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-BY-
DOUGLAS
WELLS-

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The Dons From Mexico

OR,

Lieutenant Hal and the Spanish Plot at Port Tampa.

By DOUGLAS WELLS.

First Part.

CHAPTER I.

THE DONS IN MEXICO.

"This is a beautiful day—a day that augurs well for Spain!"

Don Caesar Brabante rubbed his hands cheerfully, as, uttering this sentiment, he stepped out of a small adobe house upon the white sea sands of the edge of the Gulf of Mexico.

To be more exact as to location, the house was some two miles south of the little Mexican port of Molente.

Twenty-five yards from the house lay a little inlet—call it a bay or a harbor if you prefer. Certainly it might be termed a harbor, since, even at low tide, there was twelve feet of water in the middle of this inlet.

And Don Caesar Brabante knew all about the depth of that inlet, for its measure in feet and inches had been several times taken by Don Cesar and his comrades.

Comrades? He had sixteen of them,

not counting the dog, and the dog, though a mongrel, was no mean addition to their number.

It was the dog who had kept watch to the landward during the dark nights of weeks past when Don Caesar and his comrades had carried on their secret work in that same adobe house, and down by the inlet.

Of this secret work there had been much. Don Caesar was a man of no little means; his capacity for hate exceeded even his wealth.

Just now his hate was all directed toward the United States. Had not the ignorant, dollar-chasing Yankees dared to insult the flag of Spain?

Those same accursed Yankees had had the audacity, through their Congress and President, to order, yes, actually to command Spain to furl her banners and get out of Cuba.

If she did not, Spain, as a penalty, was to be soundly trounced on land and sea! How could Spain brook such an insult as that?

How could the haughty Castilians

BE PATRIOTIC—WEAR A BUTTON.

allow Yankees to live, after such presumption?

Of course Spain was ready to fight; Spain always was right, in the eyes of Don Caesar Brabante and all of his sixteen comrades.

What did it matter that Spain oppressed the helpless, murdered the discontented, broke her promises? What did it matter that the Yankee ship Maine should be blown up in Havana harbor? Did not Spain own the harbor, and could she not do as she pleased on her own property?

It was absurd of the Yankees to complain; criminal impudence for them to fancy that they had a grievance against so noble and haughty a nation as Spain.

The Yankees must be thrashed. They would be; Don Caesar Brabante, over many bottles of wine, had pledged his word that the Yankees must keep on being whipped until they were heartily glad to beg for peace from proud and victorious old Spain.

Nor was Don Caesar one of the kind who could be wholly content to leave the task of making the Yankees sob aloud, in their fright, to fellow Spaniards from over the sea.

Don Caesar had lived in Mexico for thirty years; he had made his fortune there, but he had never ceased to be a Spaniard.

There were many others like him, even in the sparsely settled district around the little port of Molente.

Seventeen in all, they had pledged their lives and fortunes to the service of Spain. Incidentally, it may be mentioned that not one of the other sixteen Spaniards could have raised above ten pesos at one time.

But Don Caesar had plenty of money; he had also the best of wines, the choicest cigars, and his table was the most

wonderfully appointed one in that part of Mexico.

No wonder the other sixteen were ready to follow such a leader as the rich and haughty old Brabante.

Just now, Don Caesar was alone. He did not live in the adobe house, but he had bought it, and all the ground nearby, since it offered such an isolated and convenient spot for the plot they had on hand.

"A beautiful day for Spain," repeated Don Caesar, looking all about him. "But I would that I could see some of my fellow Spaniards."

"Yee-ow! wow!"

It was the half howl and half whine that came from the mouth of the dog as the canine, stretching, came slowly out of the adobe house.

"Now, did you think I was speaking to you, McKinley?" demanded Don Caesar.

McKinley was the name given to the dog. One of the other sixteen plotters, who knew considerable English, and who had now and then glanced at the New York comic papers, had found in one of them the inspiration which led him to suggest that McKinley was just the name to give a dog.

This offering of wit had been received with delighted laughter by all the plotters, including the one who suggested it.

Don Caesar himself had been so mightily pleased that he had called for a whole case of wine, after drinking which the haughty seventeen had found themselves in such a muddled condition that no further wit had come from them that night.

So the name of McKinley had stuck to the dog. It had never occurred to any of the Spaniards that a dog with so splendid a name might some day feel it incumbent upon himself to prove himself as true an

SEE OUR NEW COUPON OFFER—LAST PAGE.

American as the best of Uncle Sam's sons.

But now the dog contented himself with another whine, after which he licked his chops as if hinting that a drink of water would not go amiss.

But Don Caesar was not just then in a mood to waste more words upon a dog who bore so insignificant a name as McKinley.

Besides, he had just caught sight of a sombrero hobbling up and down over the rolling sand hills between him and Molente.

Now this sombrero had four indentations in it—one at each point of the compass.

It was a way of wearing the sombrero that was much affected by the seventeen plotters. It was a means by which they could know a comrade when not so much as his face was visible.

"In a few minutes," murmured Brabante, tranquilly, "I shall have one true comrade to talk to."

"Wow!" assented McKinley.

By the time that the sombrero was fifty yards nearer, the face under it was visible.

"It is Don Paulo," cried Brabante, delightedly. "Him I would rather see than any of the others, for he is the one charged with bringing over our great supplies. Ah, good-day, Don Paulo," as the newcomer came nearer.

"Good-day, Don Caesar."

"And our supplies?"

"Are they not here now?"

Don Caesar shook his head, at the same time showing some alarm.

"Oh, they will soon be here," declared Don Paulo. "The supplies are loaded into a wagon beside which four of our stanch comrades will walk. Have no fear. Car-r-r-r-ramba! How parched this sand makes one's throat feel!"

"As to that," returned Don Caesar, with a smile and a bow, "allow me to prescribe. I have inside a few bottles of poor claret, but they have the great virtue that the wine was pressed from grapes grown in Spain."

"What a charming host you are, Don Caesar," cried the other, who, after bowing, followed Brabante into the adobe house.

From a cupboard to which he carried the key, Don Caesar drew out a bottle of wine, which he speedily uncorked.

There must have been an abnormal quantity of dust in Don Paulo's throat, for, with very little help from his host, he drained the bottle dry.

Some men wine renders cheerful. With Don Paulo it had the opposite effect, for no sooner had he disposed of the last of the red fluid than he heaved a lugubrious sigh.

"Don Caesar," he began, mournfully, "I have heard another account of the naval battle at Manila."

"And that great Yankee braggart, Dewey, was beaten after all?" exclaimed Brabante. "I knew it. Our navy could not have suffered defeat from such pigs as——"

"No," interposed Don Paulo. "The report has it that the Yankees, with six ships, destroyed all thirteen of Spain's noble craft."

"And you believe that absurd lie?" demanded Brabante, with a quivering voice.

"That was the report I read," rejoined Don Paulo, apologetically.

"Car-r-r-r-rajo! It is utterly absurd!" snorted Don Caesar. "No one could ever make me believe that Spaniards could be defeated by any race of sailors that the earth knows."

"Here come some of our comrades,"

FREE WAR BADGES. SEE LAST PAGE.

cried Don Paulo, evidently glad of a change of subject.

In came the comrades, one after the other, Don Caesar busying himself with opening bottles of wine.

"There are only four to be accounted for," said Don Caesar at last.

"And even they are here," answered one of the number, as going to the door he descried the approach of a heavily loaded wagon. "But, car-r-r-r-r-ramba! there are only three of them."

"Donkey," interjected Don Paulo, "the fourth is driving the team."

At this several of the others stared aghast, and one of them voiced the sentiment of the others when he inquired:

"What! A Spanish gentleman drive a mule team?"

He said it very much as if he meant:

"What! A Spanish gentleman stoop to work?"

"He is in disguise," explained Don Paulo. "Besides, our comrade, Don Luis, is performing for Spain a service that could not be safely trusted to one of these dogs of Mexicans, who, though they are descended from Spaniards, are wicked enough to favor the Yankees."

In due time the wagon was drawn up before the door.

As great a distaste as they had for work, these seventeen plotters, with the air of martyrs, demeaned themselves enough to bring in several queer-looking long boxes.

"The glorious supplies," quoth Don Caesar. "The supplies that are to enable us to strike at Fort Tampa a blow that will keep the cowardly Yankees shivering for many years to come."

"A grand toast, that!" cried one of the plotters. "We should drink it down in copious drafts of fine wine."

With just a suspicion of a wry face, Brabante went once more to the closet,

whence he brought out several bottles of the best wine he had stored there.

There was glorification then, in the course of which the dog that bore the Yankee name of McKinley got several vigorous kicks, until he ran yelping from the house and burrowed out of sight in the sand.

"Car-r-r-ramba!" cried one of the revellers, suddenly looking out toward Molente. "Here comes that Mexican captain, Vicente, with some of his soliders. It is quite plain that they are headed this way."

There was consternation, until Brabante went outside and ascertained that the Mexican captain was followed by only four soldiers.

"It would be decidedly awkward to have those fellows find our supplies," quivered Don Paulo.

"There are only five of them," insinuated Don Caesar.

He looked about him. The others, understanding his dark meaning, nodded back.

Brabante went outside. He was just in time to lift his sombrero courteously to Captain Vicente, who acknowledged the courtesy by a similar gesture.

"Good-morning, captain."

"Good-morning, Don Caesar. I am sorry that I should have to disturb you, but I have heard some rumors about a wagon load of cases that were seen coming here, where only Spaniards congregate. You will smile at the extent of my imagination, but, as you are well aware, Mexico is determined that the Spaniards who live within her borders shall not make hostile moves against the United States. Therefore, I am going to ask you to favor me with a view of your large boxes."

"You shall see them, and welcome," replied Don Caesar, bowing again. "The

WAR BUTTONS FREE TO ALL READERS.

cases are to be used by us on a week's fishing trip that we are contemplating. Come inside, captain, and I also invite the good fellows with you. I have some fairly good wine that I shall be glad to offer you."

Captain Vicente accepted, without suspicion. Who could suspect so courteous, amiable and genial a gentleman as Don Caesar Brabante?

Captain Vicente stepped inside, closely followed by his four thirsty soldiers.

Passing from the strong light of day into the gloomy interior of the adobe house, the Mexicans did not see what was before them, around them, behind them, until too late.

Knives flashed almost simultaneously. The next instant five Mexicans lay upon the floor, gasping in the last throes of death.

Spanish treachery had scored again!

CHAPTER II.

THE DONS AFLOAT.

The deed was done!

A vile act of the basest treachery, such as it is given to the hearts of but few craven souls to contemplate.

The Mexican officer and his men had been lured into that infamous den by fair protestations of friendship. With a smile upon his face and words of hospitality upon his lips, Don Caesar Brabante had led them to their doom.

It had been swift and certain. Suspecting no treachery deprived of every opportunity of defending themselves they had fallen an easy prey to the conspirators.

But upon the faces of these seventeen rascals there was no sign to show that anything out of the ordinary had taken place. Save for the five Mexicans weltering in their blood upon the floor of that

adobe house, there was no sign of their murderous work.

Remorse? No; that had no place in their make-up. Regret for the five innocent lives that had been sacrificed to their hate was also an unknown quantity.

What did it matter that Captain Vicente and his four comrades were in the performance of their sworn duty? Why pause to remember that the hand of friendship had been held out to the Mexican officer, and had been acknowledged by the latter in good faith?

Bah! such thoughts were for weaklings and fools! The noble and haughty Castilian would have none of it.

Had not these silly Mexicans attempted to meddle with the designs of the chivalrous seventeen? Had not Captain Vicente been presumptuous enough to desire to know their business and to examine their precious boxes?

More than that, the Mexican officer had the temerity to state that Spaniards within those borders should not be permitted to make hostile moves against the United States, and he was clearly there with his soldiers to thwart the plans of his band of Spanish gentlemen.

It was enough—clear as the noonday sun. He and his men were in their way and must be removed.

These were their thoughts and their justification, if they deigned to give the matter any serious reflection. But there was no indication of the gravity of the deed upon their faces.

Rather there was an air of exultation. They were pleased with themselves, and their work, and showed it by look and speech.

"Nobly done, my brave comrades!" exclaimed Don Caesar Brabante, who was the first to speak.

He stood in the doorway where he had paused with ceremonious politeness to

READ THE GREAT PREMIUM OFFER ON LAST PAGE.

admit the unsuspecting Mexicans. It had been his part of the infamous plot to entrap them, and he had not been compelled to soil his hands with Mexican blood. His fellow-conspirators were only too glad to do that for him.

Now he stood in the doorway, contentedly surveying the scene, and rubbing his hands together in glee.

"Nobly done, brave comrades!" he repeated. "Thus die the enemies of Spain!"

A murmur of approval ran round the group. They even cheered for themselves and their bravery as they gazed at their handiwork lying mute upon the ground before them.

"These Mexican dogs!" continued Don Caesar taking a step toward their murdered victims. "These dogs of Mexicans, though descended from our noble race, would ally themselves with the Yankees. They had the presumption to say 'must' and 'shall' to us, and to insult our haughty race. What say they now?"

Don Caesar looked about him with a sinister smile upon his face.

"Good! good!" cried the others in a chorus. "What say they now, to be sure!"

"He said," spoke up the one known as Don Luis, pointing toward the figure of Captain Vincete, "he said he would examine the large boxes we brought in the wagon. Ha! ha!"

"Yes," exclaimed Don Paulo with a cackling laugh, "and he remarked that furthermore Mexico will prevent all hostile moves from this point against the Yankee pigs. Ha! ha! ha!"

Don Paulo's hilarity was shared by his comrades in crime, but it remained for Don Caesar to set the gathering in a roar.

"Yes," cried Don Caesar, when the other had finished speaking. "This Mexican dog had the impudence to threaten to thwart our plans. He forgot

that he was dealing with a brave and haughty race whose pride will never suffer defeat. And now he is nothing but this——"

And with a look of contempt upon his swarthy face, the noble don pushed the lifeless form of the Mexican captain carelessly to one side with his foot and, swelling himself to his full size, gazed about at his followers.

"Thus always to the enemies of Spain!" he exclaimed bombastically, when he noted that all were admiring his heroic pose. "This and worse to the Yankee pigs!"

The conspirators were wild with enthusiasm.

"Bravo! bravo!" they cried.

"A toast! a toast!" exclaimed Don Paulo high above the din. "A grand toast is that, worthy of the finest vintage of wine."

The others took up the cry, and Don Caesar, with the faintest suggestion of a grimace upon his face, started for the closet where his wine was stored.

"Don Paulo, my noble friend," he exclaimed in passing, "you seem still to have with you some of that thirst with which nature has blessed you, and your throat has not lost its power of accumulating vast quantities of dust. Would that my wine bottles were permitted to gather as much upon their surface."

But the wine was forthcoming. The occasion and the toast called for the best to be had.

For a few minutes a wild scene of jubilation and merry making ensued. A stranger permitted to gaze upon the scene and hear the notes of hilarity that filled the place would not have imagined that the blood-stained corpses of the victims of their treachery lay in the midst of it all. Not one of those seventeen men, if such

DO YOU WANT A FLAG BUTTON OR PIN?

they were to be termed, gave a passing thought to the murdered Mexicans.

But though the human beings that swarmed around their lifeless bodies closed their hearts to all pity, there was one being—a dumb animal of the brute creation that did not forget the murdered victims of Spanish hate.

This was the dog, the mongrel whom the Don's had derisively named McKinley.

He had been attracted to the house by the sounds from within, and was now sniffing and whining in a low tone about the bodies of the Mexicans.

The jubilant dons had not seen the dog nor heard his low howl as he smelled about the blood-stained floor. But suddenly and unexpectedly he made his presence known.

"Yee-ow! yee-ow-ow!"

A mournful, long-drawn whine in a high pitch assailed the ears of the revelers. They turned with one accord, and saw the dog sitting upon his haunches and howling his sad, lone requiem for the dead. That is what it looked like, at any rate.

"Car-r-r-ramba!" cried Don Caesar, rushing toward the mongrel. "It is the brute, McKinley! Such wretched howls may bring some fool of a Mexican to the spot before we are ready to receive company."

With this Don Caesar gave the whining dog a kick that sent him flying through the door, and yelping beyond.

The incident seemed to bring the plotters to their senses. It was well enough to drink toasts; in fact, nothing pleased them better, with the possible exception of Don Caesar at whose expense it all occurred. But there was the work before them now.

"The miserable dogs of Mexicans must be disposed of," exclaimed Don Caesar,

pushing the body of the captain to one side with his foot. "Car-r-r-ramba! That a proud Castilian should be forced to degrade himself by handling such carrion!"

In plain words this meant that he did not fancy the labor attached to making way with the bodies, and in this feeling all joined.

"Why not let them stay where they are?" suggested one of the party. "We leave to-night, and——"

"Have you parted with what little sense you ever had?" exclaimed Don Caesar, indignantly. "Leave these dogs here to be silent witnesses against us to any who might come this way! I am surprised at you. No, they must be buried and all trace removed."

But the sixteen to a man did not relish the idea of soiling their hands by the vulgar process of grave digging, and some ventured to suggest throwing the bodies in the water and trusting to the tide to carry them out to sea.

"Fine food for the sharks!" they exclaimed.

But Don Caesar was obdurate. The bodies must be buried. Not that he intended lifting his hand in the undertaking—not at all.

"Car-r-r-ramba!" he cried. "Are you a pack of idiots fit for nothing but eating and drinking? The spades at once and to work. Night is approaching and our vessel may arrive at any moment with its dog of a captain."

There was some wrangling among the men as to who should perform the unpleasant task, but it was soon set at rest by their leader. With much grumbling and many maledictions upon the dead Mexicans, a trench was at last completed. The haughty dons really seemed to feel that the Mexicans had come there to be killed for the express purpose of causing them to soil their hands by manual labor.

"REMEMBER THE MAINE!" WEAR A "MAINE" BUTTON.

When the hole had been dug, they carried the lifeless forms of their victims out of the house and threw them unceremoniously into the pit. But really, they performed this part of their labors with a more satisfied spirit than they had shown in the preliminary grave-digging.

Hurriedly they threw in the earth, covering the bodies and hiding as best they could all traces of their murderous work. The sun was setting, and on the still, twilight air was borne the plaintive whine of the mongrel dog, the only funeral note that marked the interment.

It was then that the nimble-minded Don Paulo bethought himself of another excuse for a raid upon Don Caesar's wine-closet. Much digging in the dry soil had coated that throat of his with a thick layer of dust and nothing but the best of wine could remove it.

Don Caesar submitted with good grace, and the band of plotters retired again to the house and again the bottle went its rounds.

As the darkness increased there was a straining of eyes in the direction of the inlet. Evidently something was expected in that quarter.

"Car-r-r-ramba!" exclaimed Don Caesar, after a long wait. "Are the Mexican dogs playing with us, and will they never appear?"

"Look yonder, Don Caesar," cried one of the men, pointing out toward the sea.

The other did as he was directed, but after a time, shook his head.

"I see nothing," he said.

"Here," said the other, "step this way where you can see through the trees."

And he led Don Caesar to the spot where he had himself been standing.

"Do you not see that light?" he asked, pointing.

"Ah!" exclaimed Don Caesar, with a sigh of relief. "That is it."

"The schooner?"

"Yes, the schooner," replied the don. "We shall soon be aboard and away. Then we will strike such a blow that the Yankee pigs will not recover from its effects."

"But, Don Caesar," ventured the other. "Have you not a Mexican crew on board, and what of them?"

"Two men beside the captain," replied Don Caesar. "They are well paid to do as they are told and say nothing. Should they attempt to meddle with us—you know what to do."

There was no need of his saying anything further. The other saw the dark look upon Don Caesar's face and understood.

It was the long-expected boat, there was no mistake about that. Soon it appeared in the little harbor and was fastened to the shore and the captain and his crew of two men, all Mexicans, stepped ashore.

The dons were now all impatience to embark and no time was lost in preliminaries.

The huge cases were all shipped aboard and the labor fell upon the Mexican sailors. The dons, however, worked hard in bossing the job. They could do this with grace becoming a haughty son of Spain, and were once more happy to see things moving without the necessity of soiling their own immaculate hands.

They condescended to walk aboard the craft when all was ready, and McKinley, the frisky mongrel, seeing the trend of affairs, was not slow to follow their example.

With mutual congratulations among the dons at the auspicious beginning, the schooner slowly moved out of the inlet and was soon upon the broader bosom of the Gulf of Mexico.

The Mexican captain and his crew of

A BUTTON OR BADGE FREE—SEE LAST PAGE.

two men, receiving no assistance from their passengers, had their hands full in the preliminary stages of the trip.

But after a time the sailing of the boat settled into its regular routine, and the captain found time to look about him. He had been engaged in ignorance of the nature of the expedition, and as a matter of fact cared very little about it anyhow.

But the number and size of cases shipped aboard aroused his curiosity, and he set about to sound Don Caesar as to the nature of the cargo and the destination of the party.

His curiosity was fatal to himself and his crew. Despite Don Caesar's attempt to evade the subject, the unsuspecting Mexican captain persisted in his questions, and sealed his doom.

It is unnecessary to dwell long upon the method employed to silence his meddlesome inquisitiveness. The haughty dons had already that day once employed their panacea for such ills, and at a signal from Don Caesar each of his followers knew his duty and did it.

The body of the Mexican captain, bleeding from numerous knife wounds, was followed into its watery grave by those of his crew similarly dealt with.

"Fine food for sharks!" exclaimed the Spaniards, as they saw them sink beneath the waves.

Now they could breathe freely, and set out without fear of interference in the execution of the projects they had so long secretly planned.

They were even willing to work. Quickly they unpacked the cases, bringing to light quantities of torpedoes, some machinery and a couple of torpedo tubes, besides arms and ammunition in abundance.

But the interest centred about the torpedo tubes. These they carried below into the hold. They worked hard, harder perhaps than they had ever before been guilty of, and placed the two torpedo tubes in position in the forward end of the hold, one on either side.

They were panting from their exertion when this was completed, but did not yet cease their labors. It was not until they had let down canvas over the sides of the vessel, thus effectually screening the out-

lets of the torpedo tubes, that they paused to contemplate their handiwork.

"Admirable!" cried Don Caesar, rubbing his hands together in glee. "Now we will strike the blow that shall send terror to the hearts of the Yankee pigs!"

With enthusiastic jubilation they took the craft in hand and steered across the gulf in the direction of Port Tampa.

CHAPTER III.

HAL SEEKS THE DONS.

While that band of worthies is congratulating itself upon having at last fully equipped itself for the project in hand and while they are incidentally wrestling with the intricacies of navigation, we will leave them and turn to another scene.

This is of an entirely different nature, and amid other surroundings; but, as will be seen, it is destined to lead to events in common with the expedition which we have just noted.

The time is the day following that upon which the story opens, and the place is Tampa Bay Hotel, at Tampa, Florida.

General Shafter, in command of the United States troops at that point, has just greeted an army officer who has joined him.

"Hello, Westinghouse," he said. "Sit down. I am glad to see you."

Westinghouse, whose uniform proclaimed that he held the rank of colonel in the regular army, promptly obeyed.

"I have just been thinking about you," continued the general, "and wondering what you have been doing with yourself. Any new developments? Been tracking any more Spanish spies, eh?"

It is well to state here that Colonel Westinghouse was temporarily working with the secret service, and had given some attention to ferreting out the spies who were said to abound in that locality.

In answer to the general's question, the colonel smiled and shook his head.

"No," he said, "I have another matter in hand that promises to be of a more serious nature."

"And what is that?"

"I have just received warning from one of our officers, who is working in con-

junction with the Mexican authorities, that a schooner has left the coast of Mexico with a Spanish party aboard. Their destination is not known, but they shipped a mysterious cargo and are supposed to have sailed for some part of the United States coast on a mission of mischief."

"This is interesting," said the general.

"Yes, and there is some confirmation that the Spaniards are bent on dangerous work," continued the colonel. "The body of a Mexican skipper floated ashore a few miles above the port of Molente. It has been recognized as that of the captain of the little schooner."

"He probably found out too much to suit the Spaniards, and was not wise enough to keep the fact to himself," commented the general. "They are evidently a desperate crowd."

"They are all known to the authorities here," said the colonel. "The ringleader is a wealthy old Spaniard, Don Caesar Brabante, and his followers are all Spaniards who have settled in the country about Molente. They have been under suspicion of fomenting plots against this country, for some time since the war was declared, but owing to the old don's prominence and wealth they have been rather slow to take any measure against him. A Captain Vicente, with some soldiers, however, was sent to investigate some rumors, but for some reason his report has not yet been received. He probably reached there too late to stop the expedition, for the schooner sailed undoubtedly."

"What is your idea of their mission?" asked the general.

The colonel hesitated a moment as if considering, then slowly said:

"All the available troop transports are at Port Tampa, as you know. These plotters could do the most damage there, and could reach it in short order. The old don is wealthy enough to provide all the required appliances and this, no doubt, was the mysterious cargo. Yes," he said, as though he had been arguing the matter with himself, "I think they are bound for that point, and will endeavor in some way to wreck our transports."

"That would cause intolerable delay, and loss to our army," commented the general.

"It shall not happen," said the colonel positively. "We have been warned and that in time, I hope. I have called to ask you to detail a young officer to proceed at once to Port Tampa in search of this boat and its mysterious cargo."

"It shall certainly be done, colonel," said the general. "Have you any one especially in mind?"

"There is a young lieutenant who has already distinguished himself by one good piece of work in the neighborhood," began the colonel.

"His name," interrupted the other.

"Lieutenant Hal Maynard."

"Maynard! I know much of him and all to his credit," said the general, evidently pleased. "He is not only brave and dashing, but is prudent and resourceful as well. No better selection could be made. He shall be sent for at once."

This was accordingly done, and while they waited for the appearance of the youthful lieutenant, the two officers discussed the report and the probable destination of the schooner.

"By the way, colonel," said General Shafter, suddenly. "How is this boat to be recognized? Have you received any description of it?"

"Only of the most meagre sort," responded the other. "Beyond the facts that I have stated there is nothing except that she was named Anita."

"Not a very satisfactory description," commented the general. "There are numerous Mexican schooners, and the name might be painted out."

"It is not much to go on," asserted Colonel Westinghouse. "But I have confidence enough in Lieutenant Maynard to believe that, young as he is, he will find it if it is at that point."

"I do not think your confidence is misplaced," said the general.

Further comment was prevented by the arrival of the young lieutenant himself.

As Hal Maynard drew near the waiting pair, the general noticed the young man's military bearing with evident satisfaction.

SHOW YOUR COLORS—GET ONE OF OUR FREE BADGES.

"Every inch a soldier," he exclaimed to Colonel Westinghouse, at which the latter nodded in assent.

Hal approached and saluted in true soldierly fashion, and stood at attention waiting for the general's commands.

"Maynard," said the latter, "I have sent for you at the request of Colonel Westinghouse. He has some business for you—a mission of great importance. I will leave him to explain the nature of it to you."

Colonel Westinghouse thereupon put Hal in possession of all the facts that had come to his knowledge, which in view of what was demanded of him, were few enough.

"You are to proceed to Port Tampa on the next train running from here," said the colonel finally. "There you will procure a steam launch for which an order will be given you. After that use your own discretion. What we expect of you is to find out whether the schooner is bound for Port Tampa, or anything of a definite nature concerning it. I will follow you to Port Tampa on the next train."

Hal had listened attentively to all that had been told him, making note of the few meagre details upon which he had to work. In order that there might be no mistake, he briefly recapitulated:

"As I understand you, colonel," he said, "you have received no description of the boat beyond the fact that it is a small Mexican schooner."

"Nothing, except that it is named Anita, and has a party of Spaniards aboard. Not a very promising subject, is it?"

"I will do my best to find it," said Hal. "I am familiar with the appearance of these Mexican boats, and there is no mistaking a Spaniard."

Hal was in possession of all the available facts and there was now nothing to be gained by further delay. The train would soon start for Port Tampa, and he was anxious to get away.

Colonel Westinghouse noticed this and recognized the wisdom of it.

"Here is your order for the steam launch," he said, "and now may success crown your efforts."

"I will do my best, sir," said Hal, modestly.

He saluted, faced about and withdrew.

Once beyond the presence of the officers he quickened his step. There was not much time to spare before the departure of the train.

He felt elated at being selected for this mission, although it seemed at the outset a very prosaic one.

"There don't seem to be much chance of exciting adventures in cruising about the harbor at Port Tampa," he mused as he hurried toward the train, "but you can never tell. At any rate, it will be enough if I can prevent these Spaniards from doing any mischief to our transports."

He was just in time to get a seat before the train started, and in due time reached his destination.

Once in Port Tampa he was again on the move in lively order. His order for a steam launch was quickly honored and he set about examining the various schooners anchored there.

He found several which were unmistakably Mexican, but an investigation soon satisfied him that they were not what he sought. He had cruised all over the harbor, but without results.

He was about to abandon the search, convinced that no such schooner was there, when he caught sight of a small craft just outside the harbor.

The strange boat attracted his attention by reason of its erratic movements, and he put on full steam after it. As he drew nearer he could see that the other boat seemed to be making every effort to get away. Sail was crowded on to the full limit, and the wind was favorable."

This lent color to the belief that the schooner was trying to elude the little launch, though it puzzled Hal to think how they could know that he was after them.

He continued the chase at full speed and soon drew near enough to make out every detail of the boat through his glasses.

Then he felt satisfied that it was not the boat he sought, but to make assurance doubly sure he kept on until he was beside her.

CUBA LIBRE—GET A CUBAN BUTTON.

It was a coasting sailer bound for New York, as he discovered and hailing the captain, and especially anxious to take every advantage of the favorable breeze.

Thoroughly dejected at the want of success, Hal started back for the harbor.

"My best does not seem to be much this time," he muttered. "But I won't give up yet."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DONS ASHORE.

Meantime, the dons from Mexico were having troubles of their own.

We left them at the point where, having disposed of the Mexican captain and his crew, they took the navigation of the vessel into their own hands. At this very stage in the game their difficulties began.

The truth of the matter is that the haughty Castilians knew little or nothing of handling a ship, and less still of the waters upon which they had embarked.

How could they be expected to know? Were they not Spanish gentlemen, entitled by all rights to live the lives of indolent ease while some dog of a plebeian did the work?

Don Caesar Brabante, at any rate, had always existed on that principle, and his companions had been consistent in trying to follow the same line of conduct.

It was for this reason that they had secured the services of the Mexicans, ignorant fellows all whose eyes would be closed, they thought, by the glitter of gold. But unfortunately for the Mexicans, and decidedly inconvenient for the dons, had been the captain's curiosity.

He wanted to know where they were going, and what they intended doing! Such presumption must be rebuked, and they had adopted the most effectual way of doing it.

But after the captain and his men had been silenced forever, and the topredos tubes had been placed in position, it dawned upon the dons that some one would have to navigate the boat.

That meant work, and they almost regretted having dealt so summarily with the Mexican dogs. But on the whole they decided to accept the situation and make the best of it.

Don Caesar, by virtue of his leader-

ship, bossed the job, and at the outset quelled an incipient mutiny. This was not a serious uprising, to be sure.

His followers did not rebel at the nature of the expedition, and refuse to accompany their leader—not at all. What they were kicking about was the manual labor involved in handling sails and manipulating the rudder, and other things equally as degrading to a proud son of Spain.

But Don Caesar was equal to the emergency. He threatened to shut off their supply of wine unless they at once fell to work.

This had the desired effect, and the schooner was soon under way. Morning found them up off the Florida coast, under full sail and apparently going smoothly.

Don Caesar was pacing the deck, evidently on very good terms with himself. From bow to stern he walked gazing with satisfaction at the water about him.

After a time he paused and addressed his faithful friend and servitor, Don Paulo, who stood at the rail.

"Ah, Don Paulo," he said, "We are making a magnificent run."

"Splendid!" assented that worthy.

"Who is there to say, after this demonstration of our ability, that a Spanish gentleman is not equal to every emergency, even that of handling a beastly boat?"

"Who, indeed?"

"And yet, Don Paulo, I have distinct recollection of your lamenting last night that we had not kept those Mexican dogs with us until we should reach our destination," said Don Caesar, with a quizzical smile. "To be sure, you suggested that we might then quietly remove them with a knife thrust, their usefulness being over."

"True, Don Caesar," replied the other apologetically. "I did utter such a regret. But I had no thought at the time that we had such splendid navigators among our number."

Don Caesar laughed heartily, though why he did so Don Paulo could not conceive. He soon learned.

"Ah, Don Paulo," exclaimed Brabante after his laughter had subsided, "you are a sly rogue. You feared that you might

be called upon to do some of the degrading work."

"It was not that, Don Caesar," began the other, but his companion interrupted.

"It is all right, my good friend," Don Caesar said. "The sentiment does you credit, and shows you are a true gentleman. I, too, share your feelings, and will see that your pride is not humbled. We have enough others to do the work."

Then the pair fell to laughing in a good-humored way.

It was evident that Don Paulo was a prime favorite with the leader, and that they understood each other very well.

"Ah, we are making a magnificent run," said Don Caesar again, after a pause.

"Splendid," asserted Don Paulo. "And where are we now?"

"Where, did you say?"

"Yes, what part of the coast are we passing now?"

"To be sure," exclaimed Don Caesar, a light suddenly breaking upon him. "Where are we now, and where is Port Tampa."

He had been so lost in admiration of the efficiency of his crew that he had given the matter no thought. Now he procured a pair of glasses and began surveying the coast.

"It is the land where the Yankee pigs grovel," he snorted at last, "but what part I know not."

"Let me have the glass a moment, Don Caesar," said Don Paulo, reaching for it.

"What do you know about such things?" grunted Don Caesar. "The only glass you are familiar with is the kind you look into and not through. The saints be praised," he added at a sudden thought, "it is impossible now upon this water that abnormal throat of yours should accumulate any dust."

He laughed heartily and slapped his companion upon the back, thoroughly enjoying his joke.

But Don Paulo had his thirst with him and was equal to the occasion.

"True Don Caesar," he said. "What you say is correct, but remember the water is salt; and salt excites thirst. In my case it causes excruciable suffering. But come; there is a chart below in the

cabin by which we may learn our course."

"Likewise is there the claret bottle, eh, Don Paulo?" laughed Don Caesar.

"Let us examine the chart," said Don Paulo, leading the way.

The two repaired to the cabin, where the wine bottle was found without any difficulty and the ship's chart after some delay. Don Paulo improved the opportunity by drinking several toasts to the success of the expedition.

"Ah, here is the chart, Don Caesar," he exclaimed at last, turning from side to side as the other looked on. "We are bound to Port Tampa, and here it is."

He had been scanning the paper closely, and had hit upon the name.

"Car-r-r-ramba!" he suddenly added, "we are all wrong. See, here is Molente and here is Port Tampa, and we are going in directly the opposite direction. The boat must be turned around."

He was all excitement and Don Caesar began to have fears that something was surely wrong. He examined the chart closely.

"Donkey!" he cried. "You have it upside down! Another bottle of claret and you will be seeing two Molentes and two Port Tampas."

This was really the case. But it was ignorance of nautical matters and not drink that had confused Don Paulo. He was proof against wine. He might really drink all there was aboard and his head would be as clear and his thirst as long as ever it was.

With a motion of impatience Don Caesar took the matter in hand, but with no better success. He could not make head or tail of the thing.

"We will go on deck and see if any of those fellows know anything about the matter," exclaimed Don Caesar, depriving his companion of the half-emptied bottle and locking it up.

Don Paulo cast a longing look at the spot that held his friend and solace and reluctantly followed his leader above.

Here on deck a comical scene ensued. Don Caesar called his followers about him and explained how important it was that they know where they were and where they would find Port Tampa.

YOU SHOULD HAVE A "DEWEY" MEDAL.

That seemed true enough, since Port Tampa was to be the scene of their exploits, and they loudly applauded their leader's wisdom.

Then he produced the chart and demanded if any of them knew how to make use of it.

They all crowded around and looked curiously at it. Then each had a separate and distinct proposition to make.

Some insisted that it should be examined from one side and some from another; but Don Caesar had already seen Don Paulo turn it upside down, and knew better.

Some insisted that they had already passed it and that they must turn back, and then each point of the compass had its champion. Finally they took to all speaking at once, and crowded around their leader, gesticulating wildly and excitedly advancing their views.

"Car-r-r-ramba!" cried Don Caesar at last out of all patience. "Silence, you magpies! All this bother over a piece of paper. It is more bother than it is worth."

With an impatient shrug of his shoulders, he tore the chart into fragments and threw it overboard.

"Now, listen to me," he exclaimed. "Did not the Mexican captain say that we would reach Port Tampa this afternoon? Then how is it possible that we have already passed it? Every man to his post, and leave it to me to guide you to our destination."

But, though he spoke so bravely, he had his misgivings and as the day advanced began to get decidedly uneasy.

Finally in the afternoon he spoke of his doubts and uncertainties to the ever-faithful Don Paulo.

"Don Caesar, pardon my bluntness, but the plain truth is we do not know where we are," said the latter.

Don Caesar was forced to acknowledge the truth of this statement.

"Then let us find out where our course lays," continued the other.

"Yes, but how?"

"Let us go ashore and cautiously inquire the way. The Yankee pigs are a dull-witted lot and slow to take suspicion.

We can learn what we want and they will be none the wiser."

This seemed the only course open to them, and was finally decided upon. Don Caesar notified the others of what had been determined, and the schooner's head was turned toward shore, and finally they came to anchor.

Don Caesar, Don Paulo and four others, who were allowed to do the rowing, set off in a boat toward a cove that they had noticed some distance away.

With them they took an empty hogshead, which they intended to bring back full of water. It was discovered just before they decided upon this course that their supply of water was exhausted, and the trip furnished the opportunity to replenish it.

The point upon which they had stumbled was two or three miles south of Ballast Point, and they finally landed in a cove which was out of sight of the schooner.

With them they took the empty hogshead and, rolling it along the ground, started from the shore to find some one who could give them the desired information.

"The hogshead will furnish a good excuse for us," said Don Caesar. "We are a company of Mexican sailors who merely desire to replenish their supply of fresh water."

And he winked at Don Paulo and laughed heartily. The latter joined in the hilarity, and in great good humor with themselves the party disappeared up the hill toward the interior.

So wrapped up were they with their own cleverness, that they failed to hear approaching footsteps. But they had no more than left the spot when a youth, in the uniform of a lieutenant in the American army, parted the bushes and approached the waiting boat.

It was Hal Maynard, whose exploration had brought him thus far south of Port Tampa.

RALLY ROUND THE FLAG—WEAR A FLAG PIN.

Second Part.

CHAPTER V.

HAL MAKES A FATAL FIND.

Hal Maynard's appearance on the scene may be accounted for in a few words.

His cruise about the harbor of Port Tampa had been without results, except to satisfy him that the mysterious schooner was not there.

But that did not suit him. He wanted to know where it was, and what mischief it was up to.

"Anybody could find out that it is not here," he muttered in a dissatisfied tone as he turned the steam launch toward shore after his fruitless search. "What I want is to set my eyes on that strange craft and its opportunities of mischief making."

He was plainly disgusted with his lack of success when he stepped ashore from the launch.

"Colonel Westinghouse will not be here for hours yet," he muttered as he consulted his watch. "As the case stands now, I can simply report, when he does come, a negative success. The boat is not here in the harbor."

He walked disconsolately toward the inn, apparently debating something with himself.

At last he stopped suddenly, his mind made up.

"I have been given discretion in the matter," he said, half aloud. "If the schooner is not here it can do no harm to our transports in these waters, and nothing will be lost by my continuing my search down the coast. I'll do it."

He had decided upon a course of action and was not slow in carrying it out. He turned about and was soon as his way down the coast. He was provided with a strong glass with which he kept a close lookout across the water.

It occurred to him that the mysterious boat might be waiting outside the harbor or down the coast for darkness to shield its approach, and he knew of no better way of finding out if this was the case.

On he went, giving no heed to the distance he traveled, but closely scanning the waters.

His vigilance was not rewarded until he reached a spot several miles south of Ballast Point.

Here his attention was attracted to a schooner approaching the shore. It was the object of his search, though he had no means of knowing.

He studied it closely through his glass as it came to anchor some distance from shore. He had taken the precaution to pursue his investigation from the protecting screen of some bushes, for as he was in army uniform, his actions might attract attention to those on board.

"They have a glass, too, no doubt," he thought, "and can see me as well as I can them. If it is the schooner I am after, a sight of my uniform will frighten them off."

As he spoke the schooner swung around at anchor, bringing her stem into view.

"Ah, there is her name," exclaimed Hal, scrutinizing her more closely.

"Thorberg!" he added, after a few moments. "Not a very Mexican sound, that!"

A moment after he had deciphered the balance of the inscription.

"Thorberg, of Sweden," it read.

Hal was disappointed.

"Thorberg, of Sweden," he muttered, "and I am hunting for the Anita, of Mexico."

Then he saw the boat lowered, and the party with the empty hogshead embark.

"Run out of water, and coming ashore for a fresh supply," he exclaimed. "That explains it."

Though he felt satisfied now that this was not the boat he was after, he continued to watch the boat as the rowers took their places and turned their bow toward shore.

The closer the party came the more it struck him that they did not look like the crew of a Swedish boat. They had the actions of sure-enough Spaniards.

He saw that they were heading for a cove some little distance away, and promptly started in the same direction, with the intention of getting a closer view of them.

The crew of the boat reached the spot first. But Hal was in time to catch a

glimpse of the party as it proceeded up the hill, rolling the empty hog'shead.

"Spaniards, sure enough!" he exclaimed, as he parted the bushes that had concealed his approach and stepped out upon the shore of the little cove.

He had not reached there quick enough to hear any of their conversation, but one look at them was enough to tell him that they were Spaniards.

"But there are Spaniards and Spaniards," thought Hal. "Is this the party that sailed from Molente in the Anita? that is the question."

It did not seem as though it could be, for the name of their schooner stood out plainly enough—"Thorberg, of Sweden."

His first impulse was to follow the party.

"Perhaps I can learn something from their conversation," he mused.

Then another thought struck him.

"They might catch sight of my uniform," he muttered, "and then all hope of having them compromise themselves would be lost. After all, what is the use of following them, when they must come back here to their boat? I'll see what I can learn here before they return, and by that time I can be in concealment near."

After a cautious look about him to see that none of the crew was at hand, Hal glided down toward the boat.

It had been left half drawn up on shore, and was an ordinary-looking affair. It did not promise to give up the secret that Hal sought.

But there was nothing else that he could do while waiting for the return of the party, and he started in to examine it carefully from stem to stern.

He hoped to find some name painted upon it, but there was none on the sides or stern. The oars also had no telltale marks.

But at last he discovered a name on the inside of the stern. He went closer and carefully scrutinized it.

"Hurrah!" he exclaimed, in great glee. "It is Anita! The Spaniards have evidently painted a new name on the schooner, but overlooked this little detail."

He was thrilled with pleasure at hav-

ing discovered the schooner for which he had been seeking. He could barely restrain himself from giving vent to a rousing cheer.

"The Thorberg, of Sweden, is the Anita in disguise," he exclaimed. "That much is certain."

But while he had been pursuing his investigation in the boat, events were shaping themselves on shore.

The party of Spaniards had not gone far from the cove when they came upon a small cottage—a mean-looking shanty, whose whitewashed walls stood out in the bright sunlight.

In response to a knock from one of the dons, a woolly-headed darky slowly appeared in the doorway.

"Pardon us," said one of the dons who spoke English to some extent, "we have run short of water on our schooner, and have put ashore with this barrel in search of a fresh supply. May we replenish at your well? We will pay for the privilege."

The darky readily gave his consent, and led the way to the well close at hand.

"I declar' to goodness, dese white gemmen is drefful perlite to er pore nigger like me," muttered the darky.

He was impressed by the suavity of the strangers, but it is reasonable to suppose that his footsteps were quickened by the thought of the promised reward.

He assisted the dons in filling their cask, and worked to such good purpose that it soon contained all the dons required.

The English-speaking member of the party improved the opportunity to engage the darky in conversation, and by casual questioning soon learned the distance and direction to Port Tampa.

The cask was filled, at least to the extent they desired, and the bung driven in in a few minutes. The darky then made a move toward assisting them in conveying it to their boat, but this did not suit their purpose.

They had no intention of having any possible spy upon their movements. So they thanked him with becoming dignity and dismissed him with a Mexican dollar.

They left the darky, bowing and scrap-

YOU SHOULD GET A WAR BADGE AT ONCE.

ing near his doorway, the precious piece of silver clasped in his brawny hand.

"That will make him forget everything else," said Don Caesar, as they started away. "The American pigs know nothing but chasing after money, and these niggers are as base as their masters."

Laughing and talking in Spanish, they continued on their way.

It was but a short distance to the cove, and the top was soon reached, the hogshhead being rolled along in front of them.

The incline of the land from this point to the water was slight, just sufficient to permit the cask to roll slowly down toward the boat without imposing any labor upon the haughty dons. They were very glad that this was so, and congratulated themselves upon being spared that much labor.

But as the hogshhead began its descent, the surprised dons caught a glimpse of a vision that drove from their lips their laughing words.

An American pig had had the audacity to enter their boat and pry about it, or else their eyes deceived them! Such an affront must be rebuked, and besides, it might be a spy.

It was Hal standing in the stern. He had at this moment deciphered the name Anita painted inside the boat, and was just rising to his feet with a thrill of pleasure at the discovery.

He heard the voices on the shore quickly approaching.

"It is the Spaniards!" he muttered, as he sprang to his feet.

His mind was quick to act. He realized that there was no hope of his escaping in that direction. Before he could reach the bow of that wobbling boat and step shore, his enemies would discover him, and he knew enough of Spanish treachery to know that they would shoot first and ask who he was afterward.

For an instant or two he deliberated what to do. His course of action was decided upon quickly.

If he could not escape by land, he would try the water. He would plunge overboard and swim under the water to a safe retreat. He had no doubt of his ability to elude them once he was in the

water, for this was not the first attempt at swimming great distances beneath the waves.

Once beyond the range of their vision, he would rush off to Port Tampa, give the alarm, and have the schooner and Spaniards captured before they could do any mischief.

This plan flashed through his mind on the instant and he was quick to perceive that it was his only hope.

He gave one look at the top of the low hill whence the sounds came. This brief glance showed him a hogshhead suddenly beginning to move down the incline toward him.

"There is no time to lose," he exclaimed. "The Spaniards are not far behind."

Hal had accomplished his task. He turned to spring from the boat, when from behind the hogshhead a swarthy face appeared—a true-aimed shot was fired.

The plunge Hal intended to make was never taken—at least not in the way he had planned.

The bullet, aimed with precision for once by a Spaniard, had struck his forehead, and instead of his diving, he fell, bleeding and severely wounded, into the water.

And six swarthy faces appeared in view above the rolling barrel to gloat upon the deed that had been done.

CHAPTER VI.

IN A LIVING TOMB.

The hogshhead continued on its downward flight, while the Spanish dons paused for a moment to felicitate the fellow upon the correctness of his aim. Then it rolled with a loud splash into the shallow water not far from the spot where Hal, badly wounded, was floating.

His eyes were closed, his face ghastly pale, and from a wound in his forehead trickled drops of blood discoloring the water about him. There was no question that he had received a serious injury.

But he was not unconscious. He heard the loud splash of the hogshhead as it landed in the water, followed by the hurrying footsteps and the confused exclamations of the dons.

He was dazed and stunned and realized

CALL YOUR FRIENDS ATTENTION TO OUR PREMIUMS—SEE PAGE 32.

the hopelessness of his condition. He knew that he was too weak to attempt to get away in the face of the nearness of his enemies. But, brave as he was, he trembled at the thought of what his fate would be when he fell into their hands.

He could hear them rapidly approaching, and decided upon a desperate ruse. It was a slight hope, but the only thing that offered itself.

He would sham dead.

Accordingly he lay motionless with closed eyes, hardly daring to breathe.

He heard their footsteps upon the beach, and then a startled exclamation in Spanish.

"Car-r-r-amba! It is an officer of the American army!"

It was Don Caesar who had spoken. The others had been slower to note Hal's uniform, but this announcement threw them into a veritable panic.

"Car-r-r-amba! so it is!" came a startled chorus.

"We have been discovered by the enemy," cried Don Caesar, as much frightened as any of the others.

They all looked apprehensively around as though they expected to see the forms of American soldiers closing in upon them.

"Death to the American pig!" cried one, and Hal heard the ominous click of a revolver not far away.

But the report did not follow.

"Hold, you donkey!" came the commanding tones of Don Caesar "Don't shoot, you idiot! Where there is one soldier, there is apt to be more; and would you bring them down upon us by a senseless shot? Can't you see he is dead?"

"But, Don Caesar," exclaimed the other, "let us make sure of it."

"Then the knife is better," was the response.

Despite the perilous position in which he was, Hal retained his faculties sufficiently to hear what was said, and to make a mental note of the name that had been spoken.

"Don Caesar!" he thought. "It is he and his precious band!"

Then again the voice of the Spanish leader rang out.

"Here, you, Don Luis," he exclaimed.

"Draw that carcass to the shore, and make haste about it."

The don to whom the order was addressed, reluctantly waded in the shallow water, wetting his precious legs, and seized Hal by the feet. It was an easy task to pull the body up on the beach.

Hal's heart was in his throat. Now, he thought, is the critical time. A suspicion that he was still alive and breathing meant certain death.

That suspicion had apparently been aroused, as he was soon to learn.

He had been dragged feet foremost upon the shore and he could feel, though he did not venture to look, that all eyes were upon him.

"Ah, that was a beautiful shot," came the voice of Don Caesar, in tones of great satisfaction. "Square in the temple! But we must not lose time. The soldiers may be here any moment. Quick, you four, dig a hole that we may bury the pig's carcass in the sand."

Truly this was not a pleasing prospect—that of being interred alive. Hal had great difficulty to restrain himself from making an outcry and betraying the fact that he was still alive.

But there was worse to follow; for appalling as the prospect was there was still some hope left in him that he might retain sufficient strength to dig himself out of his living tomb before suffocation would overcome him.

The Spaniards, he could tell from their words, were in a desperate hurry to be off. The fact that their presence had been discovered by one American officer alarmed as well as surprised them. They were not likely to lose much time in digging, and a shallow grave might yet yield up its victim.

But this hope was for the instant driven from his mind—Don Caesar had just given his command that a trench be opened to receive the body, when one of the men spoke up objectingly.

"It was the one who had wanted to fire again at Hal as he was floating in the water. He was still not satisfied to abandon his plan.

"He is not dead, I say, Don Caesar," he exclaimed.

"Let us settle him then with a knife

Spain in the Eagle's Claws is Our "Now Will You Be Good" Button—See Page 32.

thrust," cried another. "A blade through is heart will remove all doubts."

And Hal could hear a hasty footfall upon the sand.

The young American's heart stood still. The feeling of suspense, the certainty that death was hanging over him and his utter helplessness to ward it off, all bore down upon his mind with horrible, crushing effect.

He did not dare open his eyes, for that he knew would be a signal to his enemy to strike. He could not, therefore, see what was taking place.

The fatal dagger might be but a foot, but an inch over his heart, he could not tell. He did not know at what second the mortal blow would fall.

In those brief moments he suffered untold agony. His mind felt the strain, and he all but gave vent to a groan of anguish. But, no, he resolved he would be game, and not a sound came from his parched lips, not a tremor shook his frame.

It was all over in a moment of time, but to him it seemed hours.

"Fools!" came the impatient command of Don Caesar. "Do as I tell you and do not waste precious time that may bring the soldiers about our heads. This fellow is dead enough—a bullet in the brain—and we will bury him beyond resurrection."

Hal breathed free once more. His death had been averted, but what a horrible alternative was offered instead. To be buried alive!

Don Caesar was undoubtedly in a great hurry to dispose of the body and get away to the schooner.

He fumed at the men whom he had ordered to dig the trench, and they lost no time in seizing the oars, which were the only available tools they had with them for digging.

All this had taken but a few minutes, and they promised to end their labors in a few more.

Don Caesar growled and swore at them savagely. Suddenly he stopped.

"Car-r-r-amba!" he exclaimed. "We have forgotten the nigger!"

"That fellow on the hill?" queried Don Paulo.

"Yes," replied Don Caesar, excitedly. "What if he heard the shot and should come down here to investigate?"

"No fear of that," said Don Paulo. "Did we not give him one good Mexican dollar? He is busy contemplating that, and has ears and eyes for nothing else."

But Don Caesar was not satisfied with this suggestion. He feared a surprise.

"Do you go to the top of the hill and watch," he said, addressing Don Paulo. "Here, take this," and he handed him a revolver.

Don Paulo started off for the hilltop.

"You know how to use that," suggested Don Caesar, while he was yet in hearing.

"Have no fear of my forgetting it, Don Caesar," came the response.

A few hasty strides brought the don to the brow of the little hill, and he took his station at a point that commanded a view of the whole clearing between him and the darky's cabin where they had so recently gotten the water.

Woe to that son of Ethiopia if he should venture too near!

The digging of the trench in the sand progressed rapidly. The haughty dons made almost as quick work of it, as if they were common laborers.

Don Caesar, all impatience, urged them on.

"That will do," he cried, at last. "That is deep enough. Here, you four, in with the carcass."

They dropped their oars, and, seizing Hal by the head and feet, carried him the short distance and hastily dropped him into the hole.

Hal simulated a dead man to the best of his ability. Fortunately the Spaniards were now in too much of a hurry to give much attention to him. They were satisfied that life had left him, for, thought they, where was the living man who could feel a dagger pointed at his heart and give no sign?

Hal had already in those few moments endured untold agony, but the climax came when he felt the sand thrown upon his body and over his face. In the horror of the moment a convulsive movement shook his limbs and a stifled groan escaped him.

But, luckily for him, the Spaniards did not see or hear it. Hastily they scraped the loose sand over his body, until Don Caesar gave the signal to quit.

Their task was done. Dead or alive, it mattered not, their victim was safely underground.

"Now, the cask," cried Don Caesar. "Get that aboard, and then away!"

He signaled to Don Paulo to return from his post of guard, while the four unlucky dons were compelled to do some more real work in getting the water cask into the boat.

Don Paulo, revolver still in hand, soon rejoined his leader.

"All is safe, Don Caesar," he exclaimed.

"None of the enemy in sight?" asked the other.

"None," was the reply. "Only once did the nigger appear in sight about his hut. It was to draw water from the well, and then he disappeared within his house."

"It is well."

"Not well, but ill," responded the other, in an injured tone. "Had he shown his black face at the head of the hill, he might even now be reposing beside his fellow pig here at our feet."

He pointed to the fresh mound of sand on the beach.

"You are very bloodthirsty, Don Paulo," exclaimed his companion, with a laugh.

"Thirsty, did you say, Don Caesar?" exclaimed the other. "Car-r-r-ramba! That is true. This grave digging does lay the dust upon one's throat. Now a bottle——"

But Don Caesar did not hear. He was hurrying along the quartette who were struggling with the barrel, and who now succeeded in placing it in the boat.

Then all sprang in and the rowers seized their oars.

"Thus," cried aloud Don Caesar, indicating the new made grave, as the boat began to move, "thus die the American pigs!"

Hal did not hear it, nor did the sounds of exultation from the others make any impression upon his ears.

The dons were jubilant. They had

learned all they had sought, and had besides effectually disposed of an enemy who had promised to thwart their plans. Now all was plain sailing.

"Now for Port Tampa and the Yankee troop ships!" cried Don Caesar, in great glee. "And, Don Paulo, my good friend, there is good news for you," he added, laughingly. "For each boat of the accursed American pigs that is blown up to-night, there will be a full case of the best wine to relieve that parched throat of yours. So be brave."

Don Caesar never lost a chance to twit his friend upon this one failing, and laughed immoderately at his own wit.

They were all in great good humor and hilarity prevailed. And so, gloating over the destruction of the Yankee transports that was to follow after dark at Port Tampa, and the consternation this would bring to their enemies, they set out for their schooner.

CHAPTER VII.

"WELL DONE, M'KINLEY."

But what of Hal?

His situation was most critical. The hope he had entertained of being able to dig his way out of his living tomb as soon as the Spaniards left was doomed to disappointment.

He had lost consciousness before the Spaniards were well under way toward their schooner.

His injuries had been more serious even than he thought, and he was weakened from the loss of blood. But added to this was the horror of the thought of being buried alive and a realization that to open his eyes would be the signal for his death by the knife.

The stifled groan that escaped his lips when the sand was piled upon his face was the last sound he uttered before existence became a blank to him.

As consciousness left him he gave one despairing struggle to raise his arms and push from his nostrils the earth that seemed to suffocate him.

But it was vain. His arms refused to move, he had not the strength to raise his head through the pile of sand, and the little groan of anguish was all that told he was still alive.

GIVE YOUR GIRL AN AMERICAN FLAG HAT PIN—SEE PAGE 32.

He could not save himself, but worse than that was the thought that there was no one to render him any assistance. It is hard to conceive of what must have been his thoughts when he realized that his strength had left him. No wonder that his overwrought mind refused longer to do his bidding, and that it was dead to all impressions.

Unconsciousness overpowered him, and he was now in the liveliest danger of death from suffocation.

A short time after, how long he knew not, he opened his eyes. He could hardly believe that he was still in the land of the living.

He had passed through all the agonies of death, and his bewildered mind could hardly grasp the fact that he had not passed to the life beyond.

But above, far overhead, his eyes could see the clear blue of that summer sky, and a gentle breeze fanned his brow.

"Surely, I am dreaming," he thought, struggling to overcome a feeling of drowsiness, and trying in vain to move his arms or legs.

He closed his eyes and again he could feel the suffocating pressure of the earth about his nostrils. He opened them again quickly, and crushing dread was lifted from his mind.

The sky gleamed clear above him.

At the same time he felt a moisture upon his cheek and a low, mournful whine reached his ear.

Help had come from an unexpected quarter. With a bound of hope within him, he realized that it was indeed true that he was gazing with living eyes at the blue vault above.

He tried to raise his head to look about him, but was not equal to the task. But casting his eyes down, he beheld a mongrel dog lapping his face and whining with solicitude.

It was the dog, McKinley.

In the nick of time that animal had appeared upon the scene, and well did he acquit himself.

That insignificant looking mongrel, with no graces or long pedigree to recommend him, seemed to Hal's eyes at that moment the noblest animal in the whole

wide world, and faintly but feelingly he called to him in caressing tones.

A word of explanation is necessary at this point.

The dog with the Yankee name has not figured prominently in the adventures of the story since last we saw him following Don Caesar upon the schooner Anita in the little inlet below Molente. His appearance at this point was, to a certain extent, involuntary.

For it happened that when the schooner was being brought to anchor that afternoon not far from the cove where Hal now lay, the dog accidentally got in the way of one of the Spaniards aboard.

This amateur sailor had his hands full with the unfamiliar duties of bringing the boat to, but his feet were free. And what was more natural than that he should kick the poor brute overboard?

At any rate, this is what he did, with a few choice Spanish oaths.

The dog, yelping frantically, swam about the schooner as if he expected to be taken back again. But the only attention he received was in the nature of two or three missiles thrown at him from the deck.

One of these landed upon his back and decided him that that particular locality was getting too hot for him. He then struck out for shore to wait until the clouds of wrath should roll by.

Swimming that distance was a rather slow process for the mongrel, but he reached the land safely, not far from the cove where his master, Don Caesar and his band of worthies were interring, as they supposed, the lifeless remains of their too inquisitive enemy.

Here his keen scent had detected the smell of blood, to which he had become accustomed while in the company of the Spanish dons.

It did not take him long to find the spot, and he resolutely pawed the sand away until he had uncovered Hal's face.

Lapping the blood from about his wound and face had helped to restore Hal to consciousness, and now that the dog heard his voice he whined and frisked about in great excitement.

"Good boy!" called Hal, encouragingly, endeavoring to raise his head.

The dog gave a little yelp of pleasure, and scratched and pawed at the sand, throwing it about him in showers.

Hal urged him on with encouraging words, as soon the mongrel was setting the sand flying in all directions, just as if he had a contract to remove the dirt and was to be paid by the job.

And thus with the help of the dog Hal at last managed to get out of the trench that had come so near, proving his grave.

He felt terribly weak and faint, and it seemed that he could not possibly walk. Dizziness almost overcame him when he stood upon his feet, and he was compelled to sit down for a brief rest.

But he was determined not to let weakness overpower him. He had discovered the mysterious schooner and its band of desperadoes, and now he must hurry to Port Tampa to give the alarm.

"Even now," he thought, "they are on the way, and I may be too late."

He did not know how long he had lain in the trench. It seemed to him almost days, but the sun was still in the heavens, and he knew that it had not been hours even.

But still he might be too late, weakened and exhausted as he was.

And then? The transports would be blown up, causing untold confusion and delay to the American army about to invade Cuba.

"But that shall not happen," he muttered resolutely.

The danger gave him new strength and he rose at once to his feet.

He paused to bathe his face and wounds in the water, and this revived and refreshed him greatly.

The dog had frisked about, wagging his tail in evidence of his satisfaction. He had licked Hal's hands as he sat on the sand for his brief rest, and appeared overjoyed when his devotion was recognized by a grateful pat upon the head.

Now he was hopping around, giving forth a few short, happy barks as if he understood the whole proceeding.

"Hello, old fellow!" exclaimed Hal, heartily, after his refreshing wash. "You're not pretty to look at, but you know a heap, don't you?"

"Wow! wow!" responded McKinley,

wagging his tail as if intent on shaking it off.

Hal reached down and patted the mongrel, and then there was another series of short barks and tail wig-wagging.

"I'm grateful to you, old fellow," exclaimed Hal, "but this won't do, staying here. I must be off."

"Wow! wow!" assented the dog, running around his new-found friend in a narrow circle.

With a parting glance at the hole in the sand that marked the spot of his intended grave, Hal started away from the cove.

And McKinley, without so much as a "by your leave," followed after.

Hal's resolution was firm and his spirit strong, but he soon found that his strength was failing.

He almost tottered as he left the cove, and every step was a painful exertion. His wounds were severe, and the loss of blood had sapped his powers.

But with a resolute snap of his teeth he forced his way through the bushes that lined the cove and pressed on toward the beach beyond.

"We can't give up now, can we, old fellow?" he exclaimed to the faithful mongrel who followed at his heels.

The dog wagged his tail and looked solicitously at his companion.

They had reached the open beach beyond, and the view of the sea was unobstructed.

Some distance up the shore Hal spied a schooner, sailing very slowly north toward Port Tampa.

He still retained his glass, and drew it out to take a good look at the boat. After a moment's scenting he uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"It is the Anita, alias Thorberg," he cried. "She is sailing slowly and there may yet be time."

The discovery that the boat had not yet sailed out of sight cheered him greatly, and he stepped off with a more buoyant stride.

"We'll get there in time, old fellow," he said, hopefully, to his brute companion.

"Wow! wow!" replied McKinley, and he looked as if he meant it.

IT'S EASY TO GET A WAR BADGE—SEE PAGE 32.

But it was not long before Hal realized that his progress was slower and becoming more and more painful. Every step was a trying exertion, and only his strength of will kept him upon his feet.

But ahead, slowly moving along the coast, was the schooner containing the band of Spaniards, and he determined at all hazards to keep up his chase.

"We'll get to Port Tampa, won't we, old fellow?" he exclaimed, as with a twinge of pain he attempted to hurry his steps.

But this time McKinley was silent. He seemed to have his doubts on the subject.

Hal struggled on, his eye following the movement of the vessel ahead. He had gone perhaps a half mile from the cove, every step of which had been a separate and distinct effort, when from sheer exhaustion he was compelled to sit down and rest.

The mongrel looked as if he had been expecting something of the sort to happen and was only surprised that it did not come sooner.

He wagged his tail in a deprecatory manner, and whined as he stood nearby gazing at Hal with a look of solicitude in his eyes.

But they did not stay there long. Hal was soon upon his feet and resumed his painful journey.

He said but little to his sole companion as the weary march went on.

There were deep lines of pain about his mouth, and his eyes showed forth an unflagging fire of determination.

But for all his pluck he was compelled now frequently to pause and rest before he could go on his way.

He had followed the coast for about a mile when with a groan of despair he sank upon the ground.

"I'm afraid we'll have to give it up, old fellow," he said weakly to the mongrel who had come sniffing about him.

"Ye-ow! ye-ow!" whined the dog in reply.

But he was up in a few minutes and pluckily started again. But only for a few steps did his will power carry him.

With a look of hopeless defeat upon

his face, he fell to the ground, fagged and all but fainting.

And when McKinley came running up, sniffing and whining his anxiety about what it all meant, there was no answer to his question.

Third Part.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN PORT TAMPA AT LAST.

"Who am dat?"

The speaker was a woolly-headed old darky who, half asleep, sat in his cabin, smoking intermittingly at an old cob pipe.

He had been half dozing, and a sound at the door attracted his attention.

"Am dat you, 'Rastus?" he cried in a louder key as the sound was repeated.

There was no answer to his words.

"Wha' foh yo' scratching on dat doah that a-way, nigger?" he called, impatiently. "Kain't yo' come in?"

But again all was silence save for a persistent scratch, scratch on the door.

The old darky grumblingly rose to his feet and opened the door.

"None o' yer tricks 'bout hyer, 'Rastus," he exclaimed as he did so.

But 'Rastus was not up to any pranks this time. He was nowhere in sight.

The old darky was about to close the door when he heard a whine and little bark at his feet, and looked down.

"Dog gone my boots, ef hit ain't er yaller purp dog!" he exclaimed. "What yer doin' dar? Git out!"

But the dog, now that he had succeeded in attracting his attention whined and barked more than ever.

It was McKinley. Loyal old fellow that he was, he had made up his mind that his new found friend was in trouble and that he would bring some one to his assistance.

He had trotted off and found this darky's cabin, the only habitation in sight. Now that he had succeeded in attracting attention he barked, whined and all but talked to make the woolly-headed old fellow understand.

But the darky didn't seem to comprehend that language.

"Doan' yo' heah me?" he added,

GET A COLLECTION OF WAR BADGES AND BUTTONS.

shaking his fist at the mongrel. "I done tole yo' ter git out er hyar."

It didn't make any difference to McKinley what the old fellow had said. He was then on a mission and intended to succeed.

"Dat's der low-downdest, misbehavingest purp I evah saw," muttered the darky. "He doan' seem ter mind er word I tells him."

McKinley meantime was whining continuously and running back and forth, as much as to say, "He's wounded and he's down there."

"Mebbe dat dog wants er drink er watah," mused the darky. "Dat must be der reason he cuts up dem didoodles."

The old fellow was kind-hearted enough, and got a basin with some water which he offered to the dog.

But the latter refused to drink and kept up his antics.

"Is yer hongry?" said the darky. "Dat must be hit. I'se got er ham bone what yo' kin hab."

He started off to get it. His interest had been aroused, and he was determined to find out what the dog was up to.

But he had not taken a step before the dog seized hold of his trouser leg.

"Leggo my laig!" cried the darky in alarm, shaking the dog loose. "Doan' yer touch me, yer good-fer-nuthin' yaller dorg! You'se too familar on short 'quaintance, dat what yo' is! I'll hit yo' wid dis ax, dat's what I'll do, ef yo' touches me agin."

He seized an ax handle and stood on the defensive. He was really a very comical sight, but there was no one there to see it, except the dog.

McKinley did not laugh. He was intent upon achieving success in the mission he had undertaken, and whiningly ran back and forth, as before.

He would go a little distance from the house in the direction in which Hal lay, and then pause as if waiting for the darky to follow. Then, seeing that his signals were not understood, he would come back and try to seize the darky's clothing to lead him along.

But each time the dog approached he was chased off with the ax handle.

"Dog gone my ornery hide!" sud-

denly exclaimed the darky. "What er fool nigger Is'e been! Dat dog's been er tryin' ter tell me sumfin, dat's what he is. His massa's in trubble an' he want ter show me der way, shuah's yo' born."

This time when the dog drew near he did not chase him off. McKinley again seized his trouser and began coaxing him along in the direction he had before gone.

"What did I tells yo'?" grinned the darky, looking around triumphantly at the empty air. "Dat dog done got moah sense dan dis yer nigger."

The dog, seeing that he had at last made himself understood started ahead to lead the way.

"Yo' want ter show me sumfin', doan' yer?" cried the darky.

"Wow! wow!" came McKinley's sharp reply, as he frisked excitedly along.

"Well, go erhead, honey, I'se a-comin'," said the coon as he ambled along. "I declar' to goodness," he added to the atmosphere in general, "hit do beat all what er yaller dorg knows."

The dog led the way across a small clearing and down to the shore. The distance was not far, and they were soon within sight of the spot where Hal lay.

"What I tole you?" cried the darky, looking around him in a general way. "Dat air dog kin do most eberyding but talk."

He seemed as pleased as though the dog was his own property, and had learned the trick from him.

Then he caught sight of Hal's figure lying upon the ground, and hurried to his side.

"Foh de Lawd's sakes, honey, what is yo' doin' hyar?" he cried as he stooped over him.

Then he noticed the wound in Hal's forehead, and his eyes rolled excitedly in his head.

"Foh de Lawd, you has been shotted," exclaimed the darky in alarm. "Say, honey, is you alibe?"

Any one to hear the kindhearted old fellow's anxious inquiry might have supposed that the wounded soldier was a relative, or at least some friend in whose welfare he was interested.

Hal opened his eyes with a faint smile

SHOW YOUR COLORS—SEE LAST PAGE.

and looked gratefully at the solicitous darky.

"I am all right," he said. "Just a little faint, but it will pass over soon."

"That yaller dorg cum an' tole me erbout hit," exclaimed the darky, pointing to McKinley, who was frisking about and whining gently.

"Wow! wow!" said the mongrel, wagging his tail as if he was proud of it, and coming up to lick Hal's hand.

"Fine old fellow!" said Hal, patting his dumb companion gently.

The darky meantime was surveying the young lieutenant with wide open eyes. In the surprise of finding a man in that wounded condition he had not at first noted the uniform Hal wore.

Now, however, he saw that it was a soldier, an officer at that, to whom he was talking.

"Boss, is you hurt bad?" he exclaimed. "Cain't I do nuffin' fer you?"

But before Hal could answer he had rushed to the water's edge and returned with as much of that fluid as he could carry in his old hat.

He fell to bathing Hal's wound and his head, and the young officer was much revived.

The old darky's curiosity had been aroused, and he improved the opportunity to finding out what he could.

"You is a soljer, boss, hain't you?" he asked. "A ossifer, too, though you is mighty young fer dat. How you git shotted?"

But Hal was not disposed to take the old fellow into his confidence, and remained discreetly silent.

"Tell me, boss," continued the darky, "is dar any—any——"

He looked cautiously around before he finished the sentence. Not finding any signs of what he feared to see, he continued:

"Is dar any Spaniyards erbout hyer, boss?"

His evident fear at the possibility of hostile invasion was so irresistibly comical that Hal could not forbear to smile.

"You may rest easy on that score," he said, laughing. "There are no Spaniards here."

"Den how you git shotted, boss?" persisted the old fellow.

"By the way," said Hal, suddenly changing the subject. "What is your name?"

"Petah Johnsing, sah."

"Well, Peter, you have been very kind to me, and I am deeply indebted to you," continued Hal, "but really I cannot spare the time to talk further on this subject. I——"

"I only want to know——"

"Yes, Peter, but there are more important matters to be attended to, and you can help me," interrupted Hal. "You will be rewarded. I want a carriage and that at once."

"I doan' know erbout dat," said Peter, scratching his head. "I doan' got nuthin' but er meul an' he kicks."

"But can't you get me a horse and carriage?" persisted Hal.

"I doan' know, I mout," said the darky. "Farmer Stilwell, erbout er half mile back, he got one I mout git."

"Well, get it at once," said Hal, "and drive me to Port Tampa, and you will be liberally rewarded."

"All right, boss, said Johnson, moving off. "I'll do der best I kin."

"Then be quick about it," cried Hal, but the darky was already well under way.

The little rest he had had, and the darky's ministrations had revived him considerably, and he was now all impatience for action.

He had well nigh abandoned all hope when he sank half fainting to the ground, for he knew that he could not unaided hope to reach Port Tampa.

But the opportune arrival of the darky and the prospect of getting some conveyance changed the whole aspect of affairs.

"And I owe it all to you, old fellow," he said, affectionately, to the mongrel that hung close to him.

"Wow! wow!" said McKinley, with a happy little bark.

It seemed to Hal that the darky was gone an unconscionable long time, so eager was he to be off. The first rush of revived hope had buoyed up his strength, and he impatiently walked up and down the beach waiting for Johnson's return.

The schooner was no longer in sight and this fact added to his restlessness.

"Has that darky given me the slip," he thought, as the minutes passed.

Then he resumed his impatient tramp, with the mongrel at his heels.

But the strength he displayed was born of the excitement of the moment, as he soon found. His step became less firm, and he was finally compelled to sit down and rest.

When the old darky finally did appear—and he had made very good time indeed—he found Hal fagged out and all but fainting.

He tenderly lifted him into the carriage and took his place by his side.

"Make all haste up the coast to Port Tampa," was all that Hal could say.

The darky seized the reins, and with McKinley following close behind, the wild ride for Port Tampa began.

Hal revived a little on the way, but the jolting of the carriage caused him great uneasiness and pain.

Once only did the darky driver essay conversation.

"I bin er thinkin', boss," he began, "erbout this yere thing, and I like ter know if dese yere Spaniards——"

But he did not finish the sentence, for he soon saw that his passenger was paying no heed to his words.

At last they arrived at the railroad bridge near the port over which carriages could not pass.

"What we er goin' ter do now, boss?" exclaimed the darky. "We cain't drive over hyar."

"I will walk," said Hal, briefly.

"Scuse me, boss yer cain't do dat," protested Johnson. "Yer cain't hardly stan', let erlong walk."

"With your assistance, Johnson, I can make it," said Hal, with determination. "Secure your horse here somewhere."

This was soon attended to, and leaning on the arm of the faithful old darky, Hal began to walk the last eighth of a mile over the footpath on the bridge. The mongrel, who had not missed a trick so far, followed commiseratingly after.

They were compelled to make frequent stops on the way, to enable Hal to recruit his strength a bit, and when they

arrived at the door of the inn, Hal was so faint that he tottered into the restaurant and sank panting into a seat.

He had reached Port Tampa, but was he in time?

CHAPTER IX.

WHERE ARE THE DONS.

It will be remembered that in his instructions to Hal, Colonel Westinghouse had said that he would follow the former to Port Tampa.

This he did, arriving at that point in the afternoon.

He found a note from Hal stating that the mysterious schooner was not in the harbor, and informing him that the young lieutenant had decided to pursue his investigations further down the coast.

The afternoon wore well along and no further word came from Hal. Colonel Westinghouse, however, felt no uneasiness about this.

"The young man is well able to take care of himself," he said. "He will be heard from at the proper time."

Late that afternoon he repaired to the restaurant in the inn, and after some light refreshment sat at his table leisurely reading a newspaper.

Suddenly there was a slight commotion in the doorway that attracted his attention.

He laid down his newspaper and looked across the room. He was just in time to see an elderly darky supporting a youth who tottered across to a chair into which he sank in utter exhaustion.

He saw at a glance that the lad wore the uniform of second lieutenant in the army, and a second look told him it was Hal Maynard.

"Lieutenant Maynard!" he muttered in surprise. "What can this mean?"

Hal had caught sight of him at the same moment, and his eyes signaled a call for assistance.

As Hal turned his face, Colonel Westinghouse discovered the wound in his forehead, and understood the look in his eyes.

"He has been shot," cried the colonel below his breath, as he sprang to his feet. "By all that's wonderful, what mystery is this?"

HAVE YOU READ PAGE 32.

He was at Hal's side in an instant.

"Take me to a room, colonel," said Hal in a whisper. "I have much to tell you."

The colonel was surprised beyond measure to see the young lieutenant in that condition, but this did not prevent him from acting promptly.

He supported Hal on the one side while the faithful darky took the other, and between them they led Hal to a bedroom upstairs.

"He done be well-nigh tuckered out," said Johnson to the colonel on the way up the stairs. "He done bin shotted bad in de fohthead, an' he won't say who done it. I bin er thinkin', boss, dat ef dem Spaniyards——"

But the bedroom door had been reached by this time, and the trio entered.

"Right dis a-way, honey," said the darky, leading Hal to the bed, "you lay yerse'f down yar, an' den you feel bet-tah."

Hal, it must be confessed, was glad enough to follow this advice. He fell back upon the pillow with a sigh of exhaustion.

The mongrel dog had followed close behind the procession, and now jumped upon the bed beside his new made master, and whined compassionately.

"Yes, suh," exclaimed the darky, when he had placed Hal upon the bed and turned toward Colonel Westinghouse, "yes suh, I done foun' dis hyar young ossifer a-bleedin' an' a-moanin' on de shoah. An' dis hyar yaller purp am de one dat done tole me ter go. I tells you, hit do beat all——"

But the colonel stopped his harangue by pressing into his hand a couple of gold pieces which made the astonished darky's eyes pop from his head.

"Thankee, boss, thankee," he said effusively, scraping and bowing low. "Thankee kindly, suh. An', as I was sayin', this hyar yaller dorg done lead me to der spot, an' den I c'u'dn't git er thing out er de young ossifer. Now, I bin er-thinking, boss, ef dem dere Spaniyards——"

"Now, my good man," interrupted the colonel, "you have performed your service well and we are exceedingly thankful.

But further discussion of that will only annoy the lieutenant."

"I'se er-goin', boss, I'se er-goin'," said the darky, as he moved toward the door. "Thankee kindly, sir."

As he passed out of the room he could be heard to mutter:

"I was er-thinkin' of dem Spaniyards——"

But what he was thinking about the enemy was never known, for the mongrel took a hand in the game at this stage.

Seeing the drift of affairs and hearing Johnson's mutterings as he passed out, the dog had jumped from the bed and stood barking after the retreating darky until he was pushed to one side by the colonel's foot and the door was closed between him and the object of his wrath.

Then, with a self-satisfied shake of his tail he sprang again upon the bed.

As soon as they were left alone Hal opened his eyes and attempted to sit up.

"Colonel," he began, "I have found——"

But Colonel Westinghouse stopped him with a gesture.

"Not a word now, Maynard," he commanded. "You have been wounded, and your first interview must be with the surgeon."

"But, colonel, it is important," protested Hal.

"Your safety is of more importance," exclaimed the colonel. "Not another word now until I get the surgeon."

With this he was off, first seeing that Hal was as comfortable as it was possible to make him.

He returned promptly with the surgeon in tow.

"Ah, what have we here?" exclaimed the latter when he caught sight of Hal. "A bullet wound in the forehead. We will see."

He examined it closely.

"No doubt it has bled freely," was his comment. "Quite a shock, too; but fortunately there is no fracture. A half inch to one side, though, and our young friend would not be here."

He carefully washed the wound and dressed it, and soon he had Hal nicely fixed up.

"A little rest and all will be well," he

WE WANT EVERY READER TO HAVE A PATRIOTIC BADGE—SEE PAGE 32.

said when this was finished. "And then our young friend may go out and stop another bullet."

The surgeon soon after took his departure.

"Now," said Colonel Westinghouse, "as soon as you feel strong enough you may begin."

"I feel like a new man already," smiled Hal, "and will feel better when you are in possession of the facts I have learned."

"Proceed," said the colonel. "I am all attention."

"You received my note, reporting my failure to find the schooner in the harbor?" queried Hal.

The colonel nodded.

"After I had determined that much," continued Hal, "I thought the boat might be lying down the coast a short way awaiting for dark when it could slip in unobserved. So I continued the search down the coast. At last I saw a schooner just coming to anchor below Ballast Point, and by aid of my glass I could see that it bore the name Thorberg, of Sweden. But I also saw a party in Mexican costume leaving the schooner in a boat and heading for a cove nearby. They looked like Spaniards, and I hurried to the cove where I found their boat, they having just gone up the hillside with an empty barrel for water. In the inside of the stern of this boat I discovered the name Anita!"

"Anita!" interrupted the colonel. "That is the boat we are after."

"Yes, they had evidently been sharp enough to paint in a new name on the schooner, but had overlooked this mark on the small boat. But I had no sooner found this name than the Spaniards, returning, discovered me, and before I could escape fired upon me with a rifle, inflicting this wound."

"But how did you escape them?" queried the colonel.

"There was no other way, so I shammed dead and they buried me," replied Hal, calmly.

"Buried you!" cried the colonel, incredulously.

"Yes," said Hal, smiling in spite of

himself. "They buried me in a trench they dug in the sand."

The mongrel, who still retained his post by Hal's side, confirmed this with a long-drawn whine.

"Then, by all that's wonderful, exclaimed Colonel Westinghouse in amazement, "how did you get out of that, may I ask?"

"This dog smelled me there and pawed the dirt from my face after I had fainted," replied Hal, placing his hand affectionately upon the mongrel's head. "Then with his help I removed the sand that covered me and started for here."

The dog could not restrain himself at this stage of the narrative, but gave a series of happy little barks and proudly cocked up his ears, as if to say, "I did it."

"That is wonderful," exclaimed Colonel Westinghouse. "You have passed through enough horror and suffering to turn one's brain. But you have undoubtedly found the plotters we are seeking."

"There is no doubt of that, sir," said Hal, positively. "I heard the leader addressed as Don Caesar, and saw the name Anita on the boat. Later I saw the schooner slowly sailing toward this port and followed her for about a mile on foot. After that I fainted, and on the journey here by carriage I did not catch sight of the schooner again. But I did not see everything that was passing then," he added with a weak smile.

"And for good reasons," exclaimed the colonel. "Your endurance has been phenomenal. I will leave you now to a well-earned rest, and see if the schooner has reached the harbor. I will return and report."

With this he hurried away, and Hal gladly seized the opportunity of resting.

His task had been accomplished. He had brought the information for which he had been sent, and now with a clear conscience he could lay back there and recuperate.

It was not long before he fell into a dreamless slumber, so readily does youth adapt itself to circumstances. He awoke perhaps an hour later greatly refreshed.

A few minutes after Colonel Westinghouse entered the room.

READ THE LIBERAL OFFER ON PAGE 32.

"Ah, you look brighter already," he exclaimed.

"I feel tip-top," said Hal, with a smile. "I am ready to get up and about once more."

"Not yet, my young friend," warned the colonel. "Your day's labor has been well performed, and you must now rest."

"Has the schooner then been captured?" asked Hal, eagerly.

"No, it is not in port," was the answer, "so there is no danger to be apprehended from that source. But I have reason to believe that some mischief will be attempted to the transport fleet and will arrange an extensive watch. Look-outs have been stationed for the appearance of the 'Thorberg, of Sweden,' all is moving nicely, and I will now leave you once more in peace."

"But, colonel," said Hal, quickly. "I am ready for service and would like to be on watch to-night."

"We will see about that later," said the colonel, with a smile, and then was gone.

After dark he returned and found Hal walking about the room.

"A rapid convalescence," he laughed. "I see there is no way of keeping you down. How would you like to go with me to the transports to see what can be found out?"

"Nothing would please me better," answered Hal, promptly.

"Then come along," said the colonel, with a laugh.

And the dog, hearing the word "Come," came running forward with a happy "Wow! wow!"

"And you, too, old fellow," said Hal, as he followed the colonel out of the door.

CHAPTER X.

THE DONS IN ACTION.

"Car-r-r-ramba! then it cannot be done, you say!"

"No, Don Caesar; the transport boats are not in the bay, as we expected."

"Then where are they?"

"I am told they are in the Plant canal."

"Car-r-r-ramba! then they are safe from our torpedoes, is it not so?"

"At least, we cannot fire upon the

enemy's boats through the torpedo tubes we have gone to the trouble to arrange in our schooner."

This was very unpleasant news to Don Caesar Brabante.

Their schooner had continued on its course after they had disposed of Hal, effectually, as they supposed. But, arriving at Port Tampa they had discovered that the transport boats were not in the harbor where they had expected to find them.

Don Caesar had sent one of his men on shore to make cautious inquiries and this was his report.

And it is little wonder that Don Caesar made a very wry face. Here it seemed all their elaborate plans must come to naught, and the blow to the Yankees must fail.

But no, it must not fail, he swore to himself.

"The insolence of the Yankee pigs must be punished—their boats blown up and this threatened invasion of Cuba prevented," he exclaimed.

"But how, Don Caesar, since we cannot use our weapons," asked Don Paulo.

"But we can and will," retorted Don Caesar.

"And how, pray, since we cannot get our schooner near the Yankee boats?"

"Our schooner, no," cried Don Caesar, "but we can land our torpedoes."

"And then——"

"Then under cover of night we can plant them under the boats in the canal, and pouf! up they go in an instant."

"But the place is guarded," objected Don Paulo. "How then can we approach these boats?"

"Donkey!" cried Brabante, "can we not swim?"

"Swim?"

"Yes, we will swim into the canal, where the ignorant Yankee pigs would not think of looking for us, and thus place our torpedoes where they will do their beautiful work. Have no fear, Don Paulo, you shall yet have a chance to earn those cases of excellent throat wash that your spirit craves."

But Don Paulo, for once, did not need the stimulating mention of his favorite tippie to arouse his interest and enthusi-

asm. The plan outlined by his leader seemed so bold and brilliant to him that he was in ecstasies.

"With such a leader, Don Caesar," he exclaimed fervently, "we cannot fail."

The plan met with the instant approval of the other dons, and they set about carrying it into effect.

They found a retired spot for their schooner, and impatiently waited for the approach of night, which would cover their movements.

When Colonel Westinghouse and Hal, followed by the faithful mongrel, reached the transport fleet, in the canal the dons had already entered upon the operations.

They had landed a number of their torpedoes and silently and cautiously began swimming the canal.

Don Caesar was in the lead with Don Paulo close behind him.

"Not a sound must be made," was the leader's final instructions as they entered the canal. "These Yankee pigs are more alert to-night than usual."

In silence they swam along toward the transports arranged in parallel lines along the two sides of the canal.

All was going along nicely. Their presence was not suspected.

But suddenly Don Caesar paused.

"Car-r-r-ramba!" he muttered below his breath. "What is that? We are discovered!"

A sentry upon the shore had appeared just abreast of the haughty don, and stood for a minute on the bank.

Don Caesar momentarily expected a rifle shot to ring out and a bullet sing about his head. His heart was in his throat as his beady eyes watched the silent figure on shore.

But his suspense was soon over. The sentry, after a few moments, turned and was gone. He had heard nothing.

With a sigh of relief, Don Caesar continued on his way. A few more strokes and they would be within the line of boats and their work would soon be accomplished.

The night was dark and fortune seemed to favor them.

Noiselessly they advanced through the water of the canal, and safely entered the parallel lines of ships. Once under the

shadow of the boats they set quickly to work.

Without a sound they planted one of the torpedoes under the first ship in line. It was rapidly and properly done.

Silently they advanced to the next one. A sound came from shore, and they waited in anxious suspense. It was a false alarm.

They set feverishly to work. Under this ship, too, a fearful engine of destruction was soon safely planted.

All went well.

"Now, one more," whispered Don Caesar, "and our glorious work will be accomplished!"

For they had been enabled to handle but three of their torpedoes, and these had proved burdensome, swimming as they were.

"Here is a beautiful ship," muttered Don Caesar, "and a splendid wreck it will make—not so glorious as that of the Maine in our harbor of Havana, to be sure; but it is not given to a loyal son of Spain to do such beautiful work every day."

He paused to chuckle over the thoughts that thus suggested. But only for an instant.

"Cautiously, now," was his whispered admonition, "our work is soon done. Get this one in place and then we will swim back to our starting point. And there one touch of the button will send a current that will make these Yankee pigs think their day of doom is at hand. What a glorious spectacle it will be—from that distance!"

They were all eager and excited, but worked with silent rapidity. They saw the end of their labors near at hand, and were wild to reap the fruits of their long secret plotting.

And now! It was within their grasp!

But there was a factor they had not counted upon. It was insignificant in itself, but it brought consternation to their ranks.

It was a joyous yelp, a sharp bark of recognition from the deck above, followed almost instantly by a splash in the water near the spot where Don Caesar was working.

The mongrel, McKinley, had "smelled"

BY ALL MEANS GET A FREE BUTTON OR PIN—SEE LAST PAGE.

his old master, Don Caesar, and had leaped overboard with a yelp of delight to rejoin that startled don.

"Car-r-r-ramba!" cried the Spaniard, below his breath. "It is that accursed dog, McKinley!"

With a suppressed snort of rage he struck at the mongrel who was giving vent to every expression of joy to which his intelligence was capable.

He was glad to recover his master, and in the innocence of his mongrel nature, thought the don would be pleased to see him.

But the savage blow with which Don Caesar had welcomed him, landed on his head and knocked all thoughts of friendly recognition out of it.

He resented it, and with an angry snarl, retaliated by getting a fast hold of his former master's collar.

Hal Maynard was standing on the deck of the ship at the moment. He was quick to divine the meaning of the dog's action. That happy yelp of recognition and that quick plunge into the water could mean but one thing.

Don Caesar and his band.

Hal called out the guard in a hurry. Lights flashed out in the canal, and before the flabbergasted don could disentangle his collar from the teeth of the mongrel, eight swimming Spaniards were caught in the canal.

And the capture was just in the nick of time. A few minutes more and their last mine would have been planted and they could have leisurely retired to a safe point where one touch of the button would have sent the ships to destruction, with whatever souls were on board.

It was a dejected and disgruntled lot of Spanish gentlemen that was fished out of the waters of that canal, but their dismay and horror knew no bounds when they saw Hal Maynard facing them, and with a smile upon his lips.

They could not at first believe but that they were gazing upon the ghost of him they had so recently slain. And when they heard him speak and saw him caressing the insignificant-looking mongrel that came frisking about him, though they knew he was indeed alive, they could not comprehend it.

"Car-r-r-ramba!" exclaimed Don Caesar. "He is not a man, but a devil!"

"There are many more like me among Uncle Sam's boys," reported Hal with a triumphant smile. "And we're after just such fellows as you."

It was not long now before the schooner was located and the nine other dons bagged.

"A good day's work!" exclaimed Colonel Westinghouse.

"And all on account of this stump-tailed mongrel," said Hal, with a laugh. "That's what they got for calling a dog McKinley!"

For Hal had learned from the captive don that such had been the name which their wit had bestowed upon the mongrel.

The dog now stuck to him and they were soon all but inseparable comrades. Hal's wound was rapid in mending, which seemed to bring joy to his canine friend.

"Old fellow," exclaimed Hal, addressing the dog, "you have lived well up to your name, but it don't sound exactly respectful to tack the name of our President on a dog, even such a faithful little cuss like yourself. 'Is thy servant a dog?' Not much! Henceforth your name is President."

"Wow! wow!" said the little fellow, chasing around after his stump of a tail in great glee.

And President it was—for a while.

For in short order, it was abridged to "Prex," and "Prex" it is to this day.

[THE END.]

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