

Percy B. St. John



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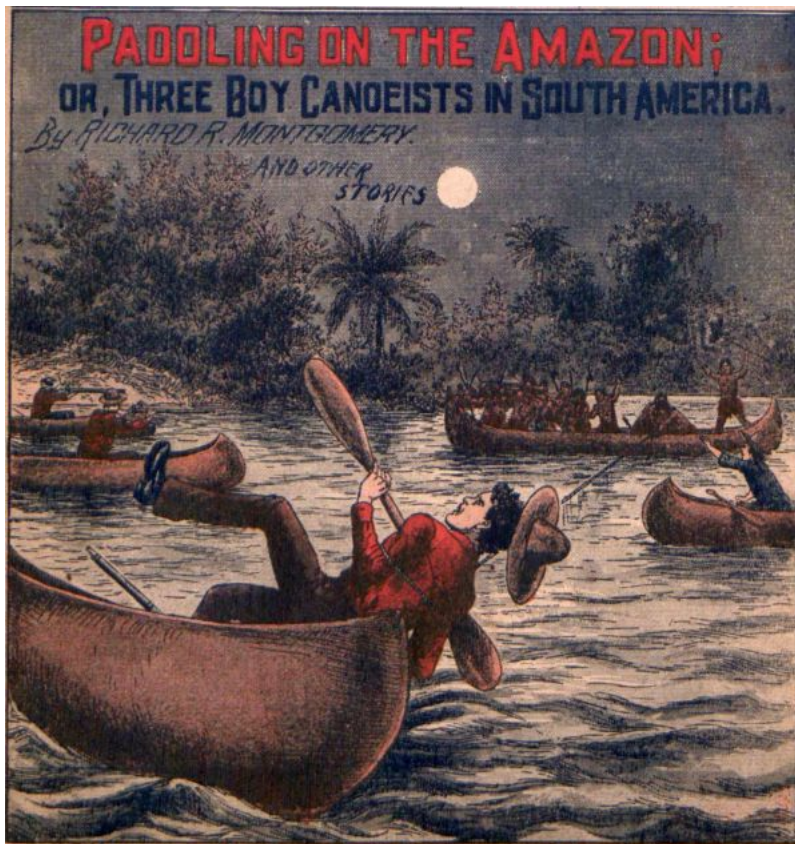
Three Boy Canoeists in South America.

A STORY OF WILD ADVENTURE ON THE GRAT RIVER.

by

Percy B. ST. John.





Chapter I.

The canoe club-concerning an absentee.

»I wonder if we shall ever see him again«

»Well, I certainly hope so, for he was a splendid fellow.«

»Who is it that you are talking about?«

Tom Blake and Frank Woodward were the first speakers, and the scene was the boat-house of the Junior New York Canoe Club.

Jack Moreland had just entered in time to catch the commendatory remark Frank had made.

»Why, we were speaking of Walter Kenmore,« responded the latter.

»Poor fellow! I fear it's all up with him.«

»It looks so—that's a fact,« replied Frank.

»For it's eight months new since a word was heard from him, and the Daily Transcript's agent has returned only to report «No clew,« added

Tom Blake.

»Certainly one of three misfortunes must have befallen Walter. Either his canoe was wrecked, he was killed by savages, or carried away into captivity by some of the wild tribes of the great valley of the Amazon,« stated Frank, positively.

»Well, probably so; and yet you all know what a daring, adventurous spirit Walter had. he was always in search of new scenes, new people, new interests, and the unknown had a powerful fascination for him,« Jack replied, reflectively,

»That's what made him one of the most popular newspaper correspondents of the day, although he is almost a boy,« said Tom Blake.

»Yes; and know that he expected great things to come of his last great canoe cruise in South America. He told me before he started that the proprietor of the Daily Transcript thought his letters would prove a very attractive feature of the paper,« Frank Moreland answered.

The three lads whom we have introduced were all manly young fellows, ranging from eighteen to twenty years of age in one, two, three order, Tom Blake being the youngest—just eighteen—Frank nineteen, and Jack Moreland twenty.

All three were members of the Junior New York Canoe Club, and Walter Kenmore had been their boon companion and best friend.

Walter Kenmore was a leading member of the canoe club, and, like his three comrades above named, an enthusiastic canoeist.

As a newspaper correspondent he had already made his mark, and at the time of which we are writing he was under engagement to the Daily Transcript, a great metropolitan newspaper.

A hint, the proprietor of that enterprising journey had sent the young canoeist to South America in the interest of the paper.

Walter had been instructed to start at the mouth of the Amazon and make a canoe voyage as far toward the source of the wonderful river as possible.

The young correspondent had reached Para at the mouth of the Amazon all right—that much was known. After remaining there some weeks, a victim to the malignant influences of South American fever, he

had embarked in his canoe, attended tended by a native guide, and set on to paddle up the Amazon.

From that day the young canoeist had become as one dead to the world-a missing man-the Daily Transcript had duly dispatched an agent to look for Walter Kenmore, as we have heard the boy friend of the absentee state. The agent of the great newspaper had spared neither time or expense. He had explored the Amazon for a distance of about two hundred miles, but he had failed to learn anything of the lost canoeist, and at last almost worn out, discouraged and disappointed, he had returned to New York.

The public generally was deeply interested in the fate of the missing canoeist. His graphic letters of travel which had become a feature of the Daily Transcript were sorely missed. Then, too, his adventurous canoe voyage had been »boomed« and advertised so extensively by the great newspaper, that curiosity, as to the result, and an eagerness to read his adventures on the unknown regions of the Amazon was evoked.

From time to time the press throughout the country commented on the mystery of the country Amazon, alluding to the disappearance of Walter Kenmore, and speaking in the highest terms of the spirit of enterprise and devotion which had caused the Daily Transcript to make such a long and expensive search for their lost canoe voyager.

But the lapse of time had new brought about in the public mind the same conclusion that Walter Kenmore's boy friends of the canoe club entertained, that the young newspaper correspondent would never be heard of again, that the mystery of the Amazon which held his untimely fate would remain a locked secret forever.

It was now the 1st of June. The boating season had well opened, and on the day of which we are writing the three lads we have presented and nearly all the members of the canoe club were at the boathouse.

All hands were looking over their canoes and seeing that they were in readiness for a cruise.

The boys who composed the club were all clerks, book-keepers and the like. They had their own way to make in the world, but every summer, when the time granted them as a short vacation from the office

and counting-room came around, they were wont to go on a canoe cruise.

The expense and the time to be consumed were truly important considerations with our bright young New York business boys.

Very few of them could spare more than four weeks in midsummer, and fifty dollars was looked upon as a sum sufficiently large for any one canoeist to spend during his outing. Many of them did not spend that.

Of course they could go to foreign lands, and, in fact, few of them had ever cruised on very distant waters.

But for all that and despite the modest expense they always came back healthy, brown and rugged as young bears, a thousand times better off physically and morally than if they had spent their time at some fashionable watering place, seeking to emulate the gilded youth who congregated there.

The boys of the junior New York Canoe Club were kindred spirits. A love of the water and of the specially exciting and oftentimes dangerous sport of canoeing had drawn them together.

Probably you would not have found a better set of fellows anywhere than the comrades of the lost canoeist, and we can personally affirm that Tom Blake, Frank Woodward and Jack Moreland were as whole-souled a trio of Nature's young noblemen as one could wish to meet. But you will all get well acquainted with them later on.

The evening was drawing on, and as there was some financial business for the consideration of the club, the president at length announced that those present would come to order.

The roughly-built boat-house presented an interesting interior scene. Several lamps, suspended from the rafters, had been lighted to dispel the gathering shadows. The president was seated at a small table in the center of an open space. About him, seated on camp chairs, were grouped the score of lads belonging to the club. On either side wall canoes were suspended, one above the other; some wrapped in canvas some uncovered. Bunches of paddles unshipped rudders, new keels and centerboards, sails, adjustable masts, and all the varied paraphernalia of the canoeists were scattered about.

Through the long window at the front of the building the waters of the Hudson could be seen, now enshrouded by the deepening shadows, and here and there a light flashed upon the somber tide, telling of the presence of some craft.

The business of the club had all been satisfactorily attended to, and the president was about to dismiss the meeting when there came a rap at the door.

It was opened and a letter-carrier entered, presenting a sealed package addressed to—Jack Moreland, Esq., care of the Junior New York Canoe Club, New York City. U. S. A.

As the postman read the inscription on the package, Jack Moreland came forward eagerly and received it from his hand.

No one paid any particular attention to him, for it was not unusual for the members of the club to have their mail sent the boathouse, which, also, in the summer season, was the only headquarters of the canoeists.

But suddenly everyone present was electrified by an exclamation from Jack.

»Great Scott! It's from South America!« cried Jack.

»From South America!« echoed a dozen voices.

»Yes, see here! It's postmarked Para, Brazil. Then it's been all the way to Spain and back. Just look at all the foreign postmarks all over it,« and Jack held up the package.

»Open it, open it!«

»What it should be from—from him?«

Tom Blake and Frank Woodward exclaimed at the same time.

While his comrades crowded around him, in eager and suspenseful interest, watching and waiting for the denouncement, Jack opened the package.

It was made up in a singular way.

First, there was an outer covering of rough manila paper, bound about with heavy twine, and sealed and stamped.

Inside that was a covering of matting, made of fine plaited grass of a yellow hue, completely woven about the package, and which evidently was the work of some time and wonderful skill.

Jack had to use his knife to cut the matting, and then he found yet another cover to penetrate. It was made of the bleached skin of some animal, bound about with thongs of the same.

At last the heart of the mysterious package was reached.

It consisted of several leaves of a note-book, ragged at the top, as if hastily torn from the volume whence they came.

Jack cast one glance at the handwriting which covered the paper, and recognizing it, dropped into a chair, exclaiming:

»It is from Walter Kenmore!«

Then there was a sensation. The boys became excited. This was a great event. It was like receiving a message from the dead, since they had given the young newspaper correspondent up for lost.

»Read it—read it,« was the eager request Jack heard from all sides.

»Of course I will, if you fellows will only give me time to get my breath. I feel as if surprise had just about knocked me silly,« replied Jack.

Then he read the writing contained in the strange package. In breathless silence his youthful audience listened.

The communication proved really to be a few pages of Walter Kenmore's diary. Across the top of the first page was scrawled the following note:

»I have no time now to write. By an unexpected piece of good luck I am able to send the last few pages of my diary. So if I am ever heard of again you may have some idea of my fate. «Walter.«

Having read the above, Jack continued the reading of the pages of the lost canoeist's notebook as follows:

»Nov. 18th.—Yesterday landed with Mijar, the gaucho, at a village of friendly Indians, after days of paddling our canoes in the terrible heat, tormented almost to madness by countless insects. The way has lain between the most wonderful forests the eye of man ever beheld. We have seen strange people and animals, I would have returned to Para, to keep my pledge to Senor Avilleos, but it was not to be. My deadly foes are behind ready to cut me off if I turn back, Mijar, true and devoted to

me through every peril, says our only chance for life is to go on, on— Can I believe his startling story that there is a water-way across the entire continent of South America through the Amazon and its tributaries? We shall see.

»Nov. 19h.— We have found this settlement to be a village of a Jesuit mission. There are about three hundred inhabitants, and the place is like a tropical garden. The mud houses are overgrown with greenery, every rock is mantled with vegetation. Strange trees, with great white trunks as smooth and round as the marble pillows of an eastern palace, give shade with their domes of purple leaves.

»The villagers have only one source of trouble—an occasional visit of a band of Indos misterios, as the old Spanish priest who has been buried here half a century call them in his Spanish idiom—meaning mysterious Indians, He had no idea, however, whence they came or to what tribe they belonged. From his description evidently they belong to a people entirely unknown to Europeans. We have been made welcome by the priest and well entertained. Shall rest here a few days longer.

»Nov. 20th.—The Indos misterios have come. They are wild and warlike looking fellows, naked to the waist, armed with bows, arrows and the longest spears I have yet seen. They came down the Amazon in great canoes carved and painted with wonderful skill, and they have just surrounded the mission. We have barricaded the structure and are preparing to fight for our lives.

»Nov. 21st,—I am a prisoner, and so is my faithful Mijar. We made a good fight, but the enemy was too strong for us, We are surprised that we were not slain upon the spot; but the cacique, or chief of the band, who wears a helmet made of the skull of condor, and which, he tells me, signifies he is a great warrior, has spared us for some future fate which is yet a mystery. I am permitted to write. The wild Indos think I am a great medicine man, and do not like to interfere with my pencil and book, it seems.

»To my surprise, the cacique speaks indifferent Spanish, and I begin to see that he has Spanish blood in his veins, as I study his features.

»He has spared my life because the queen of his tribe has instructed him to bring the first white man he can capture to her unharmed. She

has never seen a white man. Mijar will be put to death unless my intercession can save him.

»Nov. 22d.—The cacique has consented to spare Mijar and take him with her to the queen of the mysterious people on condition of my promise to make no attempt at escape during the journey to - Ah, that is the question. To all my questions as to the location of the home of his strange people, the cacique has only answered: »Up the Amazon.«

»So I am going into the unknown. I most regret that I cannot keep my pledge to the Senor Avilleos of Para to return in ten days to be present at the trial. Heaven grant the noble young man may not meet his doom because of my absence. And my heart fails me when I think I may never meet the lovely Inez again.«

Such was the message of the lost canoeist from the Amazon.

A dead silence followed the conclusion of its reading by Jack Moreland. Tom Blake, brave, impulsive Tom, was the first to break the stillness, saying:

»Oh, if we only had the money, what a good and glorious thing it would be for our canoe club to find and rescue Walter!«

»Yes-yes,« was the eager assent, and before more could be said there came another rap at the door of the boat-house. Immediately a man entered at the sight of whom all the members of the canoe club were much surprised.

CHAPTER II.

COLONEL BUGG'S PROPOSITION—OFF FOR SOUTH AMERICA.

The gentleman who entered the headquarters of the canoe club had never been the guest of that organization before, and it is safe to say that no one present had ever expected that he would be. He was recognized as Colonel Pemberton Bugg, the owner of the Daily Universe, now the great newspaper rival of the Daily Transcript.

But a year or so previously the Daily Universe had been almost on the verge of Bankruptcy, incompetent, misdirected management, a lack of enterprise and general torpidity had brought the paper down until, among publishers, it was generally considered to be »on its last legs.«

But just as the affairs of the Daily Universe were at about their lowest ebb, and the journal seemed destined to step out of the universe unheralded and unwept, Colonel Pemberton Bugg turned up and bought the whole concern at a low figure, though the wiseacres said he paid too much for it.

Colonel Pemberton Bugg was an old newspaper man with modern ideas of journalism in his head, though he had never until now had the opportunity to develop them unhampered.

There were people who said facetiously that Colonel Bugg was a humbug, but then all successful men have unpleasant things said about them by the jealous. Anyhow the colonel made a grand success of the Daily Universe.

He seemed to have breathed new life into that decidedly tired journal, revived it in every department, almost created it anew.

It was known, so it had come to pass, that the greatest professional or business rivalry existed between the Universe and the Transcript.

The latter journal, having been so long the supreme autocrat of the metropolitan newspaper World, could not calmly observe the ascendancy of what it had come to regard as a hopelessly fallen star.

Colonel Bugg spared no expense to score a point ahead of his rival. His reporters were instructed to heat the opposition at any cost. He

electrified the reading world with his enterprises, and if they often smacked of the sensational, they took with the masses all the better for that.

After all it is »the masses« who make the circulation of a paper, and there can be no error in stating that circulation was the ultimatum the doughty colonel had in his mind's eye all the time.

The colonel was a short, pompous little man with a fierce gray mustache, bright eyes, and a rubicund, which told he did not forego the pressure of the table, or allow the pressure of his great publishing enterprise to weight heavily on his mind.

He was just the sort of a man to make a favorable impression upon a company of genial young fellows, such as »The Junior New York Canoe Club« was composed of, and he did so, at once.

»I bag your pardon, young gentlemen all,« said the colonel, bowing and giving a comprehensive wave of his hand. »But I just learned that you were in session here, and the Information followed close upon the inception of an idea I have—I might say a bright idea, I think, even at the risk of incurring the charge of egotism. Nothing like striking while the iron's hot, or, at least, warm. Ha! ha! Well, the fact is, young gentleman, I believe Walter Kenmore, the young canoeist and correspondent of my esteemed contemporary, The Transcript, is an honored member of your club. Am I right?«

»Yea, yes.«

»Quite so.«

»Very good. Before stating the object of my call I would ask it, as a personal favor, to one who has the well-fare of your absent member at heart, that you, one and all, pledge yourselves to keep what I am about to say a profound secret.«

There was a general assent.

»I feel that I can rely upon your word, and now to the point. Briefly, my idea is to send some of you to find Walter Kenmore in the interest of the Universe. The Transcript has failed to find him. The Universe must succeed in the task.«

»Bravo!«

»Three cheers for Colonel Bugg.«

»The cheers were given with a will, and the colonel bowed most profoundly in acknowledgment.

»Now, then, to proceed. My plan is to prevent even an inkling of what I am up to to get to the ears of my rivals; and I want three expert canoeists of your number, one of whom must speak Spanish, to volunteer to go paddling on the Amazon after young Kenmore. Of course, only those who can assure me of their obtaining the consent of parents or guardians need volunteer.«

As the colonel paused Tom Blake sprang to his feet, exclaiming:

»I'm ready to go for one.«

Almost as soon as the words were out of his mouth Frank Woodward and Jack Moreland were on their feet, too.

»I'm another volunteer for South America,« cried Frank.

*And so am I,« said Jack Moreland.

»Well, well—this is gratifying, I am sure. You are all expert canoeists and not afraid of hardships and dangers?« said the colonel, looking admiringly at the three lads.

There was a modest assent, and Frank added:

»And I speak Spanish. I also read and write the language, having made it a study, and perfected myself in it through actual work for a great importing house engaged in South American trade.«

»Good! With the consent of your parents you will sail for Para, Brazil, at four P. M. tomorrow via the South American steamer, El Valencia.«

»At four o'clock tomorrow! Why, that will give us no time for our preparations,« said Frank in surprise.

»You will need none, I have purchased three of the finest canoes, of the celebrated Rob Roy type, ever built. They are completely equipped and all ready to put aboard the South American steamer. You will purchase your supplies in Para, before setting out on the river, with money with which I will supply you. Letters of credit on the bank of South America will be placed in your hands. You will be authorized to spare no reasonable expense, and if you find the lost canoeist I will give you five thousand dollars cash as a reward to be divided between you.«

»You almost take my breath away, colonel. Still, as far as I'm concerned, it's a go,« replied Tom Blake, with his usual impetuosity and impulsiveness.

»Here too.«

»Count on me.«

When the colonel had heard the decision of the three boy canoeists, he rubbed his hands in evident satisfaction, and said:

»I think we shall beat the Transcript. You are the devoted friends of Walter Kenmore. That sentiment will make you risk and dare to save him, where mere money rewards would fall as an incentive. You have a perilous task before you. You may all lose your lives. I do not want to conceal the truth from you, and even now, if you wish, you may draw back.«

»No! No! No!« came as one voice from the three daring New York boys.

»Very well, You are made of the right metal! Now, then, we will discuss some further details of our great undertaking.«

An earnest conversation followed.

Every point was discussed, and as far as could possibly be done in advance, every contingency was arranged for.

Then the boys gave Colonel Bugg a great surprise. The page of Walter Kenmore notebook, which he had sent from the forest of the Amazon, was read to the publisher.

»Oh, no! Now if I only didn't want to keep my scheme dark and give »The Transcript« a great »beat,« what a sensation I could make out of that communication. Why one of my »space« writers could make that stretch out into a whole page of print. But no, no. Unless you are going to give it to some paper I won't publish it, But why not? Because it would give the other fellow a clue. They might try again to find young Kenmore,« commented the colonel.

Evidently the professional instinct of the old journalist was fully awakened, and he found it hard work to put the temptation to use the message from the lost canoeist aside.

But the thought of the greater triumph he hoped to achieve sustained him.

»No, no,« said he, facetiously. »Get thee behind me, Satan. I will have none of you,« and he waved the leaves of the missing canoeist's manuscript aside.

When Colonel Bugg at length left the boathouse, it was agreed the communication from Walter Kenmore should not be given to the press or be made public in any way.

The three boy canoeists felt as if they were in a dream, They could hardly make it appear real that they were actually to sail for South America on the morrow.

All three had a longing to see foreign lands and a thirst for wild adventures, and now the hope of their lives was to be realized.

The three boys were to make an eventful cruise on the greatest river in the world, and there was to be no lack of stirring adventures, as we shall soon see.

If either one of those three lads slept that night very soundly may be doubted.

At all events, they were early astir, The circumstances were such that all had obtained the consent of the relatives interested in their welfare, and before sailing time they were all on board the South American steamer.

There were no delegations to see them off with noisy demonstrations—that would have militated against Colonel Bugg's plans.

But almost every member of the canoe club and many other friends quietly shook hands with the trio of daring spirits on the wharf and bade them Godspeed.

And when at length the noble steamer sailed down the bay, the three boy canoeists knew they were leaving a host of friends behind them who would look eagerly for their return and pray for their success in the noble and heroic undertaking upon which they had set out.

CHAPTER III.

PADDLING ON THE AMAZON—A MIDNIGHT BATTLE.

Each of the three young canoeists had taken a small trunk of boating clothes with him, and among the things sent on board for them with the canoes by Colonel Bugg they found three rifles, three pairs of revolvers, three hunting knives and a supply of ammunition.

The boys were delighted with the three canoes. As stated, these were of the »Rob Roy « type, and all canoeists know what that means. The Rob Roy was the first canoe of a safe and handy type ever built. Canoes of that style can be sailed as well as paddled. They can be drawn over land, and an expert will jump a ditch, climb over a hedge and the like, hauling his stanch Rob Roy after him. He may even upset and swim, towing the canoe after him.

The Rob Roy canoe is possessed of mote all-around qualities than any other.

It was in one of these canoes that Mr. Mac-Gregor, their inventor, made cruises on the Baltic and the Jordan, of which he has written such delightful stories.

Our young canoeists' three »Rob Roys« were built of the best oak except the top streak of mahogany, and the deck of fine cedar. The weight of each without fitting did not exceed sixty pounds, and all complete seventy-one pounds.

Lightness, however, is not all important. Much-more so are good lines, for a light boat if crank will tire the canoeist far more in a week's cruise than would a heavier but stiff craft which does not strain the body at every movement to keep her poise under the alternate strokes of the paddle or the sudden pressure of a squall when the sail is set.

»Well, the colonel has certainly done the best he could for us in the way of canoes, and to judge from the armament he has supplied us with he thinks we may have to do some fighting,« said Tom Blake, as he and his comrades were inspecting the canoes on shipboard.

»I've an idea we shall have use for the firearms before we get back,« replied Frank Woodward.

»More, perhaps, than we care for,« remarked Jack Moreland, who was, perhaps, the most thoughtful of the boys.

But let us pass over the voyage, and land the young canoeists in South America, for nothing worthy of special note occurred on the voyage.

One bright morning the three young Americans found themselves on the streets of the strange old city of Para, Brazil. They had just landed, and arrangements had been made to leave their canoes stored in the wharf-house, until called for.

As the boys proceeded to the Brazilian Hotel they saw a motley population of Spaniards, or Creoles, Indians and negroes of mixed races.

The dull, sleepy old Spanish-American city did not seem at all like grand, busy, bustling New York, no one seemed to be in a hurry, and even the negroes went about their work in the most lazy and indolent manner.

»I tell you what,« said Tom Blake, »if we had these South-American people in New York we'd make 'em dizzy.«

»I guess so. But now to make a try to find Senor Avilleos, the man mentioned in Walter's note-book. You know we decided to hunt him up the first thing,« said Jack Moreland.

Arriving at the hotel, Frank brought his Spanish to the front, and asked the proprietor if he could direct him to Senor Avilleos' residence.

»Diablo!« exclaimed the Spanish landlord. Then the young American senor does not know? Carramba! The Senor Estevan Avilleos is in prison, accused of murder! Ha! He should have been tried eight months ago, but on account of the absence of the young American who went up the Grande river in the little boat, and no more yet has returned, the trial has been put off several times. You see, senor, I speak English.«

' What has the young American to do with the senor's crime?«

»Senor Kenmore, the man of the little boat, who lives on the river, witnessed the deed. So at least the Senor Avilleos says. And he has made out that the evidence of the absent American will save him.«

There was little more to be learned from the landlord save that Senor Avilleos was of a noble family, just then unpopular because of their

political opinions. That he was accused of assassinating a political rival with his sword in a private garden.

The three boy canoeists held a consultation, and resolved to seek an interview with the accused man.

»I am sure he is innocent, or Walter would not have spoken of him as he has done in his note book,« said Frank.

With some difficulty the three American boys succeeded, the following day, in getting an interview with the imprisoned man.

They found him to be a handsome young Spanish American of twenty odd. He assured our boy canoeists that he and Walter Kenmore had become fast friends in Para, that the death of the man he was accused of murdering occurred in a fair duel, of which Walter and a young native who had also disappeared, were the witnesses.

Senor Avilleos also added the information that Walter had become betrothed to his beautiful sister, the Donna Inez, who was heart-broken at the non-return of the young canoeist.

»Ah! it is terrible to be shut up here through the machinations of my enemies, when I should be free to baffle them. I fear—indeed, I am certain—the hired assassins of my political rivals have been at work,« said Senor Avilleos, finally.

»What! Do-you mean your foes would strike at Walter Kenmore?« eagerly asked Frank.

»Yes; they would not hesitate to do so to prevent his giving testimony to save me. I fear they have killed my brave young American friend, and also the other witness of the duel.«

Then Frank read the portion of Walter's diary that had been sent to America from the depths of the Amazon forest in some mysterious way.

»Ah,« exclaimed Senor or Don Avilleos; »he speaks of the enemies behind him who sought to kill him to cut off his return to Para. Surely it is my foes who have set enemies after your noble countryman.«

»We mean to find and save him,« cried Frank.

Then I charge you, on your life, keep your purpose a secret and get away on the Amazon as soon as you can. If my foes learn you seek to

bring back the man who can save me they will become dangerous to you. They will put their human bloodhounds on your track.«

The three Americans glanced at each other. At the very outset they saw the shadow of a terrible peril approaching them.

»We will go on once. But we need a guide,« said Frank.

»In that I can help you. The brother of Mijar, the daring gaucho who went with Senor Kenmore, will go with you gladly. He would find his brother. He is true, brave and skillful. The blood of the old Spanish grandees flows in the veins of: the gauchos, or men of the pampas or plains. Nothing affrights them. I will tell you where to find the brother of Senor Kenmore's guide.«

The young Spaniard was as good as his word.

The three young Americans, upon leaving the prison, sought the abode of the gaucho.«

He was a tall, handsome fellow, with Atlantean shoulders, clad in a half Spanish, half native Indian costume, the most striking feature of which was a scarlet poncho.

Arrangements were quickly made with Ricardo—such was his name—and after making a few necessary purchases, the lads took to the great river in their canoes at midnight.

Ricardo had his own boat, a native canoe, under the stars while silence reigned, and no one could be seen about the three boy canoeists, and the gaucho paddled away on the mighty Amazon.

They had carted their canoes out to a lonely place beyond the city, and they congratulated themselves that there was no witness to their embarkation.

The great river, with its tropical scenery on the bank, presented a scene of novelty and interest to the boy canoeists as they paddled along, which was continually changing like the scenes of a great natural panorama.

Towards morning they were in the great forest, where mighty trees, such as they had never dreamed of, cast their shadows upon the water.

Suddenly the gaucho, who was in the lead, stopped paddling. He was almost abreast of a small island. The three boys, each in his own canoe,

were close behind, and under the brilliant southern moon it was almost as light as day.

As the guide's canoe stopped, two large canoes, each containing ten half-naked men, who looked like the savages of the forest, dashed out from the cover of the island.

The occupants of the canoes were armed with bows, arrows and long spears.

They came straight for the young Americans and the man of the pampas.

The latter uttered a warning shout. The boy canoeists began to back water, and then each skillfully turned his canoe. But the hostile canoes were coming close.

Jack dropped his paddle and picked up his rifle, while he shouted to his companions:

»We can't run, and have got to fight!«

»Wah! Ho! Wah! Ho!« yelled the black men in the great canoes. There came the twanging of the bow-strings, and several feathered arrows passed over the heads of the boy canoeists.

They shuddered at the recollection that the Indians of the Amazon frequently steeped the heads of their war arrows in deadly poison.

Bang! bang!

Two shots were fired by Frank and Jack; Tom's weapon failed him, though he pulled the trigger.



The next instant a cry of horror goes up from Tom and Frank. They all see a lasso fall over Jack's head, and behold him jerked out of his canoe bodily and drawn through the water toward the canoe of the savages, struggling with all his might.

The wild, exultant yells of the savages, one of whom had cast the lasso, rang out over the Amazon, and the half-naked warriors brandished their weapons about their heads.

The gaucho had disappeared, and his one canoe came drifting toward Tom and Frank.

It was a moment of terrible peril for the two devoted lads, and they realized that they seemed fated to be slain or captured.

»It's a fight for life now!« gritted Frank, sternly.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE MIGHTY FOREST.

Tom Blake and Frank Woodward desired, above all things, at that moment. of terrible peril, to save Jack Moreland. But it seemed that the young canoeist was doomed to become the captive of the Amazon Savages.

»Yes. It is a fight for life now!« cried Tom, echoing the desperate words of Frank Woodward, as he saw the black men of the Amazon drawing the struggling captive at the end of the lasso nearer and nearer to their canoes.

»Poor Jack. We cannot help you now!« cried Frank Woodward, as he pressed the trigger of his rifle, and sent a bullet hurtling at the savages in the foremost canoe, who were tugging at the lasso.

One of the swarthy rowers of the great river relinquished his hold of the lasso and pitched forward head first into the turbid waves.

The ensuing moment something entirely unlooked for, and most startling to Jack Moreland's friends, as well as his enemies, transpired.

Suddenly the lasso in the hands of the native canoeists parted under water, and the black rascals who were tugging at the rawhide strand so lustily in their efforts to drag the captive into the war canoe, were hurled backward upon their companions.

As the lasso parted, the struggling boy at the end of it disappeared under the dark waves of the mighty river. His vanishment was instantaneous, as if invisible hands had suddenly drawn him down into the dark depths.

The hearts of Tom Blake and Frank Woodward leaped with the impulse of a great dread, as they thought that their brave young comrade might have been seized in the jaws of a crocodile, or some other monster of the South American waters.

Instantly, while the surprised savages hesitated in their advance, as if waiting for Jack to reappear above the surface of the dark tide, Tom and Frank paddled lustily down stream.

But they almost constantly glanced backward, seeking to discover if Jack returned from the dark depths to which he appeared to have mysteriously descended. Jack did not reappear, and the savages, again making the waters echo with their shouts, came on in pursuit of the young Americans.

Then the canoeists behaved in a manner which would have delighted the hearts of the members of »The Junior New York Canoe Club,« could they have witnessed the scene.



The lads managed their galant little »Rob Roys « with the skill of experts, and the way they sent their wonderful little shells through the water was really a wonder.

We know they paddled the best racing canoes, and with the powerful incentive of self-preservation to spur them on, it was little wonder that they attained the most surprising speed.

The war canoes did not gain upon the two young Americans for sometime. The island, behind which the savages had been concealed in their canoes, was left behind, and the boy canoeists were shooting by one of these wonderful »floating islands,« for which the Amazon is famous, when Tom said:

»We have got to hide from those black rascals, Frank, or sooner or later: they are bound to run us down.«

»That's so. Let's attempt to make use of the numerous inlets we noticed on the north bank coming up-stream.«

»All right. We'll try for it now, while the floating island is between us and the savages.«

The two boy canoeists immediately began paddling at great speed in the direction of the northern bank, half a mile away.

A dark object loomed up before them at no great distance, and they presently saw, as they approached it, that it was another floating island, smaller than the one between them and their pursuers, and covered with tropical vegetation.

Both of the canoeists then remembered they had seen a dark object coming down-stream beyond the scene of the attack by the wild men of Brazil.

»That floating island must have passed close by the spot where poor Jack Moreland went down, never to rise more,« said Frank, indicating the island drifting near.

As they shot their canoes behind it Tom replied:

That's so. The drifting island passed the scene of our fight, and of the disappearance of Jack and Ricardo, the Gaucho.«

»There was something mysterious about the vanishment of our river guide. Certainly he was neither shot or lassoed by the savages,« answered Frank.

»True enough. I cannot account for the disappearance of our guide,« assented the other.

The yells of the black men of the Amazon were now heard nearer than they had sounded for some moments.

Increasing the speed of their canoes in a gallant spurt, as they might have done at the close of a regatta on the dear old Hudson, far away in their homeland, the boys shot into the dark shadows of the mighty forest, on the northern bank of the Amazon.

Paddling close in shore, they found the mouth of a small tributary of the great river, and boldly entered it. The way was devious, dark, and dangerous; but any danger was preferable to that from which they were seeking to escape.

Sometimes they had to lift the matted and vine entwined tropical growths which hung low entirely across the stream. Numerous monkeys, parrots, and birds of various sorts were frightened a way from their night resting-place by the canoeists. The discordant voices of the tropical birds and beasts made a saturnalia of sounds in the forest.

But ere long the two lads paused, satisfied that they had eluded their pursuers, at least for a time.

They believed the savages of the Amazon had passed on down stream without entering the inlet. Resting on their paddles the two lads listened and waited for some time in silence.

Only the voices of the birds and animals they had alarmed, and which were now growing fainter, reached them.

»We are like two castaways now that we have lost our guide—Ricardo, the Gaucho, At least we are left alone on a river to us entirely unknown,« said Tom, disconsolately, at length.

»Yes, and the expedition upon which we set out so enthusiastically and hopefully seems destined to fail miserably,« was Frank's equally disheartened rejoinder.

»What shall we attempt to do? Certainly we must either push on up the Amazon in search of Walter Kenmore, the lost canosist; and the unknown people who have made him a prisoner, or we must retreat down stream.«

In either direction danger lurks.«

»Yes, and to retreat would, in my judgment, be to venture into the most dire and certain peril, for the foes of Estevan Alvilleos, the doomed prisoner of Para, and the enemies of Walter Kenmore will, in all probability, be lying in wait for us.«

»I fear your apprehensions are just, and indeed I suspect the attack of the savages may have been prompted by some emissary of Senor Avilleo's enemies.«

»Quite possibly so. Our departure from Para might not have been accomplished as secretly as we thought.«

»No, The spies, against whom the innocent young captive of the South American bastille warned us, may have watched us when we took to the

great river in-our canoes,«

»These Brazilian bravos are cunning, unscrupulous rascals and quite capable of seeking to sacrifice us to attain their own selfish ends.«

»I say, let's push on. The dangers ahead are less to be dreaded than the assassin who may lurk in our rear.«

»Bravo! You are made of the right stuff, Tom,« exclaimed Frank Woodward, approvingly. »What would Colonel Pemberton Bugg of ›The Universe‹ say if we turned back upon encountering the first danger? No, no, old fellow, there is no back out for us, ehß«

»No. Two lives are at stake besides our own. Every prompting of heroism, every impulse of chivalry tells us to save Walter Kenmore, the lost canoeist, and then his testimony will clear Senor Avilleos.«

»The vote is settled, the question is decided. We'll push on. On to we know not what. After all, there is something delightful in the mystery which environs our future on the Amazon. But for the sad fate of Jack and the gaucho, I should feel in pretty good spirits, now that we have thrown the savages off the water trail.«

»So would I. But now day is approaching. Let's draw our canoes under the cover of the dense bushes, have breakfast, and then sleep and rest until the night comes again, bringing its cool shadows. Then we will push on.«

»All right. I have a most healthy appetite, and also that sleep is something of a luxury.«

The lads secreted their canoes in the primeval forest, and while they made a breakfast of the food they had brought with them in their canoes, they admired the wonders of nature all around them.

If the name of primeval forest can be given to any forest on the face of the earth, none perhaps can so strictly claim it as those that fill the connected basin of the Orinoco and the Amazon.

From the grassy steppes of Venezuela to the treeless pampas of Buenos Ayres expands a sea of verdure in which we may draw a circle 1,100 miles in diameter, which shall include an evergreen, unbroken forest.

There is the most bewildering diversity of grand and beautiful trees—a wild, unconquered race of vegetable giants, draped, festooned, corded and matted with climbing and creeping plants in endless variety.

The exuberance nature displays in these million square acres of tangled, impenetrable forest offers a bar to civilization nearly as great as the African desert.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE SHADOW OF DOOM.

Frank and Tom had fallen asleep on a green bank, under the shade of a giant palm. The sun crept higher and higher, and anon the sound of stealthy footsteps sounded faintly in the cover near the sleeping canoeists.

Evidently two persons were approaching the giant palm, under which the young Americans reposed as serenely and as if sleeping, safely in bed in New York.

The bushes near the giant palm were presently softly pushed aside, and a dark and savage face peered from behind the leafy canopy.

A pair of small, fierce, jet-black eyes, set under the receding brows of an Amazon savage, flashed keen, vindictive glances forward and discovered the sleeping canoeists.

A silent signal, a wave of the hand by the savage spy, and a second face was noiselessly thrust forward from the screen of foliage.«

But the second face was not that of a native of the Amazon valley. It was the face of a Spaniard whose yellow skin and pointed beard contrasted in a marked manner with the black face and beardless skin of the South American Indian.

The face of the Spaniard became as savage and exultant in its expression as that of the Indian when he beheld the sleeping canoeists.

Another silent signal, this time made by the Spaniard, and then the Indian drew from a puma-skin quiver one of those famous blowpipes used by the natives, which supply the place of fire-arms in many Parts of South America.

The singular weapon was about ten feet long and quite light, being composed of stems of a little palm which vary so much in size that one may be pushed inside of the other. The pith is removed, and the whole is spirally bound with a dark creeper. A conical mouth-piece is inserted, and sights are fitted along the barrel. Armed with tiny arrows, needle-pointed; the native has a formidable weapon.

If the arrows have been poisoned—and the war arrows are usually steeped in the fatal woorali—woe to the man wounded by one of them.

The savage comrade of the Spaniard fitted one of his little arrows to the blow-pipe and his bearded comrade drew a pistol of Spanish make. There was a further exchange of signals between the two men, and then each aimed his weapon.

While the savage covered Tom Blake with his deadly blow-gun, the Spaniard directed his weapon at Frank Woodward.

It was indicated that, at one simultaneous discharge of their weapons, the Spaniard and the Indian intended to slay the two young American canoeists.

Still the latter slept on peacefully, soundly for the fatigue of their long journey on the Amazon had told upon them and nature sought its needed recuperation now.

The fate of the boy canoeists depended on what might transpire during the next ensuing moment, and it appeared that nothing could save them.

But suddenly a dark object launched itself at the Indian and his Spanish comrade from the rear.

A man clad in the garb of a Gaucho dealt two swift and terrible blows, the first of which stretched the Indian at his feet, the second descending upon the skull of the Spaniard.

As the Spaniard fell his pistol was discharged, but the bullet harmlessly cleft the empty air above the heads of the sleeping boys.

The report of the discharged weapon sounded like a clap of thunder in the silent forest, and the boys were instantly awakened.

Bounding to their feet, they glanced about them, dazed and uncertain as to what they saw at first at the instant of sudden awakening.

They beheld a tall form standing between the prostrate forms of the Indian and the Spaniard.

Then a glad cry broke from the lips of the young canoeists in unison.

»Ricardo! Ricardo!« they recognized the gaucho guide who had so mysteriously disappeared from the canoe at the moment when Jack Moreland was lassoed by the savage on the river.

Then there came a shout from the cover in the rear of Ricardo, for he the man who had so opportunely arrived to save the boys really was, and a youthful figure pounded into sight.

»Jack!«

»Jack alive and safe!«

As the cries went up from Tom and Frank they recognized their brave young comrade who, by reason of his age and heroism, was virtually the leader of the expedition.

That was indeed a glad moment of rejoicing and reunion. While the lads embraced and exchanged affectionate words, Ricardo the gaucho, with a grim smile on his noble-looking, bronzed face, coolly proceeded to bind the two fallen men hand and foot, using the tough and pliable tendril of the forest creeper in lieu of cords.

»Now an explanation is in order. You must tell us how this has all come about. How you were saved. Where you met Ricardo, and most of all, how you came to arrive at our camp just in time to save us?« presently said Frank.

»Oh, as to that we owe everything to Ricardo, »Ah, he is a brave and noble fellow. It was a lucky hour for us, indeed, when we engaged him to accompany us,« replied Jack.

The gaucho made a disparaging gesture, as if modestly disclaiming all praise, but Jack continued.

»Suddenly, while the savages were dragging me through the water at the end of the lasso, the rawhide thong was severed by a slash from a knife, a human head, the head of Ricardo, came up from under the surface of the water the next moment close beside me, and its owner bade me dive and follow him in a swim under water for my life. I obeyed, and we struck out for one of those strange floating islands, which was coming down stream toward us. We reached the island, concealed ourselves on it and floated with it until it lodged on a bar, near the shore. Then we made the river bank, and came upon the very Indians of the Amazon from where we had so narrowly escaped. The savages were in camp. Their canoes and my own and Ricardo's were drawn up on the shore. We secured our canoes and paddled back up stream. When dawn came we were hidden at some distance south of this point on this inlet.

We saw the Spaniard and the Indian go by in a small canoe. Recognizing the Indian as one of the band we had escaped from, Ricardo followed the latter and his Spanish comrade. Creeping along the bank he heard enough to know that the two were searching for you and that the entire band of savages had separated to search all the inlets and passages.

»Ricardo, meanwhile, identified the Spaniard as a noted bravo and swordsman of Para, who is no doubt leagued with the enemies of Senor Avilleos, our lost canoeist's friend. Returning to me, Ricardo proposed that we follow the Spies in our canoes, We did so and you know the rest.«

»And now, senors, we must away as quickly as the condor wings:his flight for the snowy Andes. The enemy will soon be on our trail. But first let us despatch these men,« said the gaucho coolly.

He caught up the spear of the fallen savage as he spoke, and seemed about to transfix the Indian with it when the three boy canoeists almost simultaneously interposed.

»No, no, Ricardo, that is not the American way of dealing with an enemy. You must not kill them,« cried Jack.

»What then? The young Americano will find the enemies he spares will only make him more trouble. Better make sure of them now, Says Ricardo,« rejoined the gaucho,

»No, no. We will leave them here and on at once.«

»Ah, they will be found and set free by the human hounds of their band. There are no better trackers in South America than the Indians of the Amazon, Gomez, the bravo swordsman, will track us with his Indians as long as his men will follow,« replied the gaucho. But he cast aside his spear.

A few moments later the canoeists. were again on the water.

Guided by the gaucho, they made rapid progress along the tributary of the Amazon which they had entered.

Never once had the knights of the pampas thought of turning back, it seemed.

CHAPTER VI.

PERILS OF THE AMAZON—THE CONDOR-HEADS.

A characteristic feature of the Amazon is the Amazon is the system of back channels, joining the tributaries, and the igarapes, or canoe-paths from water-course to water-course, through the forest.

»Ha!« exclaimed Ricardo the gaucho, »one may travel a thousand miles up the Amazon without ever entering it.«

»A wonderful river, indeed,« replied Frank, whose canoe was abreast the guide's little craft.

»The greatest of all rivers, and Ricardo loves it. Though he was born on the wild pampas, where the Mamelukes of South America, or as we say, the gauchos, are the only free, unconquered race of the continent,« responded Ricardo, and his keen-sighted, coal-black eyes flashed proudly.

»Tell us something about the great river,« replied Frank Woodward.

»Like other South American rivers, the Amazon is subjected to periodical inundations: The banks, usually high, are then flooded, and vast tracks are overflowed. The tide of the ocean is perceptibly five hundred miles up. The bore or pororoca, as we say, is a wonderful thing?

»Yes, i have read of that phenomenon,« said Tom.

»During three days before the new and full moon, the periods of the highest tides, instead of occupying six hours to reach its flood, the waters of the Amazon rise highest in a few moments. You young Americans shall see it yet. Ah, it is terrible. The noise is heard a distance of five or six miles, and increases. as it approaches. Then you will see a mountain of water fifteen feet high, followed by another, and another, and sometimes a fourth.«

»That would be the end of a canoe. Oh, I hope we shall not be caught in one of those terrible flood tides,« cried Jack.

»The young senor may well say that. No man can tell how many canoes have been lost in the flood tides. But the natives usually keep off the main channel of the river at the times when the flood tides are expected, « replied the gaucho.

»The mighty tide must sweep everything away before it,« said Frank.

»Yes, these watery mountains spread across the whole channel, and advance with wonderful rapidity, rendering and crushing everything in their way. Immense trees are instantly uprooted; and sometimes whole tracts of land are swept away.«

»Wide as your wonderful river is, Ricardo, it is full of islands and bars, and the channels are constantly changing.«

»Yes, The Amazon knows no rest.«

»The shores are not very thickly populated?«

»No, and the principal tribes gather rubber, cocoanuts, copabia, cotton, palm fiber, tinka beans and tobacco, for the markets at the seaports.«

»You all learned at school, I suppose, that Yanez Pinzon explored the Amazon in 1500. But the river was first navigated by Orellana, Pizarro's officer, in 1541,« said Jack.

»The young senor is a great scholar. But can he tell the gaucho from what our great river derives its name?« asked Ricardo, with the air of a man who had propounded a poser.

»Certainly. The name came from General Orellana's story of his fight with the nation of female warriors, or Amazons,« replied Frank, triumphantly.

»No. The young Americano is wrong. It was not left for the hated Spanish invaders to name the great river of Ricardo's land. The name Amazon was taken from the Indian word Amassona or boat-destroyer. The river was so called before ever the white man crossed the great sea.«

»I will not contradict you. No doubt you are right, but I have told you what our books mostly say,« assented Frank.

An hour later Ricardo suddenly ran his canoe against a bank. There the water-course took an underground channel.

»Now we shall have to follow one of the canoe paths,« said the gaucho.

Quickly each one of the canoeists got his little '»Rob Roy« out of the water. Frank took a look ahead, and saw the way was pretty open.

»Now to try the wheels,« he said.

In a few moments wheels, carried in the canoes and movable axels, were adjusted and the water crafts were converted into carts.

But Ricardo disdainfully raised his canoe to his shoulders with his long, sinewy arms and stalked away. His limbs, lithe as a panther's, measured off the way in long strides, and the boys found it difficult to keep up with him and drag their canoes.

The canoe-path was well marked, and the party had no difficulty in keeping to the proper trail. As they went forward in single file the boy canoeists noticed that Ricardo carried the blow-gun of the Amazon savage, who had been left a bound prisoner with Gomez, the Spaniard.

The lads were pretty well exhausted when they reached the bank of the next water course. But the rover of the wild pampas exhibited no trace of fatigue.

Noting the condition of his young comrades, the gaucho opened a bag which he carried at his girdle, and with a kindly smile said, as he drew forth some cocoa leaves:

»Let the young senors chew these leaves. They will make them strong. No gaucho will ever travel far without his cocoa-bag.«

The boys accepted the refreshing leaves and chewed them, experiencing surprise at the renewed strength which the leaves gave them.

»No hunter could climb the dizzy height, of the cordilleros without those leaves,« said Ricardo, presently. »And great quantities of them are consumed by the miners in the gloomy mines of Potosi.«

When they were ail somewhat rested the canoeists again took to the water. The channel upon which they now paddled conducted them to the main river.

Still no sounds of pursuit had reached them, so pointing to a stationary island the gaucho said:

»Yonder we will make a camp and rest for a few hours.«

Reaching the island they concealed their canoes and started to walk inland to a grove of palms. But they had not advanced far when a series of singular sounds reached their hearing.

The sounds were not unlike the grunt of a porker, and mingled with those sounds were those like the clashing of tusks together.

»What is it?« cried Jack.

»The peccary or wild hog,« replied the gaucho.

»And a big troop, too. We must get into the tree-tops or we are lost,« cried the gaucho guide the next moment.

The whole party made for the trees at full speed, and by means of the clinging vines that encircled the trunks of the trees; quickly ascended to the lower branches.

Scarcely had the quartette reached a safe height when the herd of the wild hogs of the Amazon appeared in sight.

From somewhere near the shore of the island the wild hogs, like a pack of bloodhounds, had taken the trail of the lads.

In a moment the trees in which the canoeists had sought refuge were surrounded, and the fierce little animals looked up at them with fiery eyes, and clashed their trunks disappointedly.

The boys were about to open fire upon the wild hogs with their rifles, but the gaucho restrained them.

»Hold; do not shoot!« he exclaimed. «Every shot will serve only to enrage the wild hogs, and they will keep us treed the longer.»

The boys withheld their fire. The wild hogs kept on grunting and rooting about the trees for some time, but at length, as if giving up the siege for good, they trotted away.

The canoeists descended when Ricardo had assured them that the fierce little animals which were so much dreaded by the hunters of the Amazon were gone to a safe distance.

But another peril was near.

Scarcely had they reached the ground when the gaucho exclaimed, in low and thrilling tones:

»Down, senors! Down for your lives!«

As he uttered the startling warning the guide of the Amazon threw himself flat on the earth.

The boys followed his example, and looking ahead they saw a long line of dark figures marching through the trees.

»The Condor-heads! The Condor-heads!« exclaimed the gaucho, in a whisper, and the boys noted that many of the dark warriors they saw through the trees wore helmets of condor skulls.

»They are the mysterious people who captured Walter Kenmore,« said Jack, and the next moment the canoeists had cause for great alarm.

CHAPTER VII.

TOM A CAPTIVE—EL TIGRE!

A wild yell went up from the savages who had just been discovered by the boy canoeists and the gaucho.

The shout was the announcement that the young adventurers and their comrade had been seen by the mysterious warriors.

A score of the nearly naked, powerfully built, and ferocious looking Indians, led by a cacique or chief wearing a helmet of condor skulls, came rushing in the direction of the canoeists immediately.

The latter fled, and as they ran the gaucho said excitedly:

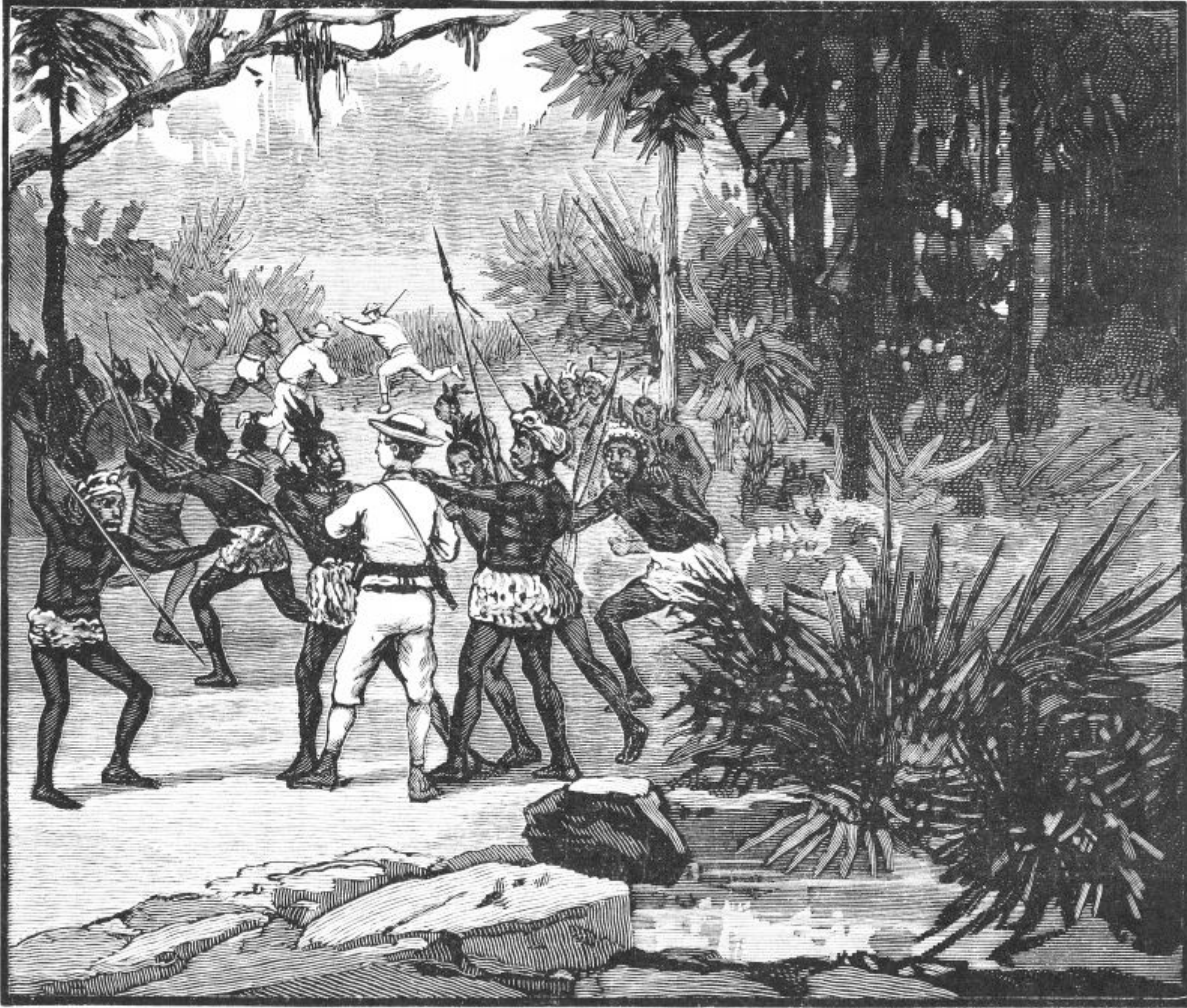
»The Indos mysterios. The wonderful condor heads of a far distant country of the upper Amazon, Often have I heard legends of such a race, but never before have I seen any them.

The mysterious Indians were wonderfully fleet of foot, and they gained upon the canoeists despite all the efforts of the latter to distance them.

The gaucho led in the race and, in single file, the boys followed him. Of course they all ran for their canoes.

But Tom stepped on a round stone and sprained his ankle severely. Nor was that mishap the end of his misfortunes.

Stumbling into an almost concealed water-hole, as he limped along, poor Tom fell headfirst. The water-hole was quite deep, with steep sides, and while he vainly tried to extricate himself his comrades, ignorant of what had happened, kept on.



The mysterious Indians soon came up to the water-hole and discovered Tom. Their exultant yells rang in the ears of the unlucky lad, and he saw their dark savage faces looking down at him. Half a dozen of the warriors leaped into the water-hole and Tom was dragged out.

Just then the lad was missed by his comrades.

They glanced back and their consternation and alarm may be imagined when they saw their young comrade in the midst of the Indians. The captured boy was left in charge of several of the warriors, and the rest came on in pursuit of his party.

But the canoeists reached their concealed crafts and immediately paddled away from the island at their best speed.

Of course they could do nothing looking to the rescue of Tom then. Evidently the canoes of the strange warriors were on the opposite side of the island, for after running along the shore for some distance,

discharging arrows at the escaping party, the savages darted off in the direction whence they had come.

The three friends of Tom reached the neighborhood of the north bank of the river as quickly as possible.

»We must run into some back channel. Those black men with the long spears will be after us soon in their war canoes,« said the gaucho.

»Now we have two bands of enemies to fear,« replied Frank.

‘Yes. But we have at least met the men of the mysterious race much sooner than we anticipated. Surely they are the people Walter Kenmore mentioned in his diary. He particularly stated therein that the chiefs wore helmets of condor skulls. But poor Tom! I suppose he will be carried away to the unknown country by the Condor-Heads, to share Walter Kenmore’s captivity, if, indeed, the poor lad is not immediately put to death,« answered Jack.

»Or rescued,« the gaucho replied.

»What? Is there a possibility that we can save Tom?« cried Jack.

»Ricardo means to try. But yonder is the mouth of a channel leading back from the main stream. No more talk now. Let us seek to get into the channel at once.«

The river guide sent his canoe through the water rapidly, and soon shot into the channel he had discovered.

The two boy canoeists followed, and the party continued to paddle on swiftly for some time. They did not converse until the gaucho who appeared to be searching for some landmark suddenly ceased paddling and pointing to a giant palm—the most lofty and magnificent specimen the canoeists had yet seen on the Amazon exclaimed:

»The ladder tree! Ricardo thought he had not lost his bearings.«

The great tree stood right on the bank of the stream, and in a moment Ricardo had grounded his canoe and leaped ashore.

»Why do you call that palm a ladder tree? Oh, I see. It is notched so that one may climb to its umbrella shaped branches!« Jack cried.

»Right, senior. It is one of the ‘spying trees’ of the gauchos. A party of pampas huntsmen, of which I was a member, years ago notched the tree. From its top you can see Many, many miles.«

The river guide had begun to climb the ladder tree while he was speaking. He reached the top and disappeared among the foliage, while the two lads below watched him with admiration, for he exhibited the agility and muscle of a trained athlete.

An exclamation from the gaucho presently announced that he had made some observation of importance.

He came hurrying down the tree, and as he alighted upon the ground he cried:

»The Spaniard and his Indians are coming. But they are far distant, down the river. The Indos mysterios—the Condor-heads, are looking for us, but they have missed the channel we entered.«

»What caused the exclamation you uttered in the tree top? You have not told us all you saw, I think, Ricardo?« questioned Jack.

»No, I saw the main band of the Condor-heads on the island. They have been on a foray, in quest of slaves, and they have a large number of women of the lower river tribes with them, and a few men. Among the latter I recognized Calka, the monkey-trapper, a native of the Amazon, partially civilized, who gains a livelihood by catching monkeys which he sells in Para, for exportation.«

»This Calka is your friend?«

»Yes. And a brave fellow, but almost too fond of gain. Calka is one to look out for himself at all times.

»But now to my plan of rescue, for I have one, and, and I mean to do my best for your comrade,« continued the gaucho.

»When night comes we will trail up the Condor-heads, if they leave the island. Then leave it to Ricardo to enter the camp and free the young Americano; I shall also liberate Calka, if I can.«

»Good!« exclaimed Jack. 'After all; if we can only save Tom, perhaps we may count it a fortunate thing that we met the Condor-heads.«'

»Yes,« answered Frank. »For if we can follow their trail they may unwittingly guide us to their mysterious country, where Walter Kenmore is a captive.«

»I have thought of that,« rejoined the gaucho. »It is evident that the Condor-heads are on the journey homeward. Ricardo means to keep

their trail. They will journey on the river where no track is left by the canoe, great or small, still the gaucho can follow them.«

Presently, he again ascended the ladder-tree. The two lads climbed up after him and, from the top of the palm, all three scanned the vast expanse of country which was clearly visible from the elevation.

They saw two great war canoes, unlike any they had previously seen, being paddled toward the islands by the Condor-heads who had come in pursuit of them.

Evidently the mysterious Indians had abandoned the pursuit as futile. On the island the main band of the strange race were making preparations for embarking.

Tom was among them, and while his comrades continued watching the lad's captors they saw him hurried into one of the great canoes.

In a very short time the entire force of the Condor-heads with their captive were pulling up the Amazon.

The boy canoeists and the gaucho did not fail to cast searching glances down stream. But they did not discover the Spaniard and his Indians.

Ricardo said that no doubt the Spaniard and his party had taken to some interior channel.

The trio had just descended from the ladder tree when the gaucho shouted, in tones of alarm:

»El tigre! El tigre!«

It was not a premature alarm. The succeeding moment a jaguar leaped from his perch in an adjacent tree straight at the trio under the giant palm.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TERRIBLE MISTAKE—RICARDO'S PERIL.

The great striped body of the jaguar shot, like a cannon ball, straight at Ricardo, who chanced to be nearest x the tree, from which the dreaded animal made his leap.

But the lithe gaucho suddenly leaped aside, and his keen-bladed hunting knife glittered for a moment ere it was plunged to the hilt in the body of the jaguar.

Backward darted Ricardo as the South American tiger, with a cry of rage and pain flung himself into the air the instant after he struck the earth. The jaguar wheeled to come at the gaucho again, for the wound he had received was not a mortal one.

Already, however, Jack Moreland had his rifle at his shoulder, and the detonation of the discharged weapon mingled with the roar of the maddened tiger.

Jack had taken a swift, but deadly aim. His bullet entered the breast of the tiger, and he fell almost at the feet of Ricardo, tearing up the earth, in furious death throes.

»Well done, young senor,« the gaucho remarked, coolly. That was an excellent shot!«

»I should like to have that tiger's skin to carry back to New York as a trophy, but I cannot burden myself with it,« said Jack, as he and Frank stood over the striped terror of the Amazon.

»The report of your gun may draw enemies here. Who knows but some of the Spaniard's band are near?« said Frank, as the gaucho strode toward the canoes a moment subsequently.

»We will embark at once,» Ricardo observed, and then, pointing at some dark specks against the cerulean sky above their heads, he added:

»Those are condors winging their flight for the Andes. The great birds visit the valley of the Amazon but seldom stay long. They like to hover above the highest mountain peaks, and I have seen them more than five hundred feet above Chimborazo.«

»Condors are plenty where the mysterious Savages came from, or helmets of condor skulls would not be so plentiful among the chiefs,« replied Frank.

»True. Ah, it may be that the trail of the Indos mysterios will lead us to the great mountains,« assented Ricardo.

»What was it that the leaves of Walter Kenmore's diary contained about a water-way clear across South America?« asked Jack.

»The purport of what you allude to was, that Mijar—Walter's faithful guide—had told him there was a water-way across the entire continent, through the Amazon and its tributaries,« replied Frank.

»Yes, that was it, and so it may turn out that the strange Indians can make the journey even to the Andes by canoe.«

While the above conversation was taking place, the party were getting under way.

They paddled over the channel route which they had taken from the river, and in a short time they re-entered the main stream.

Then they discovered that the mysterious Indians who had made Tom a captive had passed out of sight up the river.

With the gaucho in the lead the party paddled in the direction taken by the captors of the boy canoeist.

They had now to pass the island where they had first encountered the Condor Heads, and could they have seen within the dense thicket at its southern end they would have discovered a score of natives of the lower Amazon and a white man with a pointed beard.

The party in concealment was Gomez and his band. While the canoeists passed the island their enemies, who had landed there after the departure of the Condor Heads, failed to see them.

But just as the boy canoeists and the river guide were passing out of sight they were discovered by one of the Spaniard's Indians.

»Ha! they are following the strange black men of the Amazon! We must follow them. To the canoes!« cried Gomez, when the canoeists were pointed out to him.

At once the order of the Spaniard was obeyed by his followers. In a few moments they had all embarked in their canoes, and were making good

time up the river.

When night fell and the darkness became complete, the two American boys and the gaucho were rather close upon Tom's captors.

Before the shadows obscured them entirely the friends of the captured boy had caught sight of the band that was hurrying the lad away.

A little later the gleam of a number of camp fires on the river bank told the canoeists that the party they were in pursuit of had landed and made a camp.

»Now I am well pleased. We shall see if the strange Indos are more cunning than the men of the pampas,« said the gaucho as he noted the camp fires of the Condor-Heads.

A landing was made and when the night had well advanced Ricardo announced that the time had come for him to set out on his mission of peril—to rescue Tom and his friend Calka, the native,

The two lads were eager to accompany the venturesome gaucho, but he stoutly asserted that he would have no companions—that he could do best alone.

Silently he put off in his canoe, after bidding the two boys await his return where they were, unless the coming of an enemy drove them away.

The gaucho quickly vanished in the darkness on the great river. Alone, Frank and Jack seated themselves on their canoes and conversed in low tones while the moments passed.

A gang of alonattes, or howling monkeys, set up their discordant noise near by, and presently the parrots and macaws added their screams to the night pandemonium.

Thousands of miniature meteors flashed in the gloom. These were the signal lights of a multitude of fire beetles, glow worms and elates.

The boys watched the phosphorescent display for an hour while they conversed.

But at length their solicitude and anxiety regarding Ricardo and Tom caused them to lapse into suspenseful silence.

Almost breathlessly they listened, seeking to catch any sound from the river that might convey a warning of the return of the gaucho.

At last the faint sound of paddles reached the hearing of the eager listeners. The sound emanated from up-stream. It drew nearer and nearer. Presently, in the darkness, the canoe the boys heard seemed very near.

»Ricardo is going by us in the darkness,« said Jack.

»Here! Here! This way, Ricardo!' called out Frank cautiously.

The sounds ceased for an instant, then began, and in a moment or so a canoe grounded near the the boys.

They came forward. But they would have beat a retreat again almost instantly, could they have done so.

They found themselves suddenly surrounded by a company of dark forms, and from out of the envioning gloom a voice reached them, saving:

»Diablo! This is well. We have the Americanos at last, and we shall take good care they do not bring back the man who can save the hated leader of the aristocrats—Senor Avilleos.«

The speaker was Gomez, the Spaniard, and the two boy canoeists shuddered as they comprehended that they had fallen into the hands of the foe who had pursued them from Para.

But meanwhile, how fared it with the brave gaucho, who had gone to venture into the camp of the Condor Heads?

Let us follow him on his night mission of rescue among the unknown race of the Amazon.

Paddling silently, as when he left his two boy comrades, Ricardo proceeded until he was near the camp of the Condor Heads.

Then he made a landing.

But just as he set foot upon the shore, a tall warrior of the unknown tribe sprang up before him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GAUCHO IN THE CAMP OF THE ENEMY.

The gaucho was surprised, but he acted with the celerity of thought. As the lips of the mysterious Indian were parted for the utterance of a yell of alarm, which would have been fatal to Ricardo's plans, the latter's rifle crashed down upon the head of the savage.

Ricardo had swung his weapon with tremendous force, and although the Indian sought to elude the blow by a leap aside, he was not quick enough.

With the alarm shout he meditated unuttered the savage fell at the feet of the river guide, The fallen Indian did not stir.

Dropping upon one knee beside him, the gaucho remained thus for a moment. Then he arose. His black eyes were flashing as he hissed under his breath:

»So, so. There is one less of the savage men who have carried my brother and the young American away to their own country.«

It was true. The terrible blow dealt by the gaucho had broken the skull of the savage.

The former drew the body of the Indian into the water, pushed it out into the swift tide upon which it drifted away down stream.

Creeping forward, as stealthily as possible, Ricardo soon paused behind the trunk of a great Massarandanha, or cow tree, which the Indians had notched to extract its milky fluid.

From this hiding-place the Indians, in their camp, were quite distinctly seen by the gaucho; the light of their camp-fire rendered them visible.

Ricardo saw Tom Blake bound to a tree in the camp of the Condor Heads, and near the lad Calka, the native monkey hunter, was secured in the same manner.

The indications all were that the mysterious Indians had gone into camp for the night, and the gaucho watched and waited for a favorable opportunity to accomplish his mission of rescue.

Some time elapsed, and finally the Condor Heads seemed to quiet down for the night. Two guards were posted at the edge of the vamp, and all the other warriors were soon apparently soundly sleeping.

The gaucho felt that his time for action had now arrived. He began a stealthy advance; creeping forward silently he approached the nearest guard.

It was the purpose of Ricardo to overpower the guards silently-without allowing them a chance to sound an alarm.

Nearer and nearer the gaucho crept toward the unsuspecting savage until at length he was so close that he could reach the dusky sentinel with a single leap. Measuring the distance with his eye, despite the gloom, the man of the pampas suddenly sprang upon the sentinel. The dull thud of his weapon sounded on the skull of the savage, and he went down stricken as the man who had surprised Ricardo on the river bank had been.

But Ricardo had scarcely counted upon the sound of the blow being so distinct, and he was disconcerted as through the gloom partially illuminated by the dying camp-fires he saw the other guards coming toward him.

To snatch up the long spear belonging to the fallen savage, don his condor skull helmet and stand in the place of the fallen guard was with the gaucho but the work of a moment.

The second guard was close upon Ricardo, and he had not yet discovered the deception of which he was being made the victim, when he spoke in a strange language.

The gaucho for answer again swung his rifle in the air, and it descended upon the head of the second guard. He fell, knocked senseless, before he comprehended what hit him.

Silent then was the camp of the Condor-Heads, and their prisoners were unguarded.

Ricardo was creeping toward the captured boy canoeist and the native monkey-trapper, when a dark object sprang up from the grass, and with a strange cry bounded into a thicket.

It was only a Macoco monkey—the largest in America, a huge, black-faced, ill-shaped creature, with a voice like the shriek of a steam-engine when raised in a yell of alarm.

The gaucho dropped in the grass as if shot as the Macoco bounded away. He knew that the cry of the frightened monkey would awaken the sleepers, and he now feared discovery.

Several of the Condor heads started up and muttered sleepy unintelligible words, evidently expressive of anger, but the absence of the guards was not noted.

The Indians fell asleep again, and then the gaucho made haste to reach the captives. A few slashes of his keen-bladed knife served to sever the cords with which their captors had bound the boy canoeist and the native.

Come, follow me; speak not a word, make no sound until we are well clear of the camp,« admonished the gaucho then.

Stealthily the trio, with Ricardo in the lead, set out to leave the camp. They knew that the peril of discovery was very great, and that a single shout of alarm would awaken the entire band of Indos mysterios.

But the imminent peril was safely passed. The trio traversed the camp of the sleeping savages, and passed beyond it undetected.

Then they hastened rapidly in the direction of the place on the river bank where the gaucho had left his canoe.

###picture####

They were not intercepted, and, entering the canoe, they paddled silently down stream.

Suddenly Ricardo raised his paddle and made a back stroke to stop the canoe. Then he raised his hand warningly and bent forward to listen.

His comrades did the same. Tom at least heard nothing.

»What do you hear?« the rescued boy asked, in a whisper.

»The sound of paddles. A canoe is going down stream ahead of us,« replied Ricardo.

Rapidly but silently the gaucho paddled after that. A few moments, and the silence of the great river was rudely broken.

The report of a rifle rang out, and then came a shout uttered, as Ricardo and Tom knew, by Jack Moreland.

We left the two boy canoeists, Frank Woodward and Jack Moreland surrounded by the Spaniard and his band of Indians.

Suddenly the rifle of Jack Moreland sprang to his shoulder. He discharged the weapon, and one of the Indians fell. Then the brave boy and his comrade made a rush. They sprang for the river. The Spaniard and his band were surprised at the daring attempt at escape.

Before they had sufficiently regained their presence of mind to pursue the boy canoeists the latter were in their little crafts.

»Fire! Give them a shower of arrows!« cried the Spaniard as he saw the canoeists about to shoot away from the river bank in their wonderful little crafts.

The Indians uttered fierce cries as they obeyed the order of the Spaniard.

»Down! Quick for your life, Frank!« shouted Jack as he heard the order of the Spaniard. He threw himself flat in his canoe as he spoke.

Frank followed the advice and the example of his comrade. As they lay sheltered by the sides of their canoes the first volley of arrows from the Indians flew harmlessly over them.

Then up they sprang and sent their canoes further from the shore. The Spaniards and the Indians leaped into their great war-canoes and put off in pursuit of the canoeists.

The next moment the latter grounded on a sand bar only a short distance from the shore.

While the lads were trying to get off the bar the enemy came close.

Again the Spaniard was exultant.

But all at once the canoe containing the gaucho and the two persons he had rescued, dashed around the end of the bar, and »Bang! bang! bang!« sounded the report of a repeating rifle, as it was thrice discharged.

The weapon was aimed and fired by the gaucho. He had recognized the voice of the Spaniard who had just uttered an exultant shout.

Three Indians among the men who paddled the great war canoe fell under the fire of the gaucho. The Spaniard's canoe stopped.

The next instant a terrible cry burst from the lips of the gaucho, and he exclaimed:

»Merci! It is coming. The flood! The pororoca! I had forgotten the date!«

CHAPTER X.

FLOOD-TIDE ON THE AMAZON.

The silence of death fell upon friends and foes for a moment, with an abruptness that was startling, for all knew that a peril greater than man could bring upon them was approaching.

Forgotten, then, at least for the time, was the object of the Spaniard.

He sought only to save himself and his men.

Immediately they made for the shore, and the frightened Indian paddled for dear life.

A dull sounding of water was heard. The clouds that had obscured the moon drifted away. Then the boy canoeist saw a mighty wave, forty feet high, advancing swiftly, but almost silently, up stream.

»To the bank! We must get off the river before the pororoca strikes us, or we are lost!« cried the gaucho.

He shot his native canoe shoreward, aiming to make a landing at some distance north of the point the Spaniard and his party was making for.

Frank and Jack had got their canoes off the bar as the alarm of the terrible flood that was so swiftly sweeping down upon them, was uttered by the gaucho.

They paddled desperately for the shore.

It was a race for life, with the wonderful destructive flood of the Amazon that now ensued. The canoe of the gaucho and the two Rob Roys were almost to the bank of the river, when the flood struck the little bar upon which the canoes of the two boys had grounded.

There sounded a tremendous roar, as the great wave struck the bar and broke over it in a foaming billow.

The bar was swept away. The powerful wind that accompanied it carried the flood wave on beyond the obstruction, up stream, like a thunderbolt.

The swell of the water inshore lifted the canoes and hurled them in among the trees, When the wave had passed, the canoeists found themselves at some distance from the bank, high and dry in their little craft.

»Up with the canoes and follow me, or we shall have to fight a battle with the Spaniard's band,« cried Ricardo, when the flood wave had spent its fury at that point in the river.

The party were in motion almost at once, This time they all went rapidly inland, led by Ricardo.

As they marched along, drawing and carrying their canoes, Frank and Jack had a chance to congratulate Tom on his rescue and welcome him back among them.

The gaucho and Calka, the monkey trapper, conversed in Spanish as they marched along, carrying the large canoe belonging to the gaucho between them.

Ricardo's manner became excited as he listened to the talk of the native hunter. Observing this, the boy canoeists became curious to learn what communication Calka was making, and they felt confident that it must be something of importance. Their tones were not distinct enough for Frank, who spoke Spanish, to make out what they said.

A march of about three-quarters of a mile brought the party to a water course. It was one of the systems of back channels, peculiar to the Amazon, which we have had occasion to fully describe.

Having shoved their canoes into the water, and being all ready to embark, Ricardo called a halt, and remarked:

»Calka has told me remarkable news. You have related to me how you received a message from your lost friend, which he must have sent by a secret messenger from the mission village, where he was captured by the Indos mysterios.«

»Yes, yes. Tell us what news Calka has imparted?« cried Jack, eagerly.

»Calka was at the mission village when the Indos mysterios raided it.«

»Oh! Are you about to tell us he was the secret messenger who conveyed the leaves of Walter Kenmore's diary to Para and mailed it?«

»Yes, such is the fact. Calka's life had been saved in the forest by the young Americano, He sought to serve Walter Kenmore. But he kept his own council, learning in Para that villains had planned to assassinate the young Americano on the river that he might not return to bear witness in favor of Senor Avilleos.«

‘Can Calka guide us to the mission village?’ asked Frank.

»He can and will, if we deem it advisable to go there. But for three days we must not venture on the main channel of the Amazon. At the end of that time the danger will be passed—the flood tide will be over.«

»Does Calka know anything about the Condor Heads that is new to us?’

»No, But he has told me one thing that gives me satisfaction. Calka says that Walter Kenmore agreed to mark the trail of the Indos mysterios to their unknown dwelling-place, if he could find an opportunity to do so undetected.«

Frank then addressed the monkey-trapper in Spanish.

A conversation ensued between them, during which the lad elicited full particulars regarding the capture of Walter Kenmore and his faithful guide, Mijar, the brother of Ricardo.

Frank translated all that the native said for the benefit of his comrades. And then they set out on the channel to which the gaucho had guided them.

»We are a-going now to the summer camp of Calka,« said Ricardo.

A short time subsequently the canoeists heard a crashing sound in the bushes at the edge of the channel.

The growth parted, and a herd of tapirs plunged into the water. The tapirs were evidently terribly frightened, and the cause of the ularm of the animals became apparent as a tiger appeared on the bank in close pursuit of the unwieldy pachyderms.

The frightened herd of tapirs came floundering through the water straight toward the canoes. There was danger that those frail crafts might be hopelessly wrecked.

But a couple of shots from the weapons of the boys turned the course of the tapirs, and a bullet from the unerring rifle of Ricardo brought down the tiger just as he was about to take to the water in pursuit of the tapirs.

The tapirs went down-stream, and without further delay the party pushed on, As Tom’s canoe had been lost he now rode with Ricardo,

whose native craft held up its threefold load, for Calka was also a passenger in it.

Under the wonderful trees, amid whose branches the toucans fluttered in great numbers, uttering their peculiar cry, went the canoeists along the ingarape, or water path.

The sound of what the boy canoeists took to be a bell chimes were suddenly heard, and they wondered if it could be that there was a cathedral in the midst of the Amazon forest.

The explanation soon came. They saw a great brown bird perched upon a branch of a graceful assi-palm, and observed that the bell pe issued from the throat of the singular bird.

»The bell bird! One of the wonders of the Amazon,« said Ricardo,

»Hello! what is that?« presently exclaimed Tom, looking a little startled as the sound of blows were heard from the forest. It sounded precisely as if the blows were dealt with a hammer against the trunk of a tree.

»That is the noise made by a hammer monkey,« said Calka, in Spanish, and his remark was translated by Frank.

Calka added some information the substance of which was that the woods of the Amazon are the paradise of the monkeys; that those animals varied in size from the giant maccacos to the delicate little marmosettes, also that they were in the land of snakes.

As yet the canoeists had seen but few reptiles. They were destined to meet with one of the most formidable and most dreaded of the serpents of the Amazon almost immediately, however.

Jack brought up the rear in his canoe.

He was just passing under the far-reaching branches of a giant tree, when a great, shining, scaley monster, glittering in the now brilliant moonlight, sent its serpentine body swaying down and wrapped its terrible folds about the lad.

The cry of horror that burst from Jack's lips made his companions look back.

»The boa-constrictor!« cried Ricardo, as he saw Jack in the toils of the monster.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BATTLE WITH THE APES.

»Help! Help! cried Jack, vainly continuing to try to release himself from the crushing grasp of the serpent, whose coils seemed to the imperiled boy like bands of iron.

The folds of the great snake had been cast about the arms of the lad in such a manner that he could not use them effectually, They were held crushed against his side.

Each moment the terrible, deadly embrace of the serpent increased in power, each moment the young canoeist's peril increased,

Cries of horror emanated from Tom and Frank, and their rifles sprang to their shoulders. Then both hesitated. The danger of hitting their comrade was great.

»Hold! Let the young Americano wait, Ricardo will kill the big snake!« shouted the gaucho. The boys saw that he had drawn the blow-gun which he had taken from the dead savage, and immediately he placed a feathered shaft in it. An instant and, with the mouthpiece of the strange weapon at his lips, the gaucho took aim at the serpent.

»Pop!« came the report of the blow gun, and the boy canoeists shouted as they saw the shaft had been driven to its feathered tip in one of the eyes of the boa. The brain of the serpent had been penetrated evidently, for the terrible crushing embrace which held Jack grew less and less strong, and in a moment the great scaly folds in which the boy was imprisoned, relaxed and fell away entirely.

The serpent, limp and lifeless, dropped down into the water with a heavy splash, and sank beneath the surface.

Jack fell back in his canoe, pale, faint and dizzy. But he quickly revived, and declared himself none the worse for the experience.

As the canoeists pushed on, they saw many snakes of various kinds, Indeed, the woods and waters seemed alive with them.

»Look yonder!« said Ricardo, pointing to a mudbank where a huge dark object lay coiled. »That is the deadly Bushmaster. By day, when the sun falls upon him, he is the most beautiful serpent living, and also I

may say he is the most deadly. He does not hesitate to attack man. Relying on the certain death that lies at the roots of his fangs and conscious of his wonderful speed, he seldom follows a victim in vain.«

Without further adventures the canoeists arrived at a small island among the ingrapes. or water ways.

This was Calka's summer camp. Here the monkey-trapper. made his headquarters during half the year. When the rainy season came he put his captured monkeys on a great raft, and paddled down the Amazon to Para.

A hut in the center of the island, surrounded by wicker and wood cages for the monkeys, was soon reached.

For three days the party remained on the island, after the gaucho had made a scout, and ascertained that the Condor-heads were encamped some miles to the north, evidently waiting for the subsidence of the flood waves.

»Ah, the condor heads were wise, Evidently they cannot make their way through the in-grape to their unknown home, and so they have to wait until it is safe for their canoes on the main channel,« said Ricardo, when he reported to his comrades that the Indos mysterios were in camp.

The district immediately surrounding the island of Calka abounded in monkeys. The great ape or man monkey of the Amazon was often seen.

Tom and Jack were in the woods near the island, when all at once a great ape came tumbling down from a tree-top, uttering the most appalling cries. A fierce river hawk clung to his head, tearing at his eyes with his claws und beak.

A shot from Jack's weapon dropped the savage bird, but the blinded ape floundered about in the bushes, and continued to yell in rage and pain.

Among the branches on every side the faces of enraged apes began to appear. 'he whole woods seemed full of them. The apes came nearer and nearer, and the boys comprehended that they were about to be attacked. They might have smiled at the idea of peril connected with a battle with monkeys when safe at home. But now, the sight of the

enraged man-monkeys in such numbers and the evidence of their fury, sufficed to alarm the lads.

»Come, Tom, I think discretion is the better part of valor in this case. Let's make for Calka's camp.«

»All right, come along!« cried Tom. But he paused almost immediately after taking the lead in the retreat.

A multitude of apes were hastening down from the trees between the boys and Calka's camp. »They mean we shall fight, so here goes!« cried Tom in his usual impulsive way, and before his companion could say a word to restrain him he opened fire on the apes.

»Bang! Bang! Bang!« went Tom's revolver.

From every direction the apes came trooping at the sound of the revolver. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of the fierce animals came at the boys. They felt that now they had really to battle for their very lives, with that army of the great apes of the Amazon.

Jack blazed away as soon as Tom had inaugurated the fight. But though the two lads had emptied their weapons at the apeish legion, still the fierce man monkeys came on. The loss of the few of the vanguard of the horde that fell under the boys' bullets seemed not in any degree to intimidate the others.

When their pistols were emptied, the boys clubbed their rifles and dealt the charging apes heavy blows, while they advanced step by step in the direction of the camp of the natives.

The apes yelled in rage and pain. A terrible pandemonium raged in the forest. The boys were hard pressed by the apes, and they were beginning to feel exhausted.

It seemed that unless they could break through the ranks of the apes they would be dragged down and torn in pieces by their grotesque foes.

The reports of the boys' weapons had, however, been heard by foes to be dreaded as much as the fierce apes.

All at once a chorus of savage yells rang in the ears of the canoeists of the Amazon, they saw a dozen black warriors, naked to the waist, and carrying long spears and heavy bows, appear among the trees beyond the lines of the apeish legion.

One dusky warrior, a veritable giant, who towered above all the others of the band, wore upon his head a helmet of condor skulls.

The Indos mysterios came charging at the apes. The shower of arrows they sent among the little monsters and their fierce yells seemed to intimidate the man monkeys. At least they fell away before the charge of the Indians.

Tom and Jack hastily reloaded their weapons as they saw the condor heads, and springing behind tree trunks prepared to fight off the savages as best they could, hoping all the time that their friends at Calka's camp might come to reinforce them.

The Condor heads were darting from tree to tree seeking to surround the boy canoeists without exposing themselves to the fire of the latter, when all at once, there came a shout from the direction of the monkey hunter's camp, and to their delight the boys saw Ricardo, Frank and Calka coming.

The repeating rifle carried by Ricardo spoke at once. And the weapon of the same kind borne by Frank sounded a fatal chorus. It was like the discharge of a battery, so rapidly did the gaucho and the boy canoeists discharge their weapons.

Tom and Jack found that the nearest of the Condor heads were now within range, and as they sprang away, the two boys opened fire from the shelter of the trees.

The Condor heads filed in confusion, and in a moment or so the boys who had engaged in the desperate battle with the apes, and their comrades were united. Then they immediately started for the camp of the monkey hunter.

But anew peril menaced them almost at once.

CHAPTER XII.

A TERRIBLE STORM IN THE AMAZON FOREST.

A dense smoke was discovered ahead. It rolled up from the midst of a thicket at no great distance, which extended between the canoeists and Calka's island. The home of the monkey hunter was surrounded by ingrapes, or water ways.

A moment and serpents of red flame were discovered leaping up in the dry thickets, now turned brown under the tropical sun.

»The Condor Heads have fired the thicket,« cried the gaucho, suddenly halting in his advance.

»Yes, and we cannot reach the island through the flames!« said Jack Moreland.

»Fortunately the wind is blowing toward the island, and the fire will burn itself out when it reaches the ingrape surrounding it. Come, we must seek a cover. We have now to fear the Condor Heads will return with reinforcements to attack us,« answered the gaucho.

He led the way away from the island as he spoke, and the party soon reached a dense part of the green forest, where there was no danger of the flames reaching them.

On the edge of a sluggish stream, where the dense foliage screened them, the party halted to wait until the subsidence of the conflagration would allow them to reach the island of the monkey hunter.

»Ho, ho!« exclaimed Calka, down in the rushes by the water-side.

He drew from its hiding-place a large canoe, such as is used by hunting parties of the natives on the Amazon.

The craft would hold half a dozen persons easily, and it was proposed by Ricardo that the party should cross the lagoon in it.

All entered the great canoe, and they were paddling away, when Frank uttered a shout, and said:

»Alligators! See, the water is full of them!«

It seemed that this was indeed so. The cay-men Of the lagoons of the Amazon is the largest of the alligator tribe to be found on this continent.

»Whoop!« screamed Calka, as the canoe was half overturned by a huge cay-man.

Tom and Frank were hurled overboard.

»Heavens!« cried Jack. «They will be eaten up alive!«

The huge cay-man that had attacked the canoe was now coming at Tom and Frank, as they struggled to reach their friends.

The two boy canoeists uttered involuntary cries of terror.

»Courage! Courage! Senors, I will fight the monster!« shouted the gaucho.

Then he sprang clear of the canoe, brandishing his huge knife. The cay-man was but a few feet from the two boys in the water.

It seemed that the monster must crush them in his great jaws before they could possibly get clear of the water and regain the canoe.

But, with a sudden spring, the fearless man of the pampas darted out of the water and alighted on the neck of the cay-man.

With tremendous force the gaucho drove his knife into the eye of the cay-man.

The huge saurian made a tremendous leap half out of the water, and a stream of blood came from his eye. Falling back the cay-man made a deep plunge to the bottom of the lagoon. But the knife of the gaucho had cleft the brain of the monster.

The imperiled boys climbed into the canoe as the caymar made his deep dive.

Ricardo, with his knife in his teeth, swam to the canoe and re-entered it. Presently the body of the cay-man came to the surface and then it floated on its back dead.

The whole party of canoeists now bent to the paddles and sent the canoe forward at great speed, until the opposite bank of the lagoon was reached.

Having made a landing the party were advancing to. a grove of palm, when they saw, a short distance ahead, one of the most hideous animals they had ever beheld.

The creature was nearly eight feet long, and its body was covered with coarse, shaggy hair, while its bushy tail was an enormous size. The

long head tapered to a point, and its claws were most formidable.

»A tamanoir or ant bear!« said Ricardo,

The ant-bear trotted away and no one offered to molest him.

He is not an aggressive animal, and Ricardo said his flesh was not good eating.

It was now midday.

The party remained under the palms until nightfall, and then, having seen nothing of the Condor-heads, they set out to return to Calka's island.

They entered the lagoon in the great canoe and swiftly paddled across it. The passage was made without another adventure with the cay-man, and making a landing, they marched directly for the island.

Reaching the thicket, they found only a burnt district. The dry shrubbery had' been entirely consumed, clear to the water's edge.

Fortunately they had left their canoes on a sandy beach, at a distance of at least fifty feet from the nearest confines of the burnt district.

Though one of the canoes was scorched a little, that was all the damage the conflagration had done.

The party paddled across the island, congratulating themselves that they had been fortunate enough so leave the canoes beyond the reach of the fire.

That night Ricardo, who entertained the fear that enemies might discover the monkey trapper's hut and attack it during the night, stood guard.

Suddenly the boy canoeists, near midnight, were awakened by the voice of the gaucho.

»Up! Up!« he shouted. »A storm is upon us!«

The boys and the native sprang to their feet and rushed out of the hut. A terrible flash of lightning at that moment illuminated the forest; then came the crash like the explosion of an enormous magazine, and a great tree, stricken by the blast, went crashing down not ten feet away.

The shock threw Frank and Tom to the earth, and the gaucho and the other two members of the party staggered back against the wall of the hut.

The wind came rushing across the island with the fury of a tornado.

By the orders of Ricardo each of his comrades threw himself upon the earth and clung to the trunk of a tough variety of the frexi which no earthly power can uproot.

The water came down in torrents, and it seemed that if the storm continued long the whole island would be submerged.

The rapid rising of the waters of the lagoon was something wonderful.

In an incredibly short time the waves were sweeping over the island, and the adventurers had to take to their canoes or drown.

They entered their crafts.

»Try to keep together!« shouted Ricardo, as he entered the large native's canoe with Tom and Calka.:

But he might as well have called upon the winds to cease or the waters to subside.

His advice could not be obeyed in that furious storm. The wind sent the canoes speeding before the gale. In the darkness they were separated.

Jack Moreland crouched down in his frail craft and let it take its own course, while each moment he expected it would be dashed to pieces against a tree trunk.

Frank Woodward did the same.

Suddenly, when he had drifted before the gale for some distance his canoe stopped with a shock which came very near precipitating him into the dark waters.

The canoe remained where it had stopped, and soon Frank found it had lodged in the forked branch of a tree. Fortunately the storm began to lull, almost at once, and the canoe remained fastened in the tree as the water receded. Meanwhile Jack met with a thrilling experience.

His canoe was cast up on a steep embankment, and leaving it after he had drawn it beyond the reach of the flood, he advanced still higher.

All at once there came a flash of lightning, and the electric light revealed to the lad that he had stumbled right into the camp of the Condor heads. A yell from one of the mysterious savages announced that his presence was detected.

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER THE STORM—STILL FOLLOWING THE CONDOR HEADS.

Jack Moreland's presence of mind did not desert him for a single instant. He knew that his only hope of escape lay in immediate flight.

Wheeling like a flash, while yet the yell of the mysterious Indian that announced he was seen rang in his ears, he bounded away.

Jack ran like the wind, and the accession of darkness succeeding the illumination of the lightning, at once concealed him.

He made for his canoe, and after him he heard the entire band of the Condor Heads coming.

In the impenetrable gloom Jack reached the water at a point other than that which he sought. He had strayed away from the spot where he had left his canoe.

Before him lay the black water and behind him came his yelling foes.

The young canoeist dared not enter the water. The rushing waves would quickly carry him away to the main channel. He would be buffeted and beaten by the torrent until he sank to rise no more.

He ran desperately along the water's edge, praying that he might find his canoe.

Nearer and yet nearer sounded the yells of the Condor Heads. The shrill voices of the mysterious Indians sounded above the noise of the now swiftly subsiding storm.

A cold sweat started upon the head of the boy. He felt like one battling against fate as he fled on, and yet failed to find his canoe.

Again the lightning came in a brilliant flood that for one single moment made the night as light as day.

A terrible chorus of exultant yells came from the Condor Heads close behind the imperiled canoeist.

The mysterious Indians had seen the light of the electrical illumination. They were now evidently quite sure of his capture. But at the eleventh hour, as it were, the brave lad was to be saved.

The lightning that disclosed him to his foes as he ran for his life also revealed to him the object which he sought.

A glad, thankful ejaculation fell from the lips of the lad as he saw the canoe he had left on the hillside.

Encouraged now, he made a spurt in the race, and gained his canoe in advance of the pursuers.

Leaping to the water and dragging his light craft into the waves he cleared the land. With the skill of an expert he deftly embarked and sent the gallant Rob Roy shooting away under the impulse of swift and powerful strokes of the paddles.

Into the water rushed the Condor Heads. In their determination to capture the boy canoeist the savages swam after him for some distance, but the hopelessness of the pursuit soon became apparent to them, and they turned back.

On and on, through the darkness went Jack.

»Bang! Bang! Bang!«

Perhaps for half an hour the lone canoeist had been paddling on the flood of the Amazon when all at once the report of a rifle rang out thrice over the black tide.

Jack's heart leaped at the sound.

He recognized the sharp, peculiar crack of the discharged weapon.

»That was Ricardo's gun. The gaucho is firing to signal me, or Frank. No doubt he tries to draw us to him,« said Jack mentally.

Then he sent his canoe on.

He shaped his course in the direction whence the shot he had heard seemed to emanate.

Presently he fired an answering signal of three shots, and again the report of the gaucho's weapon guided him on.

In a short time Jack reached the large canoe. In it he found Ricardo, Calka and Tom, all safe.

The canoe was secured to a tree, and as the gale had subsided it floated on the flood safely.

Frank's fate was yet a mystery.

Jack had barely recounted his adventures; however, when a shout was heard, and a moment later Frank's canoe shot up to the tree to which his friends' crafts were fastened.

He too had heard the shot signal of the gaucho, and guided by the sound made his way to him.

The escape of all the party, without the loss of one of the canoes, was considered most miraculous by all.

And the gaucho said:

»Senors, I take this as a good omen. We are to succeed in our great mission. I now hope more strongly than I have heretofore done.«

The boys were encouraged, and until the dawn they remained where they were, talking hopefully.

The gaucho said that during the storm the great canoe he had managed with the assistance of Calka, the monkey hunter, and Tom had nearly capsized several times.

He added that he considered the adventure of the night the most perilous, all things considered, of any that had ever befallen him on the great river.

The dawn was most welcome when it came.

As the sunlight began to fall upon the waves the party saw that the flood had done great damage in the forest. Trees of great size, that possessed not elasticity, had been riven at the trunks and overthrown.

Masses of debris were heaped here and there, where trees that had withstood the onset of the waters made a barrier for them.

The party paddled north and entered a sheltered lagoon. There they partook of food they carried with them. Suddenly the alert gaucho raised his hand in a signal for silence.

Then, for some time, not a word was spoken. Ricardo put his head to the waves and listened intently.

At length he said:

»I thought Ricardo's ears had not deceived him. I hear the sound of paddles. The Condor Heads are coming up the river. The chances are they will pass the mouth of the in-grope without discovering it.«

The mouth of the channel was almost hidden by a mass of debris east into it during the night storm.

Ricardo silently paddled his canoe south a short distance, and finally stopped where he could peer around the obstruction.

Completely concealed, he watched the river. In a few moments, as he had predicted, the Condor Heads were seen coming up the river.

It was a time of suspense and danger for the concealed canoeists, as the mysterious Indian whom they hoped to shadow to their unknown land drew nearer.

But the enemy passed the channel and made no pause. The concealed canoeists draw deep breaths of relief and satisfaction as they saw the Condor Heads go by.

Rapidly the mysterious Indians, in half a dozen great canoes, several of which were mostly laden with captives, paddled up stream.

A bend in the river soon hid them from the sight of the canoeists.

Then the latter again took the water. trail, with the large canoe, manned by Ricardo, Calka and Tom, in the lead.

The river journey was continued for many days, and always the gaucho assured the boy canoeists that they were following the Condor Heads.

Occasionally the water trailers caught a glimpse of their quarry far ahead, but they believed that they were not themselves discovered.

The food the party had brought with them was soon eaten up, and thereafter they had to depend upon fish, fruit and game.

One night, when the Condor Heads had gone into camp at some distance, the canoeists were making a landing, when a native suddenly emerged from the bushes directly before them.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ESCAPED CAPTIVE—IN THE THISTLE THICKET.

Calka instantly recognized the native. The monkey-hunter cried out to him in his own language, as the former seemed about to take to flight.

Immediately the native halted.

Calka leaped ashore and he and the strange native held a short conversation. Then Calka came to the canoes, accompanied by the other.

»Who is he? What have you learned?« asked the gaucho of the monkey-hunter.

»The native has just escaped from the Condor Heads. He was a captive with them at the same time as myself,« replied the monkey-hunter.

»Ah! Then you knew him as soon as you saw him? I thought so. What news, if any, did the native communicate?«

»He said the Condor Heads' language was almost unintelligible to him, though some of their words are to be found in his own language. He managed to make out from what the strange Indians said in their conversations among themselves that they were gradually approaching their home.«

»Have the Condor Heads any suspicion that they are being trailed?«

»No, At least the native thinks not.«

»Good! We have only to keep the secret of our continued pursuit then, and finally we shall reach the land of the mysterious men.«

»Yes, so Calka believes.«

»Well, we will push on, when the Condor Heads again take to their canoes.«

»But I would converse with the native. You will translate what I say to him,« added the gaucho.

»Certainly,« assented Calka.

Then Ricardo held a conversation with the native, who had escaped from the Condor Heads, while Calka translated.

The gaucho first inquired:

»Have you heard the Condor Heads speak of any white captives whom they have in their land?»

»I have,« was the reply to the interrogatory translated by the monkey hunter.

»What did the Indos mysterios say of their white captive?«

The gaucho put the question eagerly. He was thinking of his beloved brother, Mijar, the guide of Walter Kenmore, the captive of the Condor Heads.

»The mysterious Indians said there was a white man in the land of the Condor Heads who would wield great power among them soon, though he was a captive.«

»How so? Did you learn that?«

»The Condor Heads did not explain.«

»Did you gather anything further?«

»Yes.«

»What was it?«

»The caciques or chiefs of the band from whom I escaped are evidently jealous of the white captive. They talked of a great plot against him and spoke of rebellion and bloodshed.«

»What more? Mentioned not these strange men anything about a comrade of the white captive who was made a prisoner with him?«

»Yes. They spoke of a powerful man of the pampas as the friend and comrade of the white prisoner, They said the pampas man must be put to death before the plot against the white captive could succeed.«

»Indeed. Then my brave brother is faithful to the last to the man who trusts him. But he shall not die. Those wild men of the Amazon shall not take the life of my brave Mijar.

The gaucho's tones rang out in intense feeling. He was in deadly earnest, and ready to sacrifice himself, if necessary, to save his brother.

Nothing further of importance could be learned from the native. The latter soon departed. He declared he could make his way alone down the Amazon to his native village, which the Condor-Heads had recently raided.

When the gaucho immediately made known to all the boy canoeists the news he had obtained from the escaped prisoner the lads were ready to shout for joy.

They now had the assurance that Walter Kenmore, the lost canoeist, and Mijar, his faithful guide, were still alive.

And that assurance rendered the brave boys more than ever determined to rescue the captives of the Condor Heads.

But the further information they had gained regarding Walter Kenmore occasioned much speculation and discussion among the canoeists.

They wondered what the circumstances were that could have made Walter Kenmore a power in the land of the Condor Heads.

Frank Woodward said shrewdly:

»I suppose human nature is much the same among these mysterious Indians as it is among other people. No doubt Walter must have become a personage of importance among the Condor Heads, or the caciques would not have cause for jealousy against him.«

»No doubt of that,« rejoined the gaucho. »I am sure we shall be surprised at the state of things in the land of the Condor Heads, if we ever reach it.«

But we need not pause to record all the conversation of the party, for exciting events are urging us on to their narration.

The journey was resumed on the main channel of the river the following day.

The country was wild and strange, and Ricardo declared they were now where no man he had ever met had penetrated.

Three days later the Condor Heads took a plunge into the unknown by entering one of the tributaries of the Amazon.

»Mijar has told me of the legend which he had from an old chief of the pampas, and which he firmly believes, that there is a water way clear to the Pacific. Who knows but the Condor Heads will lead us to the heart of the great mountain?« said Ricardo.

The boys could not deny the possibility of this, and so they did not offer any suggestion. The trail of the Indos mysterios now led into the

heart of a strange land of wonders.

At length the Condor Heads left the water and set out to follow a canoe path.

The country was full of strangely colored rocks, of seemingly volcanic origin. And between the ridges grew vast tracts of the dreaded pampas thistle.

These great stalks arise to a height of fifteen feet, and are armed with enormous sword-like spines that will keep back a horse.

»If one once gets lost in the thistle thicket there is no escape,« said the gaucho, as he and his comrades dragged their canoes along a narrow path, bordered on each side by the thistles, which the Condor Heads were traversing far in advance.

The gaucho spoke truly.

The terrible thistles of South America are the terror of man and beast. There are vast tracts of them on the pampas and the plains of the upper Amazon. Often, at the dead of night, from their dark recesses, come roars of pain, uttered by a puma or a tiger that has stepped upon one of the needle-like spines.

Thousands of fine cattle perish annually among the thistle forests of the pampas, rushing deeper and deeper into their pathways of death, driven on by the sharp points of the cruel spines until they are maddened, bewildered, lost.

Then they surely perish. Perhaps it may be by starvation, but more frequently they fall before the attack of the bloodthirsty puma.

For miles the American boy canoeists, guided by Ricardo and Calka, had followed the canoe path through the thistle forest.

All at once, when the terrible thicket seemed to extend all about them for many miles, Ricardo heard a cry from Tom, who was in the rear.

The gaucho and the others turned instantly.

Then they saw to their alarm and amazement that the pathway behind them was full of dark human forms.

The next moment a yell emanated from the thicket ahead, and a second band of men emerged in the pathway directly before the canoeists.

CHAPTER XV.

THROUGH THE DEATH GANTLET—THE TIGER PATH.

A glance at the two bands of men enabled the friends of Walter Kenmore to note among them several condor-skull helmets.

Then they knew that the enemy they supposed they had for some time—since the flood on the Amazon—tracked so secretly were aware of their presence, and had evidently set a trap for them.

It seemed it might be a death trap.

The Canoeists could not retreat or advance along the narrow way between the lines of the terrible thistle growth, unless, indeed, they fought their way through the lines of the enemy.

The force of the Condor Heads in front and in the rear outnumbered the canoeists' party ten to one.

A battle with any prospect of victory for them was assuredly not to be thought of by the rescuers.

But if they did not attempt to fight their way in one direction or the other, they must surrender, or attempt to make their way through the thistle thicket.

For a moment as the fact that they were, as it appeared, almost hopelessly in the toils of the foe dawned upon them, the boy canoeists and the gaucho looked into each other's faces blankly.

But Calka, the monkey hunter, instantly disappeared. No one of the imperiled party noted -what became of him, only, as they glanced about the moment. succeeding the discovery of the peril that had so suddenly come upon them, they saw he was gone.

»We must risk the thistle thicket. It is our only chance. I prefer that slender possibility of escape to the certainty of capture by the Condor Heads,« cried the gaucho.

»Yes, yes. Anything rather than captivity among those mysterious Indians,« said Jack Moreland.

The Condor Heads, seeing themselves discovered, were now advancing from the front and rear toward the canoeists. Some hours previously scouts had discovered the canoe party, and the cunning

savages had set the ambush in the thistle path to take the canoeists by surprise.

Evidently the strange wild men of the Amazon did not deem it probable that the canoeists would take to the terrible thicket to elude them.

But almost immediately Ricardo cautiously led the way among the dangerous needle-pointed spines.

The gaucho was closely followed by the young New Yorkers, and all had disappeared some moments before the two bands of Condor Heads met in the narrow pathway where the canoeists had vanished.

Ricardo anticipated pursuit, and he said to his boy comrades as they picked their way among the thick and cruel spines, not without many a smarting cut:

»The darkness is not far off. I count upon the coming of night to prevent the pursuit. I do not think the enemy will follow us in the darkness far. I have told you that all the natives of South America dread these thistle-thickets and avoid them as far as possible.«

»We shall lose our way! We shall die in this terrible thicket if we wander far,« said Tom, hopelessly.

»The gaucho will not lose his way. The sun will be his guide by day, and when the night comes the moon and stars will serve him as well,« answered Ricardo, in positive tones.

The fugitives had not deserted all their canoes; on the contrary Jack Moreland and Frank Woodward had dragged their light Rob Roys into the thicket with them.

Even without the canoes to burden them their progress must have been slow. But encumbered with the two canoes they moved at little better than a snail's pace. When about a quarter of a mile from the path the thistles became very dense.

Hearing distant sounds of pursuit and finding the way becoming more and more difficult, the canoeists were almost ready to give up in despair, when an exclamation of satisfaction from Ricardo, who was in the lead, suddenly caused them all to pause.

Then as they heard the voice of the gaucho again the boys came to his side. They found him standing in a narrow path, which ran at right angles to the way in which they were going.

So narrow was the path that they could scarcely proceed along it, in single file, without brushing against the thicket on either side.

Ricardo immediately said:

»This is a jaguar path. It has been made by our South American tigers as they go to and from some drinking place, or spring on the edge of the thicket.«

He went along it.

The large canoe had been left in the main path. Seeing Jack lugging his canoe, without a word the generous gaucho seized it, and having swung it upon his back, marched on as if the weight of a canoe did not trouble him in the least.

The three boys all laid hold of the dragrope of the other canoe, and their united strength rendered it not a difficult task for them to pull it along.

The gaucho went along the tiger trail. The boys kept at his heels. Meantime, certain sounds that reached them seemed to convey the welcome assurance that the enemy was straying from the proper route of pursuit in the dense thicket.

On and on went the man of the pampas and the boy canoeists, until the way grew more open, and a rock-strewn country was seen ahead.

Here and there were clumps of trees, and at some distance a range of low hills could be discerned to the westward.

Night's shadows had almost completely fallen, when, thanks to the tiger path upon which they had stumbled so opportunely, the party found themselves clear of the thicket.

»At last, thank God!« cried Jack fervently, as the last of the thicket was passed.

His words were echoed by the others most fervently, and they halted to rest just at the edge of the thicket.

Some moments elapsed, during which they listened suspense-fully. But no sounds of their pursuers reached them from the deadly labyrinth

through which they had miraculously made their way in safety.

They moved on to a clump of trees, and while they rested there the moon came out, flooding the rugged landscape with its mellow silvery light.

The night wind came from the pathway they had left, and presently it wafted to their ears the sounds of fierce growls and snarls.

»A tiger! uttered the gaucho. »But fortunately we are to the windward of the beast, and if we do not show ourselves he will not discover us.«

A moment and four full-grown male jaguars were discovered going along the path leading into the thistle-thicket.

The four monsters of the Amazon jungles passed close by the concealed canoeists without seeing them.

When the tigers had passed the party held a consultation.

The gaucho proposed that they go on to the adjacent hills and seek to see what lay beyond, This was done. Having climbed the hills, they saw a beautiful country, and just at the foot of the range they beheld a considerable river.

The water course seemed to run in the direction of the Andes—the course that had thus far been the route of the Condor Heads.

A moment later, a well-defined canoe path was discovered leading down the hills to the river, and after examining it a moment, the gaucho said:

»I'll wager, senors, this is the very path we were following the Condor Heads through the thistle thicket on, when we were surprised.«

As the boys expressed their coincidence in the opinion, a surprising phenomenon transpired.

Far away, in the direction of the Andes, a brilliant light flashed three times. This signal was thrice repeated, and in a moment more Tom announced another thrilling discovery.

CHAPTER XVI.

AGAIN AFLOAT—THE PERILOUS RIVER.

Tom had glanced backwards from the hill-top, just as the last of the signal flashes, discovered far away to the westward faded away.

The lad's glances had sought the path he and his comrades had just traversed. The view he commanded from the elevation was extensive, and he saw a line of dark forms far away in the direction of the thistle-thicket.

The party was advancing, and it seemed to the young canoeist that they were coming along the canoe path, where it probably emerged from the thicket.

Tom pointed in the direction of the thicket as he called the attention of his companions to his discovery.

»Look yonder. That long column of moving forms is the band of Condor-heads and their captives, I'll warrant,« he cried.

Glancing back all saw the marching men in the rear, and the Gaucho said quickly:

»Right, senor, The Condor Heads are on the canoe path we struck a short distance back. They are making for the river, at the foot of the hill. It is a branch of the Amazon. They will take to it presently, and it will lead them again to the great river. The route they have taken across country, by the way of the canoe-path, has enabled them to cut off a great bend in the course of the Amazon.«

»What about the signal lights we discovered?« inquired Frank Woodward.

»Ricardo cannot say with certainty. Possibly those lights were intended to convey some information to the Condor-heads, and it may be there is another band, away off yonder, on those western hills, on the lookout for the marauders, whom we_ have followed so far,« replied the gaucho.

»What now?« observed Jack Moreland. «Would you advise that we turn aside, conceal ourselves and wait to again take the trail of the Condor-heads when they have river?«

»To the river by all means,« decided Ricardo and without further delay the party set off down the hill.

They soon arrived at the river-side, and the two canoes that yet remained to them were launched.

But those two light »Rob Roys« would each carry but one person safely. Here then was a dilemma: Four passengers and conveyance for but two of them.

Ricardo, however, counted upon finding a way out of the difficulty.

»Wait and we shall see if I cannot borrow a canoe or two,« said he cheerfully as he set out along the stream and entered a thicket which grew close to the water's edge.

»Here we are!« answered the guide of the Amazon as he appeared on the water, paddling a native canoe, large enough for two, a few moments subsequently.

»I thought I should find a canoe hidden here. The natives usually keep canoes concealed at the places where the canoe-paths reach water, so that in case of accident to the craft they have with them their journey may not be delayed,« was Ricardo's explanatory remark, as he sent the canoe he had borrowed inshore, and bade Tom leap aboard.

Frank and Jack entered the other two canoes, and once more the party was all afloat.

The gaucho had sighted a small, wooded island at a short distance up the stream, and the party paddled for it.

Reaching the island they made a landing, and concealing their canoes, crept into a leafy cover from which they could watch the river.

The night had fallen, and when the moon and stars began to illuminate the gloom, the band of Condor Heads were seen entering their canoes with their prisoners, at the place where the path reached the water-course.

The mysterious Indians paddled up the stream, and the concealed canoeists on the island saw them all pass their hiding-place.

When the Indians of the unknown race had paddled out of sight, around a bend in the river, the canoeists again embarked, and once again set out upon their long and perilous trail.

»I wonder what has become of Calka, the monkey hunter? I fear the poor fellow—who must have slipped away into the thistle thicket —lost his way there,« remarked Tom to the gaucho, as they led the way up the river in their large canoe.

»Yes. I fear that is so. Poor fellow. He was devoted to me, and he considered that he owed me a great debt of gratitude, for I once saved his life in Para, when he was set upon by a band of midnight robbers, who meant so steal the money he had received from the sale of his monkeys,« answered Ricardo.

It was almost morning when, as the three canoes of the rescue party were being paddled along abreast, the wind which had been steadily increasing burst into a gale. But the stanch canoes were Only carried more swiftly against the current up stream.

Without noteworthy incident the canoeists continued on the stream in the rear of the Condor Heads until the evening of the following day.

Then the channel they were paddling on entered the Amazon. The great river was followed for some distance, and when it entered a hilly country the canoe trailers again saw signal lights.

When those lights were discovered the Condor Heads were at some distance and out of sight of the canoeists from America.

But shouts of gladness were heard from the mysterious Indians, and presently answering signals were flashed by them from the elevated river-bank. The canoeists saw the Indian signal-makers, and they were interested to see that the brilliant flashes of light were made by uncovering fiercely-burning fires of resinous wood before great metallic reflectors of burnished metal, which the mysterious men of the Amazon carried with them.

Ricardo explained that among the Indians of South America fire signals took the place of the telegraph among civilized people, and he said in this way intelligence was communicated from signal fire to signal fire hundreds of miles in a short time.

While the gaucho expressed the opinion that the mysterious Indians had probably concluded that he and his comrades were hopelessly lost in the thistle-thicket, he continued to observe the greatest caution in following the water trail.

We need not weary the reader with a minutely detailed account of ordinary events which ensued for some days.

Let it suffice for us to briefly state that, undiscovered, the party went on and in pursuit of the Condor Heads until finally the latter again left the Amazon's main channel and paddled with the swift current down a wild, turbulent river.

On this stream the skill of the boys and the gaucho to keep their craft right side up was severely taxed.

Difficult rapids had to be passed, and dangerous rocks lay concealed under the rushing waters, ready to crush the canoes, if hurled against them.

The boys won the admiration of the Amazon guide by the exhibition of skill with the paddles and manly courage which they now evinced.

One night, the second after entering the swift, dangerous stream, as the canoe trailers were following the Condor Heads, who were making a night journey, they came into the swiftest current they had yet encountered.

Frank and Jack, in their two light »Rob Roys,« were carried forward at lightning speed, despite all their efforts to check the flight on the rushing current.

Almost immediately the frightful roar of waters sounded in the ears of the two boy canoeists, and the voice of Ricardo, the gaucho, rang out from the rear:

»Back water for your lives! There is a tremendous falls ahead!«

Desperately Frank and Jack battled with the on-rushing tide that seemed bearing them to their doom, while the noise of the falls swelled into the deafening roar-of a Niagara.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE LAND OF THE CONDOR HEADS.

Like a knell of doom the terrible rush, and roar of the falls sounded to the boy canoeists, who were being carried swiftly toward it despite all their efforts to hold back their canoes from the frightful plunge.

On and on, while the roar of the waters became deafening, and drowned the frantic shouts of warning that Ricardo, the gaucho, continued to utter from the rear.

The latter, with the aid of Tom, had grounded his canoe safely on a rocky reef, as the noise of the cataract gave him a warning of the danger ahead.

As the moonlight rendered objects distinctly visible, the two frightfully imperiled lads saw the falls ahead very soon.

The air was full of mist and spray, and the white foaming, seething water, at the base of the falls, cast up a mist that seemed like a great column of water.

Nearer, and yet nearer the brink of the falls went the two canoes.

And the two lads saw that nothing now could save them from the frightful plunge.

They might have thrown themselves from their canoes, but such a course would have robbed them of the one frail chance of escape that yet remained to them.

Both lads knew that there was just one chance in a hundred that they might shoot the falls in safety.

It seemed that the mysterious Indians whom they were following must have done so, or else, as seemed probable, the latter must know some way around the falls.

Jack Moreland's canoe reached the brink of the falls first. The lad lay flat in the bottom of it with his feet braced in the bow, and clutching the side frames at the stern.

His weight was mostly in the stern half of the canoe.

Jack drew a deep breath, shut his eyes, and made a silent prayer as the canoe shot over the falls.

A sensation of falling through space amid flying spray and blinding water, that drenched him, and then a plunge, and a great wave swept over him, while he was deafened by the rush and roar of the cataract's base. Then, scarcely a moment, and he was floating beyond the maelstrom, with the canoe half-filled with water but still right side up.

Scarcely had Jack sat up in the canoe and began to breathe again, when a dark object was dashed against him. He reached forth and clutched, as he saw the object was a human body.

»Frank! 'Frank!« cried Jack, and he clung to the dead or insensible body, which he had recognized as that of his boy comrade as he was carried on in his canoe to smooth water beyond the falls.

He had lost his paddle in the whirlpool, but he managed to gain the shore with his canoe and the body of his comrade.

There he drew the little craft up on the bank, and carried Frank up beyond the water line. Jack then felt the pulsation of his comrade's heart, and he uttered a joyful cry as he was thus convinced that his young comrade yet lived.

Jack immediately endeavored to restore Frank to consciousness, and he soon had the satisfaction of seeing him open his eyes and give all the evidences of returning vitality.

In half an hour Frank was almost himself again. He had been bruised and battered some, but not as seriously as Jack feared. A great lump on his skull told that a swift contact with a rock had rendered him senseless.

Frank's canoe had been dashed in pieces, it was supposed. Anyhow it was lost.

As soon as Frank was somewhat recovered, the two lads examined Jack's canoe, to ascertain what damage it had sustained.

It was found that the injury to the canoe was but slight. Only such as could easily be remedied.

»We will stay where we are now. I am sure Ricardo will make a landing and come below the falls seeking to ascertain our fate,« said Jack, after the canoe had been inspected.

He was right in his supposition. Ricardo and Tom made a landing with the canoe, when they knew that Jack and Frank must have been carried over the falls.

They advanced around the falls almost in silence, and both feared that their two brave young comrades had been carried to their doom over the terrible cataract.

Suddenly the gaucho struck into a well marked canoe path. It was full of fresh footprints, and the river guide immediately exclaimed:

»This is the route taken by the Condor-heads around the falls!«

Reaching the river side below the falls, Ricardo and Tom went along it, and the latter ventured to shout the names of the missing lads.

There was an answering shout and in a few moments the gaucho and Tom came to whera their comrades had made the river bank.

Great was the joy of the faithful guide and Tom when they found that Frank and Jack escaped the peril of the falls.

The latter had lost their rifles and the contents of their canoes. The deprivation was a serious one. But they were so grateful for the preservation of their lives, that they did not feel like crying out against the fate that had taken their weapons from them.

The gaucho set about repairing some injuries that Jack's canoe had sustained, and when the work was done to his satisfaction he went on a scout along the river, looking for a native canoe, which he said he expected to find, when the path around the falls ended. A short distance down stream Ricardo came to a second cataract, almost as dangerous as the first, and beyond that he found where the canoe path around the falls reached the water.

Ricardo was not disappointed in his hope of finding a canoe.

Cunningly concealed, in some vine-grown water bushes, the gaucho presently discovered a native canoe, like the one he had previously found, large enough to hold two.

Ricardo entered the canoe and paddled up stream; then when he came to the place where the three lads were awaiting his return Jack and Frank embarked in the canoe he had found.

Ricardo and Tom had brought their canoe with them around the falls. They entered it and paddled in company with the others down stream.

For three days the way lay through a mountainous country, and at the end of that time the trail again left the river following a canoe path and carrying the two native canoes with them, the party advanced.

All at once the dome of some structure of considerable size appeared through the treetops in the distance.

It was a moment of suspenseful excitement for the canoeists as they made this discovery. They wondered if it could be that at last they were in the land of the mysterious people who held Walter Kenmore a captive. Certainly the structure they had discovered meant that human habitations were near.

Having concealed their canoes, the party advanced cautiously, and, reaching the top of a ridge, they saw a wonderful sight.

Before them lay a beautiful valley, of vast extent, whose western confines were a lofty range of mountains, which Ricardo immediately declared to be the Andes.

The whole valley was dotted with villages of thatched dwellings, and everywhere the landscape showed a high state of cultivation.

Near the canoeists was what was evidently the principal town of the great valley, and in its center was a stone building. It was the dome of this structure which the canoeists had discovered through the trees.

Jack produced a field-glass which he carried strapped to his belt, and which had therefore not been lost at the falls.

Glancing through it he distinctly made out the persons to be vaguely seen in the village.

Then he exclaimed:

»I see the condor-skull helmets of the Indos mysterios! We have reached the end of our journey, I think.«

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GAUCHO BROTHERS MEET AND ARE SURPRISED.

A further inspection convinced the canoeists that it was indeed as Jack said.

»There is no doubt that the land of the Condor Heads is yonder, and I doubt not the great stone building we see in the center of the village is a structure of importance, perhaps a temple,« said the gaucho.

»Now that we have arrived at this end of our journey how are we to proceed to accomplish our purpose? How are we to effect the rescue of Walter Kenmore, and the brother of Ricardo?« asked Tom Blake.

»We must communicate with them in some way. If we can only open negotiations secretly, we may arrange a plan,« replied Ricardo.

»Just then, from the town of the Condor Heads, came the sound of shouting, and forth from the great stone building in the center of the village came a great throng of the strange people.

The men were clothed in a short kilt, and they wore sandals on their feet. The women wore white tunics bound at the waist with colored scarfs.

Some of the females were finely formed, graceful, and by no means unattractive, despite their dark skins.

The multitude shouted until a long file of caiques, or chiefs, whose helmets of condor skulls showed their rank, came out of the temple, if such indeed it was.

The populace then fell back, and the caiques ranged themselves in a double file, with a space of twenty feet or more between them, extending from the great arched door.

Then came a hush until the tattoo of a rude drum was heard, whereupon a young, stately and handsome native female, clad in a purple robe, and wearing a profusion of costly gems and gold ornaments, including a wreath of gold leaves on her brow, came forth

from the temple, leaning upon the arm of a white man, clad like a native, and wearing the condor skull helmet of a chief.

Jack had the field glass at his eyes then, and he saw that the white man was Walter Kenmore, and he so announced to his companions.

Behind the captive canoeist and the native female, who was evidently a personage of high rank and authority, marched a tall, splendidly-formed, dark-faced man carrying a long spear.

The latter was clad in the garb of a native, but at the sight of him the keen-eyed gaucho cried out in low tones:

»My brother, Mijar.«

The man of the pampas was not the last person to emerge from the great stone building.

After him came a score of black-robed men, marching solemnly in pairs.

The populace greeted the appearance of the richly-attired female and her escort with cheers, and the double line of caiques grounded their spears and bowed low as the latter passed between them.

The line of march was toward a large, wooden structure with a thatched roof, in it the female and her attendant, the young American canoeist, disappeared, followed by the faithful Mijar.

Then the populace, the caiques and the black-robed men dispersed, and the ceremonial, for such it evidently was, concluded.

The three boy canoeists and Ricardo the gaucho, as well, were at loss to determine what it all meant.

But presently the latter remarked:

»I have thought of a way to inform my brother that I am near, when night comes I will under the signal call of the pampas rovers, at the edge of the village, and Mijar will know what it means, and hasten to join me if he can.«

The canoeist then crept away to the water course, and lay in concealment until darkness came again. They indulged in speculations regarding the future, and as they reflected how many, many days' journey lay between them and Para, and how surely, even if they began

the flight with Walter Kenmore and Mijar, pursuit would be made by the Condor-heads determinedly, their anxiety became painful.

At last Ricardo crept away, telling the lad he was about to stealthily approach the village and utter the signal call of the gaucho.

Ricardo also instructed the young Americans to remain in hiding where they were until he returned, stating further that he would be with them again in one hour's time, unless he was taken captive, or slain by the Condor Heads.

The boys watched the departure of Ricardo with feelings of apprehension, and when he had gone a period of suspense ensued for them such as can only be experienced when great issues are at stake.

Proceeding stealthily, the daring man of the pampas crept forward under cover of the darkness, after he left the boys.

On the way to the village good fortune certainly attended the footsteps of the gaucho, for he encountered no one.

Arriving at a grove which stood at no great distance from the first group of native dwellings, the man of the Pampas halted, and after assuring himself that he was alone in the cover, uttered a peculiar call. It was an imitation of the call of a wild bird of the great plains of South America.

then silently awaited the result. Some moments elapsed. But there was no reply to Ricardo's signal, and he repeated it. Again the result was disappointing.

There was no response.

Several times more, and with a like disheartening result Ricardo gave the signal call. Finally, however, just as the gaucho began to despair of attracting the attention of his brother, by means of the signal of the pampas, he heard an answer to the call, and his faithful heart gave a great bound of joy.

Fifteen minutes more had not elapsed when Ricardo detected the approach of some one who came stealing along through the shadows with eat-like tread.

The stealthy man was Mijar, and when he became certain of his identity Ricardo sprang to meet him.

The brothers embraced after the manner of the pampas dwellers, and then mutual explanations were made between them.

Ricardo told his brother all about the three brave young Americans who had come to South America to rescue Walter Kenmore.

Mijar then said:

»The young American, senor, whom I love almost as a brother, found favor with the young queen almost as soon as he was brought before her a captive by the warriors who raided the mission village, where we were made prisoners. In truth, the queen of the Condor Heads fell in love with the handsome young white senor at first sight.

»She chose him for her husband, and he was given to understand that if he refused the honor he would be put to death. On the contrary, if he became the husband of the queen, she would make him the head eaique of all her dusky warriors. Of the two evils, Walter Kenmore chose the less. He decided to marry the queen, if he must, but hoping that before the time for the ceremony came we might escape; he stipulated that the engagement might last some time. The queen agreed to this, but to-day the fact of the betrothal was made public, and the ceremony of the same was enacted in the great stone temple in presence of the black robed priests and all the leading caiques,

According to the customs of the Condor Heads, who are really descendants of the ancient Incas who fled to the valley when the Spaniards conquered Brazil—the betrothal ceremony of a king or queen always takes place ten days before the marriage is to occur. Therefore in ten days Walter Kenmore will become the husband of the queen unless he escapes.

Many of the caiques and black robes-priests—are opposed to the union, and jealous of the power and the honor which the young queen means to confer upon the white captive, and I suspect they are conspiring to murder him before the day set for the union of the couple.«

Mijar paused and suddenly drew his brother down into some bushes. The next moment two native warriors stole into the grove and began looking about, as if in search of someone. Almost immediately the gaucho brothers were discovered.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PLAN TO RESCUE WALTER KENMORE.

One of the Condor Heads had peered into the thicket, where Ricardo and his brother had concealed them selves.

As he saw the two brave, devoted men of the pampas, the native opened his mouth to utter a shout of alarm.

The gaucho brothers comprehended that such an outcry would be fatal to them, and acting with the celerity which is the good genius of adventurous men, Ricardo clubbed his rifle and brought it down upon the head of the spy.

The blow was a heavy one, and the Condor Head went down, all in a heap, as if stricken by a thunder-bolt. He lay motionless where he had fallen.

But the thud of the blow had been heard by the other native.

He made a daring leap, right into the thicket, but before he had fairly alighted in the cover the iron hand of Mijar fastened upon his throat, and he was strangled into insensibility while he vainly struggled on the ground.

The gaucho brothers were desperate. Upon the issue of immediate events, as they well knew, their lives depended.

A moment after Mijar released the warrior of the mysterious race, it was found that the latter was not only unconscious but dead.

And the terrible blow Ricardo had dealt the other Condor Head had proven fatal.

»They will never betray us now,« uttered Mijar, as he looked down upon the two dead warriors.

»No. But we must immediately conceal their bodies, for the discovery of them would inform the other Condor Heads of the proximity of foes,«

»True,« assented Mijar.

»We will carry the bodies away to the river and set them adrift in the swift stream, which will soon carry them far away,« advised Ricardo.

Mijar approved of his plan, and it was executed. The gaucho brothers made two trips to the river, and each time they carried one of the bodies between them and cast it into the swift current, which bore it rapidly down stream.

When the second body had been thus effectually disposed of, as they believed, Ricardo and Mijar rejoined the three boy canoeists.

Immediately the lads were acquainted by Ricardo with all the facts which his brother had made known to him regarding the captive canoeist.

The lads listened with deep interest to the exciting and romantic story of the adventures of Walter Kenmore, and when it was concluded a conversation ensued.

Mijar said he was allowed to go and come in and about the village of the queen of the Condor Heads as he willed, unwatched, because the natives knew nothing could induce him to desert his comrade.

He added that he was allowed to act as the body-guard of Walter Kenmore, and he said also:

»Gardela—such is the queen's name—knows well that many of her subjects among the caciques and black-robed priests are angry because she means to make a white man their superior in rank. But Gardela possesses a resolute character and a strong will. In defiance of the cacique and priests she will wed my comrade, the American senor. She knows his life is in peril, and fears the outbreak of rebellion.«

»There must be no delay. The rescue of Walter must be hastened. Tell us, is he free to go about the village as he wills?« inquired Jack Moreland.

»No; Walter is watched by the queen's spies. Her love makes her guard him closely. He cannot go where he wills. He is not allowed to leave the village, or go far from the palace of the queen, in which he and I have been assigned quarters,« replied Mijar.

»But he must join us here. The queen's spies must be thrown off the watch,« cried Jack.

Yes. But how is that to be done?« assented Mijar.

Jack opened a small medicine-case, which, like a wise traveler, he had carried with him throughout the whole adventurous voyage on the Amazon.

»You must drug the queen's spies and all who watch Walter too closely. Disguise him, if you must, only get him safely out of the village, Here is a drug which, mixed with any fluid, will cause those partaking even very moderately of the same to almost immediately fall into a sound sleep,« said Jack,

He placed a bottle of white powder in the hands of Mijar.

»Ha!« exclaimed the gaucho. «The young senor has the wisdom of an older head, Mijar will try to drug those who spy upon Walter Kenmore. But if he succeeds in bringing his comrade out of the village, escape will still be difficult.«

»On account of the determined pursuit the Condor Heads will make, eh?«

»Yes. But we may elude them, in the wild passes of the Andes.«

»What mean you? Our route, to Para, lays to the east—to the Atlantic seaboard. The Andes to the west.«

»If know! I know! But we can never return as we have come, across the continent of South America. We must push on through the Andes, to the Pacific coast, We may, if good fortune attends us, blind the trail we take, Certainly the Condor Heads will think we have gone by the way in which we have come. I believe there is a waterway to the ocean beyond the Andes. If not, a legend in which I have the utmost faith is false.«

»Bravo! Your plan is an excellent one. To the Andes by all means. But stay, Where shall we come out if we cross this lofty range?«

»We are now in the southwestern part of Ecuador, I believe.«

»Ah, then we may hope to reach the old seaport city of Guayaquil, if we are not overtaken by our enemies on the way.«

»Yes.«

»And there we can, no doubt, sooner or later secure passage on some trading vessel.«

»I know not. Mijar was never across the mountains. Never so far from the pampas as now.«

»Well, we will attempt to reach Guayaquil. You must try to get Walter out of the Condor Head town this very night.«

»I will do so.«

»Tell him our plans, and rely on his courage to second all you would do.«

»He is a brave man, ah! and a noble one,« replied the gaucho.

After a moment he added:

»Now I will go. Watch and wait for my return with my comrade here, The signal of my approach shall be the call of the pampas men, which my brother has already employed this night to good purpose.«

In a moment the brave pampas man was gone.

Let us follow him.

Without meeting any one, he re-entered the town of the Condor Heads, and proceeded at once to the palace of the young queen, which was the large structure which we saw her enter with the white fiance after the ceremony at the temple.

Mijar proceeded at once to the quarters occupied by Walter Kenmore and himself in a wing of the royal abode.

There he found Walter pacing up and down in the moonlight which streamed in through a casement, over which a matting screen that could be lowered if desired hung suspended.

»Ah, you have returned, I was wondering where you had gone,« greeted Walter as the gaucho entered the apartment.

»I felt like a traitor to the true sentiments of my heart—was it not a cowardly thing, after all, to consent to wed the queen, when I love the fair Inez Avilleos—when with her I have plighted my troth? Oh, Inez and her brother must think me false both in my friendship and my love, since I have not kept my pledge to return to them,« he added.

»Do not despair, senor. There are friends at hand,« said Mijar quietly.

»Friends! Friends at hand! Impossible! Do not trifle with me, Mijar,« cried Walter Kenmore, as he paused suddenly, in making the transit of the room, and faced the gaucho sternly.

»I do not trifle. It is true. There are friends at hand. My brave brother, Ricardo, and three daring young American canoeists, whom he has

guided up the Amazon in search of you.«

‘Walter Kenmore saw then that the gaucho was sincere, and involuntarily a cry of thanksgiving and supreme joy fell from his lips.

CHAPTER XX.

WALTER AND THE ASSASSINS OF THE CACIQUE.

For a moment Walter Kenmore turned away to hide the emotion which the good news the devoted gaucho had brought occasioned him.

He had abandoned all hope, and well nigh schooled himself to calmly contemplate spending the rest of his days among the Condor Heads, and of never again seeing the fair girl who was far away in Para.

The sudden realization that his case was not hopeless was almost too much for the captive to bear unmoved deeply. Tears were in his eyes, but they were by no means a reflection upon his courage or his manhood.

Walter Kenmore experienced the feelings of a condemned man at the moment when the knowledge of his reprieve or pardon has suddenly reached him, as he stands in the shadow of doom.

The young canoeist gained the mastery of himself almost immediately, however, and he said to his comrade:

»Tell me more. Give me the names of the three young heroes who have come to my rescue.«

The gaucho did so.

»Brave hearts. True friends. A better trio for the perilous task they have undertaken could not have been found in the Junior New: York Canoe Club or any other.«

»No doubt. But now to the plan of rescue, We are to attempt to leave the palace and the town this night.«

»But the queen's spies—the vigilant men who watch me day and night, and whom Gardela has declared she will have put to death, if they allow me to leave the town,« said Walter.

As he spoke he pointed through the window, and glancing in the direction indicated, the gaucho saw a group of four dark forms in the shadow of a great tree, not far from the window of Walter's room.

He knew those four warriors were the queen's spies, and he said, as he lowered the matting screen so as to shut out the view of the interior of the room from the men outside:

»I am to drug the spies.«

Then he went on to explain the whole plan to attempt an escape from the country of the Condor Heads by crossing the Andes and making for the seaboard.

»It is our only chance to do as my young friends from America have planned. I agree with them,« thus Walter replied.

»First, then, you must be disguised. You must pass through the village unquestioned, unchallenged, if we elude the queen's spies who lurk outside.«

»Yes.«

»You already wear the costume of a cacique. All you need is to color your skin and keep up a brave front. Fortunately I know how to color your skin. I shall use the juice of the palm, which the natives employ in coloring garments and skins of animals. There is a pot at hand in the wash-room of the palace. I will bring it at once.«

»Do so by all means,« assented Walter, and Mijar glided away.

In a few moments he returned, carrying a large pot in his hands, which he placed on the floor, saying triumphantly:

»I have it! Now to stain your white skin.«

Using a great soft flesh brush of native make which he had found in the lavatory of the palace, Mijar proceeded to apply the coloring matter in the jar to all the exposed parts of Walter's body.

The task was soon completed.

When it was done the gaucho surveyed his comrade with satisfaction, and declared that he would readily pass a casual observer as a native chief.

Then Mijar added:

»Now remain here until I come to the window. I go to try to drug the queen's spies.«

»May success attend you,« Walter rejoined, and in a moment he was alone. But very soon he heard the voice of Mijar in the grounds of the palace.

Walter knew his faithful henchman—who had picked up sufficient knowledge of the native language to converse in it, was talking with the

queen's guards.

He knew Mijar was very shrewd and cunning, and congratulated himself on having such a friend at hand to serve him.

Some moments elapsed, and Walter heard the voices of the queen's spies, mingled with the tones of the gaucho.

Finally these sounds seemed to recede, until they finally ceased entirely.

Then the captive canoeist decided that probably the gaucho for some purpose of his own, relating to the plot to escape, had led the spies away from the palace.

Some time went by—perhaps half an hour had elapsed—when Walter heard stealthy footsteps at the door.

At first he thought the sounds he heard indicated the return of the gaucho.

But then he reflected that Mijar had said he would return by the window.

Who could be stealing to his quarters at that hour?

The canoeist asked himself this question, and then the recollection of the fact, well known to him, that his life was in danger, because of the hatred of the caciques and black-robed priests, came to his mind.

Instantly Walter thought that secret assassins, who were determined the queen should not become his bride, were stealing near.

The young American still carried a pair of revolvers, which he had worn when he was captured, and which the queen had recently restored to him.

But he did not draw those weapons, Instead he picked up a native's spear; which, with a huge battle-ax, stood in one corner of the room.

Scarcely a moment elapsed when the door was stealthily opened, and two powerful native warriors, armed with long knives, with strangely curved blades, glided into the room.

The apartment was now a chamber of gloomy shadows, since the gaucho had lowered the screen on the window, and so excluded the bright moonlight.

The Condon Head warriors were keen-eyed. Instantly they discovered Walter, as he stood with his battle-ax in his right hand, and the great spear in his left.

Silently the two warriors came at Walter, and then he recognized them as the favorite soldiers of a cacique, who had aspired himself to wed the queen, and who was, therefore, the most jealous foe the young American had among all the strange people.

Walter was sure then that the cacique alluded to had sent the two warriors to assassinate him.

The young American did not wish to use his revolvers, if he could avoid so doing, because he knew the report of those weapons would alarm the queen, and all the inmates of the palace.

Then he would be more closely watched and guarded than ever. His plan to escape that night would surely be defeated, and its future execution would be rendered more difficult.

Almost immediately a desperate, unequal battle began in the darkened room between the brave young American and the two assassins of the cacique.

Walter took a corner, so that his two foes could not attack him in the rear, and wielded his battle-ax, while he used the spear to ward off blows aimed at his head.

Only the clash of arms and the heavy breathing of the combatants broke the silence for some moments.

The assassins of the cacique found it difficult to reach Walter with their deadly blades.

He battled with the desperate determination of one who fully realized his life is at stake.

Walter was a powerful man, and he had taken lessons in the use of the sword from a celebrated fencing master in New York.

He now found that the knowledge of swordsmanship he had acquired was of some service to him, even though his weapon was not a sword.

But it seemed the unequal combat could not last for long. All at once the long blade of one of the assassins' knives flashed inside the guard the young American sought to make with the ax and the spear.

The blade was aimed at Walter's head. But with a desperate effort he turned it aside upon the handle of his battle-ax, but not until the point had inflicted a slight wound on _ his breast directly over his heart.

The blood trickled from the wound, and, as though the sight of it awakened the savage ferocity of the assassins, they both immediately attacked Walter with increased fury.

Madly they slashed at him with their murderous blades.

CHAPTER XXI.

WALTER AND THE QUEEN FACE TO FACE.

The young American canoeist began to realize at once that he must use his revolver to shoot down the assassins, or they would, in the end, surely murder him in cold blood.

Dropping his spear, he was about to draw a revolver in his left hand, while he continued to fend off the savage thrusts and blows of the assassins with the battle-ax, when suddenly he made a thrilling discovery.

And it was a most welcome one.

All at once, behind the backs of the enemy, he saw the matting curtain on the window move, In an instant it was cast noiselessly aside and a dark form vaulted into the room.

The new arrival was Mijar.

As he alighted on the floor of the apartment, the assassins heard him and they wheeled like a flash.

The gaucho carried a long spear.

»Crash!« with one tremendous thrust he sent the weapon through the heart of the foremost of the assassins.

The rascal fell.

At the same time Walter succeeded in bringing his battle-ax down upon the skull of the other Condor Head.

The young canoeist's blow was dealt with great force, and the skull of the assassin was cleft to the chin.

Mijar leaped over the dead assassin and caught the hand of Walter.

»Just in time, my brave friend!« said Walter, Then he told how the assassins had stolen into his quarters and fallen upon him, and why he had not used his fire-arms.

»What success?« questioned Walter, when he had concluded his narrative.

»The best,« responded Mijar.

»Then the queen's spies are out of the way?«

»Yes.«

»You drugged them?«

»Yes. I decoyed them to the rear of the palace and induced them to help themselves to a flask in the queen's cellar. Slyly I emptied the contents of the bottle I had from your friend, the boy canoeist, into the flask.«

»Weil done.«

»Now to getaway.«

»I am ready to go.«

»Then come on at once.«

Mijar led the way from the apartment as he spoke.

As he turned to the door the young American said:

»Had we not better go by the window?«

»No; if we do so we shall have to pass the gate of the garden, where a sentinel is on duty. By going to the little side door, in the western wall of the palace, we can issue forth directly on the street, where there is a line of trees, and in the shadow our chances of stealing away unseen. will be good.«

»You are right. Lead on,« Walter assented.

Along a passage the two escaping ones went.

Both were familiar with the interior of the palace.

They made progress swiftly in the direction of the door by which they meant to escape.

The palace was silent; the hour was now late, and all the inmates of the queen's abode seemed to have retired for the night.

The young American, and the man of the pampas had reached, the passage, at the end of which was the small door, when suddenly a side door opened.

Immediately, before they could retreat, the light of a native oil lamp was flashed into the passage, and the next moment a handsome young native woman clad in a long white robe and carrying a lamp in her hand stepped into the passage directly before the escaping ones.

»Gardela, the queen! involuntarily exclaimed the young American.

He recognized the woman. who had compelled him, under threat of death; to plight his troth with her.

For a moment the queen stared in alarm and surprise at Walter and his companions. Then her brow became contracted in, a dark frown, and an angry light flashed in her black eyes 'as she demanded, in haughty tones, using the native language, which Walter now understood:

»What means this? Where. would. the white man and. his slave go thus slyly at dead of night? Oh, can it.be the white man is seeking to run away? Yes. yes, it is so! and yet Gardela would make him the greatest chief of all her warriors, and would make him her lord. Ah, she should now put him to death instead. But she has the heart of a woman, though she is a queen.«

Before the young American could reply, the queen turned and seemed about to utter a cry of alarm.

Walter and Mijar knew, if she did so, her maids and the guards of the royal sleeping chamber would at once hasten to the passage.

If the queen gave the alarm they were lost. She must not do so. A tall hazards the voice of the queen must not be heard by her attendants.

The gaucho was equal to the emergency.

Suddenly he darted forward and seized the queen.

His hand was clasped firmly over her mouth, and he hissed fiercely:

»The American will leave the Condor Heads and Mijar will go with him. Silence, or I will kill you!«

The queen was like a child in the clutches of Mijar, and her utterances were stifled.

Assisted by Walter, Mijar bound her hand and foot, and gagged her so that she could not utter a sound.

Then he said:

»She must be hidden somewhere, where her maid and attendants will not discover her until morning comes.«

»We will take her to my quarters,« said Walter, and as the gaucho approved the queen was carried to the room from which the prisoner had just come.

There the escaping ones left the fair ruler of the mysterious Indians,
But before he withdrew Walter said to her kindly;

»I thank you for sparing my life and for all the favors you have shown me, I appreciate the honor you meant to confer upon me, but it cannot be, for my heart is given to one of my own race. Farewell, Gardela, farewell forever.«

Walter heard a half-stifled sob uttered by the queen as he left her, and he knew that the fair ruler of the Condor Heads was really sincere in her regard for him.

Meanwhile, at a certain point beyond the grounds inclosed about two sides of the queen's palace, the cacique who had, as Walter conjectured, sent the assassins to murder him, was with several of his warriors, awaiting the return of his two emissaries of death.

After leaving the queen in Walter's quarters, the young captain and the gaucho made all haste to get out of the palace.

They reached the little street door, at the end of the passage in which the queen had so inopportunately confronted them, and passed through it.

Then they proceeded rapidly.

But the cacique and his men on the watch never saw them.

At first the lurking Condor Heads took Walter and gaucho for the two assassins.

But, a moment later, they saw they had made a mistake.

Walter and Mijar had turned the corner of the inclosure about the palace and were about to shape their course toward the river, when all at once the jealous cacique and his comrades threw themselves before the escaping men.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SIEGE OF THE ARMORY.

For Walter Kenmore and the devoted gaucho the situation was one of the most intense and thrilling peril.

The latter was almost immediately recognized by the cacique.

The latter shouted in the native language:

»The slave of the white face, who has bewitched our queen!«

The succeeding moment the clash of arms sounded, as the escaping men were forced to defend themselves from the attack of the cacique, and his warriors.

»Death rather than captivity,« shouted Walter.

As he uttered the heroic words, he laid about him lustily.

He was armed with the battle-ax, and the spear he had brought from the palace.

But, at the sound of the young American's voices, the cacique uttered a yell of surprise, and then he exclaimed:

»I know that voice. The: man in the garb of a cacique of our people is the hated white face, who plotted to become our king, He is disguised!«

Wild yells of alarm pealed from the throats of the Condor Heads as they heard the announcement.

Answering shouts came from various parts of the village; and soon the war-drums of the palace guards, which were always sounded to alarm the populace, were heard.

Meantime, Walter Kenmore and Mijar, the devoted gaucho, were engaged in a desperate battle for life and liberty.

They were almost overwhelmed, however, by the foree of numbers, and it seemed they were to be recaptured then and there, when all at once now that the general alarm had been sounded, Walter drew the revolvers he had held in reserve.

»Bang! Bang! Bang!»

The detonation of the young American's fire arms, as he sent a volley of bullets hurtling from them, into the ranks of the enemy, rang out,

above the shouts and yells of the combatants.

There were no fire-arms among the Condor Heads, and the mysterious Indians had always shown a superstitious fear of them since Walter, during his captivity, had shown them the wonderful death-dealing power the weapons possessed.

The natives fell back before the volley from Walter's weapons.

Shoulder to shoulder the young American and the gaucho advanced.

»Now for a dash. We will make for the slave-pen. I have an idea. We may yet make our capture cost the enemy dear,« said Mijar.

Running swiftly, the pair gained a stockade in which the large party of captives, brought in by the band of Condor Heads, who had been rac by the three boy canoeists, were confined.

The slave-pen was in the rear of a large, low building, which the Gaucho said was the armory of the natives. In it the spears, knives, battle-axes, and other weapons of the Condor fo including war bows and arrows, were kept.

The door of the slave pen was secured on the outside; and quickly opening it Mijar sprang inside; Walter unhesitatingly followed.

The escaping men saw about forty adult male natives of the lower Mamazon, in the stockade, and Mijar made haste to address them in their native language, saying:

»If you would escape, we are here to help you. We are prisoners seeking to get free. Follow me, and I will lead you to the armory of the Condor Heads, where you can arm yourselves and battle for freedom.«

A shout of joy went up from the poor captives, and they followed Mijar and Walter, as the latter at once rushed out of the slave-pen.

The door of the armory was quickly reached.

It was secured, but the united efforts of many men, who employed a log which they found near by as a battering-ram, enabled them to force the door.

Then into the building they thronged.

Each man chose the weapon that suited him best.

But meantime, the organized warriors of the Condor Heads were assembling and hurrying in the direction of the armory.

The enemy came in overwhelming numbers, and suddenly as the captives: were about to leave the armory Walter and Mijar placed themselves in the door.

»Hold!« shouted the gaucho. 'We shall be overwhelmed and slaughtered without mercy before we can get clear of the village if we go now? This building is strong and well-built. It will stand a siege, Let us remain within it and defend it to the last.«

Yells of approval went up from the captives who had become the allies of the white man and the gaucho.

A barricade of heavy timbers torn from the floor of the armory was erected across the door. At the several small windows the defenders of the building stationed themselves.

As the Condor Heads came on to the charge the defenders of the armory opened fire upon them furiously,

The native captives employed the bows and arrows, and Walter and Mijar used the revolvers of the former. Fortunately the young American had quite a supply of cartridges in his belt.

The battle raged for some time desperately.

The Caciques led their warriors in many charges upon the armory.

But each time the host of the Condor Heads was beaten back.

The bullets from the revolvers of Walter and the gaucho did fatal execution, and the arrows discharged by the captives, from the lower Amazon, dropped many a Condor Head.

The loss of the defenders of the armory was but light.

Sheltered, as they were, by the walls of the armory, it was only occasionally that an arrow ie the enemy struck down one of their numbers.

While the bullets continued, the yells of the Condor Heads rang out constantly, as if they sought by means of their frightful war cries to intimidate the defenders of the armory.

Mean while Gardela, the queen, had been discovered a captive in the apartment occu pied by Walter at the royal palace.

The queen was promptly liberated, and when the conflict at the armory had continued for some time, she appeared at the front of her

warriors.

In her hand the queen carried a white flag-the insignia of peace the world over.

As she waved the white flag her warriors ceased firing, and she advanced.

Mijar ordered the captives in the armory not to fire upon the queen. His order was obeyed. In a moment the conflict which had just been raging so furiously ceased.

The queen advanced fearlessly until she was near enough to the walls of the armory to make her words distinctly heard.

Then she said:

»If the white man and the ga:cho will be given up to me I will set all the captives free, and pledge my word they shall return in safety to their homes.«

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SIGNAL OF THE PAMPAS MEN.

As we have heretofore stated, the language of the Condor Heads was unlike that of the natives of the lower Amazon, and yet there was a similarity of idiom between the two dialects.

Some words were alike, and as the queen of the strange people repented her proposition, some of the captives comprehended what she meant.

Those who understood communicated their knowledge to the others, and soon all the natives in the armory knew that if they would deliver Walter and the brave gaucho into the hands of the enemy they could thereby secure their own deliverance.

Walter and the gaucho watched the dark faces of the natives in the armory with feelings of doubt and suspense, which may readily be understood.

The queen of the strange people had, with rare cunning, appealed to the selfish interests of the natives in the strongest possible manner.

She had tempted the poor captives to betray the brave men who had liberated them from the slave-pen, and so given them the one slender chance of escape which was possible for them.

It was evident that some of the natives were in favor of giving up Walter and the gaucho, But the majority were not so inclined.

After a few moments devoted to the discussion of the queen's proposition, the natives decided to stand by the brave men who had befriended them to the last.

A chorus of defiant yells announced to the queen of the Condor Heads that her attempt to corrupt the natives had completely failed.

Then Walter shouted:

»You see, Queen Gardela, the poor captives will not be corrupted. Their fealty to my friends and myself is assured, and we shall fight to the death. I warn you we shall never be recaptured alive.«

»We shall see. The white face has dared to spurn the love of Gardela. Now he shall feel the vengeance of a woman scorned,« retorted the

savage queen.

Then she turned her back upon the armory and marched slowly, and with stately mein, back to the lines of her dusky warriors.

A moment and the entire host of the Condor Heads, urged on by the queen, and her leading caciques came on in a determined charge at the armory.

The fierce, determined onset of the enemy was bravely met by the defenders of the building.

A perfect storm of arrows and bullets were discharged from the window by the captive natives, and Walter and Mijar.

Again the Condor Heads were compelled to retreat before the volley of their sheltered foe.

As they fell back the gaucho suddenly heard a sound from the distance that seemed to thrill him to the heart.

He started and listened.

»What is it?« Walter inquired, observing the agitation Mijar evinced.

»A signal call of the pampas men.«

»Ha! then it was uttered by your brother?«

»Yes, it was the voice of my brave Ricardo.«

»What meant the call?«

»Wait.«

At that moment the strange, peculiar cry was again heard by the gaucho.

This time Walter also heard it.

»Can it be! can it be!« cried Mijar. » Surely, that signal call is the old signal used by the wild rovers of the pampas to assure each other that in time of trouble help is near.«

»There can be no help for us. Whence could reinforcements come?«

»I know not. We have only my brave brother and the three young Americans near, as far as we know.«

»And they would only come to their death were they to venture here.«

»That is true. But —«

The gaucho abruptly paused.

Once more the signal of the pampas rovers was heard.

The shout was more distinct than previously, and springing to a window, the gaucho sent up an answering cry, to tell his brother that his thrilling signal was heard and understood.

Then ensued a period of suspense.

The gaucho's signal was not again heard, and soon the battle began again.

The Condor Heads surrounded, the armory and attacked it on all sides.

But, as before, they were compelled to retreat. But at a safe distance they drew their lines so as to environ the armory on all sides.

Then a cacique announced that the building was to be besieged until starvation and thirst caused the inmates of it to surrender.

The prospect looked dark indeed for the white captive and his companion.

The day dawned and still nothing transpired to prove the truth of the signal of Ricardo to show that assistance was near for the besieged.

Higher and higher mounted the sun in the cloudless sky and noon came and passed. The god of day began his triumphal march down the dome of the heaven in a halo of golden glory, and the day wore on until the shadows were again falling.

Still the situation of the men in the armory of the Condor Heads remained unchanged. Still the enemy environed them.

But, tired of a useless conflict, and apparently sure of finally taking them prisoners, the Condor Heads did not again attack the inmates of the armory during the day.

Toward nightfall the queen again came near the armory carrying the white flag.

Again she had terms to offer.

When she was near enough to make her voice distinctly heard by the inmates of the armory, she said:

»Gardela has thought better of what she said, and now she will promise the white man and the gaucho all shall be forgiven them if they

will come forth and surrender. The queen is still willing to make the white warrior her lord, if he. will pledge, himself. to fealty to her in the future.«

»That I cannot do. While we appreciate your offer we most positively decline to accept your terms,« said Walter.

Then the queen retired, without a word. But the expression of her face told that she had resolved upon a. terrible vengeance against the white man who repulsed all her advances.

»She will show us no mercy now if we fall into her power. Rest assured she will devise some most terrible and cruel doom for us if we are recaptured,« said Walter, as he noted the expression upon the features of the queen as she strode away.

The shadows grew darker.

Finally the light of day faded from the sky, and the gloomy night came, casting its shadows upon all things.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RESCUERS—THROUGH THE ANDES- CONCLUSION.

The night was very dark and most favorable for an «attack upon the armory by the Condor Heads.

Under cover of the complete gloom it seemed that they might easily creep up to the door and effectually assault the barricade the defenders of the building had erected there.

But leaving Walter Kenmore, Mijar and the natives of the lower Amazon besieged in the armory, we will return to the three boy canoeists and Ricardo.

We left the latter waiting and watching for the return of Mijar to the water-side thicket, hoping that the gaucho would bring Walter Kenmore to their hiding-place.

It seemed like an age to the boys and the man of the pampas after the departure of the gaucho, before any unusual sound from the village of the Condor Heads reached them.

At last they heard the detonation of pistol shots and the shouts of the strange warriors of the valley.

Of course it was at that moment that the conflict between Walter, the gaucho, and the force of the jealous cacique, whom the escaping men had encountered after their flight from the palace, began.

The friends of the imperiled men became intensely excited as the sounds of conflict in the village continued.

They comprehended that the attempt of Walter to escape must have been discovered, and they would have rushed to his assistance had it not been clear to them that such a course would be suicidal.

Ricardo, however, could not remain inactive while his brother was in peril, and he glided away, telling the boys he meant to scout forward and ascertain just what was taking place in the village.

The brave fellow soon reached the confines of the Condor Heads' town.

There he saw the warriors of the strange people besieging the armory, and in concealment he watched the conflict, and made sure that Walter and Mijar were defending the armory with the captives of the Amazon. Returning finally to the boys, Ricardo made known to the young canoeists the situation of their friends.

The three brave lads and Ricardo were almost ready to despair. They began to think that the rescue of Walter was an impossibility, when they were surprised by seeing a human form stealing toward the thicket they occupied some time after the return of Ricardo.

The stealthily approaching man came from the direction of the river, and in a moment the keen eyed gaucho recognized him and pronounced his name.

»Calka!« exclaimed Ricardo.

At once the man, who had heard the utterance of Ricardo, sprang to his, feet, saying: in his native language:

»Yes, yes! It is I, Calka!«

He advanced to the thicket, at the edge of which the gaucho. now showed himself, and added:

»When I slipped away into the terrible jungle of thistles as the Condor-heads suddenly came in sight before and behind us, I fled until I found a puma trail. I followed it south and it led me to the ingrape we had last paddled on, I struck south, along its bank, and journeyed far, looking for a hidden cave in vain. I thought you were. lost, and I meant to return to my town on the lower Amazon. But at length I met a great war party of the Guanos—my own race, They had organized for the pursuit of the Condor Heads, who had carried so many of our people away into captivity. At last my people were roused to fury by the last raid. of the Indos mysterios, They vowed to follow the Condor-heads. to the unknown land. I resolved to accompany my friends. I led them pack over the route I had traversed until we struck the trail of the enemy in the pathway through the thistle. Then on and on we came. But some of the band. lost heart, and were worn out with the fatigue of tne journey, and at length a great camp was made, and then the band halted, while myself and two others were sent ahead to make, a scout, and instructed to return and report if we discovered anything of the Condor Heads.«

Just as Calka concluded, two more men were seen on the river bank. The monkey hunter said they were his comrades. At a signal they came up to where Calka and the others were.

Then Ricardo and the boy canoeists hastened to tell the natives of the situation of the captives in the village of the Condor Heads, and at once the two scouts, who had been Calka's comrades, set off to rejoin the war party from the lower Amazon and bring them up.

It was after nightfall, the evening following the night when the siege of the armory began, when the army of the natives of the lower Amazon came up and joined the canoeists. The force numbered about three hundred men, while the Condor Heads were more than a thousand warriors strong. Still under cover of the darkness, it was resolved to attack the enemy.

Meanwhile, upon hearing the news that a rescue party of the Guanos was coming, Ricardo had uttered the signal call that had been heard and wondered at by Walter and Mijar.

Led by Ricardo and the three boy canoeists, the army of natives advanced stealthily in the direction of the armory. Suddenly they fell upon the Condor Heads encamped about the building. The attack was a complete surprise. Supposing themselves attacked by a great army, no doubt, the Condor Heads fell back for a moment.

The boy canoeists and Ricardo reached the door of the armory and made known the situation to Walter and Mijar. The result was that the inmates of the building hastened to join their friends. Meantime the rescuers had liberated the women and children of their race who were imprisoned in the slave-pen.

Before the Condor Heads recovered from the surprise which this—the first attack a foe had ever made upon their village—caused them, the rescuers had retreated to the river.

There, adhering to a plan they had formed to cross the Andes, the canoeists and the gaucho brothers separated from the natives, who were bent upon retreating down the Amazon.

The rescued canoeist and his friends journeyed swiftly, and they were soon among the wild passes of the Andes.

They were not pursued, and they supposed that the Condor Heads, who no doubt followed the natives, did not know that they had separated from the latter. In due time, and after encountering many perils on the way, the party reached the seaport of Ganquil, where they secured passage on a Brazilian trading vessel to Para. The voyage was made in safety, and upon their arrival in the ancient city, what was their joy to learn that the political party to which Senor Avilleos, the innocent prisoner who had depended upon Walter Kenmore's evidence to save him, belonged, had gained the ascendancy and set the young captive free! The latter's sister, Inez, who was Walter's fiancée, welcomed the lost canoeist as only a loving woman could, and there was great rejoicing in the magnificent old mansion of the Avilleos.

A week later Walter and Inez were married, and, accompanied by the three boy canoeists, the happy couple took passage on an American steamer for New York. The boys wrote up a thrilling history of their journey on the Amazon, and when they reached New York, after a short and pleasant voyage, Colonel Pemberton Bugg, of the »Universe,« had the pleasure of scoring a great triumph over the rival newspapers.

Where the latter had failed he had succeeded. His agent had found and saved the lost canoeist of the Amazon.

Later, through advice from Para, it was learned by our boy canoeists that most of the native rescue party, and the prisoners they had snatched from the Condor Heads finally reached the lower Amazon. A terrible storm had turned back the Condor Heads, who were pursuing them in overwhelming numbers. The same dispatch also stated that through the influence of Senor Avilleos, the brave gaucho brothers—Ricardo and Mijar—had been appointed to positions of honor under the newly organized government of Brazil.

[THE END.]

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