sacks and boxes of *rappadoura*, the national toffee. An odor of heavy sweetness and the hum of toil enveloped Aricá.

"Next year you will make money," said Dom Francisco, after the machinery had grumbled into July without mishap. Sacha faced him.

"I know your meaning," he replied, "but it cannot be.

The *Aventureira* will be mine in September. I go south to hunt tigers."

The Brazilian was man enough to recognize finality.

Sacha began his preparations at once. He bought a piece of tool steel, heated it in the forge, and hammered out a blade for his spear. He went into the forest and cut a branch of the hardwood named *louro preto* and rasped and rounded it until he had a shaft six feet long, unbreakable. So much for his weapon; now he must assemble a pack. In Valente, passionately keen, with a voice like a silver bell, he had the perfect leader for unfamiliar country. It was impossible to lose touch with him even across two miles of swamp. His very slowness was an asset, for Sacha had sold his horses and thenceforward would have to run. Unfortunately there were no more skilled dogs in Aricá. So he entrusted the matter to a bargee who promised to do his best in Corumbá. The result was a brown mongrel called Pardo, and a minute, frisky imp whom he christened Vinte because he purchased him for twenty milreis. Dom Francisco displayed his sympathy by presenting a white, stocky fox-terrier, Tupí.

"Listen," said the rancher. "I am no tiger-man myself, but Tupí was left here by a hunter who later miscalculated a jaguar's speed. He told me the dog was too brave. In the language of the proverb, he played with a tiger thinking it a cat, and was nearly eaten on the one occasion he performed. But, my friend, you won't find it easy to get meat on the river, unless you relish *jacaré*. My advice is this: use Tupí for *Caytetú*. He will show you the holes."



TUPI THE BRAVE

Sacha thanked him gratefully. Dom Francisco was right. A tiger-dog is as rigorously trained, and as valuable, as a first-class foxhound. Valente, a tried leader, would have fetched twenty-five pounds, which is an enormous sum in the wilderness. Nor is the price excessive; for not only must a tiger-dog be courageous and wary, he must be intelligent too. He must follow the prey through marsh, forest, and plain until either it comes to bay or jumps into a tree. In both events he must announce the fact clearly. If a pig or armadillo or tapir, capibara, or deer bolts under his nose he must not shift one meter from the trail. Anything that does not reek of cat is as forbidden to him as a rabbit to a foxhound. Tupí, therefore, was easily worth his place as caterer among the *Aventureira's* crew.

Apparicio watched the preparations with stolid good feeling. He had no personal ambitions toward fighting tigers hand to hand, yet saw no reason why Sacha should not indulge. Rather, he encouraged it. It was he, for instance, who suggested a horn, an idea that pleased his friend at once. Sacha sliced off the tip of a dead cow's horn, oiled it and cleaned it and experimented. For a while he underwent the disappointments of this type of music, but, within a week the farm shuddered. Valente, Vinte, Pardo, and Tupí learned to gallop at the clarion. It was their dinner-bell and later would be the trumpet of assault. The prisoners were openly amused.

A Brazilian *tigrero* will usually hunt with a pack of twenty-odd. Sacha regarded this as wasteful, hating that

anything should give up its life to his pleasure; and he had a theory that four was the efficient number. Hearing of his requirements, a negro workman approached him.

"I will take you to an old hunter," he said. "He lives out yonder, in an *aterrado*."

Sacha had heard of these places. Originally they were great mounds of earth raked by hand out of the swamps, by the Indians of old time. Now they are rank with trees and undergrowth, *capones* in the midst of water. They were inhabited by the lonely ancestors of the ancient builders. They occupy about two acres and are so cunningly placed in the maze of marshy lanes and by-turnings that no one, to this day, can reach them without a guide. Even in the driest of dry seasons the Xarayes laps against their shores. Here dwell the philosophers of Matto Grosso, natives whose fathers disapproved of the Conquest and retired into solitude. The machinery was running smoothly, and Dom Francisco granted him short leave.

"How much shall I pay for the dog?" asked Sacha.

The negro smiled.

"Coins to a Marshman, senhor? He has never seen a town; but a bag of sugar and a liter of brandy will purchase his very hide."

They descended the Rio Cuyabá to its junction with the São Lourenço and entered the vast peninsula of swamp that reaches fifty miles and more to the Rio Paraguay. The country was deadly flat, riddled with plant-locked lagoons and hot reed-beds. Sometimes it was deep enough to paddle;

sometimes they hauled the boat through acres of tasseled rushes. The action of the water was not lateral at all, only vertical, in the form of haze. At intervals the negro yielded to the Brazilian passion for slaughter, and the explosion of his rusty blunderbuss seemed more shocking than a crime. Chico sat in the bows and made faces at his own reflection.

Their course was intricate. Even Sacha, accustomed to steer by landmarks, was astounded at the guide's bump of locality. There was neither tree nor hill nor outline which was different from its neighbors. Yet the man proceeded with confidence, saying from time to time, "Three leagues more," or "This pool is half-way," and singing as if he owned Xarayes. He was much puzzled by Sacha's compass.

"How can you be certain?" he was asked.

"I was born here. Thirty-five years have I gone back and forth. The bushes have one image in the rains; now, in the dry season, another. I know both."

Presently they turned up an alley, edged past a lily-boom and the *aterrado* stood against the sky. It was an unbelievable piece of work to have been raised by hand. Two hundred meters long by a hundred wide, it must have sheltered a mass of families in the bad days of the Conquistadores. As the dugout glided forward a wave of perfume hastened with a greeting. For the island was covered by a *lapacho* grove in full bloom, a delirious splurge of pinks and mauves and lilacs in the harsh green of the swamp. A long canoe was fastened to the bank. At the end farthest from the shore a man was pulling in a line. Beside him a dog peered eagerly

at the water and snapped when a fish was viewed. The negro shouted for permission to land, running his craft into the ooze. Chico leapt at a tree and disappeared.

The Indian who owned the *aterrado* was a tiny, wizened creature, too small for his crinkled skin. He moved with extreme weakness, shuffling along his canoe, and holding the fish to his brown chest. He seemed immeasurably less manly than the Bororos until one noticed his eyes, which were as calm as his native hunting-grounds and were those of a man who has outgrown fear. His voice was almost inaudible.

"Look!" he whispered. "A pacu! a big, fat pacu! How skilful I am!"

His lean-flanked dog agreed, fawning and whining alternately. The Indian pushed him aside and, still hugging the fish, walked to the fire.

Sacha said quietly, "You are starving, you two."

The hairless face tilted; a smile flickered and went out.

"Three days! I was growing weak. Now Onça and I can share a kill."

Onça leaned toward the flames and wriggled in comprehension. Sacha fetched the charqui and eggs he had designed for his lunch. The Indian thanked him courteously, without humility. The smell of roasting fish mingled with the *lapacho* flowers.

"Listen, old fellow," said the negro, after man and beast had fed. "This gentleman wants to be a tiger-hunter. He is short of a dog. Can he have Onça?"

The Indian became less calm.

"My Onça for a person who shoots tigers! A nice ending

for a spearman's friend! No, I am grateful for the meat, but you must not take Onça."

"I, too, would be a spearman," said Sacha. "I have had lessons from Joaquim Guató."

"Huh!" grunted the old man. "That is better, and you have the muscles. You cannot have him, though. He is mine."

The negro approached craftily:

"The nights must be cold for any one with thin blood. The gentleman has a bottle of *canha* for sale."

In that moment the Indian was transformed. His calmness vanished. A horrible temptation was visible in his eyes. He glanced at the dog, at the canoe where the brandy lay, at the great sweep of marsh. His tongue caressed his lips and he trembled. He was no longer a dignified patriarch, but a spirit in the grip of a most dreadful urge. Sacha averted the cruelty of a choice.

"Onça is yours," he said quietly. "So is the drink, if a famous hunter will honor me in the acceptance."

The mask slipped back. The little man shambled to the bank and returned with the bottle, which he clasped as a woman clasps a baby, rocking it. At Sacha's request he spoke of the days when he really had been famous; and in the afterglow of forty years the old face shone. He referred, with frank reverence, to tigers that had vexed him in his youth; how he had fashioned a conch of bark and waited till a beast called. Then, replying in the voice of its mate, he had knelt in his dugout and listened for the first ripple of a swimming cat. A few strokes of his paddle and he had

ranged alongside, wounding deep with his iron spear. Once a tiger had found land beneath its paws and had jumped clean over the canoe, only to be stabbed in the instant of flight. Sacha, viewing the wasted sinews and minute frame, wondered how much of it was true. Yet as the hunter continued, it was evident he was not a liar. He was not boastful, did not strain after effect. He just mentioned these things in relation to a past career, as a dying priest might recount his visions to a neophyte.

"Remember this," the weak voice ended. "Do not aim at the head. The point slides off the bone."

Toward three o'clock the negro made motions of departure. He was sulky and amazed at the failure of his bargaining. Sacha looked earnestly at the Indian.

"We cannot leave you here, my hunter. You will die."

"There is always *pacu*, senhor."

"In three days, or perhaps less, you will be too feeble to throw a line."

"Maybe, but this is the home of my fathers. I cannot leave."

"Have you no friends, besides *Onça*?"

"A son and a wife, no more. He lives on another *aterrado* two leagues hence. She was hungry and bitter, and deserted me."

"You must go to them. They will care for you."

"I have no strength to pull my canoe through the weeds."

The old man was not perturbed. If he felt sorrow at the desertion, it did not appear. He squatted by his dog and fell into contemplation. Sacha was exasperated.

"You cannot stay here," he said. "When you die, as most assuredly you will, who can close your eyes?"

Very simply the Indian lifted an arm and pointed to a dark speck circling in the far heights. "There is always *Urubú*," he whispered.

It was some minutes before Sacha could think of a counter to this attitude, then, "Is it your idea of fitness," he asked sternly, "that a fine tiger-dog should die for a whim of yours?"

The hunter yielded at once.

"You are right," he said. "It would not be fitting."

He allowed himself to be placed, with his hammock, in the canoe. But now an extra difficulty arose. Chico would not obey. Swinging from limb to limb, he replied to his master's orders with politeness, though without haste. He even threw him a flower. Sacha was helpless and very angry; yet, because he was fond of Chico and to leave him would be sure starvation, he coaxed his voice into every tone from wheedling to gaunt threats. Chico grinned, holding his tail across his arm, like a lady's train. Sacha picked up the negro's blunderbuss and fired it into the trees. Chico dropped ten feet in sheer astonishment before anchoring at random with his tail. Then he gazed into the branches overhead to see what bird had been missed.

"Chee-chee-chee, kind master," he shouted. "This will never do. A straight eye is above rubies."

A peculiarly grim expression came into Sacha's face. He loaded with fine sugar and fired again. Chico sneezed. When he reloaded with slightly larger crystals, the monkey sucked

a paw. Finally Sacha chose the largest lumps in the bag and this time there was a squeal. Chico fell from branch to lower branch and landed on his feet. Inside three seconds he had vaulted to Sacha's neck and was kissing him warmly.

"Your monkey was naughty," he cried. "Never shall it happen again; please forgive Chico."

Henceforward the hint of a lifted gun was sufficient.

They paddled the Indian to his son's *aterrado*, where his aged wife greeted him for a fool. It was not, however, for long. Sacha heard later that he only went to preserve Onça. Having recovered a little strength, he returned to his own place, and the vultures closed his eyes as he had prophesied.

In the first week of October, Sacha's contract expired. The cane-fields had been stripped, the last cargo of sugar had been ferried to the market, and the lethargy of idleness descended on Aricá. The day before he sailed on his quest for spear fights Dom Francisco's daughter came aboard the barge. She was holding a tiny monkey.

"Your Chico may be lonely," she said, smiling. "Take Juca, a little gray howler whose mother was lately shot."

Sacha appreciated the gift and, after an interval of politeness, gave her some Bororo feather-work.

The whole of the Oliveira family and most of the prisoners lined the shore to see the last of the *Aventureira*. It was something between the removal of a menagerie to new quarters and the departure of a conqueror from Palos. Everybody cheered, the four dogs barked, and Chico turned somersaults on the cabin roof. Only Juca hugged himself

in misery like a very ancient judge who is reluctant to leave the earth. Then the river bent and the crowd dispersed.

There followed a period of deep happiness which was primarily the reward of courage, the outcome of Sacha's refusal to be dominated. Yet it was far more than that. The simplicity of its power dived sheer to the roots of life and was the raw discoveries of a wanderer melted and poured into a mold. It was recognition of essentials carried to the height of a religion. Any boy of spirit may escape from his parents, any tramp may be free of an employer. But flight and abstention from work are often the beginning of a bondage more galling than a clerk's collar. From the earliest days of his *Odyssey* Sacha had sensed that it was not easy, and had lived instinctively in that discernment. Now he perceived the rules and responsibilities of freedom.

In the *Aventureira* he had the home of his dreams. Ten months of his life had gone to her purchase, enhancing the savor. When he was thirsty he dipped a cup and drank. When hungry he shot *Caytetú* with Tupí. When tired he climbed into his hammock. For company he had Apparicio, whose friendship was such that they often passed days without a word and without friction. His dogs loved him; in Chico he had a perfect clown. While, over and above these mercies, he had the absolute serenity of a great river, the unforced silence of a marsh, and the solemn broodings of a forest with which to commune during any one of twenty-four bright hours. He felt as if he were in the nursery of a planet before sin arrived.

The animals were a daily joy. He knew their characters as well as he knew Apparicio's glum loyalty, and he studied their whims. Valente, wise and steadfast hound, understood the most varied cadence of his voice. Pardo was nondescript, pattern of that huge majority of men who are unhappy leaderless. Vinte was eccentric, never accepting Valente's word, never giving tongue until the scent of the tiger was unbearable in his nostrils. On the two occasions they had hunted since leaving Aricá the beast had jumped into a tree, providing no sport; but Sacha had seen that his pack was willing.

Chico was in persistent need of forgiveness. One hot afternoon, when Sacha was dreaming in the bows and Apparicio was asleep, a queer little sorrowful wail rose from the end of the barge. Sacha got up and walked along the port side. He peered over the roof and discovered Juca weeping. Chico was studying the river. On hearing his master, he wheeled and said affably, "Chee-chee, old friend. Greetings."

Sacha returned to the bows. Ten seconds later the sobbing began again. This time Juca was still holding his gray head, Chico still profoundly lost in nature. Sacha withdrew, but removed his boots and crawled to starboard, appearing soundlessly from behind. Alas! Chico was no longer a student. One skinny paw gripped Juca by the neck and ducked him in the hounds' drinking-bowl. The other was scrubbing him with soap freshly dipped in water. The vision made Sacha roar. Chico dropped Juca and endeavored to explain.

"Chee-chee-chee," he lamented. "Most unfortunate! It was going to be a surprise."

His naughty eyes interpreted Sacha's mirth. His voice grew prim.

"Dirty Juca!" he said. "Dirty, dirty Juca!"

Thenceforward Juca lived in a cage.

In the white heat of late November Sacha often slept during the day. At eventime he would come on deck, sluice himself from a bucket, eat his meal, and settle to a twelve-hour vigil at the prow. On these occasions he would take an oar to fend the *Aventureira* off the weeds, but this was only an excuse. His real object was the undisturbed enjoyment of a quite astounding peace. For an hour or two after sunset the crickets trilled and the bullfrogs sang. The plovers cried mournfully from the swamp. But toward eight o'clock the anthem would dissolve into the voices of a few choristers, as if they alone were undaunted by their praise. In the clear, pure light the sky seemed to descend, the stars blinked familiarly, almost in his face. The Milky Way flowed. The whole universe conspired to hold its breath at the beauty of its own image. The only noise was the occasional splash of a *jacaré* when the boat approached too near.

It was on just such a night that adventure called to Sacha out of absolute repose. He was standing motionless with the oar in his hands, ready to discourage a branch that was threatening the cabin. The pole was within a foot of it when, from the forest near by, a tiger spoke. He was not angry, he was not even aware of the *Aventureira*. His voice was slow

and deep . . . "Wooooof! woooof! woooof!" . . . without hiss or growl. Presently it increased. The tempo quickened; the scale rose. It became tremulous, questioning, beseeching. Then Sacha knew it was a male in search of a mate.

Valente jumped quickly from the cabin and ran forward, his nails clicking on the boards. His hackles were rampant, and he murmured in his throat. He was joined by Vinte, Pardo, and Tupí, while Chico squealed in fear. None of the dogs barked, but Valente pressed against Sacha's hand. The *Aventureira* slid into the bank and made fast.

"Now Valente," Sacha said gravely, as between men, "I know you could find that chap. Your master knows you could, but it is night. Let us wait. Then we can both have fun."

Valente cocked an ear, pondered a while, and led his friends into the cabin.

Sacha was too excited to retire. A little wind, sweeping the jungle floor at the level of his head, whispered odd stories of the ways of beasts. He watched the stars turn pale in the glory of the rising moon and listened to the tiger's love-cries; heard with enchantment the female's coy response, pictured them as they traced each other by their song. A mile down-stream the voices merged and ceased.

An hour before daylight he called Apparicio, and told him to prepare a *mattee*. While the water was boiling he unsheathed the spear-tip and whetted it to a saber-edge. He rasped the shaft for a grip; and Valente eyed him like a cat.

"What shall I do with your stuff if the tiger disapproves of you fatally?" asked Apparicio.

His somber face was clouded. He filled a gourd and produced a silver tube.

"Sell it in Corumbá," replied Sacha. "Keep a third and give the rest to Ernst."

At that moment the tiger roared. He had gone for a walk after the mating, for he was a full half-league away. Sacha took his horn, sending a clarion blaring among the trees.

"Hai-yah! Hai-yah! Hai-yah!" he shouted. "Valente, Pardo, Vinte!"

For perhaps ten seconds the dogs yelled, but directly they had scrambled up the bank they fell silent. With sterns erect and questing noses they vanished and Sacha was alone. The jungle at this point was crowded. There were few palms. The trees stood far apart and the gaps were choked by a spider's web of undergrowth. *Caraguatá*, wild pineapple, was the basis, a tough and slender thorn, breast-high, with a row of fish-hooks along the leaves. The Queen of Cats, which looks like a rope-weed until the barbs are home, tore him in his haste; his shirt was in ribbons and his skin raw before he had gone a hundred yards. It was impossible to see more than three meters in any direction. He progressed by instinct, parallel with the river.

After an hour's aching trot Valente clanged like a bell. In the same instant the tiger grunted and Pardo squealed with pain. Sacha imagined him dead, but a whimper and a further peal of wrath encouraged him. He halted till his

breath returned and then shouted exultantly. Valente answered, and the fight was on.

Now Sacha was to all intents blind. He could hear everything, even the click of the dogs' teeth. He could easily imagine the details. Yet, at what moment the vegetation might bulge at him, he could not tell. He advanced cautiously and the fray receded. He was in a circular clearing of thirty meters diameter. It was quite bare and just beginning to warm in the bright sun. Behind the rampart of vines and lianas at the farther side the rumbling growl of the tiger mingled with Valente's triumph.

"Here we are, master," he boomed. "We have got him cornered. Finish him."

Ever afterward, in speaking of this time, Sacha laid emphasis on his fear. He was not ashamed of the emotion, it seemed natural. He knew that he was shaking, that his stomach was a void, and that he might well prove a coward. Nobody could check a retreat. If he mentioned to Apparicio that the tiger had escaped he would not be doubted. Only, in that case, he would have to shoot Valente, whose eyes were unusually expressive. Trembling in every sinew, he moved across the sand.

At the limit of the clearing his position became acute. The tiger was perspiring through his mouth, resting. The dogs whimpered. All four creatures were summing Sacha up, and he could see none of them. He felt desperately lonely, and his hands were wet. He raised his spear and carefully parted the bushes. The breathing stopped.

To this day Sacha does not know why he stood firm at

just that instant. An extra sense, maybe, fruit of his communion with the wild. He braced his feet, slightly bent his knees as Guató had taught him, and the tiger came. One moment Sacha was staring at a wall of bushes, the next a great painted animal with yellow fangs and a pink back to its throat coughed from the tip of his spear. The blast of air which issued in his face was rank with carrion. Two ironshod paws met against the shaft.

With the whole force of his body Sacha resisted the attack. Once the battle was joined, all fear departed and he was joyful in the application of his strength. He was like a god, wrestling with another god. The tiger lurched and plunged, whirling with its feet, until Sacha's face was ripped and bloody from the thorns, even through his beard; but the spear was tight in his hands and the blade deep in the beast's chest. Mustering himself for one gigantic effort, he turned his enemy on to his flank and wrenched away the steel. Then he ran out into the clearing.

The tiger was on him before he was fairly set. The majesty of the onslaught brought him to one knee, making the spear-shaft rock. He wheeled, slipped, struggled for a foothold, pulled himself erect with the spear itself for a lever. As he rose the point dipped to the cross-piece in the mottled throat, passed through, entered the soil. The beast was pinned.

Then Sacha leaned on the butt, pressing downward with the energy of a madman. The round eyes went green with hate. Strange noises formed and died. A ripple quivered along the hide; the head drooped. The pack broke cover and worried at the carcass. Sacha removed his spear.

Suddenly he remembered the last rite of the chase. He jumped on to the tiger's ribs and threw back his head and there sounded in that glade the identical wild poem of exaltation that, ages before, he had learned from his teacher's lips.

When he regained the *Aventureira*, Apparicio heard him with a smile.

"Good, friend!" he said. "Very good, but you gave one wound too many. You should have reached the heart."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

A FEW leagues south of Lake Gaiba the Rio São Lourenço flows into the Rio Paraguay. It discharges its levy humbly, as behooves a tributary, through a broad gap in the marsh. Yet, to those who love Nature's stagecraft, the change of landscape on the far bank of the main stream is almost unbearably dramatic.

Here Xarayes ends, and her waters may please themselves. They may seep into the river and eventually turn salt near Buenos Aires, or they may lie about in pools to the benefit of *Jacaré*. But, should they desire the westward trail toward Bolivia and the Andes, they must pass as vapor. For a two-thousand-foot, iron-ore mountain-range dips to the very shore. The effect, after the dreary monotone of flat horizons, is that of the Empire State Building condescending to Fifth Avenue. Sacha, who had seen the phenomenon in the distance for many days, beheld it entire for the first time, at sunset, from the *Aventureira's* deck. The outline had melted from green to gold-rimmed purple and thence to starkest black before he moved.

This natural drop-scene has an echo in history. Xarayes is not the only portent to cease with the Rio Paraguay. To the east, at any rate in the upper reaches, is the Brazil whose existence was probably no secret in Lisbon fifty years before

Columbus claimed America. To the west are the old Spanish colonies. Wherefore the coffee-colored winding river, which extends like an alimentary canal from the Amazonian boundary to the Plate, is the spirit of the Borgia pope's line. It was not, however, until 1515 that Europe, in the person of one Juan Diaz de Solis, heard anything about it.

Twelve years went by and then Sebastian Cabot, Pilot-Major of All Spain, put into the estuary of La Plata, mistaking it for Magellan's Straits. Wholly against orders, he followed the river one thousand miles up-country and built a fort where is now Asuncion. He was exiled for his courage, but his favorable account loosed a whirlwind of priests and heroes and greedy knaves who hoped to repeat Pizarro's brilliant dream. Indians, peering between tree stems, watched caravels with painted sails tack against the current. Bearded men, blanketed with quilt armor, flashing in breastplates, removed their morions in the sunlight to wipe foreheads that had gone bald under the steel. Dominicans in black gowns fingered their beads, devouring the natives with hungry eyes; for here was a worthy feast of souls. Genoese sea-captains, mates of Spanish ships, rolled through the sandy fort in argument with Conquistadores before spreading their canvas for Cadiz. Mercenaries and idealists, jail-birds and ambitious younger sons gazed at the water and the jungle as their clothes grew shabbier monthly beneath the Queen of Cats. Women, there were, too, fine ladies of the court, invincible alike in their beauty and the lack of competitors. It is a brave picture.

Historically the Rio Paraguay is unique. In the sixteenth

century it was a disappointment, a golden egg that never quite got hatched. The Conquistadores were men of their age, looking to metals to pay for hardship, and in that country the riches are under the soil. Wealth came later, though not in the way they meant, when the Jesuits mobilized the savages to grow corn. These devoted and courageous men were Latin scholars. They knew that "till" and "worship" are the same verb, and therein lay their power. They were expelled in 1767 by a nervous Spanish king, but their Toledo-cast bronze bells still clang for vespers in the forest churches. The Rio Paraguay remembers these events together with the rest of the gallant tale so brilliantly expounded in Mr. R. B. Cunninghame Graham's "The Conquest of the River Plate." This is especially true in the rapt, soft-lighted hour before the darkness. Then Dominican and Jesuit, cutthroat, conqueror, and lady harken again to the splash of paddles and the "wheep" of arrows stinging out of thickets. For they loved the country.

Meanwhile Sacha had heard rumors of a glut of tigers to the south of Corumbá. They were annihilating cattle, pauperizing ranchers, and taxing the native spearmen till their blades wore thin. So cried gossip through the mouth of an excitable capibara-hunter, whose aunt kept a drink-shop in the town. ("She would be certain to know. Her company is so varied.") Sacha believed about a twentieth, but even this slim fraction caused him to take shifts with Apparicio in poling the *Aventureira* night and day.

It was grotesquely tedious labor. The motherly old barge was much given to nosing into creeks, and directly she was

asked to hurry, nosed the deeper, ruffling herself indignantly. The distance between São Lourenço junction and Corumbá was either forty miles or one hundred and fifty, according to whether the traveler was bird or fish; and the farther south the more exasperating the channel. The last sixty miles were accomplished in clear view of the town, which sat on a yellow hill and blinked its windows in the sun. Apparicio cursed the levity of the white houses for four days before the *Aventureira* grounded in water-weed behind the high tin chimney of the Electric Light Works.

Corumbá is the commercial capital of Matto Grosso and is almost humanly unpleasant. It stands on a platform above a wide bend in the river, which is the only coolness within its boundaries. In the daytime it sucks the heat into its limestone pores and takes care to wait till the mosquitoes are on the wing before exhaling foully upon the night. During the hottest months the proprietor of the Hotel Galileo wins many bets off strangers by pouring an egg on to the pavement and scraping it off baked. Sacha remained there a week, ferreting for information. He visited, among other haunts of virtue, the drink-shop of the hunter's aunt, where the company was indeed varied. But the stories were vague and he resolved to continue down-stream to a favored lair of tigers, Barranco Branco, the White Cliff. On the fourth evening of his sojourn a tragedy occurred.

He was leaning with Apparicio against the balustraded edge of the terrace in front of the main hotel. It was cooler at the top of the hill, and the imminent sunset over the Bolivian jungles promised an orgy of deep flame. Beneath

them were the ribbed iron roofs of the warehouses on the quay-side and the smoking funnels of a river boat, newly entered from Buenos Aires. The chatter of a donkey-engine rose fussily in the still air. Beyond was the glorious smooth sweep of water, shining like oiled metal except where it bubbled against the feet of a light-buoy, planted to mark a shoal. A native had tied his canoe to this support and was idly fishing.

Of a sudden something pale moved behind the Customs' yard to the left. Apparicio caught Sacha's arm.

"Name of God!" he said. "What fool is swimming there?"

Sacha made a shade of his hat.

"A European, I think. His skin is very white."

The river at this point was about six hundred yards across; and the swimmer was a quarter of a mile up-stream from the canoe, swimming leisurely, as if he enjoyed the bath. The current was bearing him in a diagonal. It was obvious that he would make the green line of sedge considerably farther south than he intended. They watched him in silence for a while and then Apparicio pointed to the buoy. The fisherman was no longer idle. He had loosed his craft and was upright in the stern, paddling like a maniac. The bow was lifted clear above the river; and a series of very faint sharp cries ascended to the terrace. The swimmer was now aware of his pursuer.

He had reached the center of the stream and had slackened visibly. His arms rose even more casually; soon he rolled on to his back and, with toes showing, floated. The Indian was quite close, not more than fifty yards away.

Abruptly Sacha yelled, and men ran from the hotel to see the cause. He could not help himself. He did not stop to reason that a mosquito might have whispered for all the good he did. Naturally the swimmer did not heed. He could not see the indefinite moving blur, like a cloud racing across a pool, which swept past the canoe and headed directly for him. Then a fish jumped, forced literally from the water by the press of its companions, and the man knew. He plunged on to his face and broke into a frantic trudgeon, slewing his course to the nearest spit of land. But before he had made ten strokes the blur enveloped him and the metal surface was splintered by the multitude of those that leaped. One frightful scream was transmitted upward (it was thin as a sliver of glass when it reached the town) and his head jerked up. There was a flutter of silver particles, a last waving of flesh, and then nothing. The water was almost calm when the Indian drew alongside. Sacha looked away.

"*Piranha*," he said dully. "Of course he would sink when his entrails went."

They descended to the little port and found a Scandinavian in tears.

"I told him how it would be," he cried, dancing with misery, "and he laughed. His boils were sore. The water cooled them. We have only been here a fortnight. What shall I do?"

The question was unanswerable. Sacha left him to his sorrow.

On the morning of his departure Sacha paid a visit to the town. He had a bear's sweet tooth and he sucked a fruit-

drop while he poked among the junk-stores on the quay. Here were the skins of every beast and lizard in Brazil. Twenty-foot anacondas, howler monkeys with rank black fur, capibaras, mole-soft otter and yellow deer, tiger, puma, and tiger-cat complete with cubs, two breeds of pig, ant-eater, and the red wolf of the forest—they all hung in sad disarmament from the ceiling. Here, too, he learned how not to preserve and kill a tiger. There were splendid hides ruined by a cowardly volley. Paws expanded when wet to give the impression of a mighty foe; specimens pulled out of design till they were nearly square; and large bare patches molted for lack of arsenic. Nevertheless he discovered the price of a well-cured hide and purchased some kilos of cotton rope and a wooden frame. As he went out a fat man in a straw sombrero met him.

"I think your name is Siemel. You are the third bearded man I have noticed in Matto Grosso."

Sacha bowed and the man fell into step beside him.

"Have you anywhere we can be private?" he asked. "I fear I have bad news."

Ernst was the only human beyond Apparicio whose destiny could affect Sacha. He glanced at the bobbing straw.

"My brother?"

"Yes. He asked me to give you a message."

"Then he is not dead?"

The sombrero halted.

"No, he is not dead. He killed a negro."

They walked rapidly and in silence to the rear of the Electric Light Works. Chico greeted them with a psalm,

but for once his pantomime misfired. He withdrew, chattering, into a tree.

"Now," said Sacha, having guided the stranger to a hammock, "if you would be so kind, tell me."

It was a grim tale. Ernst, it appeared, had been sitting in a drink-shop at the time. He was not drunk; even his enemies admitted that. Along the street came a negro, wild with *canha*, offering to slay any one who should prevent him drinking himself blind. The owner of the shop, a timid man, banged the door and shot the bolt. This infuriated the negro, who launched himself again and again until the timber squealed. In the intervals he took chips off the tiles with his .44. The customers threatened to fire through the door, but Ernst checked them. He had a .22 pistol, a child's weapon unless a vital part be touched. In his loud Northern voice he shouted to the drunkard to attend. There was a moment of stillness.

"Go home," called Ernst. "None of us mean you harm; but if you drink any more you will be dangerous and we shall have to kill you."

The only reply was a slightly longer run, which the landlord watched between the slats, and a more ferocious charge. Ernst aimed high at the door, but ill chance made the negro jump. The bullet caught him in the jugular and he died that night.

Now, by Matto Grosso ethics Ernst was blameless. The very worst that could have happened would have been a request to move elsewhere. Ernst, however, was sensitive. At the formal inquiry he lost his head. Instead of remembering

the harlot of Caçonunga, he thought that these men were really trying him for his life. He blustered and outraged the spirit of the meeting by saying that it was only a negro. At that there was a wicked hush. Hardly one of the townsmen was free of the black taint, and witnesses who hitherto had been defending him fell quiet. He was placed under guard while the burghers went into consultation.

Sacha whistled mournfully and the stranger said, "Your brother, I should imagine, never understood Brazil," before continuing the story.

One half of the population was for instant lynching; the other for removal to Santa Rita do Araguayá for a proper trial. The more courteous won, and, to insure arrival without murder or escape, one of his friends and one of his enemies rode south with him. He was now at Santa Rita with his wife and a year-old child. It was the first Sacha had heard of his nephew.

Sacha's plans were immediately upset. He told Apparicio to wait in Corumbá with the *Aventureira* and the animals. He bought a ticket on the noisy, sluggish, wood-burning paddle-steamer which runs to Cuyabá, left money with his friend, and embarked. He still had the price of his horses, and he hired two mounts in Aricá, placing them on a lighter. He had a long ride from Cuyabá and was forced to take his tools. Also he had an idea that he might have to stage a rescue. Ernst's offense might not be pardonable.

During the trek from Cuyabá the rains broke and the marsh filled up on him. So he turned due east to the Goyaz frontier and ascended the gorges of the Rio Araguayá. When

he came to Santa Rita, which has thirty poor houses in each province, the prison being in Matto Grosso, the red earth was hock-deep in mire.

Ernst received him moodily. He was astride a bench in a little mud erection without windows. In his hands and spread beside him was the mechanism of a revolver. The look in his eyes was unhealthy. His beard was almost gray.

"Cheer up," said Sacha. "If need be we can escape."

Ernst pointed to the tree-clad hills, the *campo cerrado* at their feet, and the dull pewter of a patch of swamp on the horizon.

"I could escape, myself," he declared. "Nothing easier. I am not chained. I go home every night," he indicated a low-roofed dwelling on the other side of the road, "to Maria and the kid. But where should I run?"

Sacha was astonished.

"Does not the policeman tie you up?" he asked.

"Why should he? Here he is. Ask him. . . . Good morning, Dom Marco."

An old barefooted negro with white hair and a fatherly expression swung in out of the wet. He greeted Sacha cordially.

"So this is the brother Dona Maria has been speaking about. Well! It is a bad business, though I have met worse."

"He means the Man from Rio," Ernst explained, and immediately plunged into a whirlpool of parish details.

"Yes." The jailer lit a cigar and lowered himself to the bench. "Exactly!"

With many waves of his cigar-point and a thousand clicks

of paternal disapproval, he outlined the story. Shorn of its obscenities and local allusions, it went something like this:

Zebu was a wealthy rancher. His physical attractions were inherent in his name (Zebras are the humped cattle imported from India) and he had twenty well-paid body-guards.

One fiesta-tide these *capangas* forgot themselves and shot the son of a near-by farmer who had been rude. The avengers did not bother to wait for the next feast-day. They surrounded Zebu's house, wounded him in the arm, and killed three of his friends. It was a brisk fight, but the bereaved father was not satisfied. Zebu must pay in more vital blood. Since the ranch was picketed, a stranger must be produced and the Man from Rio generously supplied the want. In exchange for five hundred milreis he rode up to Zebu's corral, demanding hospitality. Dismounting casually, he noted that the yard was clear and that the women were pounding clothes on the edge of a stream three hundred yards away. He was unsuspected. Zebu's wife offered him coffee, which he drank; and then, after wiping his mustaches, offered to cheer his host, who was moaning in a back room. He succeeded wonderfully. The pain vanished in the laughter. The wife retired to superintend the washing.

A .22 pistol makes little noise. Waving his hand to the ladies, he as casually rode away.

The country-side resounded. Nobody whined for Zebu, whose death was in any case inevitable. It was the acceptance of the coffee which riled men's souls. Yet, before galloping to revenge, both parties of body-guards had a glorious five-hour battle among the palms which no man survived. Where-

fore the law was concentrated on the aged Marco. He was not enthusiastic.

"Look you!" he finished. "He has a friend. When one sleeps, the other fondles his gun. How can I act alone? Approach I dare not; and I am a bad marksman, senhor."

His wrinkled face was very hopeful as he gazed at Sacha's hip.

Dona Maria, Ernst's wife, welcomed Sacha to their home. It was only a single room; four corner poles filled in with mud, but it sufficed. He made a trestle and unpacked his tools, for there was work in the village.

"Ernst makes a little money at repairing," said the girl, broader than ever now and holding the baby. "He had to leave most of his tools in Cuyabá, with his camera, as guarantee for a debt. He is very sad."

"So he ought to be," said Sacha. "It was a fool's trick."

"He is like that. His tongue goes like a runaway horse."

In the evenings Ernst came out of prison. He swung in his hammock, shoving with his toes against the wall and saying little. The unwisdom of his conduct did not occur to him. He was sullen with rage against those who had turned from him; and his brother and the girl were gentle with him.

One morning a boy entered with a pistol. He laid it on the trestle and said perkily:

"The Gentleman from Rio desires you to mend this gun. How much will it cost?"

Sacha's charges were five milreis for a known pattern;

twenty-five for a time-waster. The boy went out and returned later with the intimation that it was excessive.

"It is for the Gentleman from Rio, you understand."

"Let him go back to Rio," Sacha replied flippantly. "My prices are rigid."

That afternoon he encountered the murderer in the street. He was a small-boned man with bandy legs and a weak chin. His pale eyes dodged and shifted, never quiet and never meeting other eyes. He sidled up, hand on gun, voice husky and soft.

"You would not help me this morning."

"You would not pay my fee."

The voice grew insinuating; writhed.

"I am well known in the district."

"Clearly."

"My word goes for much. It is in my power to make pleasant your visit. Many people fear me."

Sacha appeared surprised.

"Fear you? Surely not. Who is afraid of a good man? Are you a thief or a torturer?" His tone sharpened. "I am not Zebu," he snapped. "Nor am I wounded and unarmed."

The pale eyes flickered, rested for a split half-second on the bearded face; and there leaped into them the maniac spite of all creeping things at the touch of Adam's heel. The Man from Rio was vividly reminiscent of Favelle, though without a particle of his courage.

"I shall give myself the pleasure to visit you soon," he moved away. "Maybe we will discuss prices."

When he had gone Dom Marco hastened from the prison.

"What a chance you missed!" he wailed. "Just one little bullet and all over. Why didn't you kill?"

Sacha took him by the arm.

"You are the policeman here," he said. "Is it my job to wipe Brazil's nose?"

Just before lunch next day a shadow momentarily obscured the light from the door. Sacha cocked his revolver and looked up. The Man from Rio, without boots, stood near the corner. His friend was just entering. They both looked sheepish.

"I have lived in the jungle for long enough to hear a tiger walk," Sacha exaggerated. "How should I not hear *Surucucu*, the rattler without a rattle? Do you ever give warning?"

The Man from Rio was silent. His body-guard started to bluster:

"That is not the way to speak to a gentleman."

"I never do," said Sacha, "and unless you are out of this room in less time than it takes this hammer to fall . . ."

The men fought for precedence in the doorway. As they gained the street a revolver spoke twice and Dom Marco burst into song.

"Thank you!" he cried, his white head bobbing. "Thank you. Without your help I could never have stalked them."

"Take them away," Sacha said disgustedly. "It is none of my doing."

Dom Marco took them away. He stripped them and bound them to a horse and, for three hours, drove them up and

down the street. When the vision palled on the inhabitants and he considered he had taught them a lesson, he slacked the ropes on the edge of the town and trusted to *Urubú*.

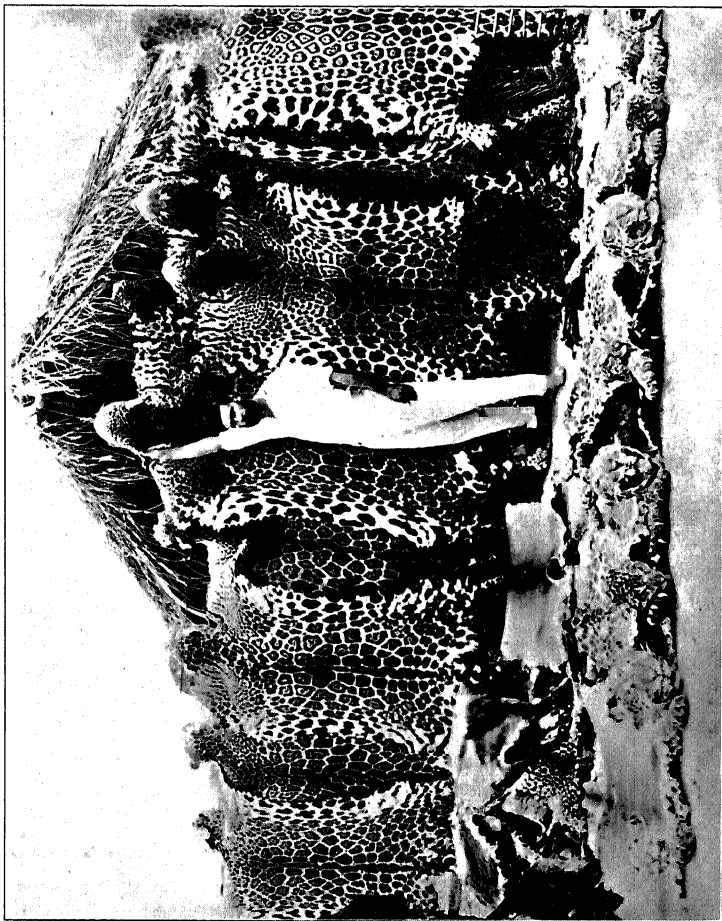
Ernst's trial, which took place a week or two afterward, was just and without prejudice. Now that tempers had cooled, it was agreed that he was a foreigner and that the offensive was not on his side. He collected his tools, his wife, and his child and returned to Cuyabá.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

IT IS no light promise to show the greatest hunter of the generation at the fell stretch of his powers and still hold the sympathy of the layman; for even this orgy of adventure must pall in the long run. It is convenient, therefore, to take artist's license, to select from the memories of two vital years the story of the hardest chase of all, leaving the rest to imagination.

During the whole of this time the *Aventureira* was moored at Barranco Branco, the White Cliff. Sacha made an income out of hides, allowing the sewing-machines of the district to repair themselves. In a little hut ashore he kept rope and frames and preservatives, and he sold his wares to the Paraguayan and Argentine merchants who came up-river on business. The ranchers within fifty miles hailed him as protector, which is hardly surprising when one remembers that a full-grown tiger will eat as many as seventy cattle in a year.

The *pantanal* or marsh jaguar of Xarayes is a far more impressive animal than is ever seen in captivity. A large male weighs anything between 300 and 350 pounds, the size of a medium Bengal tiger or an African lion. Circus trainers, who play casually with almost any cat, will not trust him in the ring, because he is apt to turn sulky, repaying the whip with



TIGER-MAN

his teeth. Blank cartridges fired under his nose do not distress him at all.

In the course of his South American wanderings Sacha killed 119. Of these 95 were shot with a rifle, 24 with bayonet, spear, and archery. He captured 10 cubs alive, 2 of which are now in Hagenbeck's zoo near Hamburg. Yet even these hunts which ended in a bullet were of more excitement than most men acquire in their lives. He used neither howdah, *machan*, nor *zareba*; nor did he lurk beside a water-hole. Every single one of them was pursued on foot through country that was always difficult, often blind, and sometimes so pestilential that only a Conquistador could have survived. For a hunt on horseback does not mean a finish on horseback. At the moment the tiger is bayed the rider must dismount, proceeding as his thumping heart dictates, generally quite alone. And the rifle of Sacha's choice was a superior kind of toothpick, thirty-two and a half inches long, dented by the anger of his foes. Five meters was the average range of the death-shot. Moreover, unlike the majority of big-game hunters, Sacha took no pleasure in wrenching the life out of harmless animals; to these he felt paternal. Valente, the most successful dog he had ever known, gave him 64 tigers.

Dom Antonio Cardoso of Firme, in the neighborhood of Barranco Branco, groaned beneath a tiger-plague. His ranchland, which was made up equally of swamp, cattle-plain, and forest, reeked with the death of kine. Thousands of *urubú* flew in from the surrounding farms, scarcely bothering to cruise the skies when they could gorge themselves at every

mile. Even the ooze of the marsh floor was less noisome than their banquets.

At the height of Cardoso's anguish (he was losing fifty cattle a week) Sacha walked into Firme. He had picked up the rumor on the *Aventureira* and had set out immediately with his hammock and mosquito-net, his spear and bayonet-pointed rifle. Valente, Vinte, and Pardo, sneering a little at less noted hounds, preceded him to the ranch-house. Dom Antonio, a square-built Portuguese, and a famous hunter in his youth, greeted him almost with tears.

"Only last night I was praying to São Antonio, my patron saint," he said warmly, "and you arrive to-day. I am too old for the game, but look! the spearmen are gathering."

He nodded toward a group of Indians who were roasting meat near a hut. Broad-faced Chamacocos, Guaranís with Mongolian slanted eyes, Guató's with pendent breasts and stooped shoulders—they represented the nomad enemies of the tiger, who appear not more than a shade slower than the vultures themselves. Sacha beckoned to a huge Guaraní, one José Abá, who had helped him on at least twenty occasions. He was known throughout the river for his courage and his beard, for a bearded Indian is a rarity; and José's curled as if his women insisted upon tongs. He came shambling to the call.

"Will you hunt with me again?" Sacha asked. "We have been lucky in the past."

Abá jerked his chin to the southward, across the marshes:

"Dom Antonio wants me to collect some horses at the mouth of the Rio Branco and bring them here."

Cardoso laughed and turned to Sacha:

"That is easy, if you do not object to a little walk. The Rio Branco runs east and west into the Paraguay, five leagues away. Let José go in his canoe, get the horses, and ride along the north bank. You can join him to-morrow evening. I will lend you a bearer for your hammock."

He plucked at his mustache, considering.

"You can keep the best horse for yourself," he ended abruptly.

When the first smell of dawn began to penetrate the darkness Sacha felt a prod against his ribs. He was already awake, but since he intended to join Abá without hunting that day and did not desire to blunder in the swamp, he lay still. Valente reproached and whined, pawing the mosquito-net until, the hammock having ceased to be a resting-place, Sacha got up. The three hounds at once indicted him for a sluggard and declared a private war upon all tigers. Their enthusiasm aroused the other hunters' dogs and the din became impressive. Dom Antonio's Indian shook himself, made some coffee, and collected Sacha's gear. With the breaking of the light they marched, Valente leading.

The geography of Firme is peculiar. To the west a belt of hilly woodland runs level with the Rio Paraguay; to the east the southernmost end of Xarayes lies in pools and meres and flats, relieved only by an occasional capão. Sacha took the middle course, skirting the marsh. The rainy season was almost due; the mud gleamed oilily and a sticky heat-wave rolled above the water-plants. The islands were unsteady in the haze.

Nobody hurried. Even the dogs moved casually, a hundred yards ahead. The morning freshness had died out of them and they were as bored as any one may be whose nose is a perpetual Sheherazade. Toward ten o'clock Sacha decided to lie up.

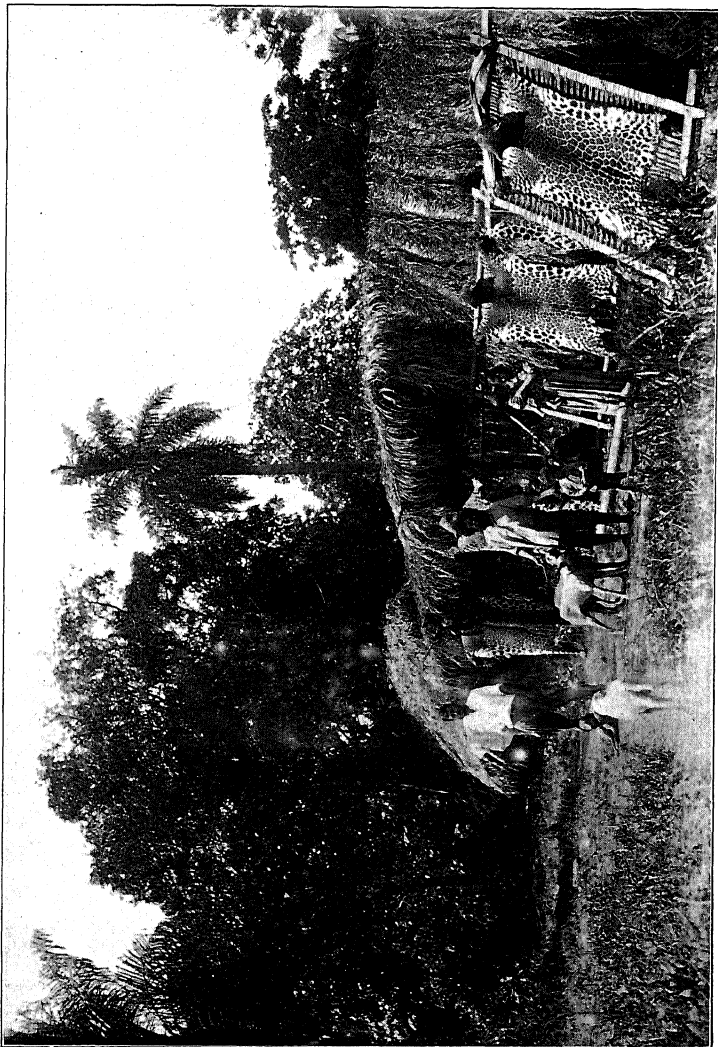
Suddenly Valente barked. Vinte lowered his head, mutely agreed with his leader, and pattered into the marsh. Pardo followed his betters. The Indian halted and grimaced. He was no hunter.

"Senhor," he said pathetically, "there is a full league between here and the Rio Branco. If the tiger turns east you may never reach the river. Blow your horn, O spearman, and call them off."

Sacha thought quickly. The dogs were galloping on a southeasterly slant, tails erect, noses down, breathing the musky odor that clung to the swamp bushes. He had no need to study the paw-marks in the shallows to realize that the track was new. The Indian shuffled impatiently. Sacha checked him.

He knew that one blast of his horn would control Valente, that such a hunt might well leave him without shelter for the night, that the swamp might beat him. He was still in two minds when he remembered Dom Antonio's words: "You can keep the best horse for yourself." Dom Antonio had trusted him to kill tigers. There had been no bargain; the horse was his as soon as he should claim it. The implied confidence drove him as no deed of transfer could have done, even were it stamped with a king's head.

"Walk you along the border," he told the Indian. "When



JOSÉ ABÁ AND FAMILY IN MY CAMP, "OCCULTO"

you come to the Rio Branco, go east until you meet Abá. Please take my spear. Rifle and bayonet are better for this job; my torch, too. I may need it to-night."

He shouted encouragement to the dogs, who heard him and ran the faster. He stepped into their wake.

At the moment that the warm marsh water seeped through the eyelets of his boots Sacha forgot himself in ecstasy. The blinding sun was no more than a snuffed taper and the reeking slime as perfume before the splendor of his dream. Here, he believed, was a chance to prove that a European, properly disciplined from within, could better the native at his own game. The idea rose to his head, and he laughed confidentially to the pink and yellow flowers on the bushes. This attitude endured for perhaps fifty meters.

It was the thick wet mud that changed him—that and the Indian's chuckle. He was running at top speed, his rifle parallel with the ground and his heart four hundred yards away with the dogs, when, all at once, his legs started a rebellion. One of them sank gurgling to the calf; the other, after scraping a while with the heel, nearly split him in its anxiety to proceed. A big black bubble hiccupped in his face as he subsided. Luckily the rifle was unharmed, but in that instant he lost his mental elevation. He became a serious hunter with a mission—to keep his feet until the tiger died, lest the dogs should take harm from his absence. Nevertheless, he spared one glance for the Indian, who had unaccountably ceased chuckling and was now offering advice.

"Jump a little when you run," he cried, "like *Cervo* the swamp-buck."

Sacha pulled himself from the mire . . . he could feel it caking in his beard . . . recovered his electric torch, and went off, sliding. For a quarter of a mile he ducked and squirmed through bushes; but once these were past, the land fell away to the horizon, a vast damp plain, the color of Gorgonzola and riddled with small pools that winked facetiously.

After one quick look at the hounds, who were dipping and bouncing in the distance, Sacha kept his eyes a few paces before his toes. With the instinct of a trained horse he knew just when to leap and when to plow his way through the water. He was helped by a certain oily gleam, product of decayed vegetation, and he made full use of it. The hunt continued.

An hour went by, two, three. The sun reached its zenith, hung in the balance, and tilted slowly to the west. The tiger, knowing the advantages of swamp, had long since refused to be harried to the Rio Branco and was enjoying himself in circles. Sacha began to tire. In all that while his relative position had not altered by one inch. He felt as if he were tethered in a nightmare. Mud patches which in the beginning he had sailed over with a cry, now oozed against his shins; and for every forward step he slipped back a foot. The perspiration was out of him and his skin hurt. His breath came jerkily.

Then it was that he appreciated the chemical formula of endurance, one part brute strength to three parts nerve re-

silience, or courage. He had been running since ten o'clock, it was now past two; and that during the siesta-hours in the hottest part of the year. Physically he should have been conquered, drained of all power; but a single mania occupied his brain and kept him mechanically at the trot.

"I never yet lost a dog," he thought desperately.

Somehow the hours passed. He was no longer sentient. He was a giant toy with dry lungs and wooden arms and a pin-point of white flame in his head. He turned aside for pools that even at noon he would have jumped. The marsh grass lapped his feet; the mosquitoes soared in their thousands, but their deadly, high-pitched whine was no more than a far-off dynamo. Swamp-deer, scared by the hunt, blundered along at a great distance. They appeared to be bounding behind a heavy curtain. The sky was gray with heat.

Presently he arrived at a mere which cut across the foreground like a ribbon on a councilor's breast. He could see no beginning and no end, and the realization that he would have to cross it very nearly broke him. He paused for a moment on the brink. The water was absolutely calm, amber on the surface, shading off into the softest of dark greens toward the bottom. The sunlight sent golden shafts piercing and flickering, and particles of matter floated through the beams like dust-motes in a church. He bent to drink.

All at once his eye was captured by something glistening up the channel. He threw some water on his face and investigated. At first he could make out nothing, but after

thirty seconds of hard gazing he discovered the skeleton of a cow half hidden by a rotten tree stump in a patch of water-weeds. And immediately he was afraid.

He remembered his first journey to Xarayes, when the bones of a *piranha* were entangled in a bush. He knew that whole shoals never see the river, being stranded by the falling marsh. He had no doubt that the remains of many cattle were strewn along the mere.

As in the majority of his decisions he was influenced not by the heroic but by the trivial. He was growing stiff. If he stayed where he was he might well spend two days without food. Better join the dogs and sleep in company. He plunged in. The surface wrinkled at his touch, and he felt his shirt go cold. Then his boots slid forward and he found himself seated in mud and gazing along the level of the water. When he scrambled up, his rifle was wet to within three inches of the foresight.

Every step of that crossing was mental agony of the most humiliating type. His sentience had returned with his fear. He was conscious of his body as only those are conscious who are going to be tortured in the dark. He felt naked and vulnerable, powerless to brace himself to a pain. The water was opaque with stirred mud; he had no means of guessing the angle of an attack. The ooze clung to his soles. He wrenched and twisted and fought, knowing that his trousers had often been soaked in tiger blood and wondering if *piranha* would recognize the taste. Fortunately, there was no current.

About half-way over, something drove against his thigh.

It was pointed and sudden, and he dodged instinctively. As he did so he recalled a spectacle in the Rio Paraguay. He had been watching bullocks at a ford. The leading animals had passed and were ascending the bank toward a slaughterhouse when one of the rear-guard winced. It wriggled for a moment, gazed stupidly at the river, and finally lashed out, crying. A few minutes later it was just white bones and the water was no longer red.

The thought released Sacha from his terror. The period of waiting was past, and his salvation was with himself. He leaned forward, lifting high his feet and thrusting backward with both arms. He used his rifle for a paddle. The extra speed neutralized the suction of the mud and within a minute he was reeling on the edge. Whereat his new-found strength evaporated and he collapsed. Nor was he more than faintly interested in the discovery that a sunken branch had ripped his thigh. He was too exhausted to care.

Soon he was goaded afresh. Except for the whistling of some ibises the marsh was empty of sound. Valente, Vinte, and Pardo had disappeared. He rose stiffly and listened, though without much hope. It was characteristic of him that he could summon the energy to reproach himself. He viewed the flat horizon with a bitter, aching shame. He looked at the sun, now falling almost visibly, and judged that it was after four o'clock. Then, reflecting that since the tiger had been running in circles all day, he might return, he lay down by the margin of the water. He was very hungry.

He must have dozed; because the next time that his brain

recorded an emotion the sun was directly in his eyes and the bell that was Valente was tolling near the sky-line. He touched his rifle; the barrel was real enough, so was the dog's voice when he had shaken his head a while. It was definitely approaching. The first clangor had gone from it, but it was still courageous and unrelenting. Vinte, too, was shouting in a shriller key, and Vinte never yelled unless he could see the tiger.

A few minutes later Sacha beheld the reason. On the farther side of the dike and a short half-mile away the hunt went by. Three weary dogs, the largest no bigger than an Airedale, were hopping through the swamp in pursuit of a worn-out tiger. He could see the painted shadow as it blended with the grass; and there was not fifty yards between the animals. Moreover, the tiger had sickened of the game and was heading straight for the Rio Branco, on the southern side of which lay forest where he could climb and rest. This time Sacha did not blunder in the mere. He swam, and in the glory of his second wind, fancied himself cool and sweet. The unwholesome ground bit under his feet like turf. Before an hour had gone he was speaking to Abá, who had galloped up at Valente's war-cry.

"He has crossed, senhor," he called, excitedly waving his spear. "A large male. Muddy as a bullfrog—or yourself. Shall we swim the animals or tie them here?"

Sacha looked over the Rio Branco. The sun was dying in a crimson bar along the water. In twenty minutes it would be dark. The river was shallow . . . chest-deep, he

judged . . . yet unpleasing enough to traverse with a tiger-hide at night. Already he was counting on a kill.

"Secure them here," he said. "Then follow the noise of the hounds."

He forded diagonally, allowing the current to support him. Once through, he scrambled up the bank and vanished into a curtain of low bush, sprinkled with *caraguatá* thorn. For a while he heard Abá cursing at the horses, heard also the whack of his spear-shaft, but immediately forgot all this in the musical howling of the dogs, which was stationary. The tiger was at bay.

Presently the sun went out and with it his sense of distance. The forest seemed thicker, more malicious. His face was whipped with spikes. The beam of his torch illuminated a single brilliant avenue of massed twigs. Beyond, and on each hand, was a jet wall which the stars did little to reveal. He felt inclosed and breathless. Soft fingers touched him, pulling clear with portions of his flesh so that he was grateful for his beard.

Of a sudden he halted. There was a new tone in the barking. It was frenzied and hysterical, as if the dogs were about to realize a dream. He knew what that meant and, regardless of his skin, went forward at a run. The tiger was changing his quarters. A moment afterward the noises were receding. He sighed as he tripped among the weeds. He did not know how much longer he could endure. His sense of time joined his sense of distance in eclipse. The black woods rushed by.

Then, just as his lungs had issued a warning of the end, the barking checked, redoubled, became stationary again. He forced himself to a canter and found an exhilarated pack talking rudely to a circular mound of scrub near a gigantic fallen tree. He cheered them with his voice and they wriggled appreciatively.

"Better late than never," gasped Valente over his shoulder. "Now earn your keep. I can't move the brute."

The tiger was uneasy. A sullen growl, which appeared to rattle the bush, issued from the back of his throat. He was shifting continually. Sacha was in a quandary. The beast might charge, in which event the creepers might delay his bayonet-swing for just that fraction of a second which would mean death. On the other hand he might slink away; and Sacha was close enough to exhaustion to realize the futility of another running fight. He began to experiment.

He dropped to one knee and shone his torch toward the growls, hoping to reflect against the eyes. The tiger edged away, and the light pursued him when he rustled. Again he avoided it, and again, until Sacha knew that he had power. Using the beam like a stick, he poked and prodded with the glare, huddling his enemy to a corner, directly beneath the fallen tree. It remained to persuade the beast to ascend.

The novelty of the battle absorbed Sacha's weariness like a sponge. After the physical enormity of the day it was a relief to struggle with his mind.

Obviously he must not insist. The commands of the torch-



TIGER-MAN WITH SPEAR, BOW—AND TIGER

light must be veiled hints, suggesting rather than driving. He kept it scrupulously low and took care not to flash it too near. He relied on the tiger's intelligence, and was not deceived. In three minutes, accompanied by much grumbling, the gentleman snarled openly from the tree. Sacha lit him up from below.

He was a magnificent spectacle in that cruel white radiance. His spots, divorced from the background of concealing forest, stood out. He was in an evil temper and the light was making him frantic. Sacha raised his rifle to the level of his torch and fired. There was a faint click. The cap only had exploded, the cartridge came out empty, leaving the bullet in the barrel. In his extremity he called upon Abá.

"José," he yelled. "Quickly with your spear!"

He turned for a moment and, from very far away, saw a tiny point of fire. It went out.

"I come immediately," cried an equally tiny voice.

Left to himself, Sacha tried to force the bullet with a stick. Nothing moved. With the corner of his eye he saw Valente leap for the tiger's tail, saw the sweep of the great paw. His knowledge of hunting told him that it could not be more than a minute before the tiger charged. As a final resort he rammed another bullet home and felt it jar against its mate. This time there was a tremendous explosion and the animal dropped, pierced by both bullets. At that a reaction fell upon him. His nerves grew raw.

"José, you sluggard!" he shouted. "Are you a hunter or an ostrich-feather brush?"

Humbly, from the middle distance, came the reply.

"You have boots for the *caraguatá*," it said. "My feet are bleeding and I must strike matches."

So that was the point of light! Sacha laughed.

"I am sorry, José," he called frankly. "I know you are brave. It is the fault of the wet cartridges."

Together they stooped to the carcass, removing as much fat as was needful to the dressing, also a rump steak for their dinner.

"You light my way," said Abá. "I will carry the hide."

Now, a tiger-hide is heavier than many people think. Properly taken, with head and paws and grease, it weighs almost one third of the body; that is, not far short of a hundred pounds. Yet Abá lifted it easily and, stepping delicately, bore it through the forest. He did not pause until Sacha asked him a question:

"Which direction did we come?"

"Southeast, I believe. Why?"

"Because we have been walking in a half-circle."

The hide slid to the ground with a wet bump. The Indian straightened himself.

"Stay here and blow your horn at intervals, I will shout to you."

Whereupon the brazen notes of a horn and an Indian's musical scream played hide and seek in the darkness. After a long half-hour the notes merged and the men decided to camp where they were. The remainder of Abá's matches kindled a cheerful fire. The tiger meat was indistinguishable from calf.

Toward midnight a sharp-edged cloud rolled out of the south, as a proof that the rainy season had begun. José slung his spear between two trees, folding the hide as a breakwater. The subsequent deluge did not interfere with their rest; for they curled themselves into a fold of the damp skin and slept.

They found the horses next morning by the swollen roar of the Rio Branco.

CHAPTER TWENTY

BY THE end of the second year in Barranco Branco, Sacha was half-way to his ambition. His hundredth tiger was dead, his knowledge of the land unique; and, in cages near the White Cliff was the nucleus of a zoo which he had caught himself and hoped to exhibit in São Paulo. But this was only his apprenticeship to fortune; already he dreamed of a film. Slowly, undeterred by setbacks or the feet of time, he moved toward his mark.

One golden evening after the animals had been fed he noticed the tiger-cubs cocking their ears and snarling up-river. He took this to mean the arrival of the fortnightly steamer and, since he expected some cotton rope for his hide-frames, walked to the landing-pier. Half an hour later a throaty whistle spoke and the chug of engines became audible. A black-and-white funnel slewed round a bend and the squat vessel made fast. The pilot, a short man with eyes perennially bright from traffic with fickle sand-bars, lifted an arm in recognition. He was an old friend and seemed embarrassed.

"I have sad news," he said when he had come ashore. "Your brother is dead."

A shaft of pain, all the more wounding because not unforeseen, pierced into Sacha's mind. He supposed that Ernst



YOUNG TIGERS READY FOR SHIPMENT

had at last fallen to the gun of a quick-handed companion. The pilot disillusioned him.

"*Tocaya,*" he said gently. "He was shot to pieces from behind."

For a moment the world went black. The river-boat and the herons and the bullfrogs vanished in a swirl of half-memories and regrets. If the affair had been face to face, with the swiftest drawer winning, he would not have stirred; he was not his brother's keeper. But treachery and cowardice demanded blood, and he knew that his spirit would be uneasy until vengeance had been slaked. His blue eyes hardened, and he promised himself to shoot the murderer in the stomach, leaving him to die. Calming his anger with difficulty, he inquired the circumstances.

It was a matter of tools, said the pilot. Ernst's German employer had refused to return his camera and some chisels until a debt had been paid. Now, by Brazilian law tools are exempt from the bailiff, for it is rightly held that nobody can repay an obligation if deprived of the means of living. Ernst, after speaking wildly, had departed; and the next night a sufficient quota of negroes remembered his views upon their race. He was waylaid outside his home within hearing of his wife. This had occurred nine months previously and had seeped down-stream by way of diamond-buyers, men from Cuyabá and deck-hands on the paddle-boats. It was probably forgotten by now.

Apparicio heard the news with fury. His long dark face grew pinched at the nostrils and he spat; his Rio Grande code had been violated. He offered to help, but Sacha, hav-

ing dismissed the pilot courteously, told his friend that he could best assist by remaining with the animals. Then, recollecting Dona Maria and the child, he took his earnings and borrowed two horses from a rancher. Inducing a native to guide him through Xarayes, he said good-by to his pack and set out on the eight-weeks journey to Cuyabá.

Game was scarce in the district and for three days and nights they ate only one small heron whose skin they had to peel. Early on the fourth morning Sacha found a bees' nest hanging from the limb of a tree. It was a round grayish affair, like a wasps' nest; and the honey was red and poor, without much moisture in the comb. The Indian was discouraging.

"It is poison in that condition," he said bluntly, and starving as he was, refused to eat.

Sacha was less particular. The love of sweetmeats that had procured his dismissal from the Chicago candy-store was once again to cause him trouble. The heavy-smelling, glutinous mass was quickly absorbed, but toward midday he began to shiver in the heat. His cheeks tightened, his mouth grew dry, the ground heaved. Securing his horses, he dropped under a tree, too unhappy to care for the future. Presently he opened his eyes. The atmosphere clouded and in the next half-hour he knew despair. For, even as he watched, his sight dimmed and, by two o'clock he could outgaze the sun. He was blind.

Luckily he had lived long enough in the wilderness to have acquired an insight into primeval things. He was sure that he would not die, naturally, though whether he would

be forced to kill himself or whether his sight would return he could not tell. He waited, reaching in the shade, until evening when his vision cleared. His companion shot a buck at sundown, and his strength was normal on the morrow. But he never repeated the experiment.

He found Dona Maria in a hovel on the outskirts of Cuyabá. A hammock swung across the low room, tethered unsafely to rings in the flaking walls. He greeted her gently and she smiled in reply; but winced suddenly at the mention of her boy. Her broad face closed like a door as she answered:

"He is dead. Every one in the world seems to be dead."

She gave him a rickety chair and stood smoothing her cotton dress. Her eyes were without expression.

"I had no money when Ernst was killed; the child had no food. He is well out of it."

Sacha was horrified, and the ache for revenge deepened within him. Bit by bit he pieced out the story. In the gaps between broken sentences he saw his brother's shattered body pulled into this room; the lack of friends and the great distance to her father's ranch. No one would lend a horse, there was no means of buying; even the necessities, were unobtainable. She had started to walk to the ranch, a mad proceeding as she must have known, and her child had died by the way. A thrill of passion swept over him and he asked of the murderers.

"Who knows?" said Dona Maria, still without emotion. "A dozen negroes killed him. The German followed the rules of Brazil and made himself scarce. Maybe there was

some one at the back of him. I believe there was; a Brazilian."

Sacha looked round the barren walls, at the insects that played among the cracks, and asked a question.

"How do I live?" said the girl. "By the simplest means on earth."

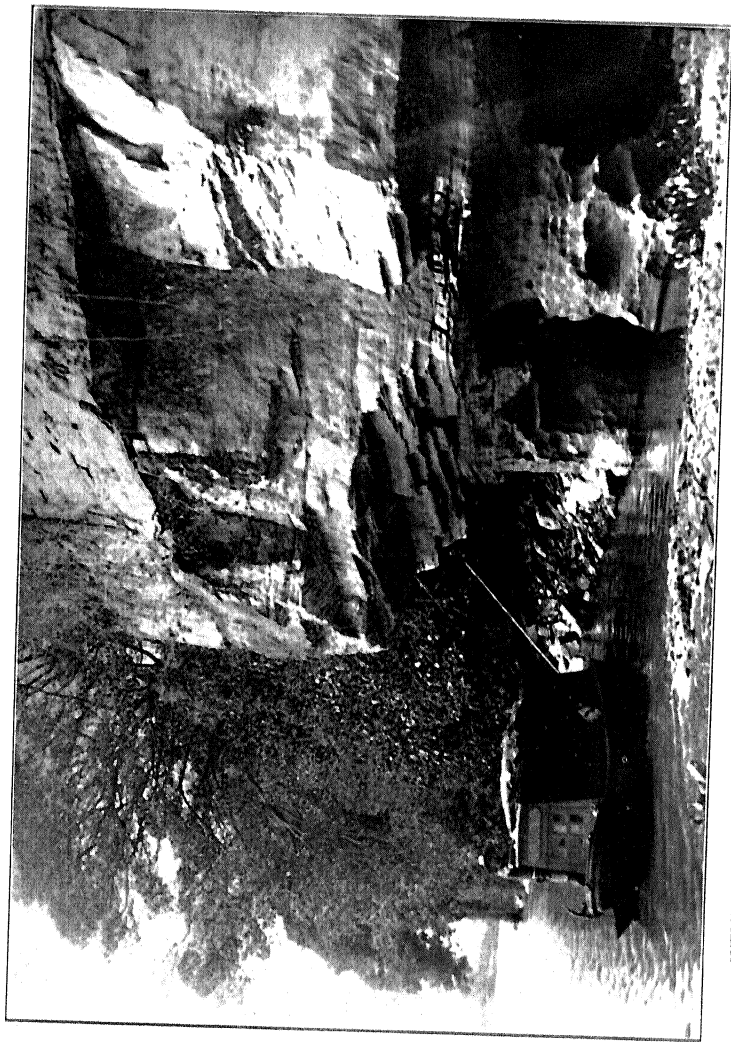
Her eyes slanted to the doorway, indicating a man who paced restlessly in the street. Sacha had observed him before, but unheedingly. Now he jumped up.

"This is horrible!" he cried. "Let me buy you a horse and send you to your parents. Meanwhile here is money for your needs."

She thanked him in a voice from which all pain was absent and, tucking the notes into her stocking, talked of other things.

Sacha passed a week probing into details. He revisited old friends, spoke to the police, and learned exactly nothing. Everybody seemed to be afraid; and, although a hint was dropped of an influential farmer behind the German who had fled, not a jot of telling evidence could he obtain. So he despatched Dona Maria and, mounting his animal, rode sadly through the marsh to Barranco Branco with a passionate vow in his heart that he would find the criminal if it cost him ten years. Sooner or later the mystery would explain itself in river gossip.

When he arrived once more at the White Cliff the fellowship of the *Aventureira* was hardly changed. Apparicio was a little more silent, Valente a little more demonstrative.



AVENTUREIRA ON THE UPPER PARAGUAY RIVER, A PLACE CALLED "MORRO DO CASTELLO"

Chico fell out of a tree on to his neck and whispered in his beard. Only the plague of tigers was different, for it had vanished from the land. Accordingly he shipped his menagerie and equipment, untied the barge and drifted down-stream to Palmas Chicas on the border of the Chaco. Here he was received with joy; the rancher's cattle were in danger.

On the second morning of his visit he mustered his pack some hours before the dawn. He walked swiftly in the darkness because his host had told of a famous tiger that lived four leagues in the interior; and he hoped to come up with him a few minutes after sunrise. The beam of a pocket-torch showed Sacha the narrow pathway in the forest. The air was cold and still.

Unfortunately Valente fastened on a trail within an hour of starting. Sacha had a glimpse of his hind quarters in the torchlight and then he was gone, his silver voice awakening the birds. Pardo followed with Vinte at his heels, and there was a sound as of an army in the bushes. Sacha could not now have postponed the hunt if he had wished; the tiger was too near. He plunged into the undergrowth with his light held along his spear and, his mind clean-swept of the horrors of the last weeks, gave himself to the adventure.

It was not long before the hunt split. Valente broke away to the left with Pardo in support, and little Vinte, crying madly at the scent of musk, ran back toward the river. Sacha, after a moment's thought, decided to help the smaller

and barged his way through the prickly wall at the full pace of his legs. Even as he raced, Valente's clarion died out behind.

Presently he realized that he was working uphill. Pebbles and loose shale bounded under his feet and spun against the tree stems. The stars became clearer as the underbush fell away; the air was less choked with vegetation. Simultaneously Vinte's war-shouts grew less pointed and finally ceased altogether. Half an hour later a stone rattled near by and the dog's nose poked into his hand. The trail was lost.

It was still dark when the descent into the forest began, and at each step the atmosphere was thicker, more inclosed. A deadly silence loomed over the trees, lasting till the dawn wind stirred the branches with a rustle of dry leaves. Sacha was uneasy as he retired past the starting-place of the hunt in the first gleam of light. Vinte, in no way discouraged by the escape of his foe, took the line of Valente's tiger, but without barking, for it was already a trifle stale. At the whisk of the dog's stern in the undergrowth Sacha ran as he had never run before. It was his last chance to find Valente.

By means of shouting and loud threats he managed to keep Vinte within hail. His clothes were torn in the passage and his flesh lacerated, but he held on with the stubborn prayer that the voice would soon be audible. From time to time he stopped, listening for the triumphant echo that would tell of a tiger bayed. He called at the pitch of his range and was mocked by a laughing bird. After forty min-

utes there was a movement among the trees, and Pardo slunk whining to his feet; and at that he was desperately afraid. Fragments of a truth that he would not believe whispered suspicions in his ear. And all the while he knew that they were right.

Toward seven o'clock, with the sun lifting pleasantly to another day, he happened on the remnants of Valente. The tall brown dog was lying on his side and the most of him was eaten. Only the head was undisturbed, proud and calm and confident as of old. In the dust around him were the paw-marks of two tigers, a mother and a full-grown cub. Even in death the curl of Valente's lips seemed gratified that he had not fallen to a single enemy.

At the sight of him Sacha dropped his weapon and cradled the head upon his knees. In the loneliness of the forest, while Vinte and Pardo watched, he cried without shame, as he would have wept in the presence of a crowd. The shock of the disaster tore him right across, affecting him as Ernst's murder had not done; as nothing, in fact, had done since the loss of Elsa, and nothing could ever do again. When the first spasm had gone by he dug a hole with his spear and laid Valente reverently to sleep, pounding the earth to a hard consistency lest a wandering dog should desecrate the grave. Then he walked back to the *Aventureira* and shut himself into the cabin for two long days; at the end of which he had a sorrowful conference with Apparicio.

"I shall hunt no more," he said. "I will exhibit my animals in São Paulo and, when I make enough money, go to my sister in Germany."

Apparicio drew his hand once over his saber face but otherwise concealed his feelings.

"It is nearly five years since we met," he said quietly, "and now we must part. One cannot forge cold iron. I will help you with the animals to the railway and then find work on a ranch."

They knew each other too intimately to speak upon the matter of farewell. During the shipment of the cages to the rail-head at Porto Esperanza they talked hardly at all, but, just before the end, they looked into the past and found it good. As the train passed out toward the east, Sacha beheld for the last time the straight, long-striding figure of his friend shooting three bullets from his revolver on the platform. Beside him were the disconsolate forms of Vinte and Pardo. When he had finished waving he noticed that the country-side was blurred.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

IN THE life of almost every man who clammers up to knowledge there comes a time when the gradient flattens out and he beholds the pleasant slopes on the farther side of the pass; and death alone can sponge away the first wild thrill of the descent.

Sacha made his bow to popularity in São Paulo during January, 1928. He had swooped out of the west with all the panoply of romance, a strange frontiersman surrounded with proofs of his labor. From early morning until after dark he stood beside his cages, satisfying the curiosity of the throng that pressed into the hot marquee to gape at his animals. But that phase passed within a week. His intelligence and sensitive reaction to atmosphere informed him that he was regarded in the same light as the beasts; and the questions wearied him. For the average Brazilian is as ignorant of jaguars as of polar bears; he has heard that both exist. So Sacha hired a man to oversee the show and spent his days with a friend, an old photographer, who was dying of a slow disease.

The trouble began at the first profit-taking when his helper, a sly, insistent youth, demanded seventy per cent for his share. Sacha, tired by his bedside vigil and raw from the loss of Valente, became contemptuous and paid him

off. The man was furious, swore that he had been engaged for the duration of the show, and threatened proceedings. Sacha expelled him and, in the course of a few days, received a solicitor's letter which he took to another lawyer.

"You are not in Europe now," said his adviser, puffing a rank cigar. "This fellow is related to politicians."

Sacha paid his fee and left. When it came to blackmail he could be as harsh as necessary and he raged through the blazing streets to the enemy lawyer.

"You are scoundrels," he said, disregarding the outstretched hand. "You can whistle for your damages."

"Very well," replied the solicitor. "The police will seize your effects."

"Let them. Three of my cubs are two years old. The moment a policeman enters the marquee I shall open the cages. Has there ever been a tiger-hunt in São Paulo?"

The lawyer gasped.

"Truly, you are a man of the woods, senhor. I will speak to my client."

He heard no more of the affront.

Financially the exhibition was a success and, as he sold two cubs to Laurenz Hagenbeck, he was able to take a holiday in Germany. Here he met Selma, confederate in his Libau escapades, the sister whom he had not visited for twenty-two full years. She knew him at once, beard and all, and introduced him to her children. For a while he was happy, but the smell of the jungle oozed into the Munich beer-gardens and he returned to South America. The vultures wheeling above the mountains behind Rio welcomed him as the doorkeepers of his spiritual home.

It was in September, 1928, that he fell across the writer of this biography, to the north of Corumbá. He came generously to the aid of a ridiculously amateur expedition and fathered it through the perils of a virgin land. His deeds of valor on that occasion have already been recorded *; and it must suffice to say that he brought it out alive. When the party split up next year he went to the United States, where he assembled a company to film the marvels of Xarayes. The new expedition was the most luxurious of his life. Yet, civilized as the conditions were in comparison with the past, he was never closer to extinction. For an alligator swirled out of the marsh reeds when he was running after a tiger and smashed some bones in his foot. The Americans had an outboard motor which shortened the four hundred miles to Corumbá; but a great pampero sprang up in mid-journey and, the canoe being heavily laden, they put in at a ranch. During a three days' halt the wound became gangrenous. It took them a week to reach a hospital, but the doctor was skilful and Sacha recovered.

In course of time the expedition packed up and returned. Sacha, borrowing a camera, built a hut in the woods and stayed on; he wanted a lecture film, and it was on this trip that he stumbled on a tragedy which impressed him like a blow. One morning he was chasing a tiger in the jungle of a *capão*. As he breasted the wild pineapples he noticed something white shaped like an emu's egg. He crossed over to it, leaned among the prickles, and lifted a human skull. Cutting away the tangle, he revealed a pile of snapped rib-bones, all that remained of a man. Scattered under the

* In "Green Hell," by Julian Duguid, Century Co., New York.

leaves was a Guató spear, corrugated from exposure and animals' teeth, a bow and arrows, and the charred pieces of a canoe, destroyed by a forest fire. Some Guató Indian, having ferried ashore in the rains, had taken the pitcher once too often to the well. Sacha cleared a space, dug a grave, and collected what, three years previously, had been a hunter. He kept the spear for a memory; but the other weapons he laid across the mound after the custom of the Guató tribe. And throughout the burial he wondered if it were his last meeting with that bleary-eyed, sagging-chested Joaquim Guató, his master, whose hunting-ground this was. Shoveling the earth into place, he raised the canoe for a tombstone; and his feelings were those with which he paid his last respects to Valente. It was the kind of fighting death he would desire for himself.

Toward the end of his film-making a message came from Cuyabá which justified his prophecy under the White Cliff. As the years passed without retaliation the instigator of Ernst's murder had grown careless, believing perhaps that the question was overgrown. Now he was boasting of his prowess. He was not the German whom Sacha had once suspected and who had never reëntered Matto Grosso, but a Brazilian of high position, well known for double dealing. Some forty killings, all purchased and from behind, were reckoned to his account.

Sacha made preparations. He sent negatives and baggage by river steamer to Montevideo and, at the same time, wrote to his friends. As a charm against accidents, he wished them good-by. Then he rode across the northern corner of the



VIEW OF THE "PANTANAL" IN FRONT OF OUR LAST HUNTING CAMP

Marsh from San Luis de Caceres to Cuyabá and thence took the Caçonunga trail, now living with the remembrance of his brother. He drew in to his enemy's white ranch-house at the beginning of the siesta hour.

It was a fine large house with a veranda round three sides, set in the middle of an orange grove. In the corral near by were a number of cargo-mules, for the Brazilian was a rich trader. A fragrant smell of cooking rose from one end of the building, a circumstance that made Sacha grin wryly; he had not abandoned his intention of shooting the murderer in the stomach; and empty, he had greater chance of recovery.

"*Oh de casa!*" he shouted from the rails.

A middle-aged lean stooping man, who coughed incessantly, walked to the doorway and beckoned him in. Between spasms which seemed to tear his chest asunder he offered some coffee, which was refused. At the ungrateful tones in Sacha's voice he lifted his head abruptly, but the scrutiny was too wearing and his eyes dropped away.

"What do you want?" he whispered.

Sacha had been considering the man with all the passion of an age-long hate. The sly unobtrusiveness of the gray-tinted face; the bony hands that were never still; the sprouting hairs on the narrow chin . . . he loathed them conjointly and in detail. He looked earnestly at the dry lips because these had been the port whence instructions for the slaughter had issued.

"You murdered my brother," he said quietly, and watched the eyes leap round.

"I?"

A burst of coughing doubled the thin body like a jack-knife.

"Let me recall to you the past. A dozen negroes. That is familiar but unconvincing; there have been many in your life. So have dark nights and the conversation of revolvers. I must help you further. My name is Siemel."

Frank terror showed for an instant, to be followed by an extraordinary look of peace. The coughing relaxed.

"You have come to kill me?"

"When you slew my brother," said Sacha, unheeding, "you also slew his child. His wife you drove to harlotry."

"Kill me then," cried the rancher, almost eagerly. "I deserve your bullet."

"I have no wish to make things easy, you are dying already . . . of consumption."

At that the rancher broke. He whimpered and begged, fell to his knees, slobbered and coughed again. Sacha waited for the fit to pass.

"Be a man. Shoot yourself," he advised.

"I dare not," screamed the man. "I should perish in hell. Shoot me, in God's name, and be done."

"Once you had a dozen negroes in your service. Command them again," said Sacha, and left him.

So Ernst was revenged in the way of nature. And Sacha, riding along the rocky paths to Cuyabá, thanked God that the punishment had been removed from his hands.

EPILOGUE

ONE last scene and Sacha's tale is done.

A newspaper man, lusting after copy, ran him to earth in a London office. After some twenty minutes of rapid note-taking he snapped his book and said:

"You have a lot of courage to live that sort of existence."

Sacha walked over to the window and looked down into the Haymarket.

"Your sense of values is odd," he said, turning. "Here in London you kill a man an hour with your traffic, and the dead are not given a paragraph."

"Never mind," said the reporter. "If you make a mistake out hunting I will give you a whole column."

"That is what amuses me," said Sacha.

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