A Set Of Six

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JOSEPH CONRAD

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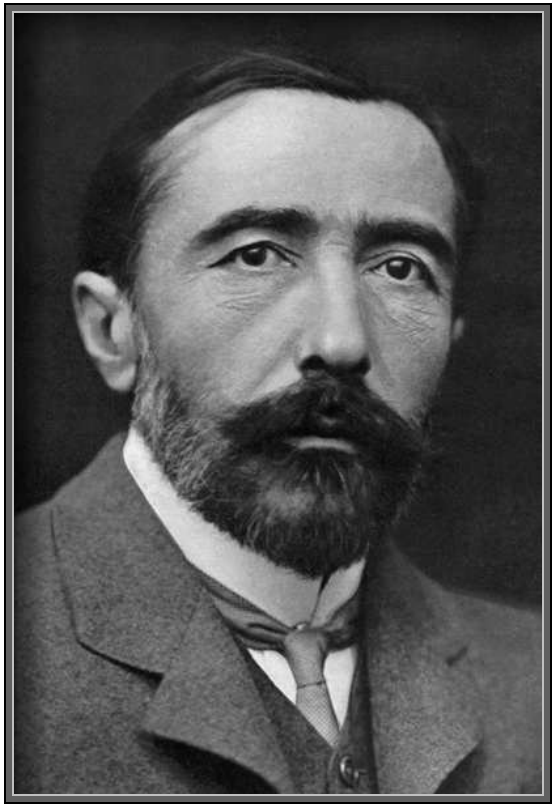
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About Author



Joseph Conrad (born; Berdichev, Imperial Russia, 3 December 1857 – 3 August 1924, Bishopsbourne, Kent, England) was a Polish author who wrote in English after settling in England. He was granted British nationality in 1886, but always considered himself a Pole. Conrad is regarded as one of the greatest novelists in English, though he did not speak the language fluently until he was in his twenties (and always with a marked accent). He wrote stories and novels, often with a nautical setting, that depict trials of the human spirit in the midst of an indifferent universe. He was a master prose stylist who brought a distinctly non-English tragic sensibility into English literature.

Early life

Joseph Conrad was born on 3 December 1857 in Berdichev, in Podolia, a part of modern Ukraine that had belonged to the Kingdom of Poland before the 1793 Second Partition of Poland. He was the only child of Apollo Korzeniowski and his wife Ewa Bobrowska. The father was a writer, translator, political activist and would-be revolutionary. Conrad, who would actually be known to his family as "Konrad" rather than "Józef", was christened *Józef Teodor Konrad* after his maternal grandfather Józef, his paternal grandfather Teodor, and the heroes (both named "Konrad") of two poems by Adam Mickiewicz, *Dziady* and *Konrad Wallenrod*.

Though the vast majority of the area's inhabitants were Ukrainians, the land was almost completely owned by the Polish *szlachta* (nobility) that Conrad's parents belonged to. Polish literature, particularly patriotic literature, was held in high esteem by the area's Polish population.

Because of the father's attempts at farming and his political activism, the family moved repeatedly. In May 1861 they moved to Warsaw, where Apollo joined the resistance against the Russian Empire. This led to his imprisonment in Pavilion X (*Ten*) of the Warsaw Citadel. Conrad would write: " In the courtyard of this Citadel – characteristically for our nation – my childhood memories begin." On 9 May 1862 Apollo and his family were exiled to Vologda, 500 kilometres north of Moscow and known for its bad climate. In January 1863 Apollo's sentence was commuted, and the family was sent to Chernihiv in northeast Ukraine, where conditions were much better. However, on 18 April 1865 Ewa died of tuberculosis.

Literary career

In 1894, aged 36, Conrad reluctantly gave up the sea, partly because of poor health and partly because he had become so fascinated with writing that he had decided on a literary career. His first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, set on the east coast of Borneo, was published in 1895. Its appearance marked his first use of the pen name "Joseph Conrad"; "Konrad" was, of course, the third of his

Polish given names, but his use of it – in the anglicised version, "Conrad" – may also have been an homage to the Polish Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz's patriotic narrative poem, *Konrad Wallenrod*.

Edward Garnett, a young publisher's reader and literary critic who would play one of the chief supporting roles in Conrad's literary career, had – like Unwin's first reader of *Almayer's Folly*, Wilfrid Hugh Chesson — been impressed by the manuscript, but Garnett had been "uncertain whether the English was good enough for publication." Garnett had shown the novel to his wife, Constance Garnett, later a well-known translator of Russian literature. She had thought Conrad's foreignness a positive merit.

Style

Conrad, an emotional man subject to fits of depression, self-doubt, and pessimism, disciplined his romantic temperament with an unsparing moral judgment. Despite the opinions even of some who knew him personally, such as fellow novelist Henry James, Conrad – even when he was only writing elegantly crafted letters to his uncle and acquaintances – was always at heart a writer who sailed, rather than a sailor who wrote. He used his sailor's experiences as a backdrop for many of his works, but he also produced works of similar world view, without the nautical motifs. The failure of many critics in his time to appreciate this caused him much frustration.

An October 1923 visitor to Oswalds, Conrad's then home – Cyril Clemens, a cousin of Mark Twain — quoted Conrad as saying: "In everything I have written there is always one invariable intention, and that is to capture the reader's attention."

Language

Conrad spoke both his native Polish language and the French language fluently from childhood and only acquired English in his twenties. Why then did he choose to write his books in, effectively, his third language? He states in his preface to *A Personal Record* that writing in English was for him "natural", and that the idea of his having made a deliberate choice between English and French, as

some had suggested, was in error. He explained that, though he was familiar with French from childhood, "I would have been afraid to attempt expression in a language so perfectly 'crystallized'." In a 1915 conversation with American sculptor Jo Davidson, as he posed for his bust, in response to Davidson's question Conrad said: "Ah… to write French you have to know it. English is so plastic — if you haven't got a word you need you can make it, but to write French you have to be an artist like Anatole France." These statements, as so often happens in Conrad's "autobiographical" writings, are subtly disingenuous. In 1897 Conrad was paid a visit by a fellow Pole, Wincenty Lutosławski, who was intent on imploring Conrad to write in Polish and "to win Conrad for Polish literature". Lutosławski recalls that during their conversation Conrad explained why he did not write in Polish: "I value too much our beautiful Polish literature to introduce into it my worthless twaddle. But for Englishmen my capacities are just sufficient: they enable me to earn my living". Perhaps revealingly, Conrad later wrote to Lutosławski to keep his visit a secret.

More to the point is Conrad's remark in *A Personal Record* that English was "the speech of my secret choice, of my future, of long friendships, of the deepest affections, of hours of toil and hours of ease, and of solitary hours, too, of books read, of thoughts pursued, of remembered emotions—of my very dreams!" In 1878 Conrad's four-year experience in the French merchant marine had been cut short when the French discovered that he did not have a permit from the Imperial Russian consul to sail with the French. This, and some typically disastrous Conradian investments, had left him destitute and had precipitated a suicide attempt. With the concurrence of his uncle Bobrowski, who had been summoned to Marseilles, Conrad decided to seek employment with the British merchant marine, which did not require Russia's permission. Thus began Conrad's 16 years' seafarer's acquaintance with the British and with the English language.

* * * * *

A SET OF SIX

By

Joseph Conrad

Les petites marionnettes
Font, font, font,
Trois petits tours
Et puis s'en vont.

—NURSERY RHYME

TO MISS M. H. M. CAPES

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The six stories in this volume are the result of some three or four years of occasional work. The dates of their writing are far apart, their origins are various. None of them are connected directly with personal experiences. In all of them the facts are inherently true, by which I mean that they are not only possible but that they have actually happened. For instance, the last story in the volume, the one I call Pathetic, whose first title is Il Conde (misspelt by-the-by) is an almost verbatim transcript of the tale told me by a very charming old gentleman whom I met in Italy. I don't mean to say it is only that. Anybody can see that it is something more than a verbatim report, but where he left off and where I began must be left to the acute discrimination of the reader who may be interested in the problem. I don't mean to say that the problem is worth the trouble. What I am certain of, however, is that it is not to be solved, for I am not at all clear about it myself by this time. All I can say is that the personality of the narrator was extremely suggestive quite apart from the story he was telling me. I heard a few years ago that he had died far away from his beloved Naples where that "abominable adventure" did really happen to him.

Thus the genealogy of Il Conde is simple. It is not the case with the other stories. Various strains contributed to their composition, and the nature of many of those I have forgotten, not having the habit of making notes either before or after the fact. I mean the fact of writing a story. What I remember best about Gaspar Ruiz is that it was written, or at any rate begun, within a month of finishing Nostromo; but apart from the locality, and that a pretty wide one (all the South American Continent), the novel and the story have nothing in common,

neither mood, nor intention and, certainly, not the style. The manner for the most part is that of General Santierra, and that old warrior, I note with satisfaction, is very true to himself all through. Looking now dispassionately at the various ways in which this story could have been presented I can't honestly think the General superfluous. It is he, an old man talking of the days of his youth, who characterizes the whole narrative and gives it an air of actuality which I doubt whether I could have achieved without his help. In the mere writing his existence of course was of no help at all, because the whole thing had to be carefully kept within the frame of his simple mind. But all this is but a laborious searching of memories. My present feeling is that the story could not have been told otherwise. The hint for Gaspar Ruiz the man I found in a book by Captain Basil Hall, R.N., who was for some time, between the years 1824 and 1828, senior officer of a small British Squadron on the West Coast of South America. His book published in the thirties obtained a certain celebrity and I suppose is to be found still in some libraries. The curious who may be mistrusting my imagination are referred to that printed document, Vol. II, I forget the page, but it is somewhere not far from the end. Another document connected with this story is a letter of a biting and ironic kind from a friend then in Burma, passing certain strictures upon "the gentleman with the gun on his back" which I do not intend to make accessible to the public. Yet the gun episode did really happen, or at least I am bound to believe it because I remember it, described in an extremely matter-of-fact tone, in some book I read in my boyhood; and I am not going to discard the beliefs of my boyhood for anybody on earth.

The Brute, which is the only sea-story in the volume, is, like Il Conde, associated with a direct narrative and based on a suggestion gathered on warm human lips. I will not disclose the real name of the criminal ship but the first I heard of her homicidal habits was from the late Captain Blake,

commanding a London ship in which I served in 1884 as Second Officer. Captain Blake was, of all my commanders, the one I remember with the greatest affection. I have sketched in his personality, without however mentioning his name, in the first paper of The Mirror of the Sea. In his young days he had had a personal experience of the brute and it is perhaps for that reason that I have put the story into the mouth of a young man and made of it what the reader will see. The existence of the brute was a fact. The end of the brute as related in the story is also a fact, well-known at the time though it really happened to another ship, of great beauty of form and of blameless character, which certainly deserved a better fate. I have unscrupulously adapted it to the needs of my story thinking that I had there something in the nature of poetical justice. I hope that little villainy will not cast a shadow upon the general honesty of my proceedings as a writer of tales.

Of The Informer and An Anarchist I will say next to nothing. The pedigree of these tales is hopelessly complicated and not worth disentangling at this distance of time. I found them and here they are. The discriminating reader will guess that I have found them within my mind; but how they or their elements came in there I have forgotten for the most part; and for the rest I really don't see why I should give myself away more than I have done already.

It remains for me only now to mention The Duel, the longest story in the book. That story attained the dignity of publication all by itself in a small illustrated volume, under the title, "The Point of Honour." That was many years ago. It has been since reinstated in its proper place, which is the place it occupies in this volume, in all the subsequent editions of my work. Its pedigree is extremely simple. It springs from a ten-line paragraph in a small provincial paper published in the South of France. That paragraph, occasioned by a duel with a fatal ending between two well-known Parisian personalities,

referred for some reason or other to the "well-known fact" of two officers in Napoleon's Grand Army having fought a series of duels in the midst of great wars and on some futile pretext. The pretext was never disclosed. I had therefore to invent it; and I think that, given the character of the two officers which I had to invent, too, I have made it sufficiently convincing by the mere force of its absurdity. The truth is that in my mind the story is nothing but a serious and even earnest attempt at a bit of historical fiction. I had heard in my boyhood a good deal of the great Napoleonic legend. I had a genuine feeling that I would find myself at home in it, and The Duel is the result of that feeling, or, if the reader prefers, of that presumption. Personally I have no qualms of conscience about this piece of work. The story might have been better told of course. All one's work might have been better done; but this is the sort of reflection a worker must put aside courageously if he doesn't mean every one of his conceptions to remain for ever a private vision, an evanescent reverie. How many of those visions have I seen vanish in my time! This one, however, has remained, a testimony, if you like, to my courage or a proof of my rashness. What I care to remember best is the testimony of some French readers who volunteered the opinion that in those hundred pages or so I had managed to render "wonderfully" the spirit of the whole epoch. Exaggeration of kindness no doubt; but even so I hug it still to my breast, because in truth that is exactly what I was trying to capture in my small net: the Spirit of the Epoch—never purely militarist in the long clash of arms, youthful, almost childlike in its exaltation of sentiment—naively heroic in its faith.

1920. J. C.

GASPAR RUIZ

I

A revolutionary war raises many strange characters out of the obscurity which is the common lot of humble lives in an undisturbed state of society.

Certain individualities grow into fame through their vices and their virtues, or simply by their actions, which may have a temporary importance; and then they become forgotten. The names of a few leaders alone survive the end of armed strife and are further preserved in history; so that, vanishing from men's active memories, they still exist in books.

The name of General Santierra attained that cold paper-and-ink immortality. He was a South American of good family, and the books published in his lifetime numbered him amongst the liberators of that continent from the oppressive rule of Spain.

That long contest, waged for independence on one side and for dominion on the other, developed in the course of years and the vicissitudes of changing fortune the fierceness and inhumanity of a struggle for life. All feelings of pity and compassion disappeared in the growth of political hatred. And, as is usual in war, the mass of the people, who had the least to gain by the issue, suffered most in their obscure persons and their humble fortunes.

General Santierra began his service as lieutenant in the patriot army raised and commanded by the famous San Martin, afterwards conqueror of Lima and liberator of Peru. A great battle had just been fought on the banks of the river Bio-Bio. Amongst the prisoners made upon the routed Royalist

troops there was a soldier called Gaspar Ruiz. His powerful build and his big head rendered him remarkable amongst his fellow-captives. The personality of the man was unmistakable. Some months before he had been missed from the ranks of Republican troops after one of the many skirmishes which preceded the great battle. And now, having been captured arms in hand amongst Royalists, he could expect no other fate but to be shot as a deserter.

Gaspar Ruiz, however, was not a deserter; his mind was hardly active enough to take a discriminating view of the advantages or perils of treachery. Why should he change sides? He had really been made a prisoner, had suffered ill-usage and many privations. Neither side showed tenderness to its adversaries. There came a day when he was ordered, together with some other captured rebels, to march in the front rank of the Royal troops. A musket had been thrust into his hands. He had taken it. He had marched. He did not want to be killed with circumstances of peculiar atrocity for refusing to march. He did not understand heroism but it was his intention to throw his musket away at the first opportunity. Meantime he had gone on loading and firing, from fear of having his brains blown out at the first sign of unwillingness, by some non-commissioned officer of the King of Spain. He tried to set forth these elementary considerations before the sergeant of the guard set over him and some twenty other such deserters, who had been condemned summarily to be shot.

It was in the quadrangle of the fort at the back of the batteries which command the roadstead of Valparaiso. The officer who had identified him had gone on without listening to his protestations. His doom was sealed; his hands were tied very tightly together behind his back; his body was sore all over from the many blows with sticks and butts of muskets which had hurried him along on the painful road from the place of his capture to the gate of the fort. This was the only

kind of systematic attention the prisoners had received from their escort during a four days' journey across a scantily watered tract of country. At the crossings of rare streams they were permitted to quench their thirst by lapping hurriedly like dogs. In the evening a few scraps of meat were thrown amongst them as they dropped down dead-beat upon the stony ground of the halting-place.

As he stood in the courtyard of the castle in the early morning, after having been driven hard all night, Gaspar Ruiz's throat was parched, and his tongue felt very large and dry in his mouth.

And Gaspar Ruiz, besides being very thirsty, was stirred by a feeling of sluggish anger, which he could not very well express, as though the vigour of his spirit were by no means equal to the strength of his body.

The other prisoners in the batch of the condemned hung their heads, looking obstinately on the ground. But Gaspar Ruiz kept on repeating: "What should I desert for to the Royalists? Why should I desert? Tell me, Estaban!"

He addressed himself to the sergeant, who happened to belong to the same part of the country as himself. But the sergeant, after shrugging his meagre shoulders once, paid no further attention to the deep murmuring voice at his back. It was indeed strange that Gaspar Ruiz should desert. His people were in too humble a station to feel much the disadvantages of any form of government. There was no reason why Gaspar Ruiz should wish to uphold in his own person the rule of the King of Spain. Neither had he been anxious to exert himself for its subversion. He had joined the side of Independence in an extremely reasonable and natural manner. A band of patriots appeared one morning early, surrounding his father's ranche, spearing the watch-dogs and ham-stringing a fat cow all in the twinkling of an eye, to the cries of "Viva la Libertad!" Their

officer discoursed of Liberty with enthusiasm and eloquence after a long and refreshing sleep. When they left in the evening, taking with them some of Ruiz, the father's, best horses to replace their own lamed animals, Gaspar Ruiz went away with them, having been invited pressingly to do so by the eloquent officer.

Shortly afterwards a detachment of Royalist troops coming to pacify the district, burnt the ranche, carried off the remaining horses and cattle, and having thus deprived the old people of all their worldly possessions, left them sitting under a bush in the enjoyment of the inestimable boon of life.

II

Gaspar Ruiz, condemned to death as a deserter, was not thinking either of his native place or of his parents, to whom he had been a good son on account of the mildness of his character and the great strength of his limbs. The practical advantage of this last was made still more valuable to his father by his obedient disposition. Gaspar Ruiz had an acquiescent soul.

But it was stirred now to a sort of dim revolt by his dislike to die the death of a traitor. He was not a traitor. He said again to the sergeant: "You know I did not desert, Estaban. You know I remained behind amongst the trees with three others to keep the enemy back while the detachment was running away!"

Lieutenant Santierra, little more than a boy at the time, and unused as yet to the sanguinary imbecilities of a state of war, had lingered near by, as if fascinated by the sight of these men who were to be shot presently—"for an example"—as the Commandante had said.

The sergeant, without deigning to look at the prisoner, addressed himself to the young officer with a superior smile.

"Ten men would not have been enough to make him a prisoner, mi teniente. Moreover, the other three rejoined the detachment after dark. Why should he, unwounded and the strongest of them all, have failed to do so?"

"My strength is as nothing against a mounted man with a lasso," Gaspar Ruiz protested, eagerly. "He dragged me behind his horse for half a mile."

At this excellent reason the sergeant only laughed contemptuously. The young officer hurried away after the Commandante.

Presently the adjutant of the castle came by. He was a truculent, raw-boned man in a ragged uniform. His spluttering voice issued out of a flat yellow face. The sergeant learned from him that the condemned men would not be shot till sunset. He begged then to know what he was to do with them meantime.

The adjutant looked savagely round the courtyard and, pointing to the door of a small dungeon-like guardroom, receiving light and air through one heavily barred window, said: "Drive the scoundrels in there."

The sergeant, tightening his grip upon the stick he carried in virtue of his rank, executed this order with alacrity and zeal. He hit Gaspar Ruiz, whose movements were slow, over his head and shoulders. Gaspar Ruiz stood still for a moment under the shower of blows, biting his lip thoughtfully as if absorbed by a perplexing mental process—then followed the others without haste. The door was locked, and the adjutant carried off the key.

By noon the heat of that vaulted place crammed to suffocation had become unbearable. The prisoners crowded towards the window, begging their guards for a drop of water; but the soldiers remained lying in indolent attitudes wherever there was a little shade under a wall, while the sentry sat with

his back against the door smoking a cigarette, and raising his eyebrows philosophically from time to time. Gaspar Ruiz had pushed his way to the window with irresistible force. His capacious chest needed more air than the others; his big face, resting with its chin on the ledge, pressed close to the bars, seemed to support the other faces crowding up for breath. From moaned entreaties they had passed to desperate cries, and the tumultuous howling of those thirsty men obliged a young officer who was just then crossing the courtyard to shout in order to make himself heard.

"Why don't you give some water to these prisoners?"

The sergeant, with an air of surprised innocence, excused himself by the remark that all those men were condemned to die in a very few hours.

Lieutenant Santierra stamped his foot. "They are condemned to death, not to torture," he shouted. "Give them some water at once."

Impressed by this appearance of anger, the soldiers bestirred themselves, and the sentry, snatching up his musket, stood to attention.

But when a couple of buckets were found and filled from the well, it was discovered that they could not be passed through the bars, which were set too close. At the prospect of quenching their thirst, the shrieks of those trampled down in the struggle to get near the opening became very heartrending. But when the soldiers who had lifted the buckets towards the window put them to the ground again helplessly, the yell of disappointment was still more terrible.

The soldiers of the army of Independence were not equipped with canteens. A small tin cup was found, but its approach to the opening caused such a commotion, such yells of rage and pain in the vague mass of limbs behind the

straining faces at the window, that Lieutenant Santierra cried out hurriedly, "No, no—you must open the door, sergeant."

The sergeant, shrugging his shoulders, explained that he had no right to open the door even if he had had the key. But he had not the key. The adjutant of the garrison kept the key. Those men were giving much unnecessary trouble, since they had to die at sunset in any case. Why they had not been shot at once early in the morning he could not understand.

Lieutenant Santierra kept his back studiously to the window. It was at his earnest solicitations that the Commandante had delayed the execution. This favour had been granted to him in consideration of his distinguished family and of his father's high position amongst the chiefs of the Republican party. Lieutenant Santierra believed that the General commanding would visit the fort some time in the afternoon, and he ingenuously hoped that his naive intercession would induce that severe man to pardon some, at least, of those criminals. In the revulsion of his feeling his interference stood revealed now as guilty and futile meddling. It appeared to him obvious that the general would never even consent to listen to his petition. He could never save those men, and he had only made himself responsible for the sufferings added to the cruelty of their fate.

"Then go at once and get the key from the adjutant," said Lieutenant Santierra.

The sergeant shook his head with a sort of bashful smile, while his eyes glanced sideways at Gaspar Ruiz's face, motionless and silent, staring through the bars at the bottom of a heap of other haggard, distorted, yelling faces.

His worship the adjutant de Plaza, the sergeant murmured, was having his siesta; and supposing that he, the sergeant, would be allowed access to him, the only result he expected would be to have his soul flogged out of his body for

presuming to disturb his worship's repose. He made a deprecatory movement with his hands, and stood stock-still, looking down modestly upon his brown toes.

Lieutenant Santierra glared with indignation, but hesitated. His handsome oval face, as smooth as a girl's, flushed with the shame of his perplexity. Its nature humiliated his spirit. His hairless upper lip trembled; he seemed on the point of either bursting into a fit of rage or into tears of dismay.

Fifty years later, General Santierra, the venerable relic of revolutionary times, was well able to remember the feelings of the young lieutenant. Since he had given up riding altogether, and found it difficult to walk beyond the limits of his garden, the general's greatest delight was to entertain in his house the officers of the foreign men-of-war visiting the harbour. For Englishmen he had a preference, as for old companions in arms. English naval men of all ranks accepted his hospitality with curiosity, because he had known Lord Cochrane and had taken part, on board the patriot squadron commanded by that marvellous seaman, in the cutting out and blockading operations before Callao—an episode of unalloyed glory in the wars of Independence and of endless honour in the fighting tradition of Englishmen. He was a fair linguist, this ancient survivor of the Liberating armies. A trick of smoothing his long white beard whenever he was short of a word in French or English imparted an air of leisurely dignity to the tone of his reminiscences.

III

"Yes, my friends," he used to say to his guests, "what would you have? A youth of seventeen summers, without worldly experience, and owing my rank only to the glorious patriotism of my father, may God rest his soul. I suffered immense humiliation, not so much from the disobedience of

that subordinate, who, after all, was responsible for those prisoners; but I suffered because, like the boy I was, I myself dreaded going to the adjutant for the key. I had felt, before, his rough and cutting tongue. Being quite a common fellow, with no merit except his savage valour, he made me feel his contempt and dislike from the first day I joined my battalion in garrison at the fort. It was only a fortnight before! I would have confronted him sword in hand, but I shrank from the mocking brutality of his sneers.

"I don't remember having been so miserable in my life before or since. The torment of my sensibility was so great that I wished the sergeant to fall dead at my feet, and the stupid soldiers who stared at me to turn into corpses; and even those wretches for whom my entreaties had procured a reprieve I wished dead also, because I could not face them without shame. A mephitic heat like a whiff of air from hell came out of that dark place in which they were confined. Those at the window who had heard what was going on jeered at me in very desperation: one of these fellows, gone mad no doubt, kept on urging me volubly to order the soldiers to fire through the window. His insane loquacity made my heart turn faint. And my feet were like lead. There was no higher officer to whom I could appeal. I had not even the firmness of spirit to simply go away.

"Benumbed by my remorse, I stood with my back to the window. You must not suppose that all this lasted a long time. How long could it have been? A minute? If you measured by mental suffering it was like a hundred years; a longer time than all my life has been since. No, certainly, it was not so much as a minute. The hoarse screaming of those miserable wretches died out in their dry throats, and then suddenly a voice spoke, a deep voice muttering calmly. It called upon me to turn round.

"That voice, senores, proceeded from the head of Gaspar Ruiz. Of his body I could see nothing. Some of his fellow-captives had clambered upon his back. He was holding them up. His eyes blinked without looking at me. That and the moving of his lips was all he seemed able to manage in his overloaded state. And when I turned round, this head, that seemed more than human size resting on its chin under a multitude of other heads, asked me whether I really desired to quench the thirst of the captives.

"I said, 'Yes, yes!' eagerly, and came up quite close to the window. I was like a child, and did not know what would happen. I was anxious to be comforted in my helplessness and remorse.

"'Have you the authority, Senor teniente, to release my wrists from their bonds?' Gaspar Ruiz's head asked me.

"His features expressed no anxiety, no hope; his heavy eyelids blinked upon his eyes that looked past me straight into the courtyard.

"As if in an ugly dream, I spoke, stammering: 'What do you mean? And how can I reach the bonds on your wrists?'

"'I will try what I can do,' he said; and then that large staring head moved at last, and all the wild faces piled up in that window disappeared, tumbling down. He had shaken his load off with one movement, so strong he was.

"And he had not only shaken it off, but he got free of the crush and vanished from my sight. For a moment there was no one at all to be seen at the window. He had swung about, butting and shouldering, clearing a space for himself in the only way he could do it with his hands tied behind his back.

"Finally, backing to the opening, he pushed out to me between the bars his wrists, lashed with many turns of rope. His hands, very swollen, with knotted veins, looked enormous

and unwieldy. I saw his bent back. It was very broad. His voice was like the muttering of a bull.

"'Cut, Senor teniente. Cut!'

"I drew my sword, my new unblunted sword that had seen no service as yet, and severed the many turns of the hide rope. I did this without knowing the why and the wherefore of my action, but as it were compelled by my faith in that man. The sergeant made as if to cry out, but astonishment deprived him of his voice, and he remained standing with his mouth open as if overtaken by sudden imbecility.

"I sheathed my sword and faced the soldiers. An air of awestruck expectation had replaced their usual listless apathy. I heard the voice of Gaspar Ruiz shouting inside, but the words I could not make out plainly. I suppose that to see him with his arms free augmented the influence of his strength: I mean by this, the spiritual influence that with ignorant people attaches to an exceptional degree of bodily vigour. In fact, he was no more to be feared than before, on account of the numbness of his arms and hands, which lasted for some time.

"The sergeant had recovered his power of speech. 'By all the saints!' he cried, 'we shall have to get a cavalry man with a lasso to secure him again, if he is to be led to the place of execution. Nothing less than a good enlazador on a good horse can subdue him. Your worship was pleased to perform a very mad thing.'

"I had nothing to say. I was surprised myself, and I felt a childish curiosity to see what would happen next. But the sergeant was thinking of the difficulty of controlling Gaspar Ruiz when the time for making an example would come.

"'Or perhaps,' the sergeant pursued, vexedly, 'we shall be obliged to shoot him down as he dashes out when the door is opened.' He was going to give further vent to his anxieties as to the proper carrying out of the sentence; but he interrupted

himself with a sudden exclamation, snatched a musket from a soldier, and stood watchful with his eyes fixed on the window."

IV

"Gaspar Ruiz had clambered up on the sill, and sat down there with his feet against the thickness of the wall and his knees slightly bent. The window was not quite broad enough for the length of his legs. It appeared to my crestfallen perception that he meant to keep the window all to himself. He seemed to be taking up a comfortable position. Nobody inside dared to approach him now he could strike with his hands.

"'Por Dios!' I heard the sergeant muttering at my elbow, 'I shall shoot him through the head now, and get rid of that trouble. He is a condemned man.'

"At that I looked at him angrily. 'The general has not confirmed the sentence,' I said—though I knew well in my heart that these were but vain words. The sentence required no confirmation. 'You have no right to shoot him unless he tries to escape,' I added, firmly.

"'But sangre de Dios!' the sergeant yelled out, bringing his musket up to the shoulder, 'he is escaping now. Look!'

"But I, as if that Gaspar Ruiz had cast a spell upon me, struck the musket upward, and the bullet flew over the roofs somewhere. The sergeant dashed his arm to the ground and stared. He might have commanded the soldiers to fire, but he did not. And if he had he would not have been obeyed, I think, just then.

"With his feet against the thickness of the wall and his hairy hands grasping the iron bar, Gaspar sat still. It was an attitude. Nothing happened for a time. And suddenly it dawned upon us that he was straightening his bowed back and

contracting his arms. His lips were twisted into a snarl. Next thing we perceived was that the bar of forged iron was being bent slowly by the mightiness of his pull. The sun was beating full upon his cramped, unquivering figure. A shower of sweat-drops burst out of his forehead. Watching the bar grow crooked, I saw a little blood ooze from under his finger-nails. Then he let go. For a moment he remained all huddled up, with a hanging head, looking drowsily into the upturned palms of his mighty hands. Indeed he seemed to have dozed off. Suddenly he flung himself backwards on the sill, and setting the soles of his bare feet against the other middle bar, he bent that one, too, but in the opposite direction from the first.

"Such was his strength, which in this case relieved my painful feelings. And the man seemed to have done nothing. Except for the change of position in order to use his feet, which made us all start by its swiftness, my recollection is that of immobility. But he had bent the bars wide apart. And now he could get out if he liked; but he dropped his legs inwards, and looking over his shoulder beckoned to the soldiers. 'Hand up the water,' he said. 'I will give them all a drink.'

"He was obeyed. For a moment I expected man and bucket to disappear, overwhelmed by the rush of eagerness; I thought they would pull him down with their teeth. There was a rush, but holding the bucket on his lap he repulsed the assault of those wretches by the mere swinging of his feet. They flew backwards at every kick, yelling with pain; and the soldiers laughed, gazing at the window.

"They all laughed, holding their sides, except the sergeant, who was gloomy and morose. He was afraid the prisoners would rise and break out—which would have been a bad example. But there was no fear of that, and I stood myself before the window with my drawn sword. When sufficiently tamed by the strength of Gaspar Ruiz they came up one by

one, stretching their necks and presenting their lips to the edge of the bucket which the strong man tilted towards them from his knees with an extraordinary air of charity, gentleness, and compassion. That benevolent appearance was of course the effect of his care in not spilling the water and of his attitude as he sat on the sill; for, if a man lingered with his lips glued to the rim of the bucket after Gaspar Ruiz had said 'You have had enough,' there would be no tenderness or mercy in the shove of the foot which would send him groaning and doubled up far into the interior of the prison, where he would knock down two or three others before he fell himself. They came up to him again and again; it looked as if they meant to drink the well dry before going to their death; but the soldiers were so amused by Gaspar Ruiz's systematic proceedings that they carried the water up to the window cheerfully.

"When the adjutant came out after his siesta there was some trouble over this affair, I can assure you. And the worst of it was that the general whom we expected never came to the castle that day."

The guests of General Santierra unanimously expressed their regret that the man of such strength and patience had not been saved.

"He was not saved by my interference," said the General. "The prisoners were led to execution half an hour before sunset. Gaspar Ruiz, contrary to the sergeant's apprehensions, gave no trouble. There was no necessity to get a cavalry man with a lasso in order to subdue him, as if he were a wild bull of the campo. I believe he marched out with his arms free amongst the others who were bound. I did not see. I was not there. I had been put under arrest for interfering with the prisoner's guard. About dusk, sitting dismally in my quarters, I heard three volleys fired, and thought that I should never hear of Gaspar Ruiz again. He fell with the others. But we were to hear of him nevertheless, though the sergeant boasted that as