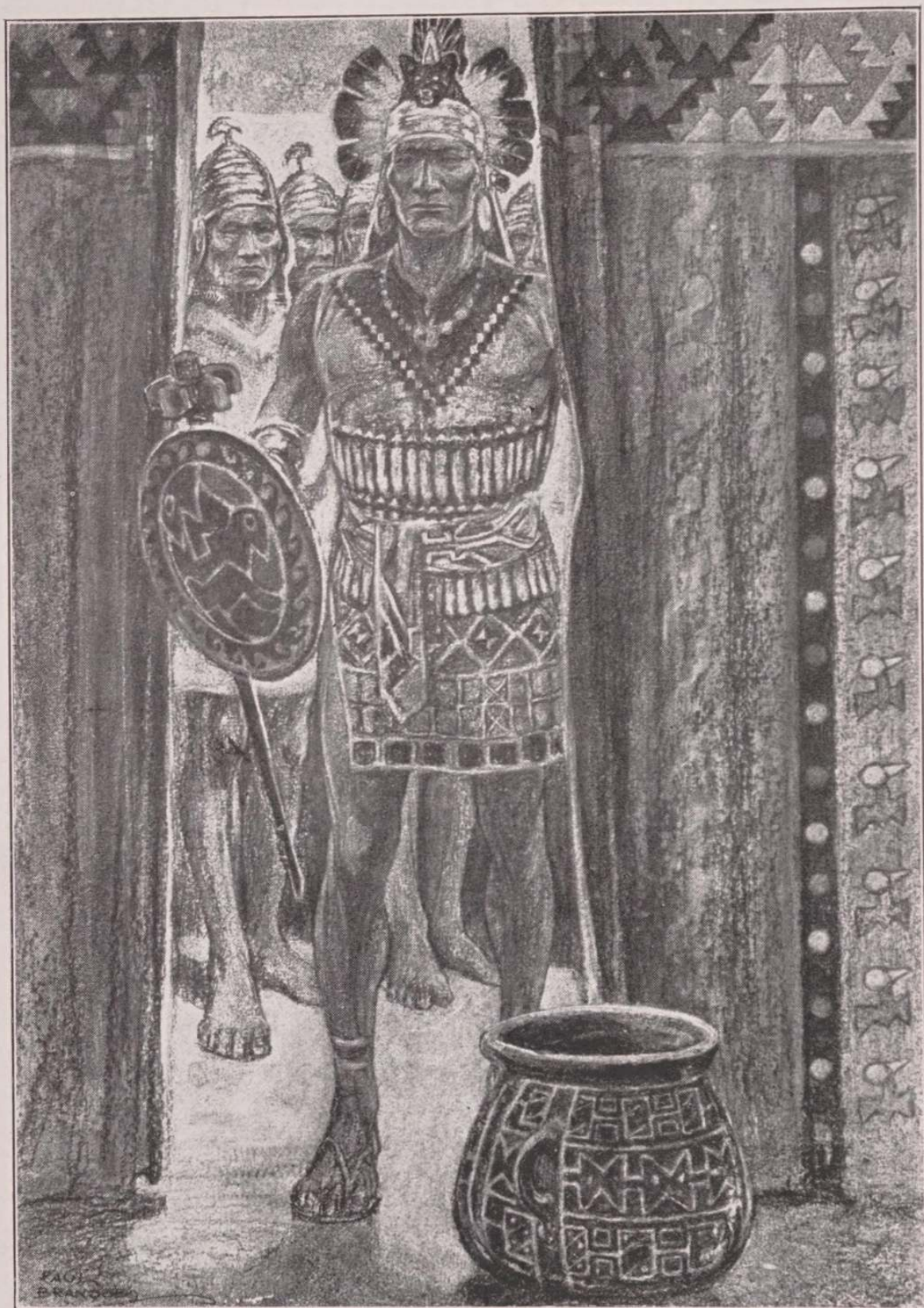




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IN THE TIGER'S LAIR



“Quizquiz, Inca, Child of the Sun . . . commands that you
appear before his sacred person”

IN THE TIGER'S LAIR

BY

LEO E. MILLER

AUTHOR OF

"IN THE WILDS OF SOUTH AMERICA,"
"THE HIDDEN PEOPLE"

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL BRANSOM

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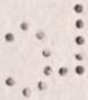
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no. 2

TO THE MEMORY
OF
LITTLE ROBERT



PREFACE

“In The Tiger’s Lair” is the story of the return of Stanley Livingston and Ted Boyle to the Andes Mountains of Peru to complete their search for the hidden treasure of the Incas. It is a separate and complete story in itself—one may read and understand it without having read “The Hidden People.”

LEO E. MILLER.

FLORAL PARK,
STRATFORD, CONN.,
Sept. 1, 1921.

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IN THE TIGER'S LAIR

CHAPTER I

THE END OF THE UNDERGROUND RIVER

Two years had passed since that day when Stanley Livingston and Ted Boyle, accompanied by the giant negro, Moses, faced the perils of the underground river rather than suffer a lingering death on the dismal shores of the lagoon beyond the wall at Uti.

Having finished their course at college, Livingston and Boyle, or Stanley and Ted, as they were better known, had decided upon a novel way of spending a few months' vacation before entering their more serious professional careers. They went to look for the hidden treasure of the Incas that was known to lie somewhere in the vast ranges of the Andes Mountains of Peru. They well understood the difficulties of such an undertaking; there were snow-clad peaks to climb and steaming jungles to penetrate, and dangerous animals and still more formidable wild people to combat. But all these things simply added to the attraction of the venture.

They had gone in quest of adventure, and their desire was gratified beyond their wildest expectations. Shipwreck, the burning thirst of a desert land, battles with fierce monkey-men, and the dread fevers of the lowlands were their lot during the first months of the journey. Then—the Hidden Valley where the Inca Huayna Capac lived and ruled the remnant of the once-great nation in all the magnificence and splendor of ancient times. The great king received them, not unkindly, made them princes, and surrounded them with every luxury. From the beginning, however, Quizquiz, son of the Inca and heir to the throne, had conspired against them, and in the end he had succeeded in securing their conviction on the charge of treason. They were condemned to exile beyond the great wall that divided the valley from Uti, the abode of the evil spirits. It was Timichi, previously banished to the dismal place, who showed them the gold-filled cavern where the vast treasure reposed and who later pointed out to them the underground river just as all hope of escape seemed gone. They had accepted the last, desperate chance and had emerged in the outer world rich in gold and in experience.

And now, after a period of two years, they found themselves back in the drooping wilderness, encamped

at the outer end of the underground river, preparing to remove the vast treasure their former efforts had revealed.

“We might have left this place only yesterday, so far as appearances are concerned,” Stanley said as they stood on the edge of the open, park-like place flanked by the abrupt cliffs on one side and the heavy jungle on the other. “Everything looks just the same as it did then. The deer are grazing just as peacefully and—I distinctly remember seeing that one with the lame fore leg. It speaks well for the neighborhood; the monkey-men have not invaded it yet, or the deer would not be so tame.”

“Yes, it surely does not seem as if two years have passed since we were here. The only thing lacking is Moses, but that is not our fault. We tried our best to find him. But, I wish we had him just the same, because we need him.”

“Poor old Moses. I miss him too. He saved our lives, and no one but a giant like him could have done it. But for him we should never have gotten out of the valley. If we ever succeed in locating him we shall have to divide up the gold we are going to get now. He shared all the hardships and he is entitled to a share of the spoils.”

“You are right, and no matter how much we give

him we shall always be in debt to him for what he did for us."

They started across the open plot toward the little stream that wended its way through the centre. The deer stopped grazing, looked up at them with startled eyes, and then bounded into the protecting forest. When the men reached the watercourse, they followed it to the base of the stone escarpment, the top of which was hidden by the belt of yellowish, poisonous vapor that served as such an effectual barrier between the outer world and the Hidden Valley. Laving the foot of the stone wall was the pool, and opening into it was the black cavern that in reality was the mouth of the underground river.

"One would hardly suspect it of being such a magic river to-day," Ted said, throwing himself on the short grass; "the water is flowing neither way; it is standing still. Wonder what Timichi would say to that, were he alive; but I have no doubt he has been dead a good many months."

"He clung to life a number of years even in that awful place, but I, too, think he must be dead now. He was nearly gone when we left him. Too bad there was nothing we could do for the poor fellow."

They returned to camp and began to prepare supper.

"Our provisions should last several weeks, not counting on the game we can get here," Stanley observed as he looked over the supplies. "In that length of time we can bring out all the gold any one could possibly desire. We have only to hide it inside of sacks of ivory nuts, of which the jungle is full around here, cache it, and then one of us can stay on guard while the other goes back to Cuzco for peons to carry them out. No one will ever suspect."

"It's all so simple. And there is not a chance of failure," Ted remarked between mouthfuls. "Just think, there are millions in gold on the other side of that wall, and it is all ours for the mere taking. Let's do the job as quickly as possible; I want to get back home to make use of my wealth."

"Don't be too sure," Stanley cautioned. "You know we haven't got it yet."

"But it is there. We know that, because we saw it and helped ourselves to all we could carry. And we know how to get in and out of the place too. So this one time I am dead sure that as much gold as we want will be ours in a few weeks, and I for one am going to treat myself generously."

Remembering Moses' experience with the deadly bushmaster, they made no attempt to sleep on the ground. But, going into the forest, cut a number of

stout poles and, tying the tops together to form tripods, slung their hammocks between them for the night.

Their first thought on the following morning was to see if there was any perceptible current in the river; but to their disappointment they found that the water was stationary, as before.

"Looks as if we might have to paddle the rafts through. We could do that easily enough if necessary, but it would help a good deal if the water were flowing in the right direction. But why worry? It will take at least two days to make the rafts, and by that time the current will doubtless set in again."

They now began to work in earnest. Near the lower end of the open space where the river entered the forest, clumps of tall bamboo dotted both banks. Some of the great, jointed stems were fully eight inches in diameter and fifty feet high. Chopping them down and cutting them into ten-foot lengths was hard work, for they had only their machetes, or brush-knives, with which to work. Also, as each joint was full of water it had to be tapped and drained, after which the openings had to be plugged up again with gum; this made the stalks light and buoyant. They carried them to the water, one at a time, and lashed them together to form rafts. This required more time than they had

anticipated; in fact, four days passed before the two were completed.

"How much gold do you intend to take from the cave?" Ted asked one day when their task was nearly finished.

"As much as I can, of course. These rafts will carry several hundred pounds each in addition to our own weight, and we can make a dozen trips, or even more."

"A ton for each is not too much. It is remarkable how much the yellow metal is worth. When we were here before, you guessed that each of our packs contained about ten thousand dollars' worth, and you were nearly right. We got almost eleven thousand apiece, and the emerald necklaces were appraised at double that. I should not wonder but that there are many precious stones in the cave, too, hidden among the gold."

"All the better for us. They are not so bulky or heavy. Think of all the good we can do when we get back home."

"Yes! I intend to be very liberal with a certain college I think a lot of."

"Hospitals is my hobby. You shall see."

When the rafts were all ready they pushed them along the bank, and up to the mouth of the underground river,

"It is strange that the water does not move," Ted said, looking puzzled. "It looks black and stagnant—as if it has been standing still a long time."

"Do not let that trouble you. If it does not flow by to-morrow morning we shall paddle through the tunnel. We have been through it before and know the way. Besides, we are well supplied with flashlights now. There is nothing to it, so why worry?"

They hewed short, broad-bladed paddles out of a cottonwood branch and carefully covered all the things they did not intend to take with them on the following day with broad palm-leaves, to protect them if it rained.

When dawn came, it found them on their rafts, paddling into the mouth of the cave. Once inside, Stanley switched on one of the lights that had been tied to the front of his raft, and the bright glare revealed a passage from ten to twenty feet wide with an uneven ceiling of jagged rock fifteen feet above their heads. Swarms of bats, frightened by the unusual visitors, left their hiding-places overhead, and with a flutter of wings dashed out of reach of the circle of light and disappeared.

"We have been going over half an hour now," Ted said, looking at his watch. "Of course we have not made very good time, but we should be nearing the end. Can you see daylight ahead?"

“No! The opening is not in sight. But, what is this? Slow up so you won’t bump into me! The water seems to stop here.”

“Stop? There must be a bend in the river.”

“I can see none.”

“Still there must be some open channel. Didn’t we come through here before? Give me the light; perhaps the turn is back here.”

They focussed the bright rays in all directions, but to no avail.

“Ted!” Stanley cried in sudden consternation. “This *was* the opening, right here, but it is not here now. It has been blocked up.”

“Impossible,” Ted returned in dismay. “Do you mean that we cannot get back into the valley?”

“Come ahead and see for yourself.”

Ted pushed his way to the front of Stanley’s raft. The latter’s words were all too true, for the opening into the valley was filled with earth and stones of large size.

“They learned of our escape from Timichi,” Ted said bitterly, “and knew we would come back. Well, I am not ready to admit that all my visions and hopes are dead; but just now there is nothing but darkness ahead.”

“How about dynamite?” Stanley asked suddenly.

"We could blast away the rocks in the entrance and get in after all."

"But what could we do against the Inca's hordes once we were inside?"

"Come to think of it, I do not believe they had anything to do with this. They would not dare venture beyond the wall. There must have been a landslide on the slope above. In a region like this earthquakes occur frequently on account of the many volcanoes, and that would explain all this."

They paddled back through the tunnel silently and sadly. All their dreams of wealth had suddenly vanished. It had never occurred to them that something might prevent them from securing the enormous treasure they had discovered. They knew its exact location; its value was so great that no man could estimate it, and to secure it required no further effort than to take it and carry it away. And then—their great disappointment.

"That is just what we will do," Stanley said that night as they were eating their supper. "We have not lost a thing, only there will be a slight delay in carrying out our original plans. To-morrow we shall start back to Cuzco for the dynamite. The rest will be easy."

Stanley had never been more mistaken in his life.

CHAPTER II

SKY HIGH

WHEN the two reached Cuzco, after the long, difficult climb up the mountain sides, they found news of a startling character awaiting them. Their own country had become involved in the World War. And with this intelligence came to them the realization of their duty.

The two lost no time in returning to the coast, and took the next steamer bound northward. Arrived in their homes, Ted applied for and was accepted in one of the officers' training-camps, while Stanley enlisted in the aviation branch of the service.

Before long Ted began to regret his decision to join the infantry. It happened late one October afternoon when the company was returning, under full packs, from a lengthy hike into the country. The dust rose in clouds that threatened to suffocate the men and the sun still blazed unrelentingly on the weary, tramping forms. But even as they marched along the men sang with a good deal of spirit, although

any one who had heard them outward bound that morning could have easily recognized the difference in the vigor of their song.

From afar came a droning, buzzing sound, hard to locate but drawing rapidly nearer. A moment later some one shouted "airplane," and a hundred and fifty pairs of eyes were eagerly scanning the sky; soon they succeeded in making out a small, dark speck high in the heavens, and as they gazed it grew larger and larger, until finally the trim outlines of the graceful craft could be distinguished clearly. Something seemed to go wrong with the machine when it was directly overhead. The steady purr of the motor stopped and the great speed at which the ship had been travelling began to slacken. Every one held his breath in anticipation of the tragedy that was about to take place. After a second's pause, during which the airplane seemed to stand still, it plunged toward the earth in a bewildering succession of turns, nose down, tail pointed into the sky. Its antics gave one the impression that it might be sliding down some gigantic aerial corkscrew, and how long the craft continued in its spinning fall to destruction no one knew, but to the spectators below it seemed like minutes. Just as it appeared as if the next few turns must bring the fatal crash the machine stopped spinning, started

into a graceful, straight dive, and then with a startled roar of the exhausts swooped upward and away.

"I'd give anything in the world to be able to fly like that," Ted confided to the cadet by his side.

"You are covering a lot of territory," he replied. "The ground is good enough for me."

"It will have to be for me, too, I guess, but think of those fellows playing among the clouds while we swallow dust on the road or wallow in knee-deep mud in the trenches. Think of the glory of fighting miles above the earth!"

"What's the matter? Not feeling sorry for yourself, are you?"

Ted ignored this remark. His thoughts were high above in the ethereal blue, where the airplane had been manœuvring with such graceful ease but a few minutes before.

"I want to fly and do my fighting up there," he said to himself more than to any one else in particular.

"And be shot down and hit the ground so hard it would take the whole police squad a week to dig you out," Ted's neighbor, whose name was Carter, interrupted. "Not for me! I'll take mine down here, where I know there is something safe and solid under my two feet."

The company reached the barracks with just fifteen

minutes in which to brush up for retreat. There was no time for discussion or conversation, but that night, just before taps, it was reported that a commission had arrived whose object it was to select men for the air service; several would be accepted from each company. That accounted for the sudden appearance of the air-ship that afternoon; it was part of the advertising plan to secure the necessary number of men.

Ted called on his captain immediately, and was told to report to the major in charge of the commission on the following morning.

There was no sleep for him that night. The hours dragged as he tossed restlessly on his hard bunk and listened to the heavy breathing of the other men, and when morning came he was so excited he was sure he should be rejected on that very account. But the major was inclined to make allowances, and informed Ted that he might expect to be transferred at no far-distant date.

The order releasing him from duty with the company and sending him southward to the ground school in Texas came two weeks later. And two days after that Ted was speeding toward his new station.

Then followed three months of the hardest kind of work; there were long lectures and hours of study

upon the organization of foreign armies, interspersed with periods of calisthenics and infantry drill; also instructions on topics connected with flying, such as motors, rigging, gunnery, and wireless. Every one worked at top speed to assimilate as much as possible of the knowledge with which he was being crammed; that occupied all the hours of daylight and part of the night, too, so there was little time to form close and lasting friendships. Everybody was so busy with his own problems that it was impossible to pay much attention to the other fellow.

But the three months were up at last, and Ted, standing near the head of his section, was promptly sent to flying school. Those who were not so fortunate in their marks were sent to concentration camps to wait weeks, even months, for their turn.

"Attention to orders," called the section leader the morning after Ted and a number of others had reported for their new class of instruction. "Boyle, Currier, Davis, and Edwards report to Lieutenant Livingston, Ship Number 188. Green, Hammond, Jones, and Murphy report to Lieutenant Talbot, Ship Number 210," and so on down the line, ending with a final "Fall out."

Ted could not believe his ears. Was it possible that the Lieutenant Livingston who was to be his

instructor was Stanley? They had not communicated with one another since entering the service.

Ted hurried to Ship Number 188, which had been pointed out to him by one of the mechanics.

"Lieutenant Livingston, sir?" he inquired of the officer evidently in charge of the ship.

"Yes, what can I do for you? Why—if it isn't Ted. What are you doing here? I am certainly glad to see you."

Ted explained how he had been transferred from the infantry and had just completed his course at ground school; also that he had been assigned to Stanley for flying instruction.

"This is luck. Let's get at it right away; we can talk more to-night. Hop into the rear seat and we'll start right off."

"What do I have to do?" Ted asked excitedly.

"This is just going to be a joy ride around the field. Don't do or touch anything; sit as comfortably as you can and look around; watch the ground and the air and the other ships."

So saying he helped Ted into his place and showed him how to adjust the buckle of his safety-belt across his lap. "You will hardly ever need the belt," he said, "but it is just as well to get into the habit of fastening it."

Then he climbed into the forward cockpit and opened and closed the throttle a number of times, while the motor roared and slowed down alternately. At a signal to the crew chief, the men removed the blocks from under the wheels, and taking hold of the lower wings swung the ship around until it faced the flying-field, which was into the wind.

An instant later, with an increasing roar, the machine was tearing across the ground at a terrific speed. Ted looked down over the edges of the cockpit, and saw the grass rushing backward in a blurred, green streak. A frightful wind struck his face, cutting off his breath and making his eyes water. He ducked his head behind the little celluloid wind-shield to adjust his goggles more snugly, and when he looked again they had left the ground. He closed his eyes for a moment; there was no sensation of motion whatever; they seemed to be standing stock-still, like a kite at the end of a string, facing a cyclone of wind, but the thunder of the engine was deafening.

After climbing a thousand feet, they made a number of circuits of the field. Then Stanley throttled the motor and dipping the ship down at a steep angle, began the glide back to the landing-place. The propeller moved so slowly that the blades could easily be distinguished, and the wind shrieked through the

wires with a shrill wail. They levelled off at a few feet above the ground, and after skimming along a short distance, touched so gently that there was scarcely any shock; after that they slowed down and rolled up to the dead-line from which they had started.

The course of instruction continued daily, and under Stanley's capable guidance Ted learned rapidly. When he had had six hours in the air he could fly the ship in a manner satisfactory to his teacher; so Stanley took it upon himself to include a few of the more commonly used stunts in the course. For this purpose, however, they always went some distance from the field, where they were safe from the observation from below of the officers in charge.

"I am going to show you a new one to-day," Stanley said one afternoon, as they were taking their places for the flight. "Be doubly sure the belt is fastened; you will need it for once."

"I can stand anything you can," Ted replied. "Go as far as you like."

Soon they were leaving the field behind, mounting as they soared into the distance. The aneroid needle pointed to two thousand, then three, four, five, and finally six thousand feet. Ted had never been so high before in the plane, and the earth below seemed new and strange. The patches of woods looked like

clusters of dark, green dots, and the fields reminded him of the squares of a checker-board. Banks of white, fluffy clouds rolled past, their upper edges tinted with glowing silver by the brilliant sunlight.

Stanley shut down the engine. "Is everything all right?" he called back.

"Yes!"

"I am going into a whip-stall. Be sure your belt is tight."

He opened wide the throttle and nosed the plane down so that they attained a terrific speed; then he suddenly pulled it almost straight upward and shut off the engine. For a moment the ship seemed to stand still in the air in an upright position; then it whipped downward with tremendous force, sliding on the tail. Ted felt himself raised off his seat, but, thank heaven, the belt held, or he would have remained in mid-air while the plane hurtled away from beneath him. After falling some little distance Stanley again turned on the power and they swung out of the dive and levelled off gracefully.

But at that instant a burst of smoke was swept back by the blast of the propeller. The engine slackened its speed and a series of sharp, pistol-like reports came from the exhausts.

Ted was seized with consternation, for a thin

streamer of flame shot back from under the hood; the plane was afire.

Stanley saw the danger at the same moment and dove in an attempt to put out the fire, but this manoeuvre, frequently successful in such an emergency, proved to be the worst possible thing in this case. With a roar the flame struck him full in the face; he tried to pull the ship out of the dive, but the fiery blast stifled him; the ground below, the sky above, and even the wings on either side of him seemed wrapped in a haze, and in an instant he was enveloped in complete darkness.

Ted saw the wilting figure in front of him droop out of sight; at the same time the plane began to quiver and lurch from side to side. Without a guiding hand to direct it the heretofore graceful craft became converted into a mass of steel and wood and cloth hurtling through space to certain destruction. He realized the frightfulness of the situation in a flash; Stanley had either fainted or was dead.

"I must get him down; I must save him," he gasped, frantically grasping the controls in his own cockpit. He thought little of his own danger; it was his companion who filled his mind. He must get him to the ground and save him if it was not already too late.

The blaze was sweeping back directly over the top

of the twenty-gallon container resting between the engine and the front cockpit. "I must fan the flames to one side," Ted thought. "If the gas catches, it will be the end."

Responding to a savage turn of the wheel, the ship turned on edge and the streamer of fire darted out to one side. If only he could keep it there! Perhaps the rudder would help; he gave it a sharp kick, then felt that he had made a mistake, for he had pushed it in the direction opposite to the wheel. But the ship, tilted at a steep angle, started into a side-slip toward the ground, and that was exactly what he wanted. He must keep on slipping from side to side, like a falling leaf.

The wind shrieked through the rigging with a terrifying scream and threatened to tear away the side of Ted's face. He straightened out the plane, reversed his controls, and then began falling in the opposite direction. Back and forth they darted; the ground was rushing up to meet them at a furious speed. It was fascinating, this sight of the ground rushing upward, and as he looked at it he suddenly realized that they were almost directly above an open field—the landing-field, it must have been, for there were the white hangars in which the ships were kept; and the machines that had been out in the open were scurrying

in all directions. Vaguely he wondered how long it would be before they should crash in their midst.

After what seemed like ages, but which was in reality a matter of seconds, the ground loomed up close to them. The moment for the supreme test had come. Throwing the controls into neutral he brought the ship into an even glide. The hot blast struck his face and the fumes of burning oil made him cough and choke. But not for an instant did he relax to lower his head for a breath of air; he must see the thing through if it was the last thing he ever did.

Her speed gone, the ship settled rapidly; it was but ten feet from the ground. Ted pulled back the wheel cautiously to keep her nose up, as he had been told so often by Stanley, and the plane responded ever so feebly. The ship struck with a jolt, bounded, settled again, rolled forward a short distance, and came to a stop.

Ted snatched at the buckle of his belt, tore off his goggles, and jumped to the ground. His head was reeling and his throat was parched. The flames now extended in back of the hood and were reaching for the fuel-tank. It was only a question of seconds before the explosion that would deluge them with a shower of burning gasoline.

There was not time to try to rescue Stanley by pull-

ing him over the rim of the cockpit, and, besides, Ted had not the strength left for such an undertaking. So he clambered up on one wing and kicked in the linen side of the fuselage, after which he dragged the unconscious form of his companion through the hole. Then he tottered away with the limp body in his arms, how far he never knew.

A chorus of excited voices reached his ears in a confused murmur and helping hands relieved him of his burden. His head burned and a thousand needles seemed to stab through his chest. He clutched the air wildly and, gasping for breath, plunged headlong into darkness.

CHAPTER III

THE RETURN TO THE LAND OF THE INCAS

THE exploits of Stanley and Ted in the great World War form no part of this story. It is enough to say that they saw extensive service on the Western Front and that they acquitted themselves in an entirely creditable manner.

The armistice was signed at last and the two, in common with thousands of others, were returned to their own country. They had attained the rank of first lieutenant. Now, their services being no longer urgently required, they tendered their resignations and received honorable discharges.

"I am beginning to feel as if I have had enough of a rest," Ted said one night a few weeks afterward when Stanley dropped in at his home for one of his visits. They saw one another almost daily. "What do you say to making another attempt to get the treasure?"

"You know what I think about it," Stanley replied. "If the folks had not been urging me to remain with

them a while longer, I should have suggested starting before now. They cannot forget what we went through on our first visit to the Hidden Valley; but they know we are determined to return to it. They are not discouraging me at all; only trying to put it off as long as possible."

"We are losing a lot of time. The sooner we go back to Peru and have it over with the better. Think of the tons of gold lying in the cave waiting for us to carry them away."

"I know. How do your people feel about it? I suppose they are not eager to have you go?"

"The situation is the same with me as with you. But I think we should start without further delay. There are so many things to be done when we get back, and time flies." Then, after a moment's thought: "I have been looking up the sailing dates. There is a good steamer for Panama next Tuesday—that is, a week from to-day. It will get us to the isthmus just in time to connect with the *Panela* of the Peruvian Line for Mollendo. Can you be ready then, or is that too soon?"

"I could be ready to-morrow. Waiting a whole week, now that we have actually decided to go, will seem like a year!"

"And," said Ted as Stanley was leaving, "we had

better not take anything with us from here. We can get all the supplies and outfit we need in Cuzco."

Arrived in Colon, they found the *Panela* scheduled to sail that same afternoon. There was barely sufficient time to transfer their baggage, comply with the customs formalities, and secure passage on the departing steamer.

Before long they had entered the muddy water of the canal, and soon after that the ship entered the locks and in an almost incredibly short time was raised to the level of Gatun Lake, with its vast expanse of murky water and its fringe of tree skeletons that stood like black monuments to mark the graveyard of the inundated forest. Darkness prevented the completion of the trip through the canal, so the ship was tied up for the night.

There was no moonlight, but the thousands of scintillating stars shed a soft radiance upon the torpid earth. The water was black and smooth as glass, save for the myriad points of reflected starlight. But in spite of the unruffled appearance of the surface the black depths were charged with life. One had only to drop some object overboard in order to excite to action the millions of jelly-fish that lurked below. When the water was agitated by the missile, no mat-

ter how lightly, it blazed with patches and circles of greenish phosphorescence, so that the surface seemed aflame with a weird, unearthly fire. And occasionally there was a streak of the same uncanny light as one of the larger inhabitants of the deep cut the surface in a burst of speed in pursuit of some of the lesser fry.

With the coming of daylight the *Panela* was lowered through the locks at the far end of the canal and headed for the open ocean.

"No wonder this is called the Pacific," said Ted as they stood on deck looking over the broad expanse of dark-blue water. The surface was so smooth that it might have been a sheet of glass; into this the prow of the ship cut a furrow crested with hissing white foam. Overhead the man-o'-war birds described great circles on motionless wings; they were marvels of grace and endurance, spanning the limitless blue day after day without stopping to rest. In the distance a number of whales rolled lazily in the briny water and blew thin jets of spray high into the air.

"If I were not so eager to finish our job down there I should say that this is the only life. I could keep sailing on forever. I certainly intend to do my share of travelling if this venture proves successful," Stanley said.

"If?" Ted queried in surprise. "You mean *when*

the job is finished. There is no question in my mind but that we shall get the gold this time. We know exactly how to overcome the one little barrier that lies between us and the hidden millions."

"You are right. When are we due to reach Molendo?"

"Six days from now. Then three more days in which to get to Cuzco. Two or three days in which to gather our outfit together, and then for the trail. In a month from now, at the most, we shall be ferrying out the gold that has been concealed for so many centuries. The underground river will hum as we dash back and forth through it."

"After that we shall be up against the hardest work of all; that is to get the gold out of the country and back home safely. But let's not cross any bridges before we get to them. The future must take care of itself," said Stanley.

"While we are so near to it, I wish we could take a peep into the Hidden Valley. Perhaps Huayna Capac, the Inca, is dead, and Quizquiz is king now. I am sorry for everybody in the valley if he is their ruler. The old king at least tried to be kind and generous, the best he knew how, but Quizquiz will be a tyrant in every sense of the word. He is conceited, arrogant, and cruel. I should hate to fall into his hands."

“And I, too,” said Stanley. “But there is no chance. He would not dare enter Uti, where the gold is hidden, and we shall certainly not trespass in his kingdom beyond the great wall. So we can simply guess at what is taking place in the Hidden Valley, and I am content to let it go at that.”

Stanley spoke with conviction, but he had no way of knowing what the future had in store for him. Just as the past years had brought the momentous events due to the World War, so there had been events of importance in the Hidden Valley, also. If Ted and Stanley could in some manner have obtained an inkling of what had happened behind those silent and unscalable mountains that surrounded the retreat of the last of the Incas, they doubtless should have refrained from making another attempt to secure the fabulous wealth that this same barrier also protected. Firmly resolved though they were not to enter the Hidden Valley proper again, it was not impossible that circumstances beyond their control might take them into the very region they were so eager to shun. And then—the terrible reckoning, with the pitiless, triumphant, and all-powerful Quizquiz as their captor and judge.

They landed in Mollendo just in time to take the early afternoon train into the mountains, and night

found them in the upland city of Arequipa. It required the greater part of another day to cover the distance to Puno, and on the morning after that the journey to Cuzco began.

As the train crept wearily over the high plateau and entered the outskirts of the city, Ted, who was gazing interestedly through the little window of their compartment, gave a cry of surprise.

"Things have certainly been happening here since we last saw this place," he said. "Look!"

Stanley, too, peered through the window. A number of long, wide, wooden buildings had been erected along one side of a level field. There were also narrower and higher structures and a small cluster of tents. Men in uniform were drilling near the group of buildings; and a detachment of other soldiers was signalling with large white panels that were spread out on the ground.

"Ted," he said suddenly, "that aviation-field has been put there for a purpose. It may mean that the war fever has spread even to these remote countries; or it may be only the beginning of a preparedness campaign. I can't say why, but I feel in my bones that we are going to get mixed up in whatever it is before very long."

"I hope not. We can't afford to let anything side-

track us from getting that gold. If we keep putting it off something may happen to prevent our getting it altogether."

"But that is just what I am thinking," Stanley protested. "Everything we do must be a step toward the big goal."

"I don't see the connection."

"Well, then, let me tell you. It takes many days of walking over the most difficult trail to reach the underground river. And heaven only knows how hard it will be to carry the gold back up the mountain-side. Now, in an airplane the distance cannot be very great, and instead of work it would be fun. Now do you see what I mean?"

"Stanley!" Ted's face beamed. "Do you think we could arrange it?"

"There is nothing impossible if you do not want it to be. We are going to get into the treasure-ground by the air-route this time, even if we have to steal one of those planes to do it."

Just then the train rolled into the station and Ted and Stanley gathered up their baggage and followed the crowd along the platform and out into the street.

CHAPTER IV

THE RIVALRY OF THE AIRMEN

"SIR, the colonel presents his compliments and commands you to report to him at once."

Ted and Stanley had just finished breakfast and were crossing the open little courtyard between the dining-room of the inn and their own quarters when the orderly stepped briskly in their path, saluted, and delivered his message.

"What?" Ted asked, stopping in his tracks.

"Colonel who?" from Stanley, "and what does he want with us?"

"Colonel José Antonio de Estrella, commanding officer of the First Aero Squadron."

"Why this great honor? We do not know the colonel and cannot imagine why he wishes to see us. But of course if he insists, we shall be happy to pay him a visit. Only he should invite, not command, us; we have put up with enough 'commanding and ordering' in our own army to last us a long, long time."

"Are not the *señores* the flyers who have been expected the past month? The colonel has been very impatient of the delay."

"No, we know nothing of the gentlemen you mention, but perhaps we can be of service, anyway. Take us to the colonel. I guess we can see him right away."

The youth saluted and started away at a fast walk, the two Americans following.

"I told you we were going to get mixed up in that aviation proposition," Stanley said. "I knew it the minute I saw that field."

"Who knows what it may lead to? but I cannot see much to it just yet. We are being mistaken for some one else, and that is about all that is clear so far. So soon as the colonel sees us he will recognize his mistake, apologize profusely, and tell us to go our way."

"Now that is exactly what we must avoid. We have an opening to do the very thing that will help us and we must manage to take advantage of it. Instead of our going to them to beg for a job, they have sent for us in error, it is true, but what is to prevent us from profiting by it?"

"You are right, and I only hope we can see the thing through. How much hard work it would save us if we could fly to the Hidden Valley, to say nothing of the time we should save!"

They reached the camp in a little over half an hour

and were immediately taken to headquarters, where the adjutant, a second lieutenant in a brilliant uniform, lost no time in ushering them into the colonel's office.

The latter officer was of rather short build but of distinguished appearance. His hair and long mustaches were snowy white; his eyes were black. A number of medals and military decorations were pinned to his coat in a neat row, but one of the first things the Americans observed was that the wings of a flying officer were lacking.

"It is I who have made a big mistake," he said as the two entered. "For the last four weeks I have been expecting two officers from Europe, but they do not come. Last night, when I heard that two strangers had arrived in the city, I concluded it must be they. I now see and acknowledge my mistake and I apologize for troubling the gentlemen."

"The colonel owes us no apology," said Stanley in a respectful manner. "Quite the contrary. It is a great pleasure for us to visit him. If we can be of service it will please us to help in any way we can. Both my companion and I have had considerable experience with airplanes."

"You mean to say you are aviators?" the colonel asked, rising from his chair. "When and where did

you learn to fly and what has been your experience? Sit down and tell me all about it."

Ted and Stanley did as they were asked, and for an hour they related to the officer their various experiences so far as aeronautics were concerned. He listened intently to all they had to say and asked many questions.

"It is indeed fortunate for me that you came," he said when they had finished, "for I need your help and can offer you good positions. The manoeuvres take place in two months and we must have ships in the air by that time. Now, when can you begin work? Remember, there is need of great haste."

"Will you tell us exactly what is expected of us?" Ted asked. "And then we shall want to talk the matter over between ourselves. And what is the remuneration?"

"Your work will be to assemble the machines and to test them thoroughly before turning them over to the instructors. That will not be an easy undertaking and, as you know, it is not without danger, for I shall insist that the test flights be very conclusive; they will include trips across country of several hours' duration. I want the planes to be as safe as possible before we begin taking up students. You will be subject to my orders only as civilian employees. And

the pay is five hundred *soles* a month, which is about two hundred and fifty dollars in the money of your country."

They thanked the colonel for his offer and returned to the inn.

"What do you think of that for luck?" Ted fairly shouted. "Things are coming our way so fast it is hard to keep track of them."

"We could not wish for a better arrangement," Stanley agreed. "It is almost too good to be true. Every time we make one of those long test flights the colonel insists upon, we can drop into Uti and bring out a load of gold, as much as the ship will carry, and that is considerable. When we have enough we can resign and go home. We have not been asked to enlist for any given period of time, so we can quit when we want to, provided, of course, we give them reasonable notice, so they can get some one else to take our places."

That afternoon they sent word to the colonel that they should be ready to start work on the following morning, and shortly after daybreak a cart arrived to take their effects to camp, as they were henceforth to occupy quarters on the military reservation.

The two reported to the officer soon after, and were at once sent to the hangars, where a number of crates

and boxes were stored. These containers held wings, bodies, and motors, just as they had been packed for shipment by the manufacturers in the United States. A detachment of some twenty odd mechanics were placed at their disposal. These men had been well trained in the theory of aeronautics, and while they lacked practical experience, showed unbounded enthusiasm for the work, combined with intelligence and adaptability. Before long the tasks in hand began in earnest.

Ted and Stanley went about the matter in a systematic, businesslike way. They called the men together and then divided them into sections, or crews, and explained in detail what the duties of each would be. A leader or chief was appointed for each crew. The Americans were to give orders to the chiefs, and the latter would be held responsible that these orders were carried out promptly by the men in their charge.

First they examined the bills of lading and invoices. Then they selected certain of the boxes, checked them off the lists, and had them removed to the largest hangar, which stood not far away. This required all of the first day.

The second day they opened the packages and removed the various parts, subjecting them to inspec-

tion, checking them against the lists, and noting minor breaks that had to be repaired. They also visited the supply-tent, looked over the tools and materials available, and made out requisitions for such things as would be needed but which were lacking.

"It's beginning to look like business now," Stanley commented that night. "The first thing is always to work out a system; after that everything is easy."

"Two days is a short time, but it is surprising how many things one can do. Of course we had a good foundation to build on, for the colonel had made a good beginning. Too bad there is not a flying officer in charge of the field; he could understand the whole proposition more clearly and make allowances for the difficulties we are up against," Ted returned.

"So far the colonel has been a prince. He has given us a free hand, and so long as he continues in that spirit we shall get along all right. If he were a flyer he would want to boss everything and show us how to do things, probably in a way different from the one we are accustomed to."

"Right. I never thought of that."

It was exactly four weeks later that the first of the planes had been assembled ready to roll out of the hangar for the final adjustments and tuning up. The

ships were of the two-seater type, similar to the JN4H's so commonly used on American flying-fields, and of sturdy, dependable construction. They had two-hundred-horse-power eight-cylinder engines, and were rated as capable of making an air-speed of ninety miles an hour. There were radio sets and machine guns, the latter mounted one above the engine and the other on a turret in the rear cockpit.

Ted and Stanley surveyed their work with pride. The motor roared with an even, steady purr, or snorted and banged as the mechanic opened and closed the throttle, while the graceful machine tugged impatiently in its efforts to free itself from the grasp of the men clinging to the wings, and to leap the blocks that had been placed under the wheels.

"When shall we take the first spin?" Ted asked as he inspected the turnbuckles and hit the wire braces with his hand to gauge their tautness.

"To-morrow, if nothing goes wrong. Think of what a wonderful experience it will be to soar over the peaks of the Andes; and the first chance we get we will hop off to the Valley. All our dreaming and planning is about to bear fruit."

Just then the colonel accompanied by two officers in strange uniforms approached.

The colonel introduced the new arrivals to the

Americans. "At last they are here," he added. "They will have entire charge of the cadets. You gentlemen will work together in perfect harmony, I hope, in the best interests of the service."

Ted and Stanley showed genuine pleasure at making the acquaintance of the two lieutenants, but the latter seemed cool and reserved, and after a casual examination of the throbbing ship followed the colonel into one of the hangars.

A moment later Ted went to the rear of the structure to get a wrench from the tool-box, and while pawing through the miscellaneous collection the chest contained, the sound of voices from within reached his ears.

"I have investigated them thoroughly," the colonel was saying, "and I have learned that they have been in Cuzco at least twice before this. Each time they disappeared on some secret mission into the mountains, and it is said that they are searching for a lost mine or hidden treasure. But that is nothing against them; we should do the same if we had a reason to hope for success in such a venture. I have also examined their pilot's books, for which they cabled voluntarily, and they showed an unusually large number of hours in the air and a record above reproach. Their work here has been done well. And, besides, they

came to my assistance when I needed them. I sent for them; they did not beg me for the places."

"If the colonel will pardon my saying so, the lieutenant and I can now assume full charge of the work. We do not need the Americans. We ourselves should supervise the rigging of the ships we are to fly."

"It is a part of their agreement that they must test the machines first, so they, not you, will take all the risks. There are enough duties to keep all of you occupied. Never forget that I am commanding officer and I shall not tolerate interference with my plans."

With these words the colonel strode angrily away. For a minute neither of the two foreigners spoke.

"Those Americans are in everything," one said finally. "What chance do we stand while they are here? They do not know the meaning of the word fear; I have often watched them on the battle-front and I know. If these two give such exhibitions here as their countrymen did over there, they and not we will attract all the attention. We must manage to keep them out of the air."

"That is easy," the other replied. "If we cannot keep them from going up, we can see to it that they come back down in an unexpected way. A loose pin, a defective strut, or any one of a dozen other things,

and they will not stand in our way again. And no one will ever suspect!"

Ted did not wait to hear more. With a face white with anger he hastened to where Stanley was clamping the Lewis gun to the iron bars of the turret.

CHAPTER V

IN QUEST OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE

TED'S first impulse was to tell Stanley immediately of the conversation he had heard in the hangar. But the roar of the motor made this impossible. Then it occurred to him that the two officers might be watching them, so he decided to withhold the information until they were safely in their own quarters.

Stanley's face was a puzzle as he listened to the story. He did not interrupt until the recital was completed.

"I am surprised that they should resent our presence here," he said finally. "There is room enough for all of us, but these fellows must have come bent on being the whole show and are determined to have their way. Still, it is almost impossible to believe they were altogether in earnest. Perhaps they knew you were listening and tried to frighten us."

"That is what they said, no matter what their real intention. I think the thing ought to be reported to the colonel."

"Perhaps we should report it, but that would only make matters worse. Why not wait until we have

some proof of their intentions? Then we shall have a fair case against them. In the meantime I guess we can take care of ourselves."

"We must take every precaution. There is too much at stake for us to make a break one way or the other."

"Yes, we will be very careful. And we will let it go at that. I think we shall be able to tell without trouble if there has been any tampering with the ships. A strict watch must be kept, for one thing, and we shall make a most thorough inspection of our machine before each flight," said Stanley. "Above all, we must work fast; that is, get into and out of our destination as soon as possible, and then we shall be at liberty to leave the country. If we speed up we may be able to forestall our rivals."

"How about a test flight to-morrow? And then an attempt to reach the hidden place a few days later?"

"The very thing. Have a first trial flight to-morrow and then spend a few days making adjustments while we also make our other preparations. After that the dash for the mountains. But we may have to alter our plans greatly. With the opposition and competition we have now it will not be possible to make an unlimited number of flights. We might succeed in going once or twice without trouble, but if we

went too often and remained away for long periods of time they would become suspicious and either stop us or try to follow to see what we were doing.”

“I have a scheme we could try. Why not take a load of equipment on the first trip and cache it in one of the caves; then open up the underground river and take out as much gold as we want that way. If we have to discontinue flying before we bring out very much in the plane we can go back by the overland route and pick up what we have hidden in the forest. That will save a lot of time and trouble.”

“We could not improve on that if we tried,” Stanley agreed enthusiastically. “While I do the final tinkering on the machine you can be gathering the things together. Bring them to our hangar, load them at night, and we can hop away early the next morning.”

Somehow the news had spread that there was to be a trial flight on the following day, and a huge crowd, composed mostly of Indians, gathered on the outskirts of the field at daybreak. It was not until shortly after noon, however, that everything was in readiness for the initial attempt. The two donned their leather coats, helmets, and goggles, and climbed into the cockpits. At a signal from Stanley the crew removed the wooden blocks from under the wheels and swung the ship around into the wind. Stanley gradually

opened the throttle, and as the roar of the engine increased in volume the machine gathered speed and raced over the even ground. In a moment it had left the earth and was soaring upward at an appreciable angle. The crowd of onlookers waved their hats and burst into a wild cheer, and Ted, who was standing in the rear pit, leaned over the rim and waved his hand toward the ground as they sped into the distance.

Stanley carefully watched the braces, struts, and wings, but as there was no unusual vibration, he tried a number of turns, banking gently, dived and zoomed, and in other ways tested the craft. Its stability and balance were to his entire satisfaction. Then they ascended to a height of five thousand feet and performed a series of stunts that even the birds would not dare attempt. They side-slipped, dived, and spiralled, did wing-overs, and ended in a series of loops. After that they descended to the field in a long tail-spin, levelling off just in time to land easily and gracefully in front of their hangar.

The colonel was most enthusiastic and congratulated them heartily, but the two lieutenants kept in the background and offered no comments.

"There are only a few wires to tighten a little," Stanley informed the commanding officer. "They are always liable to slacken somewhat during the first

flights. The fuselage is lined up perfectly. If the colonel so desires, we shall be glad to make a long cross-country flight next Sunday. That could serve as a final test, after which the ship would be ready to go into commission for the regular work of training cadets."

"Splendid!" the colonel replied. "Go anywhere you like. Give the machine a most thorough trial. The instructors and pupils are waiting impatiently for their turn."

Two days later, as they were going over the ship for a final inspection, Stanley suddenly noticed that the keys had been removed from the pins that fastened the right upper wing to the body. With a slight motion of his hand he indicated the fact to Ted.

"Now we shall find out who is responsible for that," he said to Ted between his teeth.

They had the ship rolled out on the line and started the engines. The colonel and the two lieutenants were on the field as usual, watching the operations.

"Perhaps the lieutenants would like a flight today?" Stanley suggested pleasantly, approaching the trio. "With the colonel's consent, and so far as we are concerned, the ship is at your disposal."

The two began to look uncomfortable, and one of them stammered an excuse about not being prepared

with the proper clothing. The colonel promptly suggested that they might use the outfits of the Americans if they desired, but upon this the other one pleaded illness.

"Well," Stanley said, looking straight at the two, "we thought we might go up for a few minutes, but I guess we had better not. If it is not safe for you, it is not safe for us."

The colonel understood that there was some difficulty, but said nothing until the two instructors had gone. Then he questioned the Americans as to the meaning of the affair. They showed him the pins with the missing keys.

"But you have no evidence against any one!" he said slowly. "This is most serious, but I cannot accuse any one of such an act without proof."

"No, but in the future the hangars must be guarded day and night. No one must be permitted to enter without a written pass from you."

"That is a good idea. It shall be done. I shall immediately issue an order to that effect."

The damage was soon repaired and the ship rolled back into the hangar.

Ted spent the greater part of the next morning making purchases in the city, and the packages were delivered to the field early in the afternoon. They had

been compelled to buy numerous things connected with their work during the previous weeks, so the arrival of the boxes caused no comment. Ted stored them in a corner of the hangar and covered them with a tarpauling.

That night they carefully studied their map, on which the location of the Hidden Valley had been marked as accurately as possible, as they had done so many times before. And at daybreak on the following morning Ted loaded the packages into the ship, while Stanley went for a conference with the colonel. When the latter, too, arrived on the field, the plane was on the line with the engine roaring.

Although the guards assured them that none had approached the hangar during the night, the two spent considerable time in a minute inspection of the machine. And when the sun was an hour high in the heavens they left the ground, circled the field until they had reached an altitude of several thousand feet, then headed straight to the north.

If their calculations were right, they should reach the valley in an hour, unless they encountered a strong head-wind. Allowing another hour for the return, there would be a leeway of a third hour, for the fuel-supply, counting that contained in the emergency-tank overhead, was ample for three hours.

From directly above, the mountain peaks appeared flattened out exactly like the plateaux and valleys, but they could be distinguished from the latter by the patches of snow and fields of black rocks. A wind from the south added greatly to their speed, so that the landscape beneath them moved back at a rapid pace. To their right, and far, far below, lay the sea of dark-green Amazonian jungle.

Here and there among the bleak mountain-peaks lay little green valleys with square, blocklike dots scattered about singly and in groups. To the casual observer they might have been mistaken for stones. But to the trained eye they were clearly Indian huts, distinguishable from the other objects by their regular outlines. And if Ted looked closely he could make out minute specks moving toward the houses; they were the Indians running to shelter, terrified, no doubt, by the roaring spectre in the sky.

"Keep your eyes open wide," Stanley shouted back to his companion after he had throttled down the motor so that its roar did not drown the sound of his voice. "Look for the yellow vapor and the ring of volcanoes. The wall, too. What was that?"

A black form had passed them at great speed, its shadow blanketing one side of the craft.

Ted looked back, knowing that it could not have been a cloud, for the sky was clear.

"It's a condor," he called at the top of his voice, just as Stanley opened the throttle. Even as he spoke the great bird was wheeling gracefully and heading in their direction. Master of the desolate mountain tops and of the air above them, the huge bird was evidently investigating or challenging this newcomer into its realm.

Ted pounded the linen side of the fuselage frantically with his gloved hand, and at the signal Stanley automatically pushed the control forward, ever so slightly, and the ship went into a steep dive. It was part of their old code, originated on the Western Front, and in the emergency both remembered it instantly.

They were not a moment too soon. The great bird shot past above them with a rush of wings audible above the slow throbbing of the throttled-down motor.

Just as Stanley brought the plane to a level keel, the bird wheeled, and again came toward them, from the front, but this time the pilot saw it in time. He must avoid collision with the audacious creature, for the impact of the heavy body against the struts of propeller would be enough to shatter them and send them crashing to the ground. His first impulse was to use the machine-gun in an attempt either to kill the bird or to cause it to swerve; but a second thought seemed better. He waited until the black form was

a scant hundred yards away; then he pulled hard on the control, and instantly the bird seemed to drop into space below them. What had really happened was that the ship had bounded upward in a steep zoom, passing high above the attacker, and before the latter could turn, Stanley had resumed the level course and opened wide the throttle. The ship started forward at such great speed that the bird, swift of wing though it was, could not overtake them; and they soon lost it in the distance, a black speck growing constantly smaller in the unclouded sky.

After that they flew at a lower altitude, so as not to arouse the ire of other condors that might be soaring at that dizzy height.

Ted was carefully scanning the ground, on which everything now appeared with startling distinctness. Below was an Indian trail on which a caravan of llamas had been wending its leisurely way. The leader of the file stopped and evidently sounded an alarm of some kind, for in a moment the panic-stricken animals were dashing down the trail, leaving a cloud of dust in their wake and scattering their packs by the wayside. After leaping a stone wall they disappeared into the doorway of a hut. At the same time a number of Indians, wearing bright-colored blankets, darted out of the rear doorway, routed from their

abode by the onrushing beasts, but no sooner had they gained the open than one of the group discerned the strange monster above them, and back they dashed into the hut.

Ted was watching the spot long after to see if any of the occupants of the shelter would appear after they had passed, when the engine again slowed down.

“That looks like the spot over there,” Stanley shouted, nodding toward the landscape in front of them.

Ted looked in that direction and nodded assent. Far ahead, and to one side, lay a circle of yellow vapor; it seemed to hug the earth in a solid ring, while columns and wisps rose into the sky to a great height. That could mean but one thing. It was the impenetrable barrier of poisonous gases arising from the chain of volcanoes surrounding the Hidden Valley. A quarter of an hour later they had crossed the margin of the ring. There it was, directly beneath them—the long valley with its winding river, Uti with the dismal lagoon glistening in the sunlight, and the great wall that separated the two places showing like a narrow gray ribbon. To the left was another valley with high, steep walls of rock hemming it in on all sides, but there was no vapor clinging to the rim of that enclosure.

Stanley shut down the power and they began a rapid and almost noiseless descent in a series of graceful spirals. When down to five hundred feet above the ground, he again opened the throttle and circled a few times, while both craned their heads over the sides of the cockpits, looking for a suitable place to land. In a moment they recognized the level strip of beach on the border of the lake, the very spot, in fact, where their canoe had been stranded several years before; another spiral, then a long glide, and they had landed on the hard sand.

At last they were in the region of gold-filled caves, a mere stone's throw from the place where the vast treasure of the Incas had lain untouched for so many centuries. The two scrambled out of their cramped quarters and jumped to the ground. Then, dashing their helmets and goggles aside, they started in a wild rush toward the cave.

CHAPTER VI

THE CROWNING MISFORTUNE

UPON reaching the entrance to the underground chamber they stopped. The vision of Timichi, the demented, self-styled king they had encountered on their previous visit, loomed up before them. What if he were still alive and had observed their approach? It was not probable, for even years ago he had been very old and in ill health; but it was just barely possible that he still lived. In that event he would be awaiting them in the darkened passageway with some heavy weapon with which to attack them. He had every advantage, and that he would submit to the seizure of the treasure without putting up a fight was out of the question.

“Let’s call to him,” Ted suggested. “Perhaps he will recognize our voices or his name and come out—if he is in there.”

They called “Timichi,” then “Loco,” which latter was the name he had liked and which applied to him so well. But there was no response. Then they advanced slowly, but no sinister figure dashed out of the blackness to dispute their way.

A few steps and they had entered the treasure-

chamber. The light from the openings in the ceiling shone full upon their faces. They broke into a run in their eagerness to reach the shining heaps of yellow metal. Then they slackened their pace, stopped, and stared hard—first straight ahead and then at one another. Was it true? Could it be possible? Or were they dreaming? For a moment they were speechless, but Stanley finally managed to force the fateful words through his lips.

“It’s gone, it’s gone!” he cried hoarsely. “The gold is gone!”

“Yes, it’s gone!” Ted echoed. “There is not a speck of it left. All our trouble is for nothing.”

Stanley burst into a laugh almost hysterical in its sudden shrillness.

“Why, what a pair of chumps we are! Timichi must have taken it away. He was the only one this side of the wall. He got some foolish notion or other into his head and so carried away the treasure.”

“Of course! And being old and feeble, he could not have taken it very far. He took it to one of the neighboring caves, where we shall find it in a few minutes. It did give me a scare, though, to find the place empty.”

“Same here,” agreed Stanley. “For a minute I was thunderstruck. I could not even think straight.”

They hurried from the cavern and began a systematic exploration of the numerous openings that led to subterranean chambers in the mountainside. Some were so dark that they had to make constant use of their flash-lights in finding their way about. Others were illuminated by shafts of daylight that entered through crevices overhead. Most of the caves bore no evidence of ever having been occupied; others had evidently been used as lairs by curious wild beasts of a bygone age, and their bones, mingled with those of the creatures on which they had preyed, strewed the earthen floor.

At last they came to the cave where Timichi had pointed out to them the rows of his silent subjects. They had avoided this place until the last, because they did not want to look upon the rows of dead. Now, as they had half expected, they found the remains of Timichi, dressed in his gorgeous finery, and sitting on a stone with his head resting against the wall, as if surveying his little kingdom of the departed. It was weird and pathetic and they did not stay long.

As for the gold, it had not been found. It had disappeared as completely as if the rumbling craters had opened and engulfed it with their fiery mouths.

“It’s the most mysterious thing I ever heard of.

There were tons of it, and it does not seem possible that Timichi could have carried it away at all."

"I'll bet he didn't. Some one else has been here since we left. Let's look around," Ted replied.

The underground river occurred to them first of all. It was by this means that they had made their escape during their previous visit to the dismal place, just as it seemed they were condemned to a living death in company with the demented Timichi.

When, after a tedious journey along the murky margin of the lagoon, they finally reached the mouth of the subterranean stream, they found the entrance blocked by a mass of stones. Nor was the barrier the result of a landslide, as they had supposed when they tried to force their way through from the other side; the stones had been placed there by human hands. Some one had indeed anticipated their return and had tried to forestall them in every way.

Then they returned to the cave in which the gold had been concealed and carefully looked around for traces or clues of the one who had removed the treasure, and after a lengthy search their efforts were rewarded. A faint trail led from the entrance toward the great wall. They followed the indistinct path, breathless with anticipation; it ran straight to the point where the wall joined the abrupt mountainside.

And there, under the massive structure, a hole had been dug large enough for men to pass freely to and fro. The gold had been carried back into the Hidden Valley.

“Quizquiz!” both shouted in one breath. “It was he. No one else would have thought of it or had the cunning to put through such an undertaking.”

The hole had been partially blocked with a heap of earth and stones.

“Not even this place, which had the reputation of being the home of the devils, could stop Quizquiz,” Stanley said. “I see through it now. After our escape in the canoe he planned to get us back. He had the hole dug and found that we were gone. Then they saw the underground river. Putting two and two together, he could easily figure out how we got away. He knew we should return, so he had the river blocked and carried away the gold.”

“We are stumped, all right,” Ted admitted. “All my wonderful plans have gone soaring. We might as well go back and forget about the whole thing. But it is a bitter pill to swallow.”

They made their way to the plane slowly and suffering all the agony of keenest disappointment; their hopes and ambitions were not to be realized. Their dreams of the future had vanished in thin air.

"Let's have a bite to eat," Stanley suggested. "I feel faint and weak. Then we can fly back to the field, give up our jobs, and get back home—soon, I hope; the sooner the better."

"What about all the stuff we brought with us?" Ted asked. "We shall not need it."

"No! We might as well dump it. No use to carry back the extra weight. And, by the way, what is in those boxes? They are awfully heavy. I could tell we had a big load aboard because I could not get the ship to climb fast."

"That is the dynamite," Ted said calmly.

"What?" in consternation.

"Dynamite. About a hundred pounds of it!"

"Do you mean to tell me those boxes are full of dynamite?"

"Certainly. We should have needed it to blow open the entrance to the underground river."

"Good heavens!" Stanley fairly shrieked. "Think of carting along a load of dynamite in a country like this. If we had had a forced landing we should have blown into bits."

"I thought of that. But a forced landing in a mountainous country would have meant our finish anyway. So what is the difference?"

"I guess you are right, but if I had known it I

should not have attempted to fly a single inch until we had taken it out. It is a good thing you did not tell me about it."

"What shall we do with it?"

"Get rid of it as soon as we can."

"But if any one from the valley should come here he would find it," said Ted. "I have an idea. Let's mark the boxes for Quizquiz and leave a note saying that if he hits them with his golden sceptre he will see all his forefathers; then shove the boxes through the hole under the wall."

"It would serve him right, but they cannot read. Besides, we do not want to kill any one. We shall have to hide it or throw it into the lake."

"No, not throw it into the lake," Ted said, with a peculiar shudder. "We are not out of here yet; we might need it!"

"Are you predicting more trouble? Hasn't enough happened to us already?"

"I don't know. But something tells me not to throw it away. I feel queer; it might be my imagination, but it is true just the same."

"All right; do anything you like with it. But we will take it out of the ship this very minute; and the other things, too. We cannot be bothered with useless baggage."

They unlashd and unloaded the boxes. Then they ate a light lunch.

“We can hide everything in one of the smaller caves,” Ted decided. “No one will go prowling around in any of them. And if—I almost said when—we need the things we shall know where to find them.”

When they had disposed of the packages they prepared to depart. It was mid-afternoon and they must lose no more time in returning to the field. The colonel, no doubt, was anxious about them already.

In order to take off properly they were compelled to head toward the great wall because a current of air came from that direction. But the distance was sufficient to enable them to clear it by an ample margin. They also wanted to circle above the valley a few times for a farewell glimpse of the hiding-place of the last of the once powerful Incan nation, for soon they should leave it, never to return.

With a steadily increasing roar of the engine the ship raced over the ground, and when it had gained enough headway Stanley pulled back the stick and the plane leaped into the air. In a moment they had cleared the wall by a hundred feet. Now they were skimming above the depression concealing the Inca's stronghold.

Ted leaned out over the rim of the gunpit in order to have a good view of the fleeting ground below them. There was the river down which Moses had steered their plunging canoe to safety on the night of their escape, spread across patches of velvet green; stone huts that looked like toy blocks were scattered over the barren places, some in rows, others in groups and villages. People, terrified by the monster thundering over their heads, were scurrying to cover behind stone walls and into doorways. Far, far in the distance was a great city; Ted recognized it as the Patallacta, or City on the Hill, where they had first met Huayna Capac, the old king. Nearer was another collection of buildings covering a large territory; that was the City of Gold, with its palaces, gardens, and the great temple of the sun. Ted remembered it, too, only too well, for it was there they had been tried and condemned because of Quizquiz's treachery. But they had escaped, thanks to Moses! And here they were again, safe, high in the air, out of reach of their enemy.

Without warning there came a few loud explosions from the exhausts, the engine hesitated, picked up again for a moment, slowed down, faltered, and stopped. Stanley realized immediately that the fuel in the main tank was exhausted, so he quickly shut off the feed-valve and turned on the supply from the

second reservoir, after which he dived at a steep angle, so that the rush of air might spin the propeller and thus crank the engine. But the expected roar did not come. Apparently the gasoline did not flow, for while the propeller was turning, there was only the coughing sound of a dead engine. He looked at the indicator in alarm; the tank was full, there was no mistake about that.

Almost before he knew it he was so near the ground that there was not time for further efforts to determine the cause of the trouble. He barely succeeded in straightening out the diving craft before it struck the earth with a thud. They cavorted along over a rock-strewn field beside the river, bounding and threatening to upset, and when the ship finally came to a stop the two were too dazed for speech. For, in their wild sprint over the uneven ground the propeller had struck a boulder and one of the blades was shattered.

They were indeed in an unenviable predicament. Not for all of the gold of the Incas should they have entered the Hidden Valley voluntarily. Yet fate had decreed that they should find themselves there, and under the most distressing circumstances. The ship was as useless as if it had been broken into bits, and there was no other means of escape.

They were as good as in the hands of Quizquiz, their

enemy, who did not know the meaning of the words fair play or mercy. He would come to them soon with his hordes of followers, overwhelm them, and gloat over them as a beast of prey might do over its victim, exulting over their helplessness and over his own unlimited power. At last his day had arrived when he could repay them for the humiliation they had caused him during the athletic contests, where they had made such a superior showing against him and the other picked youths of the nation. And their escape—that rankled, too.

As they thought of these things they grew pale and shuddered. There could be but one outcome of the misadventure, and they knew only too well what that end should be.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE TIGER'S LAIR

WITH each passing minute the helplessness of their position was more firmly driven home upon Ted and Stanley. They expected momentarily to be attacked by the horde of Indians, many of whom they had seen from above. But not a human being came within range of their vision.

“What fools we were,” Ted observed dejectedly, “not to let well enough alone. We *would* come back, and now——”

“That is only human nature, I guess. Never satisfied and always eager to take a chance. Well, we are like the pitcher that went to the well once too often.”

“Why don't they come after us, I wonder!”

“Superstitious, perhaps. But they will be here in due time. Count on that!”

Ted changed the unpleasant subject.

“Whatever could have happened that the engine died that way? Did I neglect to fill the second tank?”

“No. It's full. There is something mysterious

about it. We might try to find out what the trouble is while we are waiting."

They examined the tank for air-leaks that would reduce the pressure to the point where the fuel would not feed. But the gauge registered five pounds—more than enough. Then they began tracing the slender feed-pipe from the tank to the carburetor. Almost immediately the trouble was found. Some one had disconnected one of the joints and had stopped up the pipe with soap, so of course the gasolene could not flow.

"We have our friends, the lieutenants, to thank for that," Stanley said bitterly. "It's hard to believe that any one could do such a thing."

"They did a good job. I guess we shall never stand in their way again."

"If we had only brought a spare stick there would be a good chance of getting out of here. We could make the change in a little while and leave before any one had the courage to come near us."

"But the fact is we did not bring a spare stick. We knew better than that, too. Luck has been against us from the very start; and it's getting worse."

"We might rig up the wireless outfit and send out a call for help. That is the only thing I can think of," Stanley suggested without enthusiasm.

"It can do no harm, anyway."

They unreeled the long wire antenna and removed the lead weight, or "fish," from the end, replacing it with a bottle from the emergency kit. In flight the purpose of the fish was to keep the wire trailing out behind as straight as possible; but now they stretched the slender braided metal thread to the top of a tree near the river and tied the bottle to the highest branch. In this manner a message could be flashed into space, they did not know how far, but none could be taken in answer, as there was no receiving equipment in the plane.

Ted switched on the battery and placed his fingers on the key.

"S. O. S., S. O. S.," the spark was flashed into the ether; "stranded one hour north of Cuzco, in valley surrounded by ring of yellow vapor. Need propeller. Notify aviation-field, Cuzco."

The message was repeated a number of times.

"We are wasting time and energy," Ted said suddenly, releasing the key and cutting the switch. "In the first place, I doubt if the spark will carry beyond the valley. And I just remembered that even if they should pick it up at the flying-field, they could not possibly help us. There is no other ship in commission, and even if there were, the only persons who could

handle it are the lieutenants, who certainly would not come to help us."

"I don't look for help from the field, but I thought there might be a station somewhere near here in the mountains, a secret government outfit. And if the facts were known, it might be possible that a ship would be sent from some other camp, perhaps even from Bolivia."

"All right. I'll send it again and add our names to the end of it."

Once more the appeal was wafted into space.

"I have it," Ted shouted, jumping from his seat. "We will get a new stick right here!"

"Get one here?"

"Yes. When the Indians show up it is as likely as not that they will be overawed and treat us like gods instead of starting trouble, for didn't we come from the sky? We can keep on our goggles and helmets as a disguise; then put them to work."

"I fail to see what good that would do."

"People who can build walls and houses of large stones that fit together so perfectly they stand for centuries; who put up temples and palaces, and who make such wonderful textiles and ornaments, must be pretty skilful with their hands, and also have a good deal of intelligence to back them up. We will get

them to make a new propeller, under our direction and with our help. Then we can leave the way we came."

"It sounds wild and impracticable."

"Wait and see. Leave the matter to me."

It was not until the next day that they saw signs of life in the valley. They had eaten the last of their food and had spent a miserable night huddled up in the seats of the stranded plane.

A long column of Indians, marching in orderly manner, appeared from the direction of the river that flowed through the centre of the depression. At first the advancing throng was too far distant to distinguish its character, but as it drew nearer the two watchers saw by the gorgeous dress and glittering ornaments that many of the marchers belonged to the nobility.

"What are we going to do?" Ted asked, breaking the suspense.

"The machine guns are in good order and there are over five hundred rounds of ammunition in the magazines."

"Shall we open fire?"

"No; at least not yet. We could do that only as a last resort. It would rout them in terror, but they would come back. There are many thousands of

them, you know. If gaining a few hours' or days' time alone would help us, I should be in favor of standing them off with the guns. But that would be of no use whatever to us. As you suggested, we need their help, and the way to get it is to play on their superstitious natures and put them to work. It seems like a flimsy bulwark right now that the mob is bearing down on us; but let's try it and trust to luck. I will do the parleying and you supervise the work when the time comes. I can see no other way out of it."

"Nor I," Ted agreed.

The Indians had halted while still some distance away and were obviously holding a discussion as to whether or not they should advance. A few minutes later they again started forward, then stopped for a second conference. This time they reached a definite conclusion, for they now approached in an unfaltering manner.

Ted and Stanley put on their helmets and goggles and, at least to outward appearances, calmly awaited the coming of the mob. When the Indians had reached a point a hundred feet from the airplane they stopped.

Two files of soldiers stepped forward, halted, and turned to face one another, forming a wide lane. Scarcely had they taken their station when a proces-

sion began to advance through this formation. Ted and Stanley watched with pounding hearts and bated breath.

First came a group of menials sweeping the ground with branches of evergreens; then a number of officers or high officials garbed in brilliant robes and bearing various insignia of rank in their hands, such as silver staffs and bundles of rods. Following these, several score of youths, walking backward and singing in a monotonous cadence, strewed the ground with flowers.

A sedan of gold borne on the shoulders of twenty-five of the highest nobles came next. The curtains, heavily embroidered in colors and threads of gold, were drawn so that the occupant of the conveyance could not be seen.

When the men who carried the precious burden reached the end of the lane formed by the soldiers they halted and lowered the litter to the level of their knees. The curtains were drawn aside and an elderly man wrapped in a mantle of black-and-white and wearing numerous amulets, bracelets, and anklets stepped out upon the rug that had been spread on the ground for him and stood with outstretched hands. Apparently he belonged to the religious order, or perhaps he was a witch-doctor, for he made mysterious passes with his hands and shook a rattle of dried seeds.

After a moment he came forward a dozen paces, bowed to the ground, and throwing one corner of his mantle over his shoulder in an impressive manner, spoke.

"Benevolent spirits, demons or men," he began in a loud voice, "I know not which you may be, so know not how to receive you."

"And who are you who dares question us?" Stanley returned, pitting his own strategy against the Indian's.

"If you are spirits or demons, you must know that; for I am Villac Umu, one of the obedient servants of the great Inca, and High Priest of the Temple of the Sun. And you?"

"We have come from the sky. That is all you shall know until it pleases us to tell you more."

"Yes, yes; even the king saw the great bird swoop into the valley. It filled him with amazement and joy, for might it not be a messenger from heaven with tidings to the greatest of the Incas? If you are brothers of the moon or children of the sun, you may confide in me; the king demands to be told, so that he may prepare to receive you according to your rank."

"Why did not the king come in person?" Stanley abruptly changed the subject.

"The king is far away."

"Villac Umu, you dare say that? For all you know

we may be able to read your most secret thoughts and to separate the truth from the untruth."

"Then you must know that I speak truly. The king is not here. If he were, you should feel his very presence, though you could not see him. He is great and powerful and so terrible that he is called the Tiger."

"Go back to your people," Stanley commanded, "and return when I wave my hand like this."

The man bowed and turned without a word.

"What do you make of it?" Ted asked when he was out of hearing. "It looks like a plot of some kind."

"Certainly. Quizquiz sent him on a spying mission, to find out who or what we are. He dared not come himself, the coward, but I would bet he is concealed somewhere in the background, at a safe distance. No doubt he connects this occurrence with our previous visit, but does not quite trust his own judgment."

"So much the better. We do not want to see him."

"I will call back the old man and tell him what we need and ask him to send it to us."

"Good! Tell him to come on."

Stanley waved his hand and the waiting figure approached.

"For the present we shall need food, water, and shelter," he began, "and as soon as possible there-

after twenty of the most skilled workers in wood, who must bring with them their implements; also a dozen boards of the finest, hardest wood that grows in the valley, of these dimensions." Here he threw to the priest a ball of cord, into which he had tied knots to show the required length, breadth, and thickness of the boards. "Let them bring an abundance of glue, also."

"But there is no shelter near by," the spokesman of the Indians interposed. "Let the visitors accompany me to the villa at the baths where the Inca sojourns, and where there is comfort and refreshment."

"That is impossible. We shall remain here."

"The king will want to know to whom these supplies are to be given."

"Tell him they are for visitors from the sky who are disappointed and grieved at the suspicion with which they have been received, and who will therefore depart again after a short rest."

"The great king will be pained to receive such a message, for in addition to being terrible he is also generous and kind. He would welcome the visitors from the sky in his palace."

"Will you kindly convey our requests to him?"

"With pleasure. And in the meantime tents and food will be provided without delay." Then, after

a moment's silence: "The king will be sad and disappointed because you will not accept the hospitality of his villa. Will you not go, later perhaps, when you are rested?"

"Later, perhaps."

"Possibly the king may consent to come here as a special favor to——"

"No! It is not necessary. Urge him not to expose his sacred person to the hardships of the trail. Plead with him. We could fly to the palace later, so why subject the great Inca to any inconvenience."

Without a word the priest returned to his followers and immediately departed in the direction from which the column had come.

"He is a shrewd old fellow," Ted said when they were gone.

"But he did not find out much. You don't think he recognized our voices?"

"I hope not. You should be an actor. You played your part very impressively. I almost forgot who was talking."

A number of soldiers arrived before nightfall. They brought tents and baskets of food. After putting up the shelters, two of their number volunteered to remain to do the cooking, but Stanley ordered all of them to depart.

“We must use the greatest caution. We will be surrounded by spies. Instead of using the tents we had better take the blankets and sleep on the ground under the wings.”

“I wish the carpenters would get here, although I doubt if they can make a usable propeller. There is nothing like trying, though, and we will pretend that they can; that will be more cheerful and will give us time to look for some other possible opening for escape.”

“No telling! Something *may* turn up sooner than we expect. That has always been the way here. New things happen suddenly every so often. Let's eat.”

The carpenters did not arrive until the third day. They brought all the articles that had been asked for and were at once put to work. Their first task was to shave down the boards until their surfaces were absolutely smooth. Then they were all glued together face to face, forming a thick block, after which heavy stones were placed on top to press them firmly together while the glue set. The dexterity with which the Indians plied their tempered copper tools was remarkable. And the hopes of the two Americans rose accordingly, for they saw that the shaping of a new propeller was a possibility after all.

These hopes, however, were badly shaken a few days later. A herald arrived to announce the coming of the Inca on the following morning. The youth was dressed in a tunic made of small golden disks linked together, and comported himself in an arrogant, even impudent, manner.

"I have never known it to fail," Ted exploded. "Just when things are beginning to run smoothly a new calamity happens."

"I knew he would come. They have given him a good description of us and of the plane, and as we refused to visit him, he decided to come here. You remember how curious he was."

"Yes, and you know what curiosity did."

"I only wish Quizquiz had been the cat."

"Well, if he is determined to pay his respects to us, we shall return the compliment in due time, count on that."

"I have just thought of something," Ted said solemnly. "The way Pizarro conquered the whole Incan nation of many millions was to capture the king. Without a leader they were like so many sheep. We will capture Quizquiz."

"I should like to lay my hands on him for a few minutes at least. But how are we going to do it?"

"Induce him to take a ride after the ship is repaired."

“He would never do it. He’s too big a coward.”

“We will tell him he can soar above the clouds and absorb some of the radiance of the sun. That will flatter his vanity and he will accept eagerly in spite of his fears. Then we can land him outside the valley and hold him prisoner while we come back to continue our search for the gold. His people will do anything to help us and will give us everything they have if we will but give them back their king.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE INCA'S THREAT

WHEN the Inca hove in sight the following morning Ted and Stanley were filled with wonder and dismay. It seemed as if the whole population of the valley had come with him. Long lines of soldiers marched in advance and at the rear of the procession. In the centre were the members of his court, the nobles, and a numerous body of the clergy. The pomp and splendor affected by the youthful monarch were surprising to the two Americans, who on their previous visit had become accustomed to the gorgeous attire of Huayna Capac and to the lavish display of wealth with which he surrounded himself.

A horde of menials swept the roadway in advance of the royal party; youths in snowy garments sprinkled it with scented water and strewed the petals of orchids and other rare flowers over the way the ruler must pass.

The golden litter in which the king rode was not the one used by his father, for, according to custom, upon the death of an Inca, all those things connected intimately with his use accompanied his remains to their final resting-place or were destroyed. Quizquiz had a

more massive one, encrusted with emeralds, which were ingeniously mounted in the pale, pure gold, so as to form figures of the sun rising above the mountain tops, of llamas and of condors. And while fifty of his subjects of the highest rank trudged along under the oppressive weight of the litter and its occupant, Quizquiz, reclining on soft cushions, amused himself by striking at them with a long-lashed whip. The carriers seemed not to resent this abuse; they deemed it an honor thus to serve their sovereign, knowing all the while that to trip or fall while bearing the sacred burden would constitute a crime punishable by death.

Very obviously the Inca had carefully planned to impress the visitors with his power and magnificence. When the throng reached the helpless airplane and its equally helpless occupants, it formed a circle around them, leaving a space in the centre not over a hundred feet across. The golden litter was carried much nearer, so that the monarch could have a clear view of what was in front of him.

Ted and Stanley, their faces well concealed by their helmets, goggles, and upturned collars, returned the insolent stare of Quizquiz, and at the same time took in the colorful display of his trappings. On his head he wore the scarlet fringe, or *borla*, that fell down to his eyes, with two slender, glittering feathers standing

up in front; that was his crown. His mantle, falling loosely about his rather well-knit body, was a mass of shimmering folds of rich brocade, gold and silver threads woven upon a white ground. His arms, which were exposed to view, were bedecked with bracelets; rings covered his fingers.

"I am Quizquiz, Child of the Sun, most illustrious of all the Incas that have honored the earth with their presence," he announced haughtily, toying with his whip as he spoke. "My authority is unquestioned and unlimited. My subjects do my bidding. At a word from me they die, if it suits my pleasure. Indeed, I am called the Tiger."

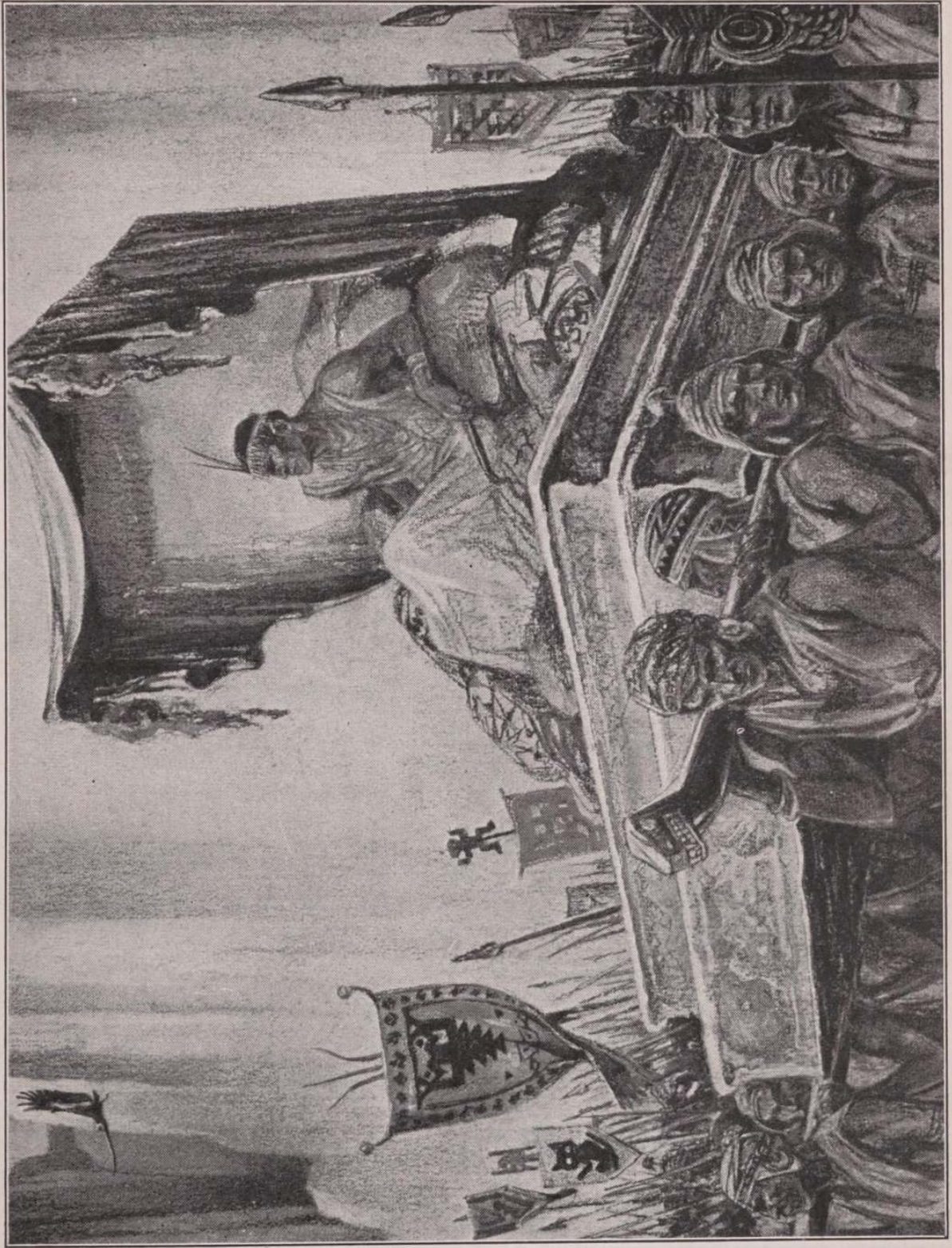
"None disputes the glory or the power of the great king," Stanley replied promptly.

"Then make known your mission. The valley is sacred ground. Intruders are not welcome, as two men from the outer world learned during the reign of Huayna Capac, my father."

At the latter words the two Americans detected a shade of hatred in the speaker's voice, while his eyes flashed fire.

"We desire food, shelter, and rest until it suits our convenience to return to the sky whence we came. That is a small request to make of a king."

"You came from the sky! I saw that with my



Very obviously the Inca had carefully planned to impress the visitors

own eyes. Are you gods that you travel through space like the spirits of the departed?"

"We are masters of the air," Ted said. He did not like the attitude of the questioner, and Stanley was visibly uneasy.

For a moment Quizquiz surveyed them. His face, while handsome, bore a sullen expression, and the beady black eyes and drooping mouth bespoke a cruel and cunning disposition.

"Yes, yes," he said impatiently. "But are you gods? Are you brothers of the sun, or companions of the moon? You speak with the voices of men. You ask for food and rest, like mortals."

"All who would make known their thoughts must speak with the voices of men. The Inca is no exception."

Quizquiz was plainly puzzled.

"And the thing that carries you through the air," he asked, "is it bird, beast, or devil?"

"That you shall hear for yourself. It speaks with the voice of thunder."

According to a prearranged plan, Ted sprang to the ground and spun the propeller, while Stanley operated the switch and throttle. With a snort the engine was under way and rapidly picked up speed, until the hand of the indicator registered five hundred revolutions a

minute, the shattered blade of the propeller adding a whining shriek to the roar of the exhausts.

The Indians stared wide-eyed at the marvellous performance, and many, no doubt, would have liked nothing better than to turn and flee, but the knowledge that a show of fright would bring dire punishment restrained them from following their impulse.

Stanley cut the switch and the engine stopped.

"Now you have heard," he said. "Let your priests and wise men interpret the message."

Quizquiz called Soncco and a number of other sages and after they had all admitted that they were unable to interpret the strange sound he dismissed them in anger with a flick of his whip.

"Twenty strokes of the lash for each one," he shouted, and a body of soldiers promptly stepped forward to obey the order.

"Mercy, great and glorious father," one of the older men cried out, falling upon his knees and extending his hands in supplication.

"An additional ten strokes for the beggar! Take him away," Quizquiz ordered. "And if any one of them so much as sigh while the lash is falling on his back, run him through with a lance."

"If it pleases the king, I will explain the message," Stanley announced.

"I will hear your words, but let your speech be brief, for I am weary."

"The great vehicle would carry the Inca into the sky, high above the tallest mountain-peaks, where the air is pure and where not even the condor dares venture; out of reach of the contaminating earth, to play among the clouds and to bask in the bright sunlight; it would take him so high that the radiance of the sun could descend upon his sacred person; men would be blinded by the dazzling splendor of the great king," Stanley announced solemnly.

"Is that the message?"

"That is my interpretation. A few days are needed for preparations for the momentous event. And then, the flight into the heavens which even an Inca has never visited."

If these speeches were calculated to flatter the vanity of Quizquiz, the two were doomed to disappointment. For a moment he regarded them with narrowing eyelids while his hands toyed nervously with the whip. Then he flew into a violent rage.

"Now indeed do I know that you are not gods, nor even the messengers of gods," he shrieked, rising from his cushions and raising his whip as if to strike in their direction, "for else you must know that I, Quizquiz, mightiest of all the great kings, never touch my foot

upon the contaminating earth; I honor my highest nobles by permitting them to carry my holy person from place to place. I need not the radiance of the sun, for I am already more resplendent than his brightest rays; is it not through my benevolence that the sun shines at all, and the stars come forth at night? It is I who permits the wind to blow and the rain to fall. Your words are blasphemy to my ears. All who live are my slaves, and to them my words are laws. Depart at once or you remain here forever!"

The two had no time to ponder the quandary in which this unexpected turn of affairs had placed them, and for a moment they were speechless.

"Villac Umu!" Quizquiz called. "Come to my side!"

Attendants brought forward the sedan containing the high priest, which had been kept a few paces to the rear previously. It was the same conveyance in which he had appeared some days before to interrogate them.

"How may I serve my revered father?" Villac smirked, with a great show of humility. "My one hope, my one desire is that I may one day give my unworthy life to please the king."

"Speak not of death, Villac Umu, for I have need of you alone among all men. You, who relieve me of

the burden of communing with the gods and with the spirits, tell me, who are these insolent ones who dare invade my kingdom, and who disobey me when I command them to depart."

The high priest languidly raised his hands to his eyes, and for a full minute appeared to be lost in thought. Then he stood up and pointed toward Ted and Stanley with one hand. "I have divined the mystery," he announced.

"Then speak, good Villac," Quizquiz said indulgently. "Wisdom such as yours is given to few men. I knew I could depend on you."

"The visitors from the sky are no other than the two strangers from the outer world who came into the valley during the reign of Huayna Capac, your father, and then escaped after having been condemned to death for their treason against the king. The great bird on which they ride is a contrivance of the evil one, and I know not the limits of its power. But as for the men, I recognize their voices, even though they feign hoarseness, and the color of their eyes is not unfamiliar to me. Seize them, great king, before they escape."

"He talks like a madman," Stanley quickly interrupted, quivering with apprehension.

"Still, I am inclined to believe his words. Uncover your heads and faces."

“When the Inca removes his crimson fringe, for, as the *borla* is the emblem of his position, so does this head-dress proclaim ours.”

The crowd began to surge forward at this bold defiance hurled at their sovereign, whose eyes blazed as he raised his jewelled hands to heaven. It was a signal to the soldiers. Like an avalanche they swept upon the plane. The engine not running, Stanley's gun was useless, but Ted swung his weapon and pulled the trigger. Three shots rattled out in quick succession; then the gun jammed and was worthless. The mob was upon them in a flash. Ted and Stanley fought valiantly, but the fight was of short duration. Numerous hands clutched them; they struck back with wrenches, but so soon as one of the soldiers dropped another jumped into his place. The odds against them were too great to be overcome.

In a short time the two had been dragged from their stronghold, their clothes nearly torn from their bodies, and barely conscious of the fact that they were being carried to the Inca's litter.

Quizquiz's eyes gleamed with a triumphant and malicious fire. He gloated over his prisoners, and could scarcely keep from leaping from his seat to pounce upon them.

“Ever since the day I caused the hole to be dug

under the wall and learned of your escape, I knew you would return; that your greed for gold would overcome your better sense, and that you would again fall into my power. The great day has arrived. You are here, my captives, and I, Quizquiz, am king now! You shall suffer for those insults to me, and for your treachery to Huayna Capac when you protected the youth he had condemned to die. You shall not get away this time, be assured of that. You shall know what it is to suffer bitter agony, and when death comes to relieve you from the torture you will welcome it. Nor shall you long be kept in ignorance of the fate that awaits you, for the knowledge will add to your torment. The highest intellect of the nation shall pass the sentence. The valley will be rid of you forever and we shall live in peace, knowing well that your secret ends with your lives," he roared.

"Quizquiz," said Stanley, recovering his senses sufficiently to speak, and shaking his clenched fists up at the Inca before the guards roughly grasped his arms. "You cannot frighten us with your threats; it is you who are afraid, not we. We got the better of you once and we can do it again. If you are a man, come down and fight me now. I will show you up for the weakling you are, depending on that villainous crea-

ture called Villac Umu for every word that comes out of your mouth. You haven't a thought of your own; if a bird had so little sense it would fly backwards. You may kill us if you dare, but so surely as you do our friends in the outer world will come in search of us; they will find the Hidden Valley and enter it as we did, from the sky. Your crimson crown will be dragged in the mud and your people exterminated. Now do your worst and the responsibility for what follows will rest on your own head."

The throng stood silent as death, hardly daring to breathe. No one had thought it possible that any human being could utter such a tirade against the Inca and live. In awe, they expected the speaker to be struck to the ground by a hand from heaven, for had he not insulted a divinity? Even the king was speechless and waited for the miracle that he felt sure must happen, and that would vindicate his position. But nothing occurred. Then the people began to stir; into their minds had come the first suspicion that Quizquiz was not a god, but very human like the rest of them.

"I am waiting." Stanley broke the spell with the sound of his voice. "Will you come down and fight, or do you admit before all your people that you are a coward and afraid of me?"

In response Quizquiz flicked his whip and the nobles holding his litter turned and started away.

The multitude, however, did not go away; it broke up into small groups and in hushed voices discussed the momentous events of the day.

CHAPTER IX

SONCCO'S SHREWDNESS

THE two prisoners were closely guarded by a double circle of soldiers until the day drew to a close; then the guards tied their hands securely behind their backs, but not without a struggle, and lashed their feet with tough thongs and fastened the ends to stakes driven into the ground. A small shelter-tent was erected over them.

There they remained throughout the long hours of the night, helpless and suffering from the numerous bruises they had received in the encounter and from the cramped position of their limbs. Added to these tortures were hunger and a burning thirst, for they had been given neither food nor drink. And during all this time they heard the monotonous tramp of many sentinels walking around their prison.

In the morning the thongs were loosened and coarse bread and a basin of water were placed before them. As they ate Stanley tried to engage the guards in conversation.

“What is all the noise outside?” he asked.

The soldiers did not reply.

"Is the Inca still here? Tell him to call; I have thought of several other things I should like to say to him." But still no reply, so Stanley concluded that further attempts would be futile.

When the two had eaten, the guards gathered up the empty bowls and departed. Ted looked through the opening in the tent; what he saw made him stare in wonder. There was great activity in the direction he could see. Tents in hundreds were being put up and groups of soldiers, led by gaily dressed officers, were marching back and forth. The surrounding country was assuming the aspect of a vast encampment.

Stanley, too, came up to the opening.

"Looks like preparations for a battle," he said.

"And it is all for our benefit, no doubt. I wonder what Quizquiz intends to do?"

"We shall find out soon enough. I wonder where he is?"

They tried to venture out of their tent, but the guards pounced upon them immediately and forced them back into the prison.

Days passed slowly for the two confined within the narrow space of their shelter; but, fortunately, they were not again bound. Evidently their captor had no

fear that they might escape—the place was too well guarded. The suspense was terrible. They knew only too well that all the preparations going on around them were directly connected with their fate; but what that fate was to be they could not even surmise.

One day Ted noticed that Stanley was counting a number of knots that he had tied in a string. "Poor fellow," he thought as he watched him sadly, "his mind is going, but I cannot blame him. It's enough to drive any one mad. Sometimes I think I feel myself slipping, too"; the latter was uttered half aloud.

"What are you mumbling about?" Stanley asked, looking up. "I guess I know; it is enough to drive anybody crazy."

"I was just thinking the same thing about you when I saw you playing with that string. What are you doing?"

"What, this? Take a good look and see if you can't guess."

After a while Ted was compelled to admit that he could not make out the meaning of the string.

"Well," Stanley informed him, "this is my calendar. I am keeping track of the days. Each morning I tie another knot. We left Cuzco on the 12th of the month; it is the 26th to-day."

"How the days pass, even if the hours drag! I

would not have thought it is so long since we got into this. By now we have been given up for lost. I can only hope the colonel suspects what happened and starts an investigation. One of the sentinels must have been in the plot and may talk if he is cornered."

Further conversation was checked by the entrance of an officer of the guard attended by a score of soldiers. He looked at them haughtily and elevated his dagger to the waist-line, point outward.

"Quizquiz, Inca, Child of the Sun, greatest king that ever came from heaven to rule the earth, commands that you appear before his sacred person. Prepare at once to face the mighty sovereign," he announced in a loud voice.

"Did he tell you to say that?" Stanley asked.

"He did. You will come at once. The king waits on no man."

"I thought so. It sounds like him. Tell Quizquiz, Inca, and biggest coward that ever lived that we are ready to fight at any time he desires."

"You dare be insolent! You shall pay for this," the officer retorted. "Come with me at once."

"Suppose we refuse?"

"Refuse the king's command?" incredulously.

"Why not? He is nothing to us."

"Then you will be carried forcibly."

“Not a bad idea. Being carried is better than walking. The king rides from place to place, so why not we?”

At a word of command from their leader the soldiers seized the two, raised them to their shoulders and passed quickly out of the tent.

An encampment of great size had sprung up on the level floor of the valley. It was well laid out. The tents were placed in straight rows with wide streets between them, and there seemed to be armed guards and soldiers everywhere.

The Inca's quarters, covering a large plot of ground, were easily distinguishable on account of the brilliantly colored tapestries that adorned the sides of the tents. In the rear was a spacious courtyard, and it was there that the monarch awaited them, sitting in a raised chair covered with a silky brown vicuna robe. His nobles and amautas, or wise men, formed groups on each side. In front was a double row of soldiers with spears held in a horizontal position, the points outward, similar to the “on guard” position of bayonet drill.

The prisoners were brought close to the rows of spear-points and unceremoniously deposited on the ground. Quizquiz cast one scornful, triumphant glance in their direction, but without one word to them turned and addressed the officials at his sides.

“Many, many months ago, as you are all aware, I, Quizquiz the Great, commanded you, my abject servants to devise the means of punishment for these two creatures from the outer world upon their return to my kingdom, for my unfailing wisdom told me that they should one day return to complete the plunder of my treasure. They are here; they are in my hands. I am impatient to mete out to them their justly deserved fate. But the modes of execution that have been placed before me are too mild, too lenient; they must be more severe, more terrible, and death must come only after a period of lingering horror and fear of a very apparent end. You have not justified my confidence in your intelligence. If you have not the knowledge to better serve me, I would be well rid of your presence also. Therefore, I have selected twelve of the highest in rank from among you, and do hereby command you to appear before me to-morrow to make known to me the method of punishment you have devised. But,” and he slowly turned his head to look first at one, then the other of the groups of silent officials, “in order that I may not be further annoyed with your stupidity, I shall cause to be inflicted upon each one of you the mode of torture he prepares for the prisoners, if I deem it too mild for them. Villac Umu, High Priest of the Temple of the Sun, will now

announce the names of the twelve whom it has been my pleasure to honor. Proceed, good Villac!"

The throng stood in awe, while Villac Umu walked ceremoniously to the front and, first kneeling, kissed both the sovereign's feet with a show of great humility. Then the high priest took up his position at one side of the king. Aged men inclined their heads forward and pushed back their snowy locks with trembling hands to hear the better; others looked stolid or indifferent, while in the eyes of not a few appeared a gleam of resentment and defiance.

The high priest, in a loud and officious voice, called a dozen names in rapid succession, and finished by admonishing the chosen ones to think well before they spoke or they should pay dearly for their haste. After bestowing a look of approval on Villac Umu, the Inca was carried into his apartments, which was the sign of dismissal for the assembly.

Not a word was spoken by any one as the crowd dispersed. A pall had fallen over all, for the officials whose names had been announced were the highest, the most respected, and the best beloved in the nation. For the twelve it was a virtual sentence; according to the terms announced, only one of them had a possible chance of escape, and Quizquiz was to be their judge.

As Ted and Stanley were being taken back to their prison tent, walking this time by preference, they realized that Quizquiz had had some deep, ulterior motive when he called the assembly. It was but a flimsy way of finding an excuse to rid himself of the most popular of his officials. He envied them their knowledge and ability and the just esteem in which they were held by the populace. But even he, powerful as he was, did not dare condemn them without some pretext to his people. And, judging by the saddened looks of the unfortunate ones, they, too, understood his true motives. However, so accustomed were they to obeying without question the mandates of their ruler, that apparently they would rather suffer death than question an action of a Child of the Sun.

Quizquiz was indeed developing all the unjust, tyrannical, and evil tendencies of which he had shown symptoms in his youth. Added to these was his colossal conceit. If he continued to govern his people in his present manner he must, before long, succeed in destroying all the sacred traditions of the nation, and the nation itself, unless there should be a revolution against his despotism.

That night Ted and Stanley had a visitor. They could not see his face in the darkness, but they knew that he must be a person of distinction, for at his word

of command the guards withdrew to a distance at which their footfalls were scarcely audible.

The curtained end of the shelter parted, and a stooped figure entered hastily. That much but no more they could see in the semi-darkness.

"I am Soncco," a tremulous voice announced without ceremony. "Do you not remember me? I was one of the two amautas who instructed you in preparation for your position as princes when you were here before. You cannot see my face, and a light is forbidden you, but do you not remember my voice?"

The two feared some new trap, so were on the alert.

"If you are Soncco, give some proof of the fact," Ted demanded.

"I can soon prove that I am no other. If you will but recall, one day when your fare was reduced to almost nothing, you complained to me about it. I told you that others, including Quizquiz, son of the Inca, were undergoing the same ordeal. You replied that 'if the others can do it we can.' Those words impressed me. I admired your courage and nobleness of spirit, and I felt that the nation would be honored in admitting you to the lofty station you were about to occupy. I was more sad than I can express when the council condemned you, for I knew in my heart that you were guiltless of any intention of doing

wrong. Men of your character could not commit treason against the good Huayna Capac, who had been so generous to you. And now I regret that your punishment must be so terrible, for I feel that again you are innocent of evil intentions against us."

"We thank you, Soncco, and assure you that your confidence is not misplaced. We did not intend to visit this place again. An accident brought us here. We had no choice in the matter. We would have given anything to have avoided it. But why talk of it? When we were here before you taught us how to live; now you have come to instruct us how to face the ordeal that is being prepared for us! Am I right?"

"No. This time I seek your advice. Tell me how I may meet my fate."

"You, Soncco? What makes you talk like that?"

"Because I am compelled to. Was not my name called to-day by Villac Umu, High Priest of the Temple of the Sun? It means that I and all the other luckless ones must perish by the means we suggest for your punishment, for Quizquiz will heed none of us. It is merely a pretext for getting rid of those of us who have won his disfavor."

"We thought the same thing. And while Quizquiz is bad enough, there is another who is infinitely worse; that one is Villac Umu, who is the real ruler. You

know that as well as we do. Then why do you meekly submit, like a flock of brainless llamas? Why not be men and fight for your rights and your lives?"

"Quizquiz is king. The Inca always has been looked upon as a holy being. In all the history of the nation none has ever resisted him because he is a Child of the Sun, and no one dares question his actions now. He cannot do wrong. If his will seems unjust to us it is only because we lack the wisdom to see the higher aims that are clear to him. We are as nothing compared to his magnificence."

"Soncco, it is hard to believe that you really think that. You seem to be a man of intelligence, but if you are really in earnest it is time you knew better. The Inca is a person like any one else, and is great only because the people make him so. Strip him of his crown, his jewels, and his finery, and he would look exactly like any other human being. Dress him in the rags of a menial, and he would not even be recognized in the street. He eats, drinks, and sleeps just as we do; he is a king because the people are ignorant enough to want some one to worship and to bow to," Stanley said.

"If you were to choose your own mode of punishment, what would it be?" Soncco evaded.

"I understand now why he came," Stanley whis-

pered to Ted. "He knows we should pick out something easy, so he figures on getting off easily himself, for he is to receive what he proposes for us. Let's humor him. Who knows what it may lead to?" Then to Soncco: "Nothing could be more terrible than to keep us in the valley the rest of our natural lives and to do everything possible to make us live a long, long time. We should be given full liberty, of course, to come and go as we please, and should live in state, like princes. But still we should be prisoners of the Inca."

Soncco appeared to be surprised.

"What would be so terrible about that?" he asked.

"Just think of it, prisoners in this small place, when we have been accustomed to the outer world. We long to travel its vast lands, its great rivers, and the mighty oceans. We have even conquered the air and can fly from place to place like the birds. Here we are far from home and all those we hold dear; we should never see them again, nor would they know what had befallen us. What could be more horrible?"

"I understand now," Soncco replied with enthusiasm. "You speak wisely. I shall suggest it at the meeting to-morrow, and I can only hope that my words will be heeded. And now I must go. Good night, my friends."

As he stole away they heard him mutter to himself: "I am afraid Quizquiz will never let them off so easily, for they might escape; but, at any rate, he can do nothing worse to me, for if he refuses the request for them he will be compelled to grant it to me. I am safe. And the proposition offers the one chance to——"

They could hear no more, for he had passed into the night. Soon the guards were back at their posts and the steady tramp of their feet was the last sound the two heard before falling into a fitful sleep.

CHAPTER X

THE PRISONERS CAPTURE THE KING

AFTER a few hours Stanley awoke with a start. The seriousness of their position made lengthy or restful sleep impossible. As he lay thinking of their plight and raking his brain for some means by which its outcome could be averted, he heard a sigh from Ted.

“Are you awake?” he whispered.

“Yes. I have given up trying to sleep. I am thinking of to-morrow and what it may bring. For once I wish the night would last forever.”

“I have made up my mind. I am not going to stay here longer waiting for them to drag me away——”

“That’s just the way I feel. Suppose we try to get away. It seems hopeless, but we can try. The guards may be overconfident or drowsy. And, anyway, whatever they would do to us if they caught us would be quicker than the plan Quizquiz is preparing.”

“Then let’s go. Try to get hold of a weapon of some kind; perhaps the guards have stacked their

arms, or we might be able to overpower one of them. A knife, a spear, anything will help if we have to fight our way through."

Apparently the watch was being changed, for they had not heard the footfalls of the sentinels for several minutes.

Cautiously stealing out of the tent, they listened for a moment; then they began to crawl in the direction of the river. If they could gain its banks they would brave the current in an attempt to reach Uti, beyond the wall, and once there the numberless caves offered places of at least temporary security against any horde of besiegers.

When they had crawled a distance of twenty yards they heard the sound of approaching footsteps; they stopped and flattened themselves to the ground. Four sentries passed between them and the end of their tent.

Ted touched Stanley lightly on the shoulder. "We are through the line," he whispered. Again they resumed their stealthy advance. From out of the blackness ahead of them came the murmur of flowing water; it must be the river.

And then, without warning, a loud clangor broke upon their startled ears; it seemed to come from all around them at the same time, and bewildered them

by its suddenness. Before they fully realized what had happened, a dozen soldiers with flaming torches came running from various directions, shouting as they ran. The two sprang to their feet and started away as fast as they could, but other guards headed them off and, tripping them, pinned them to the ground. Before long they had been taken back to their tents, bruised from the rough treatment they had received, but leaving several of the soldiers sprawled on the ground from the mauling they had given in return.

“We travel in circles,” Stanley panted. “Here we are, back again in the place we started from. But that was a clever plan of theirs; we have to give them credit for that. And we fell for it like a couple of chumps.”

“What caused all the racket?” Ted, too, was breathing hard. “I don’t know yet what happened, unless some one saw us and gave the alarm.”

“Nothing of the kind. We gave the alarm ourselves, or at least I did. The place is surrounded with a rope fence with bells attached to it. I was all tangled up in it.”

“Well,” Ted tried to console his companion, at the same time paying him a graceful compliment, “you could not help it. You got into it only because you

were in the lead; if I had been first I should have done the same thing."

The end of that night, wretched as it was, came all too soon. As day was breaking the journey began to the City of Gold, where stood the great Temple of the Sun, for it was in the court of this sacred edifice that the sentence was to be pronounced. The procession was already formed when the prisoners joined it. Every one of the numerous host was in his proper place in the line that reached far into the distance, excepting only a small detachment of soldiers that remained behind to look after the encampment.

Quizquiz truly travelled in all the barbaric splendor and luxury at his command. Riding aloft in his golden litter, borne on the shoulders of his uncomplaining nobles, he looked down haughtily upon the throng that formed his escort; he even gazed defiantly or with a superior air at the snow-capped mountains in the distance marking the confines of his empire, as if they, too, were subject to his wishes. Occasionally he amused himself by striking those nearest him with his whip, or in admiring the flashing jewels on his fingers and around his neck.

The march was interrupted frequently while the monarch took long draughts of corn beer from golden goblets served by the numerous attendants.

Other menials of the retinue carried cages of live ducks, doves, and tinamou or mountain partridges, so that their sovereign might not want for these highly esteemed delicacies while on the march. Another group had charge of the Inca's wardrobe, which was of necessity very large, for with the exception of the outer mantles he never donned the same garment more than once. After having been worn it was discarded forever, nor could it be used by any other person after having graced the sacred person of the king. It was either burned outright or stored in the repositories of the palace to be destroyed with much ceremony at some future time.

One incident of the march well illustrated the cruel and unfeeling nature of Quizquiz, as well as his entire lack of justice or desire to provide for the welfare of his people.

In passing through one of the settlements an elderly man rushed out of the crowd and knelt in the street; as the royal litter approached he threw himself flat on the ground and begged the Inca to grant him an audience.

"What does this insolent creature want?" Quizquiz asked in a surly voice of Villac Umu, whose sedan was carried directly in back of the king's.

"Speak!" Villac commanded the man.

"My allotment of land has been taken from me by my gracious lord's governor. I have nothing now and am starving," the aged man pleaded.

"Why was it taken?" asked the high priest. "What crime did you commit? Conceal nothing from the all-knowing king!"

"No crime. I was not even accused of a crime. My plot was more fertile than that of the officer, so he envied me and took it away. I beseech you that justice be done."

Quizquiz flew into a rage.

"The governor represents me and enforces my laws upon an unworthy people. If he desires your land he shall have it. What right have you to anything? Everything is mine. You have lived many years by my grace and by my father's, yet you complain. Is it true that you now have nothing—no place to which to go?"

"It is true, most noble king. I know not where to turn."

"It is well; throw him into the river!"

Two soldiers seized the luckless man and hurried him away. With a chuckle Quizquiz ordered that the march be resumed, while Villac Umu nodded approvingly.

Ted and Stanley were enraged at this high-handed

action on the part of the Inca. Even the meanest of his subjects had always retained the right to plead his case before the king, according to the law of the nation. Huayna Capac had without exception listened patiently, caused an investigation to be made, and if one of his officials had been guilty of oppression or had administered the laws badly he had been severely punished. It was obvious that Quizquiz had launched forth upon a career of cruelty and extermination that would surely lead to his own downfall.

Arrived at the Golden City, the procession proceeded directly to the Temple of the Sun. The soldiers arranged themselves to form a hollow square. The nobles, priests, and amautas formed groups in the centre of it. In front of the massive structure of the temple stood a giant tree, its topmost branches reaching well over a hundred feet above the ground. Trailing plants that hugged the earth grew at its base; they were symbolic of the Inca towering high above his lowly, cringing subjects.

The king's litter was carried to the very door of the temple and placed upon the top of the stone terrace, from which a rug-covered runway led into the building. A carpet of soft chinchilla skins covered the floor of the passage.

Quizquiz arose, stepped out of his conveyance, and

in a haughty, deliberate manner entered the holy edifice—alone and unattended. No one dared enter the temple while the king was within, lest they disturb his devotions.

A loud voice raised in a chant soon came out of the open door and reached the ears of the waiting multitude, which promptly fell upon its knees; supposedly Quizquiz was praying to his Sun-God for guidance in dealing with his prisoners in a proper manner, but the tone and words were of such nature that they were obviously calculated to impress his hearers rather than any divinity.

The soldiers, too, were kneeling, with heads bowed low. For a moment Ted and Stanley stood alone. Not an eye was turned upon them.

“Come!” Stanley whispered. “This is our chance.”

Closely followed by Ted, he sprang lightly to the raised platform, and before the guards knew what had occurred the two had disappeared into the gloomy building. Knowing that there could be no pursuit, they moved slowly and silently through a corridor flanked by tall columns of stone, and reached the main room, which was the place of worship.

They saw Quizquiz in the distance, and once again they gasped in astonishment. They had fully expected that at least in the temple the vainglorious monarch

would dispense with some of his conceit. But they had been mistaken.

A representation of the sun, emblazoned with gold and jewels, covered the entire end wall of the building. Instead of kneeling, or at least standing in front of it, with outstretched arms, as the ritual prescribed, Quizquiz had seated himself on a cushion, with his back turned toward the sacred emblem. That accounted for the fact that his voice could be heard so distinctly by the multitude outside. But, most profane of all, he held a large metal mirror in his hands and admired his own reflection the while he prayed.

So absorbed was he in this fascinating occupation that he did not see the two until they had left their place of concealment and were close upon him. Hearing the sound of their footsteps at last, he looked up to ascertain their cause. As he beheld the onrushing pair a shudder passed over his frame and the mirror fell from his hands; his arms froze in midair while a look of terror came into his face. Before he could recover the two had reached his side.

“One sound and I will choke the life out of you,” Stanley threatened in a whisper, at the same time grasping him by the throat, while Ted, picking up a heavy gold sceptre that lay on the floor, raised it

above the startled ruler's head in a manner that left no doubt as to his intentions.

Quizquiz was too frightened to speak.

"You are our prisoner now, understand?" Stanley continued. "The tables are turned. Now you know just how we felt up to a few minutes ago, and you will learn other things, too, before we are through with you. Not a sound, remember, or it will be the last one you ever make."

"You dared follow me here?" At last words came to the lips of the terrified monarch, but his voice was scarcely audible; the thing seemed so impossible to him. "Here! in the holy temple—in the presence of the Sun-God and of my sacred forefathers——"

"Shut up!" Stanley commanded, while Ted's eyes, becoming accustomed to the semi-darkness, made out a row of mummies seated on gold thrones that lined the walls on both sides of them.

"Take us to one of the inner chambers," Stanley continued, "and we will tell you what to do, but do not forget, no treachery, or you know what will happen,"—and he tightened his fingers perceptibly.

"I am the king; I obey no man's orders," Quizquiz protested weakly.

"You *were* king; now you are our prisoner and you will do exactly as we say. Move on!"

Without another word the captive led them to a small, bare room, with four walls of solid, hewn stone. Light was admitted through an opening ten feet above their heads. Ted stood guard at the door, while Stanley pushed Quizquiz to the centre of the floor, still retaining his hold on the prisoner's throat.

In this position they stood for an appreciable length of time, looking at one another, the Inca's wily brain busy trying to devise some means of outwitting his captors, and the two Americans hoping they could gain their end without resort to the violence they had promised in the event their demands were refused.

CHAPTER XI

THE COUNSEL OF THE WISE MEN

QUIZQUIZ was rapidly regaining his self-control and haughty reserve. He folded his arms majestically and looked at the two who had made him prisoner.

“What do you want?” he asked with a sneer.

“You know without asking. Set us free and permit us to return to the outer world.”

“And give you all my gold to take with you. Is that all?”

“We do not want your gold. We told you that before.”

“If I should grant that request you should soon return with some new and more powerful contrivance to rob me. And others would come with you to make sure of it. I know your thoughts. Gold, gold, gold! That is all the white men think of and they stop at nothing to get it. The history of my people proves it.”

“We are not going to argue. If you don't grant our request at once——” Stanley's fingers again tightened, while Ted advanced with the heavy rod.

“It shall be as you say. Now I shall go.”

"No, you will stay. We are not fools. What assurance have we that you will keep your promise?"

"The word of a king."

"That means nothing to us. We must have something more substantial than that, something more reliable."

"I will make a solemn oath in the presence of my ancestors. There is nothing more binding in the laws and rites of the nation. No one could break a promise so given and live."

"Then swear, and after you have taken the oath we will tell you what to add to it; and you will talk loud enough so that the people outside can understand every word you say. Make it clear that we are free to leave the valley, and that you will help us in every way to do so; that if you fail to keep your promise, you will forfeit your throne and submit to the vilest treatment any mortal ever received in the valley; admit that your action toward us was unjustified, and apologize for it. Also, as a sign of good faith, tell the truth about Villac Umu, and command the soldiers to arrest him at once and throw him into the river—this to be done before we let you out of the temple; appoint Soncco to take his place. When you have said all this, we will dictate the rest of your speech."

Quizquiz appeared startled, but soon the old manner returned.

"But not here," he protested. "The people could not hear me, and to make the oath binding it must be made in the sanctuary before the image of the Sun-God, and where the bodies of my dead and glorious ancestors repose."

"Then come at once. And be sure that you attempt no trickery. One suspicious move and you will never see the daylight again."

They quickly retraced their steps, holding the Inca between them, to the main hall of the building. It was damp and gloomy. The rows of dead seemed waiting in silent expectancy; each was seated on his golden throne in a niche in the wall. Their heads were inclined forward, as if in a listening attitude, and their hands, adorned with many jewels, were crossed on their breasts. The crimson fringe adorned the royal heads, and the attire was of the richest. Most of them had long, white hair, indicating that they had attained a ripe age. Obviously they had been embalmed by some secret process, and were in such a splendid state of preservation that they seemed more asleep than dead.

"This place is holy and you have desecrated it by your presence," Quizquiz hissed as they reached a

stone sacrificial altar which stood in the centre of the floor. "You have insulted me, the king, have laid your hands on my sacred person, have gazed upon the venerable dead, and——"

"And we will do one other thing—you know what it is—if you don't hurry and do what we told you to. Now take your oath; turn around so every one can hear you, then repeat what we said."

"Release me so I can kneel!"

Stanley relaxed his hold and the Inca knelt close to the altar. Raising both hands he began in a solemn voice: "In this holy temple, in the presence of my forefathers now resting in the glory of the sun, I, Quizquiz, king, swear that——"

At the same moment Stanley noticed a movement in the altar wall. A panel was sliding noiselessly to one side. He made a quick lunge for Quizquiz, and Ted struck with the heavy staff just as the Inca dived headlong into the dark opening that had been revealed under the stones. The door sprang back instantly and from beyond it a mocking voice continued in triumph: "Your punishment will be a thousand times more terrible because of this. You shall see!"

The two stared at one another in blank amazement. It had happened so quickly that it was over before they were fully aware of what was taking place. They

pushed and tugged at the panel, but it resisted their efforts.

In kneeling to pray, Quizquiz had pressed a secret mechanism that operated the sliding front of the altar. And he had made good his escape. He had out-generalled them just as it had seemed certain that their release and departure from the valley was assured. The blow stunned them.

"He's gone for good," Stanley panted. "It's all over with us now."

"Why didn't we fix him while we had him? Why didn't we at least tie his hands and feet? We might have known what to expect. Listen!"

A loud shout from without rent the air. The Inca had reappeared and the people acclaimed him with loud applause. Suddenly the noise stopped; some one was speaking. Scarcely knowing what they did the two crept forward to listen. The voice was Villac Umu's:

"Our holy and adored sovereign, having finished his devotions in the temple, now commands that we, his unworthy slaves, proceed with our declarations. Tupichi, commander of the army, advance, kiss the king's feet with reverence, and speak. But hold! First I must again remind you of the responsibility attached to the honor bestowed upon you by the

king, for each high honor, like each exalted position, carries with it the heavy burden of rendering worthy account of the opportunities it affords. Therefore, should your proposal displease our generous and beloved ruler, you must suffer the fate you suggested for the prisoners."

Tupichi came forward as he was bidden, knelt humbly, and kissed the Inca's feet. After a slight pause, lengthened by the silence of the crowd, his tremulous voice could be heard.

"If it pleases the king, let them be stoned to death," he said meekly.

"You have the courage to insult me thus?" It was Quizquiz who replied. "That penalty is inflicted on petty thieves and like offenders, not on persons like these. The army shall have a new leader; for you, Tupichi, shall be stoned."

"Huascar, advance and let our ears drink in the thoughts that have been conjured by your fertile brain," Villac Umu commanded in a croaking voice. Again the silence of expectancy pervaded the air.

"My unworthy proposal is that the prisoners be boiled in a caldron of oil," he said simply.

"Your proposal is unworthy indeed. It blasphemes my ears. If you, Huascar, can think of nothing better than that, you do not deserve to be permitted to live.

Space in the valley is limited and far too valuable to be occupied by such as you. Boiling in oil will be a fitting reward for your stupidity, and so it shall be."

"Let Toparca now be heard," the high priest then announced.

"Glorious one, who has honored me with this rare distinction, blind them with the point of a red-hot spear," Toparca ventured. "Then set them free on the rugged peaks flanking one of the many craters, so that they will fall into the lake of fire that seethes and roars at the bottom."

"Come, come!" Quizquiz scolded impatiently. "You chatter like a monkey, or like a parrot that lacks the power to think. Words that mean nothing proclaim a brain that has lost its usefulness. You have pronounced your own sentence."

"Speak Zaron! It is your turn."

"I would hold them prisoner until the next exercises, then set them up as targets and let the youths of the nation try their skill at them with bows and arrows, or, if the king prefers, with spears and daggers. A living mark is more interesting to shoot at than some lifeless object."

"You will be a more fitting target than either of these, Zaron, but I doubt not that the density of your head will dull the arrows and turn them aside," Quiz-

quiz retorted with a chuckle, in which he was joined by Villac Umu.

And so they proceeded. Each one of the luckless twelve was ordered to state his proposition, and the offering of each was spurned, often with sarcasm and ridicule. So each in turn was sentenced to the same punishment he had contrived to plan for the captives. Only one remained to be heard.

“Soncco, speak quickly; I am fatigued with all this stupidity,” Quizquiz continued impatiently after directing a number of cutting shafts at Chapas, eleventh on the list. “Surely you possess wisdom, or at least so you have pretended. I have trusted you with important missions in the past, and I trust you still—or I should not consent to listen longer to this idle gossip.”

“Great and holy king,” Soncco began gravely, “besides whose splendor even the sun pales to the dimness of a menial’s grease-lamp, I am flattered by this praise and confidence, which is undeserved. To serve my revered sovereign is my only wish; to die for him would be my greatest joy. I have evolved a plan that is as striking as it is different from all the others that have been proffered. Therefore I beg of my beloved master that he will condescend to listen with patience while——”

“If you think to flatter me, Soncco, I must tell you that your words are falling on deaf ears. What mere mortal can proclaim my glory? I am above the praise that any tongue can speak,” Quizquiz interrupted haughtily.

“Keep the two strangers in the valley until they die of old age. Let them go where they will, and feed them well so that they may live all the longer—and provide rich apartments for them, with servants and all the comforts of life. As your prisoners they will give perpetual testimony of the power and greatness of the king who is capable of holding them against their will. That is my humble plan, offered in deepest humility.”

“It must be that Soncco does not understand. A reward is not wanted for these intruders, but a penalty of the most terrible nature,” Villac Umu said in consternation.

“It is the high priest who fails to understand,” Soncco replied in a steady voice, while the crowd craned their necks so as not to lose a word. “What punishment could be more horrible than to keep the two here as prisoners all their lives, far removed from their homes and friends? The valley is a small place compared to the vast lands, rivers, and oceans of the outer world that they have been accustomed to trav-

erse. They are masters of the air as well. An ant confined within the pod of a bean would have a thousand times more liberty than they."

Quizquiz looked incredulous. For a short while he looked intently at Soncco, as if trying to read his innermost thoughts. Then a look of understanding came into his face.

"I have heard your words, Soncco, and I appreciate the motive that inspired them. Instead of obeying my command to contrive a method of punishment for the prisoners, you have thought only to save yourself. One inspired by motives less lofty and less generous than mine would see in your act disloyalty, even treason, and would deal with you accordingly. But have no fear; your life shall be spared, for I have need of you. I hereby designate you to carry out the sentences imposed upon themselves by your eleven companions, and remember, Tupichi, your brother, is among them. Even though you live, Soncco, you will be the one to inflict torture and death on others who are dear to you."

Soncco was stunned at hearing these words. He stood as in a trance until Quizquiz waved him aside and continued with a note of triumph in his voice: "Let the prisoners now be brought out of the temple."

Hearing this, Ted and Stanley rushed from the

opening in the wall at which they had been listening, and fled to one of the smaller rooms where they could better defend themselves, for now that the Inca was no longer in the building the priests and guards were at liberty to enter. They waited, Ted retaining the heavy, golden rod in his hands, Stanley holding a long knife he had taken from one of the altars; but no one came to attack them. Instead, a pungent odor, faint and not disagreeable, came to their nostrils; they could not tell where it originated. Aside from noting the scent which grew constantly stronger and began to roll into the room in thin wisps and wreaths of blue smoke, they attached no importance to it. Doubtless it was caused by burning incense in one of the numerous sanctuaries; matters of greater import filled their minds.

"I am choking," Ted suddenly muttered, clutching at his throat; tears streamed down his cheeks. "And I can't see either."

Stanley was blindly groping his way toward the door. The two were rapidly losing consciousness in the suffocating fumes that seemed completely to fill the building. As they painfully and aimlessly stumbled through the growing darkness a harsh voice half aroused them to their senses. It was the high priest's. At the same time they could make out his form,

faintly outlined in the haze, while in back of him were other dim figures.

“Drag them out of the holy place,” cried Villac Umu, “and take them before the throne of judgment.”

A dozen hands seized them by the shoulders and legs and carried them, limp and unconscious, out of the temple.

CHAPTER XII

THE VILLAINY OF VILLAC UMU

A FEW breaths of the fresh, outer air restored the two prisoners to their senses, although it was some time before the stupor caused by the suffocating fumes left them entirely; this was followed by severe spells of coughing and a choking sensation. They asked for water but none was given them.

If Quizquiz had looked upon them before with a triumphant gleam in his eyes, he now regarded them with utter disdain. An insect or a reptile could not have been treated with greater contempt. His lips were set. Cruelty and the desire for revenge showed in every line of his face. He had suffered what he considered an unspeakable indignity; the captives had actually dared touch his sacred person, and none too gently at that. The temple had been desecrated. It was only by sheer luck that he had succeeded in escaping them. In the secret underground passage into which he had disappeared he had taken enough time to collect his composure and to straighten out his dishevelled clothes and diadem before appearing to the

multitude that awaited him. Halting an instant he had spoken quickly and in a whisper to Villac Umu, whereupon an officer and a squad of soldiers, accompanied by one of the priests, entered the labyrinth of galleries that undermined the holy edifice to start the smudges. Then, without referring to his experience, the Inca calmly seated himself on the throne and proceeded with the business for which the assembly had been called. As king he owed explanations to no man; and, besides, he was in no humor to recall or to make known to others the humiliation he had suffered. However, his scathing remarks to the unfortunate ones who were called before him gave evidence to his state of mind; the rage that boiled within him found an outlet and an antidote in the denunciations and sentences he hurled at those of his nobles who had been chosen to forfeit their lives for no other reason than that it pleased him that it should be so.

This gruesome work finished, the high priest followed the soldiers into the temple and soon returned with the captives. For Quizquiz that was the supreme moment.

“I am the most luckless of kings,” he began, feigning deep sorrow and unclasping his hands in despair, “for when it is my pleasure to call upon the members of my court for advice or assistance, even the highest

fail me miserably. What have I done to deserve such punishment? Slaves all, you do not deserve to have a king to rule and to protect you; better by far that I return to the glory of the Sun, whence I came, and leave you to perish miserably without my wise guidance than remain among you. Is there not a single man of intelligence in my whole nation?"

This was no doubt the cue for the high priest. It was inconceivable that the plan had not been pre-arranged, and judging by the looks of several in the crowd, Ted and Stanley were not the only ones to see through the wily monarch's tactics.

Villac Umu came forward and bowed low, too low in fact for entire sincerity. "Beloved ruler," he smirked, "do not desert us; tarry a moment longer, I beseech you on bended knees. If you will lend your most gracious ears to my unworthy words, I——"

"By all means, good Villac Umu," Quizquiz said indulgently. "After listening to the jabbering of these ignoble ones my ears long for words of real wisdom, such as always flow from your lips."

"I, Villac Umu, high priest of the Temple of the Sun though I am, do not deserve the praise of my adored sovereign. What man, indeed, lives who is worthy of even one glance from those august eyes, or one thought from that godlike mind?"

“True! But I would have it so. So do not hesitate to speak freely; that is my pleasure.”

“In the Temple of the Snakes there are two serpents of immense size, with unusual length of fangs, and with the dispositions of all the demons combined. As I studied them in their golden dens, a thought came to me.”

Quizquiz leaned forward eagerly.

“You interest me, great Villac. I would hear the thought that formed itself in your brain.”

“Yesterday, Sarrak, keeper of the serpents, was struck in the thigh by one of these devils. They brought him to me without delay that I might observe his writhings, for it was I who ordered him to stroke the snake-gods to soothe their tempers. For half an hour he suffered all the pains of a lost soul before death came. I saw it with my own eyes, and I heard his cries of agony; it thrilled me with a strange joy, for nothing that I have ever experienced was more magnificent and at the same time more terrible. Might we not rid the valley of these two,” pointing to Ted and Stanley, “in the same manner?”

“You possess the wisdom of a god, Villac Umu. You are sublime! I am more pleased than words can express. You may kiss both my feet, nay, even my hands, and I will invest you with a chain of emeralds

in appreciation of your nobleness of character. You will see that I amply reward those who prove themselves worthy of my confidence."

The high priest was enraptured. He raised his voice to a scream and waved his arms wildly, so that his numerous bracelets tinkled like miniature bells.

"But they shall not die the easy death of Sarrak," he shouted. "Horrible though that was, it is still too good for them, and not edifying enough for your eyes. So I would have it arranged thus. Chain the two prisoners to a wall, their backs to the cold stones; and to stakes driven into the ground in front of them tie the great serpents—but just a hair's breadth out of reach of their victims. There let them remain, the men to gaze in terror into the green eyes of the merciless monsters, and the snakes to glare with impatience and increasing rage at the victims who cannot escape them. Hour after hour you shall witness this glorious spectacle. The heat of the midday sun and hunger and thirst will add to the suffering of the captives. But human nature can endure only so much, and then at last their limbs will grow numb and sag, and they will crumple and fall to the ground. The great moment will have arrived; they will be in reach of the snakes. You shall see the gleam of white fangs and the lightning thrusts of arrow-shaped heads, and

hear the cries of the doomed ones. It will be a sight for the gods, and—your revenge will be complete.”

“But, good Villac,” Quizquiz protested mildly and hypocritically, “is the venom of these serpents really so deadly? May not the white men possess some antidote or some magic charm to counteract its effect?”

“There is no antidote known to god or man effective against the poison of these snakes. Upon that point I will stake my life.”

“Now only does my mind feel relieved, and I shall sleep again, for at last I have heard words of real wisdom. Your description, dear Villac Umu, has aroused my interest and curiosity; I can picture the grandeur of the spectacle—it unfolds itself like a vision before my eyes. And the plan shall be carried into execution with the least possible delay. To-morrow we begin the return journey to the plain beside the river. I shall allow two days after our arrival for the preparations. On the following morning the festivities shall begin. Look well to the prisoners—the eleven who condemned themselves by their own stupidity, and these two enemies of the common good, who stop at nothing to attain their evil end, not even at invading the temple and scoffing at the Sun-God.”

“Quizquiz”—Stanley took a step forward, with clinched fists and blanched face—“King though you

are of a nation of ignorant, cringing people, you are a coward at heart, and you know it. What is more important still, your subjects know it too, and the day is coming when your tyranny and abuse will bring them to their senses. They will cast off their superstitious reverence for you, for they will see in you the weakling you are, dominated by a cunning hypocrite who calls himself high priest, but who is, in reality, lower than the snakes in the temple."

"Speech shall not be denied you," the Inca mocked. "The more you talk the surer I am that your anguish has commenced. What next?"

"Do you not fear our friends in the outer world, whose number is greater than the grains of sand in the desert? They will avenge our death. You and your people will be reduced to slavery and destroyed!"

"Should other men from the outer world invade my kingdom they shall receive the same welcome that has been prepared for you. But they will not come. Your greed for gold is so great that you kept to yourselves the knowledge gained during your previous visit here; if others were informed of your secret they too would come to share the spoils; so you have told no one. I know that."

"Our promise to Huayna Capac has been kept, for we are men of honor. But a letter has been left be-

hind. If we fail to return within a given time, that letter will be opened. Others will learn of our whereabouts, and how to get here, for we included a map and full directions for reaching the valley. Your existence will be known. Men in great numbers will enter your hiding-place armed with contrivances against which you will be powerless. They will annihilate you, carry away everything of value, and leave your cities masses of deserted ruins."

"You cannot frighten me. The Sun-God will protect his children. He demands vengeance upon you particularly because you profaned his temple; he never forgets. Perhaps you too have a god? Why not appeal to him? Of what use is any god if he will not help you?"

At this sally Quizquiz and Villac Umu burst into loud laughter. Several in the crowd followed their example.

"Yes," the high priest seconded, "call upon your god. Tell him to show us what he can do; we shall see who is the more powerful, yours or our own."

"The sun is not a god at all, if you want to know the truth," Stanley hotly proclaimed. "You might as well worship a stick or a stone for all the good it would do you. Therefore we could not have possibly offended that which does not exist."

“Blasphemer! When your backs are chained to the cold stones, when the snakes have struck and the poison from their fangs is burning in your veins, you will think of your words and wish you had left them unsaid,” Quizquiz hissed. “We have proof of the sun’s power. We are not blind. Each day as the florid tints of dawn light up the eastern sky we are reminded anew of his glory and greatness. Without his light and warmth the valley would be steeped in everlasting gloom, and life could not exist. What other evidence do we need? None! Now, perhaps you can give some proof of the——”

“You ask for proof? All right, you shall have it, and of a most convincing nature. You shall see that the object of your adoration is as nothing in the hand that created it. Then you will believe—but it will be too late.”

“Does the king wish him to speak more in this irreverent manner?” Villac Umu asked, seeming ill at ease. “May not he be struck dead and thus evade our plans of a just punishment?”

“Let him continue, for his show of suffering gives me delight. The more he talks the greater his guilt.”

“On the fourth day from to-day,” said Stanley, drawing from his pocket the string with many knots

tied in it, "you shall see a miracle, and one not soon to be forgotten. You say that the sun gives the light and warmth that makes life possible, and even the most ignorant of your people know that that is the truth. Then you shall experience the despair of seeing that light and warmth shut off in the middle of the day while it is at its height. Darkness, like a cloak of mourning, will sweep over the valley and blot from your sight each familiar thing. In the cold blackness, with the chill gnawing into your bones, you will grovel in the dust and raise your voice in lamentations and in prayer, but your words will be wasted, for you will be powerless to drive away the darkness. All that live will curse Quizquiz and Villac Umu, and rightly accuse them of having brought the terrible catastrophe upon their heads."

The Inca grew pale and arose from his cushions. "Tell me, Villac Umu, is such a thing possible? You talk with the gods and know their thoughts."

"It is not possible or I should have been informed of it," the priest assured him, although he too was perturbed. "How could such a thing come about? I assure you there is no god but the sun, and he always protects his child, the Inca, and his people."

Evidently Stanley was thinking fast, while Ted, dazed at his companion's rash predictions, gazed at

him wide-eyed, not knowing what to make of the situation.

“And then,” Stanley continued, pointing straight at the Inca, “while the darkness is heaviest, you shall have proof of other strange powers of which you know nothing, for in spite of your good opinion of yourself, you have the mind of a child. From out of the blackness will come a roar mightier than the loudest thunder, and more penetrating than the rumble of the volcanoes all around you. The ground under your feet will tremble, and even the stones in the great wall will hurl themselves into the air and fall with a crash. The barrier between Uti and the valley that has stood for hundreds of years shall no longer exist; and that will serve as an invitation to the evil spirits who slumber there to come back to life to complete the work of destruction. Quizquiz, the days of your glory are no more than the number of fingers on one of your hands.”

“I will listen to no more,” Quizquiz screamed, clapping his hands over his ears. “I should not have listened to anything at all.”

“Nor I,” wailed Villac Umu. “Take them away. To-morrow we start on the journey. The sentence must be carried out. Let there be no delay!”

“Poor Stanley,” Ted thought sadly as the guards

seized them and hurried them away to the place of confinement, "his mind has snapped. He is as crazy as a loon. I wonder how much longer I can stand it."

CHAPTER XIII

STANLEY'S PLAN

STANLEY could hardly await the time when he could reveal his scheme to Ted. The opportunity came as they were being led away from the meeting by the guards.

"What do you think of it? Maybe I didn't start something. They are all excited and scared to death, and will be more so, too, before the thing is over. Why don't you say something? I need a lot of encouragement to put the thing through. You will have to help me," he exclaimed enthusiastically.

"I am sorry," Ted returned sadly. "Try to keep as calm as you can and do not think of the future. It will be over soon."

"Not think of it? Why, I can think of nothing else. It will be great. Quizquiz will get the surprise of his life, and his people will wake up with a start. There will be no stopping them when they see what happens."

"Yes, and think of how *we* will feel about that time," Ted thought, but said nothing.

"What is the matter, anyway?" Stanley demanded, losing patience. "Do you think I am joking?"

"Joking, no! There is nothing humorous in our situation. If you want to know the truth, it strikes me you are just a little upset, that is all. But no one could blame you for that. This whole thing is enough to——"

"I thought so from the way you acted, and I was beginning to wonder if you were not showing the effects of it too. I was never more in earnest nor saner in my life. Just fix that firmly in your head."

"You think we have a chance?"

"I am making one. And I would be absolutely sure of the result if it were not for two things. First, we must get Soncco to help us; I believe he will because we saved his neck, and he does not relish the job that has been assigned to him—that of chief executioner of his fellow teachers. Second, my calculations as to the day of the month must be correct; on that point I am not quite sure, but I feel that I am right. I was careful to tie a knot in the string each morning so far as I can remember. But it is possible that I may have forgotten it once, and that would throw off all my calculations."

"But what is your scheme? The predictions you made are so wild and impossible it would take a miracle to fulfil them."

“Nothing of the kind. It can and it will all happen exactly as I said. It sounds impossible so long only as they are ignorant of the things that could cause such happenings.”

By this time they had reached the building in which they were to be confined for the night.

“I will tell you the rest when they leave us alone,” Stanley added. “It will take some time to explain the plan fully.”

Much to their disgust they found that they were not to be imprisoned in the same enclosure. Ted, with a score of guards, was left in one small, dungeon-like room, while Stanley was taken to another on the opposite part of a courtyard. The officers obviously suspected that another plot to escape might be formed if the two were left together. Henceforth they would forestall such a move by keeping them apart, or at least so it seemed to the captives. That was indeed discouraging, for Stanley could not possibly carry out his plan without Ted's help.

The distance between the two prison cells was too great to enable them to carry on a conversation even by shouting, so they tried wigwagging signals across the open space. But the guards immediately understood their design, and drew rush mats across the doorways.

On the return journey to the plain, however, they were again thrown together, much to their delight.

"Tell me quick, before they separate us," Ted begged. "I couldn't sleep a wink last night for thinking over what you said; but I can't figure it out."

"Listen! Do you remember that before we left home the papers were full of stories about the eclipse of the sun that is to occur this month?"

"Yes, I remember that. We talked about it at the time. But it was to be partial only."

"Partial at home, but complete in parts of South America. It depends on where you are looking from. The black bands on the maps illustrating the articles extended right across this part of Peru. So you see what is going to happen, and that I haven't exaggerated."

"I have to hand it to you, Stanley, for remembering the event, and making such good use of it. It will seem like the most powerful kind of magic to these Indians, and will terrify them. They will think we are responsible for it and will respect us after that. Then it will be our turn to have the upper hand."

"The only thing that worries me," said Stanley with concern, "is that I may have made a mistake

in keeping track of the time. If I am off one single day, the eclipse might as well never come, so far as we care."

"Do you feel that you have made a mistake, or not?" Ted asked bluntly.

One look into the serious, apprehensive face of his companion and Stanley felt that he could not dash all his hopes to the ground by telling him of the fear that had gradually loomed up to dispel the hopes of the previous day. For the more he thought of the matter the more certain he was that not only had he tied too few knots in the string, but that the eclipse was not due until the following month.

"You shall see," he said evasively. "Look, here comes Soncco now. He looks troubled. We must have an interview with him where none can hear. That is the first step, and it has got to be arranged somehow."

As a matter of fact, Soncco was looking for them. He was the picture of misery; years had been added to his age overnight.

"The king did not see fit to accept my suggestion," he said slowly. "I have escaped death only to be condemned to a worse fate."

"It looks bad for all of us," Ted returned.

"I did all I could," the aged amauta whispered.

"Alas! that I should live to see such days. By the king's command I am forced to become a killer—of my own relatives and fellow teachers. I can neither eat, drink, nor sleep. Still, the will of my sovereign must be obeyed."

"Soncco, you have charge of the prisoners. Is not that true?"

"Yes; I am the jailer."

"Then arrange that my companion and I remain together hereafter. You can do that."

"I can do that, but I will not. You would think up another plan for escaping; but you might as well save yourselves the trouble."

"On our honor, we shall not attempt to escape, and you know we are men of our word. One more thing: come to our place of confinement to-night. We have something of great interest to say to you."

"Say it now. Why wait until to-night?"

"There is not time. Besides, we are being watched. Come to-night just after dark, and you will learn something worth your while."

"It shall be as you say. But remember, the guard will be tripled—so as to form a solid wall around you. Attempt no treachery or you will regret it."

With that the amauta went his way.

"Do you think he will come?" Ted asked.

"I hope so. We helped him out once and he believes we may do it again," Stanley replied.

Soncco kept his promise and arrived shortly after nightfall had come upon the valley. His face bore a tragic expression and his voice trembled. They had never seen him so agitated.

"Speak quickly, for I have not long to stay," he faltered. "There are many things on my mind."

"Soncco," said Stanley slowly, looking straight at the aged man, "the task for which you have been selected does not suit you. I can tell that by your appearance and your actions. You are worried to death."

"But I will obey the Inca's command."

"You do not want to kill your own relatives and friends, do you?"

"The king's commands must not be questioned."

"Of course not. And we are not asking you to disobey your king in even the smallest matter. But you will admit that Quizquiz is not the kind of king his father was. He is cruel and bloodthirsty. You know the history of the nation back to its very beginning. Was there ever another such ruler—one who wantonly destroyed his highest nobles as well as his common people for the mere pleasure it gave him?"

"No, there was not. The Incas were all filled with solicitude for their subjects. They were all kind and benevolent and just; that is why they were so great and why the people venerated them."

"I thought so. And if Quizquiz keeps on at the rate he is going, he will break down and destroy all that the others before him have built up at such enormous cost and sacrifice. And that will mean the end of the hidden people, the last remnant of the once powerful and glorious nation. Those who survive will be like your brethren in the outer world, downtrodden, miserable, and without hope."

"Quizquiz is young, and he is under the spell of an evil influence."

"Yes, Villac Umu. We must get rid of him by all means. And we must save the nation. We want you to help us help you to do these things."

"I will not be a traitor to the Child of the Sun; I will not even consider such a thing."

"No one is asking you to do that. In helping us you will be doing a favor to all the people. This may sound strange to you, and we do not expect you to understand because you are accustomed to look at things differently than we do. But we simply want to prove to you the thing you refuse to admit—that the Child of the Sun is very human; that he makes

mistakes and can be good or wicked like any one else; and that he must be taught a lesson that will bring him to his senses. Even your Sun-God is subject to a higher power. Do not take my word for it. You shall have the proof. Wait and see."

Soncco was in despair. An expression of helplessness spread over his face.

"The person of the Inca always has been considered holy, and it cannot be violated now," he wailed. "I ought not to listen to your words, for they are blasphemy. I should not have come here at all. And I should not have stayed on and on after I got here, were it not for one fact——"

"That you know I am speaking the truth," Stanley interrupted. "The truth is painful as often as not, but it is best to listen while there is time. If you delay you will be lost."

Soncco was showing signs of weakening.

"The people are grumbling," he admitted reluctantly. "If the oppression and tyranny continue, there will be an uprising—the first in the history of the nation. We have suffered misfortune enough already without having a new calamity thrust upon us."

"Now you are talking sensibly. We are offering you the opportunity to prevent all this trouble and bloodshed you justly despise. Will you take advantage of it? Will you trust us and let us help you?"

"How can I accomplish the impossible? What can I do? I am old and my power has been taken from me. Indeed, I am now no more than an executioner, hated by all men."

"You can do more than you think possible. Are you acquainted with the country beyond the wall—I mean Uti?"

"Uti, yes. Only sixteen changes of the moon ago I accompanied an exploring party there much against my will. It is a terrible place with death staring one in the face at every step."

"Then you know the caves in the mountainsides?"

"Each one of them. We searched them all. It was like a hideous nightmare. In some were the remains of men, rows upon rows of them. In others we found the bones of monstrous beasts or demons that invaded the valley many years ago and killed the people by hundreds. It was to keep them out of the valley that the wall was built."

"Good! You know the place well. Now listen carefully."

Stanley then minutely described the cave where the dynamite had been hidden when they had first landed, several weeks before, and after they had discovered that the gold had been removed from the cave in which it had been hidden.

"Bring those boxes to me," Stanley concluded.

"That is all for the present. No one will suspect anything. As master of ceremonies you have a perfect right to come and go as you please, and make any preparations you like."

It took a good deal of persuasion, but Soncco finally consented to make the trip to Uti for the boxes. He had reached the point where he would do almost anything rather than carry out his part of the fiendish plot set for two days hence.

"I will do this one thing," he said, "but no other; so spare yourselves the trouble of making any more requests."

"Now do you see daylight?" Stanley asked when the aged amauta had gone.

"No!" Ted was bewildered. "I haven't brains enough to go around."

"Well, then, do as I am doing. Trust to luck."

CHAPTER XIV

SONCCO'S AID TO THE PLOTTERS

SONCCO, accompanied by two soldiers carrying the heavy boxes, returned as the first shafts of coming daylight penetrated the wreath of vapor that clung to the peaks standing like black monoliths between the Hidden Valley and the steaming forests of the Upper Amazon. The party looked tired and worn from the strenuous labor of the night.

The men threw down their burdens none too gently and departed. Stanley noticed that one of the boxes had been opened, and the aged amauta, reading the trend of his thoughts, hastened to explain.

"I could not bring the parcels without knowing what was in them," he said; "they might have contained some contrivance dangerous to the Inca or to the people, or that would help you to escape. I am responsible for your safe-keeping. But I found only sticks of sweet, harmless earth. There can be nothing wrong in letting you have them, so I had them brought to you. I tasted one of them; how it did make my head ache!"

"You are lucky to have your head on your shoulders," thought Stanley, "handling and eating that dynamite as if it were candy." Then aloud: "Thank you, Soncco, for bringing it. You shall be well rewarded for your trouble. Now you must continue to do as we say."

"No! I will do nothing more. My conscience troubles me already. I may have done too much. And, besides, the things you ask me to do are too hard. The tunnel under the wall was blocked with stones; we had to remove them, and there were many; then hunt for the cave in the darkness. Uti is a terrible place even when the sun shines. What then is it at night? The bats were chirping and fluttering about our heads, and we had to drive them away to keep from being attacked; and one of the men bumped into a wasp's nest, so that we were all stung. After we finally found the boxes they had to be dragged back to the wall and through the passage, and then there were all the stones to put into place again. The men grumbled at the work, and I, Soncco, old though I am, had to help them."

"I am sorry we had to put you to all that trouble; but remember, we are helping you more than any one else. Do you want to take the lives of your relatives and friends?"

"No! You know that. My heart is heavy that this duty has fallen upon me."

"Then do as I say and you will be relieved of that duty."

"But the Inca's command must be obeyed."

"Of course. We have given you our word before this that his wishes shall be carried out. In other words, you will do exactly as he directs. Go ahead with all the preparations; do as you were told. It is Quizquiz who will change his mind at the proper time. And, remember, you shall be well paid."

"Who will reward me?"

"The king. Be patient. You shall see in a few days."

"My head is dizzy. I cannot think clearly. But no matter what happens I can be no worse off than I am. I curse the day that Villac Umu obtained his evil power over Quizquiz," Soncco murmured.

"Come back at nightfall, then," Stanley continued. "We want you to take these boxes away again. Bring only one man with you this time—some one you can trust absolutely. If he is deaf, dumb, and blind, it will be all the better."

"Yes, yes; I will be here. You have me completely in your power. And may all the devils of Uti torture you if you betray me."

"Do not worry. You will soon find out that we have told you nothing but the truth. Then you will be thankful to us."

"I will keep my word," Soncco said, "and at the same time I will make provisions against trickery. Do not forget that."

When the old amauta had gone the two opened the boxes and took out the fuse and primers; then they began to prepare the charge. They fastened one of the long, copper caps to one end of the fuse and then inserted it in a stick of dynamite, carefully folding back the paper wrapper over the end and tying it in place with a strip of cloth torn from their clothing. As they worked Stanley explained his scheme to Ted. The latter fell in with it immediately, and to all outward appearances both were cheerful and entirely confident over the outcome of the plan.

"I am going to ask you just one more time," Ted said suddenly after a short pause, and with a trace of anxiety in his voice. "Are you sure about the date of the eclipse? And are you certain you made no mistake in keeping track of the time—the knots in the string, I mean?"

"Wait and you shall see," was all Stanley could say. Of course he knew that everything depended on these two things, and several times he was on the

verge of confessing to Ted his uncertainty as to both the date and the number of knots. But why should he add to the burden of worry of his companion? If he were mistaken, they would meet the end like men, fighting to the last gasp. If he were right, they would be freed, no doubt. Better look at the bright side, anyway, and make their last days as cheerful as possible. They could do no more than had been done, and in the meantime they were constantly on the alert for any eventuality that might present itself.

Food of excellent quality and in abundance was brought the two by the guards. Soncco was responsible for that, they felt sure. They were also permitted to walk around the outside of their tent. A double row of soldiers, well armed, formed a compact circle around them, and not more than twenty paces away. They watched every movement of the prisoners and held their spears ready for instant action.

As they strolled about they could not help but see that preparations for the awful event had begun on all sides of them. They had frequent glimpses of Soncco hobbling from one group of workers to another, giving sharp orders, reprimanding, and directing their labors in general.

Here, a furnace was being built in which to heat the spear with which to blind Toparca. The workers

had piled up two rows of stones and were covering them with mud. After that other stones were placed across the top and plastered down with more mud so that no heat could escape from the interior of the oven-like structure.

A short distance away was the enormous earthenware caldron; menials in a steady stream were bringing oil in small vessels and pouring it into the huge container. Ted and Stanley did not envy Huascar the fate that awaited him.

The stones that were intended for Tupichi lay in a neat heap. They were the size of apples, and were round and smooth, having been gathered from the river-bed.

Then their eyes met another sight that made them shudder. On the far end of an open, arena-like plot masons were constructing a short wall. The stones were being dragged to the spot by long lines of men. As the work progressed, earth was banked up against the structure and tamped down to form an inclined plain up which other stones could be hauled into position on top of the last layer of the wall. The ingenuity displayed would have been interesting to the Americans had they not known the sinister meaning of the work. It was against this wall that they were to be chained, with the deadly snakes at their feet. Copper rings

on long spikes had been incorporated in the wall between the stones to receive the chains that would hold them in their helpless, hopeless position.

After surveying the various activities for a short time they went back into their prison tent.

"One of us will have to accompany Soncco to-night," Stanley announced when they were inside, "to see that the dynamite is placed where it will do the most damage."

"I will go," Ted volunteered, "but I doubt if I can get past the guards, even in the company of Soncco. The soldiers get their orders higher up."

"That is why I asked him to bring along some one he trusts absolutely. That one must change clothes with one of us and remain here while the work is being done. Perhaps I had better go."

"It isn't fair to let you face all the danger."

"There is no danger, but even if there were, it would be up to me because I started the thing, and I shall have to see it through. You entertain the substitute while I am away."

"It is all a capital idea. How easy everything is when you know just how to do it! You are a better general than Pizarro. He killed the Inca and caused the death of millions of the people. You will bring the whole nation to its knees through strategy, and

they will respect you instead of hating you as they did the Spaniard."

"Never mind that kind of talk. We haven't done a thing yet."

"But we shall, to-morrow," Ted said confidently.

Stanley suppressed a sigh and turned away.

Soncco arrived in due time.

"You see, I have kept my promise," he said without enthusiasm. "And I have brought a man who can neither hear, see, nor speak."

"You are a wonder, Soncco," Stanley returned gleefully. Then he told him what was expected of him.

At first the aged teacher was absolutely set against allowing Stanley to accompany him after exchanging clothes with the man he had brought. He was certain that it must be part of a plot to escape, the far-reaching branches of which he could not foresee.

"But," they argued, "what good would it do one of them to get away while the other remained a prisoner in the valley? Could he not quickly take revenge on the hostage who was left to his mercy? From what he had seen of them, did it seem possible that one of them would desert the other in such a position?"

Soncco finally was forced to bow to the strength of their arguments. But only the firm conviction that

his lot was already so luckless that it could not possibly be worse, no matter what happened, and that the growing unrest among the people was spreading to the proportions where it was a menace to the existence of the race induced him to lend his aid in a scheme he could not comprehend.

Therefore the two, carrying the heavy boxes of explosive, left the tent at a moment when clouds obscured the moon, Soncco taking the lead, Stanley, fully disguised in the borrowed clothes, following at his heels. Before long the latter realized how futile it would have been for them to attempt to leave the place of confinement unaided by some one in full authority. They passed through no fewer than five lines of sentries. To each of the five challenges Soncco replied with a different password, and in addition there was also a short ceremony to be gone through with each time they were halted. Thus, at the first challenge of "Who lives?" Soncco replied with "Quizquiz, the great and glorious king," and, stooping, picked up a handful of earth which he threw over his left shoulder. At the second station he answered, "Quizquiz, greatest of all the great kings," and beat his breast three times with his free hand; and so on until all the guard-lines had been passed.

It was with a feeling of relief that Stanley finally

found himself in the open country beyond the encampment. He offered to carry Soncco's burden in addition to his own, for the old man was lacking in strength; but the amauta insisted on retaining possession of the package, adding in a whisper: "Now you walk in front of me, and at the first sign of treachery I will kill you; I have a poisoned dagger in my hand."

"Do not be foolish," Stanley responded, losing patience. "I would not leave this place now if you asked me to. I want to stay to see all of you get what's coming to you."

Before long they reached the foot of the great wall, looming black and awe-inspiring high into the cloud-checked sky. They followed along the base, their elbows almost touching the cool, moss-covered stones, until they reached the point where the gigantic structure joined the abrupt face of the mountain. It was here that the passage into Uti had been dug under the foundation; the existence of this opening saved them the labor of making another in which to place the explosive.

"We need go no farther," Stanley announced, carefully depositing his pack on the ground and relieving the aged man of his.

"I am glad of that; my limbs are weary, for I am no longer young."

"Then rest while I work. Sit right beside me if you wish, so you can see everything I do."

"I will tie this thong to your foot, and fasten the other end to my own feet."

Stanley was on the point of making a wrathful reply when the humor of the situation struck him. Soncco, in spite of his shrewdness, was childish in many ways. With the thong tied to his feet and the other end in Stanley's possession, it would have been an easy matter to upset the old man and then pounce upon him. But of course he did not intend to do anything of the kind. With a smile he submitted to his companion's whim. Then he fell to work in earnest, carefully following the plan formulated by Ted and himself after much discussion.

The passage under the wall had been left partly open by Soncco when he brought back the boxes of dynamite from the other side. Therefore Stanley had to close it again. He began by rolling stones into the tunnel and pushed them to the far end, packing in the open spaces between them with earth. When half of it had been filled he carefully planted the explosive, placing the fuse so that it led out where Soncco was sitting. Then he shut up the remaining portion of the passage with earth and the largest stones he could handle.

This took several hours of the hardest kind of work. Stanley was nearly exhausted when the task was completed.

"Now listen," he said, seating himself by the side of his guard. "If you fail us in this one detail, everything will be lost."

"I am willing to hear. Speak!"

"Here is a white cord," Stanley explained, placing the end of the fuse in Soncco's hands. "I will leave it here in plain view. To-morrow you must have a trusted guard stand on this spot beginning with the rising of the sun. He must not go away from this place for an instant, understand, for it all depends upon his faithful performance of the duty you will impose upon him."

"What is that duty?"

"When the light of your god, the sun, is suddenly blotted out, as it were, by a hand to hide his face in shame over the actions of his child Quizquiz, and of all the rest of you, too, who meekly permit him to do such fiendish things; when the blackness of night has enveloped the valley, although it is only noon; when the bats leave their caves, and the beasts of prey come out of their dens to kill their defenseless victims, thinking the day is over—that will be the time for him to act. Fire must be applied to the end of this

cord. It will begin to burn and sputter, and later will send out a message that will be heard throughout the valley, and even far beyond. But I must caution you of this: when the cord begins to give off its first crackling sparks, let the man who lighted it flee from the spot. His work here will be finished, so he must hurry back to the encampment, and not stop running until he reaches it."

Soncco appeared greatly impressed.

"The message that will be conveyed by the cord," he asked in an awed whisper, "will it reach the sun?"

"Who knows? It may reach farther than the sun."

"And will it cause the bright light and warmth to come back to us again?"

"If the sunlight should be withheld from the earth all life would soon come to an end. Nothing could live in the cold and everlasting darkness."

"Oh! Such a calamity must not befall us."

"Then follow my instructions to the letter. Will you?"

"I swear it. My own beloved brother, whom I trust in all things, shall be assigned to this mission. His faithfulness cannot be questioned."

"Good. Now we might as well start back. My companion is waiting, and we must get past the

guards before daylight comes or they would recognize me."

"Yes, and that would spoil everything. I can hardly wait to see if you are really such wonderful magicians, or if you have been deceiving me."

"Soncco," Stanley said with a note of pleading in his voice, "do everything exactly as Quizquiz has commanded. If he should suspect anything he might remove you from your position, where you can help us and—yourself. Be patient. Continue to trust us. And you will not be disappointed in the end."

"Now what do you want?" rather testily.

"Nothing right now. But if we should need you again we shall let you know. How about this cord? Do you expect me to walk back like this?"

Soncco removed the thong from Stanley's ankle and the two started away at a fast walk. They passed through the guard-lines without trouble. Stanley returned the borrowed garments to the waiting man, and then the latter, led by the aged amauta, departed.

CHAPTER XV

THE TERROR OF DARKNESS AT MIDDAY

TED and Stanley slept little during the night preceding that fateful day. And, to Ted's occasional questioning, Stanley could only repeat that he thought his record of the time correct; however, there was no way of finding out for a certainty. The morrow alone would tell.

The camp was astir early. Groups of musicians struck up tunes on reed instruments accompanied by the deep roll of drums. The wailing of the flutes seemed to carry a mournful note, an ominous message in its very monotony. But, when singers joined in the music, their shrill voices rising and falling in gay cadence, it changed its tenor and was more like the celebration of some joyous festival than the beginning of a day of torture and life-taking. How pitiless these people were, how devoid of all compassion! Down-trodden and suffering though they were, they made an outward show of rejoicing at the ill fortune of others.

After a breakfast scarcely touched by the two, they were taken to the arena where the spectacle was

to be staged. A vast number of people had already assembled. Most of them stood in a solid mass surrounding an open square; armed guards formed lines and held them in check. On one side stood those of noble birth, dressed in their most gorgeous attire and bedecked with jewels. Round ornaments of gold hung from their ears. Some wore large breast-plates of the same precious metal that extended from shoulder to shoulder, and from the chin to the waist-line. Their mantles were embroidered or brocaded in curious figures of birds and animals, among which the condor and puma were conspicuous by the frequency with which they appeared. Huge golden pins, shaped like spoons, held the draperies in place. And chains of emeralds hung from their necks, while the turbans that crowned their heads were a mass of bright colors and flashing stones. Each noble was accompanied by a number of attendants that held a canopy of cloth of fine texture over his head to shield it from the sun, and in his hand he carried a staff of polished wood with numerous gold and silver pendants that denoted his rank and position.

Quizquiz arrived not long after. He came in his sedan of gold, massive and heavy, and borne on the shoulders of his highest officials. As the latter deposited their burden on a specially constructed plat-

form, Ted and Stanley could not suppress exclamations of surprise at his lavish and beautiful attire. He was wrapped in a mantle of gold cloth that covered him from his head to his feet; throwing this aside carelessly, he revealed his undergarments made of the same material. Bracelets and amulets covered his arms. The chain around his neck, falling to his waist, was composed of alternate turquoise, pearls, and emeralds, some of them the size of a pigeon's egg, and so skilfully had the gems been polished that there was continuous play of refracted light in a thousand points of shimmering, satiny color.

Quizquiz carried a burnished-silver mirror in his hand and made frequent use of it to throw a shaft of dazzling light into the eyes of some favorite; this was always the signal for the honored one to fall upon his knees and to chant the praises of the sovereign who had thus condescended to throw the radiance, supposedly emanating from the Inca's sacred person, upon him.

After amusing himself in this manner for some time, Quizquiz spoke:

“Rejoice with me, for this day is an eventful one,” he said. “I am about to rid my kingdom of its worst enemies; the two strangers who came to spy on me and to rob me, and also of those others who are of no

further use to me, but are rather a burden. There are more persons in the valley deserving of a similar fate, and they all shall be called to account in due time. We shall have these imposing spectacles often. It shall be my pleasure to attend them; you also shall be commanded to do so, for they shall remind you of my greatness and of your own abject station. And let each one feel that perhaps he may some day be chosen to delight my eye as one of those to die in my presence. What end could be more glorious for a slave? So cherish the hope of that honor in your hearts."

The crowd moved uneasily. Evidently they did not relish recognition of that kind. Was there no limit to the vainglorious boasting and cruelty of the tyrant? Was he personally responsible for his words and deeds, or was there some evil influence that prompted him to do such things? Among the spectators were not a few who knew the truth, and their unanimous verdict would have placed the responsibility upon the shoulders of Villac Umu.

"Now let the ceremonies begin. Soncco will attend to his duties well or suffer dire consequences. First, let the two men from the outer world be bound to the wall; then tie the serpents at their feet."

Soncco bowed low to the Inca. His face was pale

and his eyes shot fire. Resentment was pictured in his every feature, and Ted and Stanley knew that it was directed not at them but at the king. Still, he had no alternative but to obey the command. He started his work in a businesslike manner, and prepared personally to bind the hands of the Americans with copper chains. As he reached their side he whispered in Stanley's ear: "Pray to your God, to mine, or to any other one you want to; use your most powerful charms and magic. But let everything happen just as you said it would. If you fail in this, stand quietly until Quizquiz has taken too much wine; then break away, for the chains have an open link, and kill Villac Umu. Leave the rest to me. Here is a dagger," and he slipped a long, keen blade into Stanley's hand, hiding the transaction with his cloak.

Stanley made no answer, but a moment later conveyed the information to Ted, who was tied close by his side.

These preparations completed, the priests from the Temple of the Snakes put in their appearance. They were a hideous lot, clothed in long mantles of a drab color, and wore black masks over their faces. Each one carried a tuft of red feathers in his hand. The column, headed by six of its number who beat drums

and sang in a weird jargon, marched to the Inca's dais and halted. The drum-beats ceased and the priests prostrated themselves on the ground, rising after a moment and forming a semicircle in front of the doomed men. One of the leaders produced two bags from under his cloak; he untied the string of one of them and shook its contents on the ground. It was a great snake, drawn up in a mass of tight coils, and hissed defiantly at the men who stood around it. The two saw at once that it was a bushmaster, the deadliest and most feared of all South American serpents. But what a monster it was! It could have been no less than ten feet long. As it raised its head, slowly, the deep orange color of its back, marked with a regular pattern of broad, black X's, glistened with a metallic lustre in the sunlight.

Before the reptile could get its bearings to dart away several of the priests pounced upon it and seized it in their hands, for it was harmless so far, its arrow-shaped head having been covered with a muzzle of fine, gold wires. A stout cord was fastened around its neck, and with this it was securely tied at Ted's feet, the priests stretching out the snake and allowing sufficient cord so that it could strike to within less than an inch of the man.

The second bag was now opened and its occupant,



It was a bushmaster, the deadliest and the most feared of all South American snakes

exactly like that of the first, bound in front of Stanley. Then two of the priests pinned the heads of the snakes to the ground with long, forked sticks, while others removed the wires that held the death-dealing jaws together. This accomplished, the entire company performed a wild, uncanny dance, howling and rushing past the supposedly helpless men and the serpents. As they passed each stooped and struck the reptiles a blow with his tuft of feathers, until they had been aroused to a mad frenzy. After that the priests again marched up to the Inca's sedan, fell flat on their faces as before, and took up their station in the front ranks of the onlookers.

Ted and Stanley were fascinated by the terrible creatures at their feet. Enraged at the treatment received from the priests, the snakes were lunging to right and to left, and then settled down to striking at the men in front of them. Again and again their repulsive heads shot forward, with wide-open mouths and long, white fangs that glistened in the sunlight; but the tethers kept them just out of reach and tantalized them to further effort. And all the while the snakes coiled and uncoiled their great, scale-covered bodies and lashed their tails on the hard ground with such rapidity that they made a buzzing sound. Ted and Stanley felt the cold, sinuous bodies writhe against

their bare feet; how long could they withstand this ordeal? If it was true that snakes could charm, and they began to think it was because they could not remove their gaze from the greenish eyes of the reptiles, they would be unable to endure the strain much longer, and would soon either droop within reach of the darting heads or be compelled to make a break for liberty.

Peals of laughter from Quizquiz recalled them to their senses.

"It is better than I had hoped," he said in a shrill voice. "Praised be Villac Umu, who is father of the idea."

The high priest, who was seated in his own golden sedan by the Inca's side, rose and bowed in recognition of this compliment.

"For the pleasure of my adored one I would arrange any spectacle," he said.

"Now let us feast and sing and dance to while away the time," Quizquiz continued. "Bring the sparkling wine that we may drink to the evil fortune of the men from the outer world."

Golden cups of large size, filled with a beverage made from ground, fermented maize, were brought by attendants, and after the Inca and Villac Umu had partaken liberally, the others of the nobility were

served. The drinking continued throughout the remainder of the morning, interrupted only when Soncco came to report the progress of the preparations that were being made for the other victims.

"The spear-point glows with a reddish heat, and Toparca lies on the ground, bound hand and foot," he said on one occasion, and, "The oil is bubbling in the caldron; Huascar is near by, well guarded and sullenly awaiting his fate," on another. But Quizquiz only laughed and bade Soncco stay his hand and to place the condemned men in a position so they could see what was happening to the strangers.

To Ted and Stanley the hours seemed like eternity. Would Quizquiz never succumb to the influence of the liquor? The amount he could consume was prodigious! The strain of remaining in one position was becoming unbearable. They dared not shift their feet; the snakes, now motionless, with heads raised a few inches above their coiled bodies, were quietly waiting for the decisive moment.

"It must be noon now," Ted finally ventured.

"Yes," said Stanley slowly, looking up at the glaring sun almost overhead in a cloudless sky.

"No signs of anything happening yet," uneasily. "I wonder if Soncco told the truth about the open link in the chains. He may have said that simply

to pacify us, so we would submit to being bound without a struggle."

"Wait a little while longer. Then—well, I believe Soncco told the truth. We must get Villac Umu. If there is a fight, any one and every one else will do for the next, but I think that with the high priest out of the way Soncco can handle the crowd; he is the one they really hold in superstitious fear. Snap the chain suddenly and jump to one side so far as you can. Remember that Pizarro conquered the whole nation of millions of people by capturing the leader; we have a chance of doing the same thing on a smaller scale with that beast out of the way."

Minutes passed; they waited in vain.

"I must have been mistaken, after all," Stanley said gloomily as he caught an impatient look from Soncco. "Look! he is signalling us now. Let's break away. Are you ready?"

"Yes. Give the word."

A crash halted the reply on Stanley's lips.

"Cursed drink that has dimmed my vision," Quizquiz shouted, at the same time dashing his heavy golden goblet to the floor of his litter, "for it must be my blurred eyes that deceive me. Look, Villac Umu! Do you see anything?"

The Inca and the high priest were anxiously scan-

ning the heavens, shielding their eyes with jewel-bedecked hands. Concern and fear were plainly pictured in their faces.

"It is not the drink." Stanley was quick enough to comprehend the situation and to make use of it to their advantage. "What you see is a giant hand grasping the neck of your helpless Sun-God. Soon his light will fade and you will be floundering in the darkness. Your time has come!"

Then to Ted in a joyous shout: "I was right! I was right! Look! The eclipse; it is starting."

The two could scarcely keep from jumping from their places, but the decisive moment had not arrived.

The stillness of death had fallen upon the multitude. The drum-beats stopped suddenly, the reed flutes ceased their wails, the voices of the singers were hushed, and half-emptied cups of wine slipped from nerveless fingers and fell to the ground. Every eye was turned skyward, and upon the sea of faces came a pallor and a look of horror, for the impossible was unquestionably happening. A black disk was rapidly stealing over the face of the sun from the west; half of the flaming orb was already obscured, and slowly but relentlessly a sickly gray twilight was falling upon the earth. Brilliant colors faded in the uncanny dusk, and jewels that had flashed and shimmered grew dull and lifeless.

Familiar objects took on strange, fantastic shapes before they melted in a maze of grotesque shadows.

"Speak, Villac Umu! Speak!" Quizquiz's voice was bordering on despair. "You are High Priest of the Temple of the Sun and know the will of the gods. You said this thing could not happen."

"It is but a cloud," Villac Umu explained nervously, but his faltering words carried no conviction.

"You lie! It is not a cloud. Command the shadow to retreat. Show your power. Use your magic. Do anything you wish to stop this terrible thing!"

The high priest arose and stretched both arms heavenward. In one hand was a staff from which numerous charms dangled, in the other a rattle of dried seeds. He loudly berated the demons that dared thrust themselves in front of the sun, and commanded them to depart without delay. He shook his staff and rattled his charms at them, but the grayness rapidly deepened into gloom, and when the last vestige of light had disappeared his helplessness was apparent to all. Loud cries, first singly, then in chorus, were raised in terrible accusation. In the darkness it was impossible to see who spoke, and this gave the speakers courage to say what was on their minds, but Ted and Stanley recognized the voice of Soncco among the leaders.

“Villac Umu is to blame for this; he said it could not happen, but it did, and now he is powerless to protect us. Kill him!” the mob shouted, and “Quiz-quiz shares in his guilt; he is not fit to be king, for he has betrayed us.”

Then one solemn voice made itself heard above the multitude:

“Stay in your places,” it shouted, “for you know not what new terror may overtake you if you move. Do nothing—yet. First beg the white man, who has shown you his power, to bring back the sunlight he has taken away, then——”

A deafening crash cut short the words that came from Soncco’s lips. Then more crashes came, followed by roars and rumbles that shook the very ground beneath their feet.

Ted and Stanley were nearly as much startled as were the others, for in the excitement of the moment they had completely forgotten the dynamite.

“Now,” Stanley shouted, “let’s go.”

With a start they snapped their chains and leaped to one side. Stanley rushed up to Soncco, who, too, seemed bewildered.

“Silence the crowd,” he panted. “I have something to say that I want every one to hear.”

Regaining his senses, Soncco blew shrill blasts upon

a trumpet, but it was some time before the confusion subsided. Judging by the sounds, the majority of the people were either kneeling or had fallen to the ground in their terror.

"You have seen and heard everything," Stanley shouted at the top of his voice. "Now, what do you want? Choose between——"

His words were drowned in the clamor that went up.

"Kill Quizquiz and Villac Umu," the thousands demanded, "and make the white man king. His companion shall be high priest. We ask nothing more than to be permitted to serve them as slaves for the remainder of our lives if they will but bring back the sunlight."

It was with the greatest difficulty that Soncco again silenced them.

"It shall be as you say," said Stanley. "But for the present let every one remain in his place. The sunlight will come back again, and so long as you obey my wishes no harm shall come to you. But if a single one of you betrays his pledge, worse things may happen."

"You shall be king," the multitude roared. "We swear it."

"Quizquiz is gone," Soncco whispered to Stanley; "the thunder of your medicine was too much for him."

He jumped to the ground and ran when the crash came. Villac Umu followed him."

"Will they keep their promise?" Stanley asked.

"Without question," Soncco assured him. "And I am sure you will fill the lofty stations in a manner befitting them."

"What do you mean? What stations? We want to leave so soon as possible."

"What are the wishes of an individual compared to the welfare of a nation? Consider yourself king, although the actual crowning ceremonies are still to be performed. And your companion is head of all the religious orders. If you had planned to go back to your people, you may find that they will insist on keeping you here, for the people have sworn it."

CHAPTER XVI

THE COMING OF THE TIGERS

THE sunlight returned in due time, and with its coming the people regained their composure. A shout that rapidly assumed the proportions of a roar went up as the assembled host proclaimed Stanley their king, and Ted high priest. This latter office was the second highest any man could hold. A few short minutes before they had been meek spectators to the terrible ordeal to which the white men had been subjected, ready to see them die without the courage to so much as say a single word in their defense. But now the tide had turned. Men who could command the sun to be darkened, and to shine again, and who brought thunder to the earth, were not men in reality in their sight, but gods. And to prove this contention, had the two not come from the sky in some mysterious contrivance they could control? It was but an example of how the estimation in which people are held too often varies with their fortunes.

“Long live the king and the high priest!” and “let them be crowned now!” they cried, while stal-

wart hands seized them, and carrying them aloft placed them in the golden thrones that had been deserted by Quizquiz and Villac Umu.

Ted and Stanley were on the point of objecting, but a look from Soncco silenced them. They permitted the nobles to raise the shining conveyances to their shoulders and carry them to the regally appointed quarters that had been occupied by the Inca.

Stanley's first official act was to order the instant release of the other prisoners who had been condemned to die with them. Next, he instructed the commander of the troops to capture Quizquiz and Villac Umu, and to bring them to him, unharmed. After that he commanded that preparations for the return to the city be made at once, and that the journey begin early the following morning. Soncco was appointed counsellor, and to him they intrusted the management of all civic affairs, the important ones, however, to be brought to Stanley's attention before action was taken. Upon reaching the capitol he would take up everything in detail and consider what was best for the future. In the meantime work was to be resumed by the inhabitants, and the laws administered exactly as they were before. This done, every one was dismissed excepting only Soncco and the servants of the royal quarters.

"You will dispose with all formalities while in our presence," Stanley instructed the aged amauta. "No crawling or bowing or taking off your shoes. We will conduct things on strictly business basis. Talk freely. We depend on you to help us."

To the former Soncco reluctantly agreed, for was not a king entitled to homage? The latter he would do with pleasure.

"Now let's take a walk," Ted suggested. "I am eager to see how much damage that dynamite did to the wall. I didn't think it would do more than tear a hole in it, but it sounded as if the whole thing fell down."

They went out of the spacious tent and looked in the direction of the great wall that had been erected to shut off the lower from the upper and larger end of the valley. That end of the massive structure that joined the natural stone escarpment of the mountains had fallen to the ground; there was a gap that appeared to be fully fifty yards wide. But that was not the more surprising result of the explosion. A broad rent had been torn in the mountainside itself.

The two gazed in astonishment.

"That hundred pounds of dynamite could never have done all that damage," Ted commented, much puzzled by the scene of devastation. "But I am glad

to see that there is a hole in the slope, because that means that we will have an easy passage into the outer world."

"That is just what I was thinking. What the jar of the explosion did was to cause a landslide, and the whole upper precipice tumbled down. Look at the huge pile of rocks! The avalanche carried the stones of the wall with it, and that accounts for the destruction of such a large section."

"To-morrow, after the people leave, let's go over there for a good look at it. We can catch up with the procession later. And perhaps we had better examine the airplane, too. It is standing there exactly as we left it. I guess they were afraid to touch it."

"Yes, let's do those things to-morrow. We have had enough for to-day. I am wobbly and all in a muddle, and cannot realize yet all that has happened to us. So I am in favor of getting something to eat, and then going straight to bed."

"I second that motion. It will be the first real sleep in a long time."

The food was of the finest the valley afforded, served by numerous menials and with all the pomp that had been lavished on Quizquiz. The bowls, platters, and goblets were of gold, finely wrought and decorated with flowers, fruit, and other designs. The two ate

heartily but refused the cups of corn wine, or *chicha*, remembering that the grain of which it had been brewed, first had been chewed thoroughly to induce its fermentation. Roast partridges, cakes made of fine meal, strawberries and honey, that was the repast intended for the Inca, and which they did not hesitate to accept.

Soncco remained in waiting in an adjoining room, and at their request came for an interview in the evening. They discussed their future policy with him for a brief time, and after assigning a place to him for the night sought their own luxurious blankets.

Sleep came almost immediately but was destined to be of short duration. At the command of Stanley the people had retired to their shelters early, thus putting an end to the loud chatter over the day's events. Also, the numberless fires had been extinguished and absolute quiet reigned over the sea of tents.

A frightful roar broke the silence of the night. For an instant there was not a sound; then came the hum of excited voices, for the encampment had been aroused, and lights began to flicker in many places.

Ted and Stanley sat bolt upright. They strained their ears for a repetition of the sound. It came before long. Another roar, preceded by a few low,

hoarse growls, came to the ears of the astonished listeners.

"What under the sun can that be?" Ted asked, stepping off the edge of his couch. Stanley was up and had lighted a torch.

"I never heard anything like it before."

"Sounds something like a jaguar, only much more powerful. Perhaps it is the noise of some wind-instrument we don't know anything about. Do you suppose it can be Quizquiz, trying to frighten us, perhaps? Or is it the people serenading us?"

"I don't know. Listen! It may come again."

"I'll bet it is Quizquiz. He has gathered those of his followers who are still faithful to him, and is preparing to attack the camp. That was a war horn."

"We shall soon see. If it is anything of that kind Soncco will know and report to us."

The excitement among the Indians was great, but as the unusual sound was not repeated, and as their adviser did not show up, the two came to the conclusion that the disturbance did not concern them, and went back to bed.

They had scarcely closed their eyes, or, at least so it seemed, when the camp was again thrown into an uproar by a repetition of the unearthly sound.

"I am going to find out about this," Stanley said decisively. "It must be stopped."

He had scarcely finished speaking when Soncco rushed into the apartment.

"Forgive me, great and noble king," he panted, "for entering without asking permission."

"I am glad you came," Stanley replied quickly. "What is all the racket about? Find out who or what is making it and have it stopped."

"That is why I came to you. The people are in a panic and many are fleeing toward the city. They fear it is some evil sequel to the astounding events of the day."

"But what is it?"

"Every one is asking that. They are begging that you, their king, enlighten them. On my knees I am presenting their humble petition."

The sound of heavy footfalls attracted their attention and hushed their conversation. A moment later some one clapped his hands before the entrance.

"Enter!" Stanley commanded.

Toparca and Huascar, followed by a dozen other nobles, in bare feet and carrying their sandals on their left shoulders as a sign of homage, filed into the tent. Their faces were pale and they could hardly suppress their excitement.

"Speak quickly and freely, for I know what is on your minds," Stanley encouraged.

"Lords, lords, who have mastered the air and to whose wishes even the Sun-God bows, save us or we shall all be killed," cried one of the party as they all fell upon their knees and stretched their hands toward Stanley and Ted.

"Stand up. Now explain just what you mean. What do you want us to save you from?" Stanley was losing patience.

"We do not know. But having seen and heard the events of the past day, and having been shown the great power of the men from the outer world, we came to beg for help and for mercy. A new horror is stalking through the valley. Every one is terror-stricken. An undefinable dread clutches at each heart. The air is heavy with forebodings and vibrates with the rumblings from monster throats that bespeak death and destruction. We are in your power. If this be a punishment, let it be inflicted upon those of us who deserve it, but spare those who are innocent the anguish and the suffering they are compelled to endure awaiting an unknown fate."

"Wait," Stanley said simply. Then, turning to Ted: "This is awful. Have you any idea what the trouble is?"

"This is so bewildering I can hardly think. There it is again."

Once more the frightful roar reached their ears, followed by shrieks and wails. For a moment they studied the blanched faces before them in the vain hope that they might betray some clew to the solution of the mystery.

"We are certainly up against it. Let's go outside. Perhaps we can learn something definite there."

Throwing light blankets over their shoulders they started toward the door. As they reached it they nearly collided with a man who was dashing in.

Half-naked, with streaming, dishevelled hair and bulging, startled eyes, he was a picture of the kind of fear that borders on insanity.

"I have heard with my own ears, and I have seen with my own eyes," he shrieked, waving his trembling hands over his head, "and I shall carry the image of it into my grave."

"Who is he?" Stanley asked Soncco.

"He is Lolo, one of the officers of the guard."

"Lolo, having heard and seen, you will tell me everything. Talk slowly and distinctly and keep nothing from me. Remember, your king commands it." Stanley addressed the man in a tone of authority.

This in a measure brought the officer to his senses, but the look of bewilderment did not leave his eyes, and his face retained the expression of fright and suffering. He bowed low, unsteadily, and asked forgiveness for intruding into the royal quarters without permission.

"It is all right," Stanley reassured him; "think as clearly as you can, and tell us plainly what happened. We understand your position."

In obedience to the command just given him Lolo told of the terrible spectacle he had witnessed.

"I was on my rounds, inspecting the guard," he panted, "and was just nearing the post close to the mountains. One of the soldiers was piling wood on the watch-fire, and the flames shot up, lighting the plain for many paces around. Without warning, a deafening roar came out of the blackness beyond the circle of light. We had never heard anything like it before, and the shock of it was so great that we could not stir from the places on which we stood. We were as men paralyzed, and simply stared into the darkness. A pair of points of green fire appeared; they were the eyes of some great beast. A form followed, gliding between the watch-fire and the stone wall of the mountainside, so that its outline fell full upon the smooth face of the precipice. And such a monster! It

was higher than the Temple of the Sun in the Golden City, with eyes that burned into our hearts and brains."

The man had gesticulated wildly during the recital. He now wrung his hands in despair, and was on the point of breaking down.

"Go on!" Stanley commanded. "Finish your story."

"The brute raised its great head; the jaws opened wide, like a serpent's, and fangs, shaped like curved swords and longer than a man's arm, flashed white in the flaring light, and then buried themselves in the breast of the nearest soldier. The man uttered not a sound, so quickly had death come. With a low, rumbling growl the beast or demon, I know not which it may be, turned and faded away into the darkness whence it had come, the dead soldier limply dangling from its mouth."

"Do you expect me to believe that?" Stanley demanded sternly. "Did you see it?"

"Yes, yes. And others saw it too. I have spoken only the truth. The king shall have the proof of other eyes and other ears."

"Then go, all of you, as fast as you can. Command the people, in my name, to congregate in the centre of the camp, and to build a ring of fires around the

outer border. Do not lose a minute. It is a matter of life and death."

The visitors bowed and rushed away, Soncco going with the rest. When they had gone, Stanley turned to Ted.

"That man told the truth, but he was excited and exaggerated the facts. We know the worst now."

"You mean that it was a——"

"Yes, nothing less than a sabre-toothed tiger—a living example of the kind whose bones we found in the cave in Uti when we were there before. He saw the beast, but the thing that made the greatest impression on him was its shadow on the abrupt mountainside. Heaven only knows where it came from, but we must have opened the passage for it with the dynamite."

"Can it be possible that some of those awful creatures still survive after all the hundreds of years?" Ted asked incredulously.

"It must be possible because we have the evidence. And, besides, anything is possible in a place like this. Come to think of it, I know just where it came from; you remember that other valley we saw from the air? That is the place. We are in it for fair now. A more terrible creature never trod the face of the earth. We are to blame for the calamity of turning it loose

on these people, and we shall have to find a way of exterminating it; there may be many of them for all we know. What to do is the question. A tiger the size of a cow, and more powerful and ferocious than a dozen of the ordinary kind, is not an antagonist to be sneezed at. Will our troubles never end? We haven't a rifle; nothing but spears and bows and arrows; they will do about as much good as hailstones."

"I have it," Ted announced suddenly. "What about the machine-guns on the airplane? We can rig them up on mounts. Each one will be worth twenty rifles."

"Why, of course. That's just what we'll do. And we will have our hands full at that. But now, let's go out and help quiet the people. They are starting their wailing again, and there will be real trouble unless we can soothe them."

CHAPTER XVII

ANIMALS OF A BYGONE AGE

TED and Stanley lost no time in going out among the people. The event of a king mingling freely with his subjects, and on foot at that, was without precedent. They encouraged, soothed, and even threatened where necessary. But their presence in the midst of danger in itself had a calming effect on the majority of Indians, and the Americans rose mightily in the estimation of the multitude.

“Quizquiz deserted us in time of peril,” they said with an awe akin to adoration; “the new king shares our danger and will vanquish it, just as he drove away the demon of darkness and brought back the sunlight. Long live the new king, the greatest of them all.”

Apparently the animals that had invaded the valley had become emboldened by their first onslaught, for toward morning the thunderous roars again rent the silence hovering over the valley. This time they were repeated more frequently and drew nearer with great rapidity.

“It is exactly as I thought,” Stanley said. “They

are coming from the direction of the gap torn by the dynamite."

"But if they are coming from Uti, why did not they attack us while we were there?" Ted asked.

"I don't think any of the brutes survived beyond the wall. They must be extinct there, for we saw only their bones in the cave, and Timichi, the exile, who had lived there for years, had never been molested by them. The landslide caused by the jar of the explosion opened a passage from that other hidden valley where they still exist, and it did not take them long to find the outlet into a new feeding-ground."

"We had better make a round of the outposts. If the soldiers become panic-stricken and desert the fires the tigers will break through the lines and carry away more people."

"By all means, let's go. This is doubtless the last attempt of the creatures to invade this place, for daylight will soon be here, and they will return to their hiding-places."

They hurried from fire to fire, and ordered the guards to pile on more fuel, and the two viewed with satisfaction the mounting glow as the flames leaped higher and higher.

The unbroken prospect of the circle of crackling fire did not appeal to the attackers, for they did not ven-

ture near to it, but after a succession of deafening howls and cries retreated in the direction from which they had come.

Daylight brought relief to the frightened inhabitants of the valley, and Soncco urged that they break camp immediately and return to the capital, for in the stone houses of the city there would be at least a measure of safety. Also, preparations must be made without delay for the coronation ceremonies, when Stanley would be crowned with the crimson *borla*, and Ted receive his appointment as High Priest of the Temple of the Sun.

Soncco argued long and earnestly, but to all his pleas they replied that while, no doubt, they would be safe in their stone palaces, the hundreds of others living in the country would remain exposed to the ravages of the great brutes, which, growing constantly bolder, would destroy them in increasing numbers. The welfare of the king depended upon the welfare of the people, they believed; to desert the latter at a time like this would be to invite their own ruin.

No! They were determined to attack the tigers in their own fastness, in their very lairs, if necessary; to exterminate them if possible, and if not, to at least check their inroads. After that had been accomplished there would be time enough to consider other matters. But the safety of the populace came first.

After a hurried breakfast the two Americans hastened to the stranded airplane. The wings and body had been battered considerably by the wind, but as no rain had fallen since their arrival, the guns were free from rust and in good working order. They immediately set about to strip the weapons, carefully wiped all the working parts with oily cloths, and reloaded the magazines. Then they made tripods of stout poles on which to mount the guns.

In the meantime the people had been sent away to places of security. Only fifty picked soldiers, with their officers, were retained. These were ordered to look after their bows, arrows, and swords in order to be sure that everything was in fighting trim. Shortly before noon all preparations had been completed, and the expedition, with Stanley and Ted in the lead, started for the break in the mountainside.

If there had been any doubt as to the locality from which the tigers had come, the great footprints of the animals would have dispelled them soon. Where the ground was soft or under cultivation the massive paws had sunk to a depth of nearly twelve inches, and the holes measured fully as much in diameter. Some were larger than others, indicating that several of the beasts, of various ages, had been quick to take advantage of an opportunity to secure a meal easily.

"We will mount one of the guns here," Stanley

said when they had approached to within fifty yards of the opening. "You stay here with half the men; I will place the remainder on either side of the gap while I take a look at what is on the other side. If there is none of the animals in sight I will motion to you to come on. If there should be one near by and it charges, I will run to the rocks on one side so as to give you a clear sweep of the gap. Keep the gun trained on the opening, and if anything comes through hold the trigger back until you are sure the bullets are hitting in the right spot. You can't miss at such close range."

"You stay here and let me go first," Ted pleaded. But Stanley insisted on being the one to face the danger.

The gun was quickly set up, a magazine full of cartridges snapped into place, and the muzzle trained on the narrow passage through which the tigers must come if they should be aroused and attempted a charge. Then Stanley cautiously started forward with his men, weapons in hand, the party moving in two files, one on each side, and keeping out of sight as much as possible behind the mass of rocks that had fallen from above.

They halted when they reached the foot of the escarpment, and Stanley mounted his gun on one side

of the breach. Then he crept forward alone, at such a slow pace that he seemed scarcely to move. His face was covered with cold perspiration, and he thought the pounding of his heart must be audible across the entire expanse of the valley, but his courage remained unshaken. Crouching low, he took a hurried peep around the edge of the rock barrier. Ted watched his every move, firmly gripping the handle of the gun with one hand, the forefinger of the other resting lightly on the trigger.

Stanley must have seen nothing of a formidable nature, for he took a second and longer look, then, emboldened, crept into the opening. A few minutes later he emerged, crawling backward, and motioning to the men to remain where they were, hastened to Ted's side.

"It's the most wonderful thing I ever saw in my life." He could hardly speak from excitement. "There is another world beyond that wall of stone, and it belongs to the past—thousands of years ago, I mean. You won't believe it; you can't until you see for yourself."

"What is it?" Ted asked, also breathless with excitement. "You wait here now and let me sneak up and see."

"I will crawl back and put up the gun in the pas-

sage. Then you come with yours. I can't believe my eyes, and I want you to see it and then tell me if I am right, or am I losing my mind."

To Ted, waiting in the distance, it seemed ages while Stanley carried out his plan, although in reality it was only a few minutes. The eagerly awaited wave of the hand came at last, so, picking up his gun, he hastened to the side of his companion.

Together they quietly made their way through the rent in the mountainside; the walls, jagged and torn, rose to a great height on each side of them, and the bottom was strewn with a mass of shattered rock. When they reached the far end of the passage they stopped and stared in awe and amazement at the panorama spread before their eyes.

They were standing on the brink of a crater miles across in each direction. The floor of the great depression was only slightly lower than the spot on which they stood. Plots of green grass, fields of huge, black boulders, interspersed with islands of tall trees, met their gaze whichever way they turned. Whisps and jets of steam and smoke rose from crevices in the rock-fields, showing that the volcano was not yet extinct, but obviously it had been many, many centuries since there had been an eruption of any importance. In the centre lay a lake of large size—it covered at least a

square mile. And enclosing the arena on all sides rose the stupendous walls of stone and lava, blackened with smoke and sulphurous fumes, and of such abruptness that they appeared perfectly vertical.

“Good heavens!” Ted gasped. “It looks like the Inferno and Paradise combined.”

“It is so terrific and so unbelievable that I am stunned. Prehistoric is the word for it—a leaf torn from the pages of the world’s history of thousands of years ago; perhaps even a million. Look, look!”

Stanley was pointing to a number of black objects of rounded form that dotted one of the velvety, green areas.

“Wonder how those stones came to be of such uniform size, and why they are standing in such evenly distributed groups. Some one must have placed them there. Why, one of them is moving!”

“They are not stones. They are tortoises. See that one? It is the size of a wash-tub, and it’s eating grass.”

“And look over there, on the margin of the water—to the right,” Ted whispered.

A herd of deer was timidly approaching its favorite drinking-place, out in the open where the nervous animals had a clear view of their surroundings for many yards.

"But the tigers! I don't see a sign of them anywhere except these tracks leading away from here."

"They must be laying up in their lairs among the rocks, or in caves, maybe. Perhaps they come out only at night."

"That makes our work all the harder," Ted returned. "We cannot follow them in there without rifles. And if they remain hidden all day long, how are we going to get at them?"

"I thought of something just this minute. See that ledge right above us? That must be fifty feet from the ground. Why not hide up there to-night and shoot the beasts as they pass? There will be a full moon, so we shall have no trouble in seeing."

"Great! The very thing! We can stick a fluff of white wool on the sights to make them plainer," Ted exclaimed enthusiastically. "We have a number of hours to get ready in, but not one too many, so let's get busy right away."

While two of the soldiers crouched in the opening as sentinels, ready to give the alarm at the first sign of danger, the others, under the direction of Ted and Stanley, rigged up a ladder by winding thongs around a spliced pole, up which the two could climb to the rock shelf. This required a good deal of time, but when the work was finally completed the Americans

ascended to the lofty perch, after which they hoisted up the guns. There were other ledges above them, but the lower one, they thought, was high enough for security.

The guards then removed the pole-ladder. Ted and Stanley found themselves alone on a narrow ledge, and confident that from this strategic position they could easily stop the murderous marauders when nightfall should induce them to leave their hiding-places in quest of victims.

The soldiers, with their officers, departed immediately, with instructions to barricade themselves in the nearest houses. At first the officers were reluctant to leave, but they dared not disobey the command to go now and to return early on the following morning. They left their woollen cloaks to be used as blankets by the watchers, and also a sufficient quantity of food.

Ted and Stanley, from their point of vantage, scrutinized the saucer-like expanse before them. Probably they were the first men to behold the strange world within the crater. So long as daylight lasted, life in that weird place was peaceful enough. Animals were abundant, almost everywhere. Species they had not observed before appeared here and there. Besides the tortoises and deer, there were herds of wild

pigs, armadillos of such great size that they must have weighed a ton, ant-eaters resembling the large, banded kind, not uncommon in the Amazon country, and monkeys with short tails. The creatures seemed to live in perfect harmony; they frolicked in play or busied themselves searching for food. To look at them engaged in their peaceful occupations, one would never suspect that such terrible monsters as the tigers lurked in their very midst. It was a curious conglomeration that defied description, but of the kind that the men of ages ago saw and struggled with daily.

With the first signs of coming night the animals grew restive. The deer moved toward the high, barren sides of the crater; the armadillos sought their burrows; the tortoises waddled into crevices in the rocks, and the other creatures hurried to the forested areas. Within the space of half an hour the crater appeared deserted. It was ominous. Experience had taught the denizens of this strange region to seek their shelters before the onrush of darkness.

"I've loaded the magazines so there will be bursts of ten shots," Ted announced. "That ought to be enough, and if it is not, we can let loose another string of ten additional ones."

"If that does not stop them, nothing will."

"This place does not seem so high as I thought, somehow or other."

"The coming darkness and the shadows are deceptive. Powerful as they are, the tigers could not possibly jump up here."

"No, of course not. But this is a creepy place, just the same. I hope they do not keep us waiting very long. I almost think I might get nervous," Ted laughed, but the laugh sounded hollow and was without mirth. It seemed as if the experience would be more exciting and less enjoyable than they had anticipated.

Just then a black apparition swept past their faces, not a yard away, on silent wings, and settled on the ledge near by. When it hooted dismally they knew it was an owl.

"Wow!" Stanley exclaimed. "I'll say it's creepy here. And we are in for a whole night of it. They took the ladder away so we can't get down if we want to. Come on, tigers; this suspense is worse than fighting you."

And, almost before he knew it, his wish was gratified.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAN IN THE CRATER

WHEN the sun plunged into the masses of yellowish mist that clung to the rim of the crater a bright moon was already high in the heavens. The transformation from day to night was sudden, for in the tropics the light fades abruptly, and darkness swoops upon the land almost as a black cloud scurrying across the face of the sun obliterates the brilliant radiance in a short space of time.

The soft moonlight, in streaks and splashes, and the long, creeping shadows made the floor of the crater seem weird and unreal. A streak of silvery light lay across the smooth surface of the lake, and as the two men, crouching on the narrow ledge, gazed in fascination at it, the mirror-like water was broken by ripples that appeared here and there like little pools and lines of sparkling jewels. The creatures that were coming out for their nocturnal frolic, but which could not be clearly distinguished, swam in circles or straight lines and dived with great splashes. Only their heads, like black dots, could be seen on the surface of the water.

"They may be some kind of a muskrat, like the *nutria* of the Argentine, or like the water opossums," Stanley suggested. "Whatever they are, they do not seem to be afraid of anything, for, look, one is heading for the shore."

"I suppose the tigers don't bother them; they are too small to make even a mouthful."

A herd of very large, black animals, with low-swinging heads and short, curved horns suddenly hove into sight. They emerged from a clump of forest in a long, straggling formation, and moved to the centre of the largest clearing.

"Buffaloes," Stanley gasped. "A herd of buffaloes. But what are they doing out in the open?"

"I should think they would hide at night, like the other animals we saw. But they do not seem to be worrying about anything."

A shrill wail rose clear and piercing from somewhere in the darkness and echoed back and forth among the rocky walls. It was not repeated.

"That sounds like a puma," Ted hazarded after listening in vain for a repetition of the cry. "I wonder what next!"

Just then one of the buffaloes gave a sharp bellow of alarm. The herd became charged with life instantly, and rushed into a compact mass so quickly it was im-

possible to follow their movements. But when they again became quiet it was seen that they were standing in a solidly packed circle. The cows and calves were in the centre, and the males, facing outward with lowered heads and bristling horns, formed an unbroken stockade around them.

“Now I see their scheme,” Stanley exclaimed. “They have taken their stand for the night out in the open, where they have a chance for their lives. I doubt if even the sabre-tooths would dare charge that front of horns and hoofs. In the forest they could pick them off singly without much trouble, but——”

A small stone struck Ted’s shoulder, dropped to the ledge, bounded off, and rattled down to the ground.

“Where did that come from?” he asked with a start.

They looked up along the face of the stone wall, but saw nothing.

“Just a loose fragment,” Stanley explained with a nervous laugh. “Probably small pieces are dropping all of the time, or an owl may have started it in alighting.”

Again they strained their eyes toward the moonlit floor of the crater.

“I don’t remember seeing that stone before—the one right below and a little to the left.”

"Nor I. But it must have been there, just the same, for stones can't walk."

"How smooth and round it looks. The moonlight and shadows make it appear more conspicuous than before; that is why we notice it now."

"Yes; I guess you are right."

Another pebble came rattling down from above, struck the ledge, and bounded down into the crater.

"There is something up there. Stones like that would not drop one at a time unless something started them," Ted whispered. "I am going to watch the top while you keep your eyes on the bottom."

But a short time elapsed. Stanley nudged his companion.

"Look!" he whispered. "The smooth, round stone is moving. It is creeping along as stealthily as the shadows themselves, and it is coming in our direction. It must be an animal of some kind."

"There is one above, too," Ted returned with bated breath. "They are stalking us from the top and the bottom."

Stanley quickly looked upward. What he saw made him gasp. A massive head was clearly outlined against the dark rock of the wall, and a pair of eyes, blazing with a green fire, seemed to pierce him through.

"The guns, the guns; quick!" he panted, "before it springs. Don't mind the one below——"

Ted was tugging at his weapon.

"I can't. I can't point it straight up. The angle is too great."

"Kneel down. I will rest it on your shoulder."

Stanley pulled one of the guns from its mount. The great head was now hanging over the edge of the shelf on which the creature stood, not ten feet above them, and from it came a rumbling growl accompanied by a clicking and champing of strong teeth.

Ted had dropped to his knees. Stanley was flat on his back trying to bring the bead through the ring sight of the gun. But the high lights and shadows were deceptive, and before he could align the sights the glowing eyes had vanished again. The tiger had drawn back for the spring.

"Back! Flatten yourself against the wall," he shouted, throwing himself against the face of the cliff and dragging Ted with him.

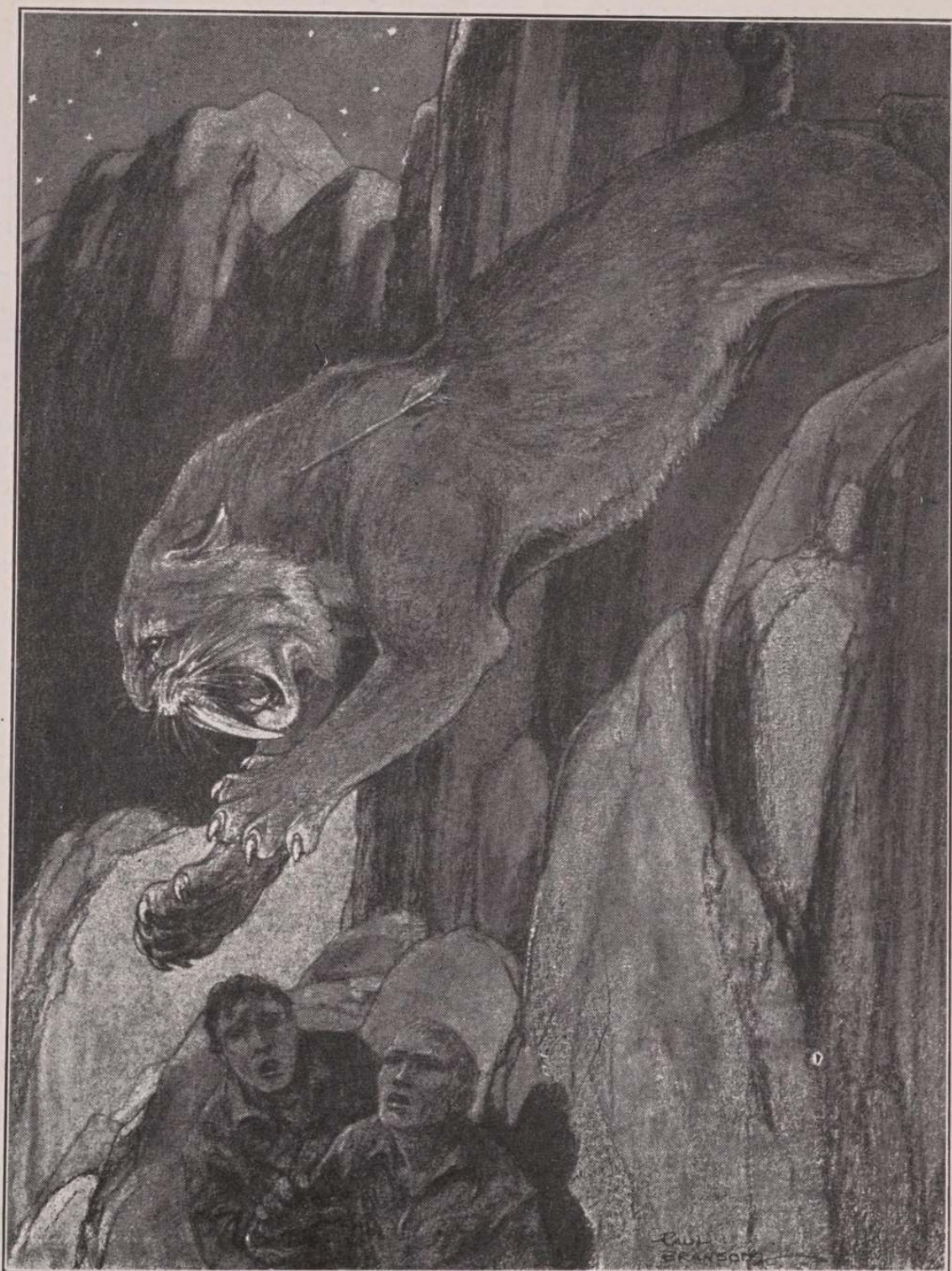
Something whizzed through the air; there came a crunching thud, and then a roar that seemed to make the earth tremble shattered the death-like silence that had reigned in the crater. An instant later a huge, dark form catapulted past the crouching men, heavily struck the edge of the narrow shelf, and fell to the

ground with a crash. Something had gone awry; either the brute had miscalculated the distance or its footing had given away, and the fall of such a heavy creature from the great height must have hurt it sorely.

With one accord the two men pulled themselves to the edge and looked down. They were just in time to see what they had at first mistaken for a stone rise to its feet, give one snarl of rage, and then spring upon the mass that had fallen from above and was thrashing about helplessly on the ground.

As it shot through the air, white teeth, like long daggers, glistened in the sides of the wide-open mouth. There was no mistake. They were face to face with the sabre-toothed tigers.

Screams and snarls, hoarse bellowings and roars cut short by gurgling blood filled the air, mingled with the sound of the heavy, struggling bodies. The brutes were in a deadly embrace, and rolled over and over on the rock-strewn ground, biting, clawing, and tearing at one another with all the ferocity of their savage nature. The onlookers could not tell whether this was the settling of an ancient grudge, or if the tiger that had been on the ground had quickly realized the helplessness of the one that had fallen from above, and had taken advantage of the opportunity to easily rid the crater of one of its own kind, of which there



An instant later a huge, dark form catapulted past the crouching men

may have been more than the limited space could conveniently support.

The combat was terrifying, even from a safe distance, but of short duration. The aggressor finished his work in short order. To the ears of the spell-bound watchers came the sound of crunching bones and rending flesh, mingled with cries of agony and fear. And from a distance rose the mournful wail of a lone wolf, doubtlessly watching the battle and impatiently waiting for its end so that it might feast on the remains of the loser. Shadowy forms, also, were flitting noiselessly through the air, coming apparently from nowhere. They, too, were awaiting their share of the spoils.

A few additional plunges of the sword-like teeth and the tiger that now was underneath lay still. Then the victor arose, shook himself, and calmly walked away a few paces, faced the centre of the crater and announced his supremacy with an ear-splitting roar. But was it really the proclaiming of the winning of a battle with one of his own kind, or did the thunderous voice convey a challenge? Looking in the direction toward which the brute had turned, the two on the ledge understood the situation in a flash. In front of the terrible creature, and not fifty yards away, stood a man.

For a moment the tiger stood still, as if planning

its strategy, then it advanced with measured steps, moving its head from side to side and growling the while. But the man did not stir; he had taken an arrow from a pack that he carried slung over one shoulder, and was fitting it, without haste, to his bow.

Ted and Stanley stared in horror. Who was the man who had dared venture into the crater, alone and at night, and who now calmly faced the most powerful as well as most savage of all the earth's living creatures, armed with but a bow and a handful of arrows? Surely, he must be demented, for any man in his right senses would know that such weapons were of little avail against such an adversary.

At five paces from its victim the tiger stopped. It crouched low. The head was resting between the forepaws; the tail, which was short and thick, twitched nervously from side to side. Was the great beast surprised and puzzled by the audacity of the man-creature? Or was it preparing for the spring?

The man, without haste, raised his bow, grasping the tough wooden arc and the shaft of the arrow with his left hand while with his right he began steadily and firmly to draw back the cord. The upper part of his body was bare, and there was the rippling play of powerful muscles in arms and shoulders straining to the limit of endurance.

Crack! The arrow fell to the ground and the bow straightened with a twang. The string had snapped under the terrific strain. The weapon was useless. But the man was not dismayed by the misfortune. He threw it from him and calmly drew a short sword from his belt; then he crouched forward to await the onslaught of the tiger.

Stanley sprang to his gun and Ted was not long in following his action.

“We must save him,” the former shrieked.

A string of shots rattled forth in quick succession as pointed tongues of flame leaped from the muzzle of the gun. Another followed immediately and the gunners took their eyes from the sights and anxiously looked for the result of the fusillade. Some of the bullets had found their mark. The great beast was rolling on its back, clawing the air with frantic and convulsive movements, and tearing at its own shoulders and sides. Screams of pain came from its throat. But its struggles did not last long. It lay still save for an occasional moan and quiver, then even these signs of life stopped.

“Run! Run for your life!” Stanley shouted to the man. “There may be another one near by. Come this way. There is a ladder at the foot of the cliff.”

"I am not afraid," the man replied. "I came here to fight the demons."

"But your bow is useless; you have only a knife, and that is little more than worthless against such creatures."

"I will come up to you because I want to talk with you. After that I shall return to the crater."

The man started toward them in a leisurely manner.

"I never saw such courage before. It borders on recklessness."

"He must be crazy or trying to do away with himself," Ted said emphatically. "Wonder who he can be?"

"The voice sounded familiar. I am sure I have heard it before, often. Do you realize that he saved our lives? The *whiz* we heard over our heads just as the tiger above us was about to spring was caused by an arrow. He saw our position and knew that it was hopeless, so he shot at the animal and wounded it; that destroyed its aim and it missed us, barely striking the edge of the shelf and falling to the ground. If it hadn't been for him the brute should have dropped on top of us."

"Well, it was a narrow escape, and I am glad we were able to repay the fellow in kind. But I want to meet him and thank him for his action, anyway."

There was the scraping of the tall pole-ladder against the face of the rock, and a moment later the man's head and shoulders appeared over the rim of the ledge. The two grasped his hands and helped him up.

His face was youthful. Ted and Stanley knew they had seen it somewhere. And his body, while inclined to be slender, was of strong, athletic build. His only article of clothing was a short tunic of a dark color, so tattered that it hung from him in strips and fringes of thread.

"You killed the demon," he said in a voice touched with sadness. "Why did you do it?"

"To save you, of course. Your weapon was broken. You had only a sword left. And, anyway, you saved our lives, so we were but repaying an honorable debt," Stanley said in surprise.

"I was not afraid. I am not a coward."

"No one could ever call you a coward after seeing what we saw. But it was only natural that we should see your danger and do what we could to help you out of it. A man armed with only a sword would have small chance against such a large, ferocious beast."

"I was not afraid to die. It would not have mattered, anyway," the man said sadly.

"Tell us," Stanley urged, "how did you happen to be in the crater at this time of the night, and alone?"

"To prove to myself that, no matter what I may have been or may have done in the past, I am not a coward at heart."

"No one called you a coward."

"Yes, imploring your forgiveness for the contradiction. You called me that very loathsome thing."

"I?" in surprise. "When?"

The man hesitated. His demeanor was so humble and he appeared so downcast that the two were sorry for him.

"I will take it all back," Stanley apologized, holding out his hand. "You are as courageous as any one I have ever seen."

"Do you not know me?" The man came a few steps nearer and turned his face full into the moonlight. "Look into my face. I am Quizquiz!"

"Quizquiz!" both the Americans exclaimed in astonishment.

"Yes."

"Impossible."

"Look closely! Now do you recognize me?" He came still nearer and quietly submitted to their scrutiny.

"As I live, it is Quizquiz, but it cannot be the one we knew." Stanley could hardly believe his eyes. "The Quizquiz who was king was treacherous, cruel,

cowardly, and bloodthirsty; the person who stands before us has proved by his actions to-night that he does not know fear, at least, and such valor must have other noble qualities for companions."

"The same body, but not the same spirit, stands before you. Yesterday I was king, with all the evil traits you mentioned, and more too. To-day, I rank with the lowliest—I am nobody in the sight of men, but I have found my true self. That is worth all it cost."

"Tell us, how did you get into the crater?"

"When, at your command, the sun became darkened, I was seized with panic and fled, blinded by fear and terror. I knew not where I went. And when daylight came again I found myself in this frightful place. Fearing pursuit, I hid in the first crevice in the rocks—it would scarcely admit my body—and waited. Darkness came and with it great monsters emerged from their lairs in the caves. First one, then another, found my hiding-place, but the opening was too small to admit their massive heads. There they stood, screaming and roaring, and blowing their hot breath into my face until I fainted. When I came to, the demons had gone; soon they returned carrying in their mouths the bodies of the luckless soldiers they had slain in the valley. One stopped not ten paces

from my place of concealment and, in full view, proceeded to eat its victim; for minutes that seemed like ages I was compelled to lie quietly with the sound of tearing flesh and splintering bones in my ears. And then it came to me suddenly, like the lightning flash in the sky. I was to blame for all this. It was my wrong-doings that had caused untold discontent and suffering in my kingdom. With vainglorious pride I had listened to the flatterers, had followed their suggestions, and had rewarded them lavishly at the expense of the wise, the just, and the good. It was too late to undo these wrongs or to right the injustices of which I had been guilty; but I still had the opportunity to prove to myself that I could be a worthy son of Huayna Capac, then return and ask for a merited punishment. My spirit is now at ease."

"Villac Umu was the cause of your downfall, was he not?"

"He was my instructor and adviser so long back as I can remember."

"Were you not governed entirely by his advice?"

"I blame only myself. As king, I was not compelled to listen to any one. I alone am responsible for everything, and deserve the most merciless punishment."

“Of course you realize that you are no longer king. You are a fugitive from justice, while we are now masters. The tables are turned. You prepared the most fiendish torture that could be devised for us; naturally you must expect us to treat you in the same manner.”

“I am in your hands. Do as you see fit.”

Quizquiz fumbled at his belt; then he fell upon his knees.

“On bended knees I give to you the crimson fringe to which I have no further right. Take it, wear it, and may your God and mine protect you.”

His head was bowed in deepest humiliation. In his extended hand he held the *borla*, the Inca's badge of authority.

Stanley took it almost reverently.

“Quizquiz”—Stanley's voice was tense with emotion—“we are not unmindful of the fact that to-night you were the means of saving our lives, and we are not ungrateful. But neither can we forget your previous character. The welfare of a nation depends upon us. We cannot sacrifice it. You admitted your guilt; you deserve the severest punishment possible. Therefore, you will now consider yourself our prisoner. Do you consent to arrest, or shall we use violence?”

“I give myself into your keeping freely, and I know that the worst you can do to me will not be half so

much as I deserve. Here are my hands—bind them—then my feet, too.”

“No, we shall not bind you. We are not afraid of you, or that you will escape. Go to the far end of the ledge and sit down with your back toward the wall. Our guns will be trained upon you; one move, and you die, understand?”

“Your words are very plain. I will do as you command,” and he took up his station in the spot indicated.

Ted and Stanley, while never for an instant relaxing their vigilance, discussed at length the amazing turn events had taken. The problem that confronted them was a perplexing one. Had they encountered the old Quizquiz they had known it would have been an easy matter to dispose of him. But the new Quizquiz was a different person, endowed with the very virtues the other had lacked. There was also this to consider: was he sincere? Would his goodness last, or was he but playing a game with the hope of regaining the throne, when his old character should again assert itself in all its viciousness?

The problem, therefore, that they discussed far into the night, but for which they were unable to find the solution, was: “What shall we do with Quizquiz?”

CHAPTER XIX

THE BREACH IN THE MOUNTAIN IS CLOSED

"I HOPE the two dead tigers down there are not the only ones that remained in the crater. It would be a pity to exterminate such a wonderful species," Stanley said toward morning. They had watched throughout the long hours of the night without seeing more of the beasts. So long as the moon shone observation had been comparatively easy, but when the bright disk dipped behind the crater walls the darkness was intense. They strained their eyes and ears but saw or heard nothing.

"It does seem a pity to destroy all of them, but what else can we do? If they are not killed they will eventually wipe out the people," Ted returned.

"Quizquiz!" Stanley called to the crouching form that had not stirred from its place on the ledge. "You spent last night in the crater. Were there many of the creatures you call demons, but which are in reality tigers? Did you see more than two?"

"There were more than two. There were more than four. I saw five from my crevice in the rocks after I had regained my senses and looked out."

"I wonder why we saw only two to-night?"

"I saw a third and a fourth near the lake just before the moonlight faded; but the smell of the blood of their dead kindred kept them from coming nearer."

"What? You saw others to-night?" from Stanley severely. "Why did you not tell us about it?"

"A prisoner may not speak to his captors unless he is spoken to first," Quizquiz replied meekly.

"You are right. See that you keep your proper place at all times."

When daylight was fairly advanced, Soncco and the soldiers appeared in the distance. They approached the spot cautiously until Stanley, from his lofty station, bade them halt. Soncco alone was commanded to advance to the foot of the precipice, but in deference to his age Stanley came down the ladder instead of asking the elderly man to climb up. Ted remained above to keep his eye on the captive, and also to watch for signs of life in the crater. He could not hear what was being said by the two below, but after half an hour Stanley rejoined him, while Soncco remained on the ground.

"We have been discussing a number of things," he said in answer to his companion's inquiring looks. "I suggested some of them, Soncco thought of others, and still others just grew out of our conversation.

First, before anything is decided definitely, I want to lay the plans before you so you can express your opinion. Whatever we do concerns both of us. Your future, as well as mine, depends on the outcome of things."

"All right," Ted returned, "but I should be perfectly willing to intrust the whole matter to you; you have done pretty well, so far."

"Thanks! But I will let you help. Now, first, here is the crater. From all we can see of it it does not possess much value as an agricultural proposition. There are scores of queer animals in there that probably do not exist anywhere else on the face of the earth. If we let the people go in there the animals will be exterminated in short order. We do not want that. They are a last remnant of a prehistoric age, just as the people in the valley are the last pitiful reminder of a once powerful nation, possessing a wonderful civilization. Both survived because they were isolated from the outer world—and would still be so but for us."

"How can we save them?" Ted asked. "I am in favor of it if it can be done."

"That great wall between Uti and the main valley was built to keep the tigers from destroying the people years ago," Stanley said, pointing to the massive

structure, the end of which had been undermined and destroyed by the explosion. "If that was not too much work for them, it will not be too much to fill up this little gap."

"That's a bully idea. We can watch up here while the men place the stones in position, and protect them if need be. Then life can go on in the crater just the same as if we had never found it."

"Exactly. I am glad you are in favor of that, too. Now for the two dead tigers. We must take them out, of course, and carry them back home with us. I am glad we have them, and we have a clear conscience also. We did not destroy them wantonly. And we did not exterminate the species."

"I should say we do want to take them home with us. They will be the biggest treasure we shall get."

"Then we must have them dragged out and skinned. The skins and skeletons will weigh a lot. Remember, the same weight in gold would be worth a fortune."

"I would rather have the animals. Some museum will be glad to have them, and they will create no end of discussions. Now we ought to make a solemn pledge—never to tell any one of this place, or how to get to it. We shall have the proof that we were in some prehistoric spot, and that will have to be enough."

“It’s a go. Shake! Now that is settled. Soncco wants to have the coronation at once. I want him to hold off a while. We must have time to learn more of our respective jobs before undertaking the responsibility of them. How does that strike you?”

“Very sensible, I should say. Let’s call together all the amautas in the valley and ask them questions. They can tell us all we ought to know.”

“We’ll do that. Last of all is the proposition of having Quizquiz on our hands. But we can come to no decision about him just now. Time may make a difference in the attitude we should assume toward him. We must be perfectly fair and see that no injustice is done any one.”

“That seems to answer the question for the time being. He is our prisoner and we can take our time in deciding what his fate shall be.”

Stanley went back down the ladder and, after a short conversation with Soncco, the latter commanded the soldiers to advance. He then placed himself at the head of the column and led it through the passage into the crater. There, under his direction, they fastened thongs to the legs of the great animals, and after an infinite amount of tugging and panting succeeded in dragging the heavy carcasses out into the valley. Then they built a fire in the far end of the

gap, after which Ted and Quizquiz, the latter with a cloth covering his face, came down from the ledge, and while messengers returned to the city for laborers the two Americans examined their prizes, measured them, and made numerous notes upon their appearance. The monsters were terrible even in death. They were the size of a grizzly bear and of a uniformly tawny color. The head and shoulders were massive and showed that the brutes possessed unrivalled strength. A short but thick mane of coarse hair grew on the neck, although it was not so abundant as the mane of a lion. From each side of the mouth protruded a long, curved tooth, sharp and dagger-like. It was these terrible weapons, a foot long, coupled with the powerful claws, that made the tigers so formidable, and enabled them to kill without danger to themselves every denizen of the crater world excepting only the buffaloes, whose safety lay in concerted action. The tail was short and thick.

One of the animals, the one that had fallen from the high ledge, had been so badly mauled that its skin was torn to shreds in numerous places. The other was in perfect condition; it had been struck by five of the twenty shots fired from the machine gun.

Ted and Stanley lost no time in beginning the preparation of their prizes, after having recorded the neces-

sary observations. At their request Soncco detailed a dozen soldiers to do the work under their direction. The natives were wide-eyed with wonder at sight of the strange creatures, and marvelled over the fact that the Americans had been able to slay them, for, according to their traditions, they were demons that had best be pacified with offerings of victims, and not attacked and vanquished. But so accustomed were they to the rigid discipline of army life that they dared not question the orders that had been given them, and fell to work in a mechanical manner.

While some worked at removing the skins, others began to scrape the bones. When the skins were finally free from the flesh they were stretched on frames of poles and raised to a vertical position. Soon a black speck appeared in the sky, then another, and another, until a score of vultures were circling overhead, drawing constantly nearer and moving their bare heads from side to side as they scanned the ground for the food they had sensed from a distance.

At a word from Soncco the men stepped back a few yards and stood motionless. Then the repulsive birds swooped down and hovering in front of the hides pecked and tore at the particles of flesh that clung to them until they were clean, so that they could dry without spoiling. The skins themselves were not in the least

injured by the birds; only the superfluous tissue had been removed, and the men were saved the trouble of scraping and dressing them down.

After that, the bones of both tigers were taken to an ant-hill and buried in the loose mound. In a few days they too would be perfectly clean, and could be taken out and packed for transportation.

"If we had rifles we could make a complete collection of all the species in the crater," Ted exclaimed. "There is not another one like it in the world."

"The temptation to do that would be strong, so I am glad we have no rifles."

"Yes, it is best to let them stay where they are and to live their lives as was intended rather than preserve them in a glass case."

By this time a detachment of the laborers arrived. This group had been recruited from the nearest village and brought camping equipment and supplies. Soncco immediately put them to work erecting tents for the Americans, and when this had been accomplished the two retired for a much-needed rest. The aged amauta had urged them again to return to the city, but they steadfastly refused, saying that the safety of the populace was their first consideration. Their own comfort could wait. How different was their conduct from that of the deposed Inca! Although they had

been raised to the highest ranks by popular acclamation, their request that the people refrain from showing signs of homage were wonderingly respected; and their orders were instantly obeyed. That was sufficient for the present. It would inspire that confidence and admiration that would be the greatest asset in the long run.

Quizquiz, unrecognized, shared their quarters with them. No one dared question them upon any matter whatever, so their secret was safe.

It was not until the following morning that the laborers arrived in numbers. A roaring fire had been kept burning in the passage throughout the night, and there had been no attempt on the part of the tigers to force this barrier. That more of the ferocious creatures did exist in the crater, however, was proven by the occasional roar that issued from the dark regions beyond the fire.

Being unacquainted with the working methods of the Indians, Stanley turned the proposition of building the wall over to Soncco, who in turn immediately placed one of the chief masons in complete charge of the undertaking. The latter proceeded in a most businesslike manner. He divided his workmen into squads and assigned to each its respective duty.

There being need of great haste, the master mason

had decided to erect a temporary obstruction first. Some of the workers brought baskets of earth and pebbles from the river-bank, carrying their burdens on their shoulders, and dumped them into the opening. Others picked out the smaller fragments of stone from the débris of the tumbled-down section of the great wall, and of the avalanche that had slid down the mountainside, and threw them into the breach. It was surprising to see how rapidly the heap of material grew in height as the unbroken line of toilers filed past and deposited the contents of their baskets.

Nor did they pause in their labors for food or drink. At frequent intervals they crammed handfuls of coca-leaves into their mouths, which they chewed or held in their cheeks so that they bulged out like a gopher's. The effect of the drug derived from the dried leaves was to deaden all feelings of thirst, hunger, and fatigue. At night they ate a large quantity of thick porridge, made by boiling ground maize in water; after eating, each man took off his *poncho*, or cape, wrapped it tightly about himself, and lay down on the bare ground to sleep.

By the end of the second day the ridge of earth and pebbles had reached a height of fifteen yards, and preparations were made to begin work on the wall proper on the following morning. The skilled masons

had been engaged during this time in hewing the blocks of stone intended for the permanent structure. They used mallets of stone and chisels of tempered copper.

The stones for the first layer, or foundation, were of large size and very heavy. They were rolled and pried into place by a swarm of workmen who used long, stout poles as levers. This accomplished, the horde again took up its baskets and brought pebbles and earth as heretofore. But this time the material was thrown on the ground in front of the wall-base and tamped into place, forming an inclined plane, the higher end of which was level with the top of the row of stones already in place. Other blocks of granite were now pried and rolled on the first tier; then the sloping plane was immediately filled in to reach the top of this layer.

Thus the work continued for thirty days. And when the wall had reached the height of fifty feet it was considered finished. The tigers were again shut off from the valley, isolated in their own little world, to live their lives free from the destructive influences of man, and the inhabitants of the Inca's domain were safe from the attacks of the ferocious creatures. Ted and Stanley felt sure that the Indians would never reopen the passage; they held the great beasts in super-

stitious awe and were afraid of them, and were only too glad to keep them prisoner where they belonged.

The workers now removed the material forming the inclined plane, leaving the wall straight and true, rising from the foot of the escarpment, with each stone exposed to view. As this task was one not requiring their supervision, and would take a long time, for the earth and pebbles were scooped into baskets and returned to the places from which they had been taken, the two Americans did not stay to see its completion.

They had spent the days in serious discussions with Soncco, and others of the amautas were sent for at times. The policy of the new government was considered minutely; reforms were considered; and, after numerous secret sessions to which Ted and Stanley admitted only Soncco, the fate of Quizquiz was definitely decided. Their power and authority was supreme; they would use them as they saw fit, and the example they had determined to set was one the people would never forget.

CHAPTER XX

THE KING IS CROWNED

THE way back to the city was short, and Ted and Stanley, accompanied only by Soncco and the disguised Quizquiz timed their march so as to arrive after nightfall. They did not want to be observed by the populace. The white-haired amautas, who were on the lookout, took them directly to the royal palace—the one that had been occupied by the late Huayna Capac, and more recently by Quizquiz.

“In the olden days each ruler had his own residence,” Soncco apologized. “When an Inca died his palace was closed forever and a new one built for his successor. But there is so little room in the valley that the same edifice is used by all the rulers. But the old furnishings are always destroyed and new ones provided.”

“That is perfectly all right so far as we are concerned. We shall retire at once. Come back early in the morning; there are a million things to do,” Stanley replied. Then to Ted, after the amauta had gone: “We shall have our hands full for quite a while. Their

whole system of government will have to be studied, but we must make as few changes as possible."

At daybreak the two were awakened by the chatter and whistling of troupials in the garden. Further sleep was impossible, so they went out into the crisp air to view their surroundings and to witness the birth of the new day.

"What gorgeous birds!" Ted exclaimed when he discovered the source of the early serenade. "It's a pity their voices are not so beautiful as their feathers."

A number of troupials, or orioles, of a black-and-yellow color were confined in cages suspended from the lower branches of the trees. They were of a fearless and happy disposition and pecked at the fingers of the men when they thrust them between the golden wires of the little prisons.

The two wandered between the trees and flowers for some time. Among the growing, blossoming plants were clumps of artificial ones wrought in gold and silver. They admired and marvelled at the extravagant beauty of the garden; and to think that it was all theirs!

The murmur of water came to their ears, and following the sound they came upon a basin hewn in the solid stone and lined with silver. It was the Inca's bath. Streams of water flowing from silver tubes

poured into the pool on two sides. Vines covered with brilliant flowers formed a canopy over it.

"Just what I have been looking for," Stanley exclaimed gleefully. "I have not had a bath in ages."

"Huayna Capac would turn in his grave if he saw us profane the sacred bath of the Incas."

"Let him turn. I am certainly going in for a swim."

"If you can, I will too."

They splashed about for a while and had hardly finished dressing again when Soncco appeared and greeted them with a low bow.

"I am at the service of the king," he said humbly.

"Remember," Stanley rebuked him, "I do not want to be addressed that way. And stop the bowing—at least for a while. What news?"

"Villac Umu has been captured."

"Good work! Now we have both the trouble-makers."

"What is your pleasure regarding him?"

"Keep him prisoner—closely guarded. Feed him all he can eat and do not mistreat him in any way. He shall have a fair trial."

"Why not have him brought here so we can keep him under observation and size him up?" Ted asked.

"I have no objection. Bring him to the palace.

And now about the meeting: have all the nobles here to-morrow morning an hour after sunrise. Above all things, do not let out the secret that Quizquiz is here. That must remain absolutely unknown."

Soncco, forgetting himself, bowed and departed. The two returned to their apartments and spent the day examining the wonders of the palace and in questioning Quizquiz.

The next day the council chamber was packed with the nobles who had been gathered together by Soncco. They formed a silent and expectant mass. It was their first official visit to the new sovereign they had chosen during the moment of darkness and terror when the eclipse had wiped out the light of the sun. Ted and Stanley felt the importance of the occasion. Their future might depend upon the way they handled the situation. They must impress the assembly favorably and more firmly establish their power over it. For these reasons they consented to use the thrones that stood at one end of the room, but were concealed from the assembly by heavy curtains.

Attendants drew aside the draperies slowly, and as the two Americans were revealed the nobles bowed low their heads in homage and reverence, nor did they raise them until Stanley spoke.

"Quizquiz is no longer king by reason of his deser-

tion of his throne and because you, the nobility of the nation, have declared his reign at an end," he said without rising. "By popular acclamation I have been chosen his successor."

Not a sound interrupted the speech. All ears were strained so as not to lose a single word.

"My first and only desire in accepting the lofty office is to serve the people. This sounds strange to you. But the welfare and happiness of the nation must be brought about, and I shall work toward that end. In order to accomplish this it is only just and proper that the people should have a voice in their government through chosen representatives from the various districts. Theirs shall be the duty to meet and discuss the needs of the populace, and to advise the king of them, and to act with him in council. Therefore, the first step under the new régime is to secure these representatives."

Soncco, who had been in the front of the gathering, now came forward and stood on the left side of the golden chairs on which Ted and Stanley were seated; after bowing to the two he turned and faced the audience. It was necessary for him to assume this position in addressing the gathering, for it was unlawful for any one to turn his back upon the ruler.

"It has been decreed by our most wise sovereign,"

he began in a solemn voice, "that two representatives shall be chosen from each of the twelve districts—one to be a noble and the other from among the common people, and in the following manner. On the day of the election all the men must gather in the respective capitals of the various districts to make their choice. The office is open to any man above thirty years of age. Those who seek election must present themselves in the public square and stand facing the sun, twenty paces apart; they may not ask support of any one, but each may briefly state his policy so that every one may hear. One hour after sunrise each voter will fall in line in back of the candidate of his choosing. The groups will then be counted by the resident chief of the district, and the man having the greatest number of supporters will be declared elected for a term of two years. If any candidate solicits a vote, or if any voter sells his ballot, he will be guilty of a crime; the penalty for either offense shall be disqualification to ever vote again or to ever hold office. Furthermore, the offender shall work for a period of one hundred days in the public fields, clothed in a distinctive black mantle of disgrace. If there be any one who would ask questions, let him speak!"

An avalanche of queries were hurled at the speaker and for a moment he was nonplussed.

"One at a time," Stanley ordered, and then the commotion subsided.

Soncco was kept busy explaining the matter for over two hours, but finally they understood. It was all so different, so unheard of, that at first they could not comprehend the situation.

Before dismissing the assembly Stanley ordered them all to return to their homes without delay and in a series of mass-meetings explain the tidings to the inhabitants of the valley. At the end of twenty days the elections were to be held, and at the end of thirty days the representatives were to report to the Coricancha for the coronation of their ruler and for the inauguration into their new offices.

"We cannot do everything," Stanley said to Ted when they were alone after the meeting. "Changes in government come slowly, and if they are too radical and too complicated they cause only confusion. All we can do here is to point out the right road; then let them find their own way. In the long run it is they, not we, who must work out their salvation."

"Even at that it will be one of the biggest steps forward they have made in ages. I believe we are accomplishing something well worth while. To have a whole nation in one's absolute power, and to set it on its feet, is a thing the greatest statesmen in the

world are trying to do at this very minute, and without glaring success either."

The ensuing thirty days were busy ones for Ted and Stanley. Each morning they received the amautas and spent several hours in conversation with them. After that they strolled in the garden with its marvellous flowers, gorgeous birds, and sparkling fountains. The afternoons were spent closeted with Quizquiz, whose presence they had succeeded in keeping secret save only for Soncco and a few trusted guards. They received reports daily from the caciques, or chiefs, of the various districts who were conducting the search for the supposed fugitive, and these reports, of course, always admitted failure to capture the elusive Quizquiz.

Villac Umu remained surly and unapproachable. The Americans tried in every way to penetrate into his real character, and to learn if there was not a single good trait in his make-up, but his case proved hopeless. He repelled all their advances with sneers and threats, and convinced the two that any attempt to reason with him was worse than futile. So, after deciding definitely the future of Quizquiz, they also passed upon the fate of the high priest.

The month passed all too soon. By the end of the twenty-second day the representatives from the nearer

districts began to arrive. Those from the more remote cities did not reach the City of Gold until the day before the ceremonies. Each one was accompanied by the chief from the district that had sent him, and the latter was compelled to vouch for his identity and to certify to his proper election. Those of noble birth as well as the commoners were given quarters in one of the large buildings adjoining the Inca's own residence.

Besides the delegates, hundreds of nobles and a host of the populace swarmed to the capital for the great event, and these were taken care of either in the numerous barracks or in the private houses of the city. No one was left without suitable accommodations and food, as befitted his rank.

Long before sunrise of the appointed day the crowds began to make their way to the great plaza, where they took up their stations, silently and expectantly. The space had been divided into three sections, the limits of each of which was defined by a line of soldiers. In the first part, immediately in front of the palace, was a raised dais on which the coronation was to take place; it was covered with a fringed canopy of snowy cloth, and an enclosed passage led from it into the royal residence. On each side was a lower platform for the newly elected delegates of the people.

The second section was reserved for the nobles.

And in the third as many of the populace crowded as the space would hold.

The Americans had planned to make the ceremony as unpretentious as possible. All the pomp and splendor that had previously attended the crowning of a sovereign should be lacking. Only those things were retained that were absolutely required by the ancient code of laws to make the act legal and binding in the eyes of the nation. The importance of the occasion should impress itself indelibly upon the minds of the assembly by its seriousness and simplicity.

The sun was high in the heavens when all was in readiness. A single herald stepped from behind the curtains that hid the stage from view and, raising a silver bugle, blew a loud blast. Instantly all conversation was hushed, and a breathless silence fell upon the throng. A second blast, but not so loud as the first, rang out upon the still, morning air. And then a third, so low and plaintive that it was scarcely audible, and seemed to die with a sob. Then the trumpeter withdrew.

One hundred youths, dressed in simple blue tunics, with bare arms and legs, now filed out of the palace with slow, measured steps. On their shoulders they carried a massive golden chain, each link of which was four inches long. They formed a semicircle in front

of the soldiers between the first and second sections—a kind of barrier between the king and the people.

When they had taken their places six trumpeters appeared on the stage and sounded the three blasts, as before, in unison. Then the curtains were slowly drawn aside revealing the massive throne of wrought gold that had been removed from the palace; beside it stood Ted, dressed in the robes of Villac Umu, and in front of him knelt an attendant holding a white cushion, upon which rested the *borla*, or crimson fringe, that had been given to them by Quizquiz on the ledge the night he had saved them from the tiger, and which was the diadem of the kingly office.

Once more the bugles sounded, but this time it was the royal fanfare of twelve loud blasts; it announced the coming of the one to be crowned king. At last the great moment had arrived. The assembled thousands uncovered their heads and reverently awaited the appearance of their white ruler.

A single figure walked out upon the stage, clad in a simple white tunic and scarlet sandals. Not a jewel, not an ornament of gold, adorned the newcomer, and this fact alone was unexpected and startling to the multitude. But the thing that caused them to gasp in even greater astonishment was that the lone figure was not Stanley—but Quizquiz. They were speech-

less with amazement. Where a thunderous roar should have greeted the appearance of the sovereign, there was the silence of death.

Quizquiz, pale but unafraid, stood in the centre of the dais and faced the people. He said nothing, but in his eyes there shone a new light that bespoke courage, firmness of purpose, and at the same time repentance. After standing quietly for a few minutes he spoke in a clear, steady voice:

“The past cannot be recalled. You know what my conduct was. I have no excuses to make. I was a fool. Judge me as you will, do with me as you will. I am ready to abide by your decision.”

The surprise had been so overwhelming that for a short time no one was able to utter a word. They simply stared, unable to believe their eyes. But finally Huascar, he who had been condemned to be boiled in oil, assumed the rôle of spokesman:

“It is Quizquiz,” he cried hoarsely, “who wanted to kill us. Where is the white man who saved all of us and who was chosen to be king? Has this evil one done away with our benefactor, who came from the sky and whose commands even the sun obeys? Is he usurping the power given to another and which he so shamefully gave up?”

“The white king!” other voices took up the cry.

“We want the white king who saved us from the darkness and the demons, and——”

At this juncture Stanley, who had been waiting on the rear of the stage, thought it best to show himself. His appearance was the signal for a demonstration of welcome that sounded like the rumble of thunder.

“Hail! Hail the king!” and “Let him be crowned at once!” the multitude shouted until Stanley raised his hand to command silence.

“I am not unappreciative of this, the greatest of all honors, which you offer me,” he said with feeling, “and I thank you. My companion and I did not come here to rule you.”

“You saved the nation from destruction,” Huascar shouted. “Do not desert us now.”

“Our work is finished. Therefore we shall return again to our own people.”

“And leave us to the mercy of Quizquiz the Tyrant? Never!”

“Wait! Quizquiz is the son of Huayna Capac, whom you all loved and venerated for his many noble qualities. Does it seem possible that the son of the Inca so justly beloved for his kindness, justice, and understanding should have inherited none of his father’s greatness?”

“He has never shown it. He was cruel and unjust

and selfish. He treated us like vermin, and tried to exterminate us."

"No one knows that better than I, unless it is Quizquiz himself. But listen, and when you have heard my words you will understand; and, understanding, you will agree that what we would do is for the best."

Stanley then related how they had found Quizquiz in the crater, alone, and with only a fragile bow and arrows, surrounded by strange and terrible beasts, and of the courage he displayed in facing them; how he had saved their lives when the tiger was about to spring upon them, and how he had climbed to the ledge and voluntarily surrendered his crown after acknowledging the wrongs of his past life. Finally, he told of the months during which they had kept him under constant observation, and of the decision they had reached regarding his future.

"Furthermore," he concluded, "we have surrounded you with safeguards for the future. The code of laws has been revised, and the death-penalty abolished, so your lives are safe. Every person accused of a crime or offense will be considered innocent until proven guilty in a fair trial, by the regularly constituted court. The king may suggest new laws, or changes in the existing ones, but unless two-thirds of the representatives, chosen by the people, agree with him they shall not be effective. But to all government there must

be a head. Quizquiz is your king by law and heritage. Respect him as such and he will rule wisely and well in return for your devotion. We are sure of this or we should not ask you to take him back."

"Truly, the white man's words are those of a god, and not of a mortal!" Huascar exclaimed. "The things he says must be true, for have we not had proof of his powers? To keep him here against his wishes would be poor gratitude for his goodness—and, anyway, he would find a way to leave us if he so desired. A great light is dawning upon me. Instead of taking advantage of our helplessness, the men from the outer world have made over our king and are giving him back to us. They could have power and riches, but their unselfishness causes them to reject the temptation. Let us kneel in gratitude and bless them."

The words of Huascar had a magical effect, which only proves how easily mobs are swayed provided there is a strong leader among them. As one man the mass of people obeyed, and as they knelt Stanley spoke to them for the last time:

"Receive your king with the acclamation that is due him," he said.

Then Quizquiz advanced and extended his hands toward his people. The roar that greeted him left no doubt in the minds of the Americans of the success of their plan. So Ted came forward and placed the

crimson fringe on Quizquiz's head; then he stepped back three paces, saluted the new king smartly, and followed Stanley into the passage.

Quizquiz descended the steps and taking a sword cut a cord that joined two links in the golden chain, whereupon the youths carrying it stepped aside, leaving an opening in the centre. The Inca then invited the twenty-four representatives of the people to follow him up the dais and take their places by his side. After that he delivered a short address, lauding the Americans for their work and thanking them, and assuring his subjects that henceforth his life would be devoted to their welfare.

The crowd was delirious with joy. It was one of the happiest days in the lives of the populace, for, despite their denunciation of Quizquiz in the hour of panic, old beliefs die hard, and most of them still felt deep in their hearts the old reverence for the Child of the Sun, and were glad to have him back. And they celebrated the festival for a period of ten days. They also rejoiced over the fact that Villac Umu, the real cause of all the trouble, had been banished to the high slopes, to be a herder of llamas.

Quizquiz had arranged an impressive demonstration to commemorate the departure of the Americans. By his command every inhabitant of the valley capa-

ble of making the trip had journeyed to the foot of the range that formed the western enclosure of the hidden retreat. There was to be a gala celebration, after which the strangers would depart through the secret pass that opened up once every ten years.

During the first day there were music, dancing, and feasting. On the second all the nobles came to bid the two farewell, and to offer their well-wishes for a safe and speedy return to their homes. On the morning of the third day a surprising thing occurred. Soncco, who was master of ceremonies, had arranged a startling spectacle. At his command a number of menials removed the covering from what had appeared to be a great heap of wood or stones. To their surprise they saw that it was a great mound of gold.

“Assembled here is all the treasure in the valley,” Soncco said solemnly. “Gold has been the curse of the nation, but we are determined to be cursed with it no longer. So much of the gold and precious stones as one hundred men can carry on their backs will be sent with our white friends to the outer world, as a token of the Inca’s appreciation of their unselfish service to him and to the people. The remainder will be destroyed.”

To the astonishment of Ted and Stanley a long line of men began filing past the glistening heap.

Each one picked up as much of the treasure as he could carry, and started up the slope to the rim of one of the numerous craters; there the precious burdens were dropped into the volcano.

Not until dusk did the homeward journey commence. The people had been sent away to their own homes. Only Quizquiz and his attendants, Soncco, and the hundred soldiers with their officers remained with the Americans. After embracing the two the Inca gave the officers their final orders. Then he turned to Ted and Stanley.

“As I have told you before, the journey to the coast is not a long one—ten days at most. You will be among my people all of the time, for the trail runs through a region into which white men never venture. Food will be supplied by the villages through which you pass. On the shore of the great water stands the town of Tula. There you may safely store your treasure until such time as you care to remove it; the inhabitants are my faithful subjects, and my orders to serve you in every way will not be disobeyed. Good-by.”

Soncco accompanied the two to the very end of the narrow passage between the seething volcanoes.

“Before you go,” he said with a merry gleam in his bright eyes, “I want to tell you something. That

eclipse of the sun came at a very opportune moment for all of us."

"What!" both Ted and Stanley exclaimed in chagrin. "You knew about it?"

"Of course, and so did all the other amautas, for do we not know everything? Eclipses have occurred before, and we have records of them, but the Inca and the people are not told about such things. If we told them everything we know we should lose our standing among them."

"Then why did you help us and seem so reluctant about doing it?" Ted asked.

"Because, from my knowledge of you, gained during your previous visit here, and also this one, I felt that you could be trusted. But I wanted to test you in every way so as to be sure. You acted just as I expected you would. Quizquiz was getting intolerable, and something had to be done. You offered the solution."

"And now, Soncco," Stanley said smiling, "let me tell you something. You made a great show of destroying all that treasure. We should have believed that you did actually have it thrown into a seething volcano were it not for the fact that early this morning we saw a number of soldiers go up the slope and disappear into the very place they later carried the

gold to. The carriers simply handed it over the rim, carefully, to those others waiting to receive it. Tomorrow, no doubt, they will bring it out again."

Soncco appeared confused and panic-stricken.

"Do not fear," Stanley hastened to assure him. "You said you trusted us. Continue to do so. Your secret is safe with us. We shall never return under any circumstances, and we shall never tell any one else, either. I swear it!"

"And I," added Ted.

"Good-by. And may the greatest blessings of life be yours. I shall always remember you with gratitude, and the story of your visit will be handed down from generation to generation by the amautas as part of the history of the nation."

One of the officers gave a sharp command and the column of men, each carrying a pack containing one hundred pounds of gold and gems on his back, started forward. Ted and Stanley followed.

An hour later they were descending a green slope, their first glimpse of the outer world in many months. They were happy, for they were on the way home.



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