

Literature, &c.

ABREYO: THE BRIGAND OF CUBA.

PART III.

Concluded.

Before ascending the staircase, I went up to the pantry, which was beneath it, and, after a momentary hesitation, placed my hand upon the knob of the door, and, turning it gently round, found that it was indeed unlocked, and the key away. The window sash, too, was thrown up, and the bolts of the shutters withdrawn. My limbs trembled under me, as I went up the steps. I unlocked the door of my friend's sleeping-room, and, taking down one of the many pistols, that—with blunderbusses, guns, swords, and daggers—were hung up in devices upon the walls, put the ramrod into the barrel. Its whole length disappeared! I examined another—and another. They were all alike! I took down one of the swords, and found that the blade had been broken off within an inch of the handle, which had been stuck on again for the purpose of deception. The rest of the sheathes were equally bladeless! I had seen enough.

'Abreyo has not deceived me in this,' thought I: 'will he deceive me in the end? If so, why does he leave me thus, when I might even now, within five minutes, obtain the protection of the patrol or the military? But am I free to do this? Am I not watched from without—from within? What am I to do? Abreyo is reputed generous—humane—magnanimous—at least for a robber. Should I stir in the matter without him, these villains may escape. He is confident of securing them without any assistance. Is he their accomplice? If so, why should he have sought this visit as he acknowledged he had, when the plan is so deeply laid, that it could scarcely choose but succeed? Perhaps they are afraid of my discovering the trick upon the arms, and so suspicion became awakened, and this insinuating serpent has played me this trick to make all sure! Then, why has he left me thus in possession of the secret, and of my liberty to enable me to disclose it and provide against it? His appeal, too, to the Virgin! If that be a mockery, then farewell confidencee in man for ever!'

These, and a thousand similar conflicting thoughts passed rapidly through my mind, when I resolved at last, to await the return of Abreyo, and, in the meantime to prepare myself, as well as I could, against any attempt at treachery on his part, or the earlier arrival of the blacks, should they make their appearance before his return; and the time they had fixed upon, which was, as Abreyo understood, three o'clock in the morning.

In the *escritoire* in my bed room upstairs, I had a canister of fine powder, that I doubted not was quite safe; and I remembered that an old cigar box, filled with shot and bullets of all sizes, lay amongst a heap of rubbish in one of the garret closets, in which we kept the bottled Madeira, as is usual in hot climates. These I immediately brought down, in fear and trembling, to the drawing-room, with a couple of pair of my own pistols—which, with all the other arms in my room, as I had found, on examination, had shared the same fate as those in my friend's chamber. Having loaded them forthwith, and disposed them about my person, I went into the little piazza, and, finding that the ladder had been left standing at the back of the house close beside the bell, I stepped out, with some difficulty upon it, and, ascending to the eaves, disengaged the clapper from the roll of old woollen cloth that had been wound around it. Hastening down again, I proceeded to load all the blunderbusses, guns, and pistols, and having replaced them on the walls, lit a cigar, and went out into the balcony to await the coming of Abreyo.

In a short time I saw him recrossing the bridge, and I ran down to be in readiness to let him in. I heard his footsteps upon the flag stones before the door, which I immediately opened, and he was again alone with me in the house. The hasty dispositions I had made in his absence gave me a degree of confidence that I had not felt in the first instance; and when he had disclosed his plan of entrapment, which was precisely the one I had fixed upon myself, I readily agreed to every particular, and we commenced operations on the instant.

The door of the pantry, as I have already stated, opened into the hall, across which, immediately opposite, was a door leading into the little room already alluded to. From this we removed, with great difficulty and with the least possible noise, the heaviest iron chest that we could manage, and placing it against the door of the pantry, piled upon it such others of the smaller ones as we were able to lift; thus barricading the proposed entrance of the villains with the very gold which had tempted their cupidity, and which they were no doubt, contemplating to appropriate to themselves. To render it still more secure, we picked out a piece of scantling, of which a great quantity lay about the premises, of the exact length, and placing one end against the top of the door, over the chests, fitted the other to the bottom of the frame of the little room door across the hall.

'If we could but secure the window in the same manner when they have entered, *amigo*,' said I, wiping the perspiration from my forehead, 'they will be as safe as in the lowest dungeon of the Inquisition.'

'Let them but enter,' returned he, 'and if they get out without leave, then is Abreyo a poltroon and a liar! But we shall require a harquebuss or so, friend *Rubio*. Think you that rascal of yours has laid his hands on the ammunition as well as the arms?'

'The pistols and blunderbusses in the room above are all loaded and primed,' said I, gravely.

'Eh! and the swords?'

'Are butt-sheathes and handles,' I replied, laughing.

'Aye,' said he, shaking his head, 'I would have sworn that you have not been idle in my absence. And I warrant me the bell—'

'Has recovered its tongue.'

'Bravo, Sir Englishman! You and I would—'

'Be the better of a glass of Geneva,' said I hastily waving a compliment that I was by no means ambitious to deserve.

Having fastened the windows and doors on the drawing room floor, and lit the lamp in my chamber, to which I seldom retired before two—which was, perhaps, the reason of the blackamoors fixing upon three o'clock for their purposed robbery—Abreyo and I, after arming ourselves with pistols and blunderbusses, left the house through the front door, which, of course, I double locked after me, and hid ourselves behind a wooden fence, on the other side of the little bye-street nearly opposite to the pantry window, to await the coming of the villains. In about twenty minutes we perceived them approach from the back of the town. They passed close beside the fence behind which we were concealed. The end of a cigar that one of them had been smoking, and had been thrown up, fell on my hat; and the fellow having spat on the fence, a portion of the saliva sprinkled over my face, through the openings of the planks. I started—the blood rushed to my brow, and an oath hovered on my lip. I could have borne a stab with more patience; but I had been in too many positions of danger not to know the value of discretion. The least audible movement of indignation would have ruined all; so I wiped my face and thought no more about it.

The unsuspicious scoundrels reconnoitred about for some time, and, at last, one by one, entered in at the window. The moment they closed the shutters after them, we bounded lightly over the fence, and, lifting a piece of broad heavy timber which we had previously selected from a heap that lay in the neighbourhood, placed one end of it on the ground, against the foundation of a house which was immediately on the opposite side of the street to the pantry window, letting the other end fall gently against the junction of the leaves of the shutter, about half-way down; and, springing up and catching hold of it with our hands, close up to the window, forced it down with our weight, in such a manner, that it was impossible for them, with all their combined strength, cooped up as they were in the narrow pantry, to make their way out again in that direction.

They were now secure enough. But it occurred to me immediately, which it had not done before, that the villains might either break through the thin partition, which served to square off the pantry, and hide from view the inside of the lower steps of the staircase,

and, by forcing up these, make their way into the hall, and effect their escape; or, finding that impossible, might set fire to the house, which was a wooden one, with the means which they had no doubt of striking a light,—their own lives being, with negroes, a willing sacrifice in furtherance of revenge. The moment I mentioned my fears to Abreyo, he was surprised that the two possible cases had occurred to his own mind; and we concluded, that sooner than the house should be injured, or that one of the rascals should escape,—which might happen if we attempted, of ourselves, to seize them, without knowing what means they might have of defence,—or that they should all be killed, which was most probable, if they attempted their escape,—it would be better to call in the military at once, to assist us in securing them uninjured and alive. He accordingly gave a long, shrill whistle, and, in an inconceivable short time, *Sombra del Diablo* came up over the bridge, at full pace towards us. Abreyo mounted him—for on no account would the animal suffer any one else to do so—and rode off, leaving me sentinel of the watch.

The villains exerted themselves for a little while, first against the door, then at the window, then on other parts of the pantry—but all in vain. I spoke out loud continually, as if giving instructions to people about me, which no doubt imposed on the prisoners the belief that they were completely surrounded; for, giving themselves up for lost, they began to quarrel, and I could distinctly hear them accuse each other of treachery. Words now were accompanied with blows and a horrid scuffle ensued, which brought down the whole of the shelving upon them. The hideous crash of crockery, mingled with the scuffling and with hideous groans and imprecations, exceeded all that the imagination could conceive of the horrible. I stood paralyzed. Wound up as my feelings had been by extraordinary excitement, I was not prepared to be a mere listener in such a fray. Murders—the most appalling—had frequently been perpetrated in my sight; the knife of the assassin had often times been lifted against me, and once I had felt it at my throat; but never—never did I experience such sensations as, during that unseen scuffle, chilled the very marrow in my bones!

Abreyo now returned, accompanied by my friend Capitan de Gonzales, and a few of his *caballeria*. On displacing the plank, and opening the shutters, no resistance whatever was made by the negroes. They were all dead! We found them covered with ghastly wounds, lying in a deep puddle of blood, in the midst of the confusion they had made. Our servant, who had been the object of attack by the other two, had, it was supposed, survived them, and not being able, it was thought, to find any of their knives, which had probably been lost when the shelving gave way, had, in his determination not to be taken alive, forced his tongue into his throat with his fingers and choked himself!

To all my entreaties, and those of my friend, Abreyo replied, '*Signor Ingles*, you once rendered me a service—'tis thus Abreyo shows his gratitude.' We could not even force *El Rey* upon him. He would accept of nothing.

My friend soon after falling a victim to a disease contracted by over exertion in a journey to Sigüapa, the head quarters of the atrocious nest of pirates, who, at that time infested the coast of Cuba, to endeavour to ransom two young acquaintance who had been captured on their return to the Bahamas, I left Matanzas for the Havana, where, a few months after, the following account of the death of Abreyo reached me by common report.

The pardoned brigand had been wearied of the inactive and unexciting duties of common life, and had been induced by a gang of desperados, who had projected a new company of banditti, to join them; but quarrelling one night with the main promotor of this enterprise respecting the captaincy, they agreed to refer it to single combat with *machetes*. His antagonist was slain on the spot, and he himself mortally wounded.

Finding his life at its last ebb, he made a vigorous effort to mount *Sombra del Diablo*. When he was seated, he raised himself up for a moment, and, looking calmly around him, and up to the broad moon over