

A Stone Soldier

He Coolly Stood Guard in the Presence of Mexican Bandits

By F. A. MITCHEL

During the administration of the government of Mexico by Porfirio Diaz a young American, Edward Ingersoll, who had just married a young woman, went to the state of Durango to settle. Northern capital was then pouring into Mexico, and the prospect of prosperity was greater than ever before. Diaz had held the discordant elements in check for many years, and it looked as if the continued succession of revolutions was over.

The young emigrant was a stonemason and settled in a town where the wooden buildings were being torn down to give place to those of a more substantial character. Having purchased a small tract on the outskirts of the place, he built on it a dwelling house and a shed, under which he kept his material. Besides getting out the ordinary stonework for the ornamentation of buildings, he designed and constructed marble monuments. His instincts were artistic, and, although his figures were crude, some of them were fairly well executed.

But scarcely had Ingersoll become settled when the revolution was started which was destined to result in the downfall of the man whose iron hand had kept the peace in Mexico. The Madero revolution destroyed the equilibrium under which Mexico had prospered, and Madero was succeeded by Huerta. In addition to the regular forces (if they deserve the name) pitted against each other, bands of men whose only object was plunder were let loose, and if anything were needed to complete the wreck of Mexico they supplied the deficiency.

The orders which had kept Ingersoll busy dropped away. His business was paralyzed. He would have pulled up and gone back to the United States, but what means he had were invested in his stoneyard, and he could not get it out. He must wait for some new power to seize the government of Mexico that would restrain the conflicting elements. Hoping against hope, he remained where he was, but made what preparation he could with his limited means to resist any attack that might be made upon his premises by marauders from the different armies of the bandits.

Having plenty of stone in his yard, he built miniature fortresses around his dwelling. A parapet was constructed of headstones, either finished or partly finished. Square apertures were left, intended for loopholes through which to fire. But since there was no one except Ingersoll to do the firing and since he had no ordnance there was little prospect of a successful defense.

There were several stone figures in the yard which Ingersoll thought of putting up on his fortresses as scarecrows—that is, in the hope that an enemy seeing them from a distance would believe them to be veritable defenders. But unfortunately they were not suitable to the purpose. One was a white marble angel blowing the resurrection trumpet; another was a saint that had been ordered for a church. There was only one that would be a suitable decoration for a fortification, a life-size statue of a soldier that had been ordered to mark the grave of a young man who had died in the Mexican military service. He was represented standing as if on guard, the butt of his musket on the ground, the barrel resting against his shoulder. Ingersoll could not hope that this stone figure would be mistaken for a live man, but it was the only soldier-like defense at hand, so he lifted it by a derrick onto the rampart.

The fort might deceive an enemy if it could not be plainly seen, but in broad daylight it would deceive nobody. At night it would not be seen at all.

There came a time when a bandit chief determined to loot the town near which Ingersoll lived. He had sent one of his men into the place to discover where the richest plunder was to be obtained and to report thereon. When the spy returned among other persons who might be compelled to disgorge what would be worth having he named Ingersoll. There was no plunder in stones, manufactured or unmanufactured, but Ingersoll was supposed to have money and would doubtless pay well for the lives of himself and family. The spy did not visit the stoneyard, but had heard that some sort of defense had been constructed. The bandit chief, when he approached the town at night, expecting to take the people off their guard and prevent their having time to organize a defense, sent a detachment under one Manuel Nunez to swoop down on the stoneyard and extort all the money the owner had.

"I learn," he said, "that the man is a gringo, and if he doesn't give you all the ready cash you have reason to suppose he possesses kill him and take what you find."

Now, these instructions were given in the home of an American settler whose premises the bandits had looted and were overheard by the despoiled man, who sent his son to Ingersoll to tell him what was to be meted out to him. When the boy appeared at the

stoneyard conveying the awful news it was after dark. He had made a short cut through a forest and a marsh, with both of which he was sufficiently familiar to traverse, but they would be impassable for the bandits, who must take a roundabout route over the road. They had not yet started when the boy left, but were preparing to do so. The Ingersolls calculated that they would have an hour to decide whether to take to flight and if they concluded to remain they would have at least an hour for preparation.

Ingersoll was for immediate flight. His wife was not so minded. They could not take with them their furniture or other effects which they had been a long while accumulating, and the woman could not bear to give them up even if she risked the lives of all of them by remaining to protect their property. She had given much thought to making their fortress effective, but leaning, womanlike, to deception instead of force. She advocated remaining and trying the effect of a certain ruse she had contrived.

About 11 o'clock at night Nunez, with his detachment, came in sight of Ingersoll's premises. One of Ingersoll's children, a girl of twelve, was hiding at an outpost and ran back home by a short path to report their coming. When the bandits came within a few hundred yards of the stoneyard Nunez, who was at their front, suddenly saw a light ahead of him. It was not a bright light, but enough to reveal to him the head and shoulders of a man in the uniform of a Mexican soldier standing with his musket leaning against his left shoulder and with both hands screening a burning match from the wind. He held the flame over a pipe he held in his mouth and lighted his pipe. Even the little puffs of smoke were visible. Then the match went out as suddenly as it had been lighted, and all was dark again. Nunez halted, and his men did the same. When the light went out he turned and said:

"It seems that the place is defended by a force of regular troops."

"And a fortification," put in one of the men. "Didn't you see that the man stood on a parapet?"

"At that moment there came from the stoneyard the notes of a bugle sounding 'taps.'"

"We are not out for soldiers," said Nunez. "I am quite sure the captain would not approve of our bringing on a fight that might land us at the end of a rope and interfere generally with his plans."

"Certainly not," called a voice from the rear.

"But, since we must pass the place," said another, "we may get a nearer view."

"Very well," said Nunez. "Let us proceed."

Now every one on the premises, expecting an attack, was listening and when the tread of feet was heard at a convenient distance up the road Tommy Ingersoll, a youth whose figure was much smaller than the one on the rampart, stationed himself behind it with a match in his hand. Ingersoll, at his wife's suggestion, had dug a hole from the back of the stone soldier's neck to his mouth and inserted a rubber tube. A tobacco pipe had been piced between the lips, and by suction at the other end of the tube the figure would appear to smoke. When the bandits were heard approaching Tom used his own arms in place of the soldier's to strike a match and hold it over the pipe. His father, at the other end of the tube, did the smoking, and the soldier seemed to the bandits to relight his pipe. The light, however, was so small that they got a view not much better than before.

One of the articles the American had laid in for the defense of his fortress was a drum. It belonged to a little boy in the neighborhood and was not in itself an important weapon. But it is not the cannon, the rifle, the sword, or the bayonet that are useful. As in the shrill tone of the bugle, so in the beat of a drum there is inspiration. The Ingersoll garrison did not intend their drum as a means of keeping up their courage, but to inspire their enemy with terror.

The Ingersolls could hear faint sounds made by their enemies and did not know but that they were crawling up upon them. A hurried council of war was held and the question discussed as to what auxiliary to the stone soldier could be adopted. While they were debating Tom seized the drum and began to beat the long roll, which is a signal in all armies for the men to turn out to repel an attack. As an adjunct to this Ingersoll himself sang out, "Fall in!" in a number of different tones, to lead the bandits to suppose that the orders came from different officers.

Nunez gave an order to tread softly and pass the place without a word, lest the garrison be aroused. So the bandits went stealthily by the stone soldier with a stone gun, the only defender of the Ingersoll premises. Nunez led them into the town, where they found the main force plundering, and they joined their comrades in the work. When it had been finished and they were marching on the chief asked Nunez how much he had acquired from the Ingersoll stoneyard.

"Nothing," replied Nunez. "The gringo succeeded in getting protection from the troops. I did not think it prudent to arouse them, since it might have led to interference in speaking the town. I led my men by the place stealthily."

"A wise decision," replied the chief. Ingersoll remained in Mexico till the raids to the United States occurred, when he thought it better to leave his property and save the lives of himself and his family. Having reached the Texas border with his wife and family, Ingersoll took part in the punitive expedition that started in after the bandits.

To France as Battalion. Brookville, Dec. 8.—Private advice received here from one of the officers of the 156th Leeds and Grenville Battalion, which went overseas towards the end of October and

since merged with other battalions, stating that the unit is to be remobilized and will go to France as a pioneer battalion. The choice lay between a forestry and pioneer, and the latter was selected.

E. E. Riley, B.S.A., Shannonville, is assisting Mr. Smith in the Department of Agriculture at Athens.

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