

## CHAPTER XV

### LOUIS PACHECO BIDES HIS TIME

TAMPA BAY was filled with transports waiting to carry the Seminoles to New Orleans on their way to the Indian Territory. On shore, the soldiers' encampment beneath the grand old live-oaks of Fort Brooke swarmed with troops, newly arrived from the north, and hoping that the Indians would at least make a show of resistance. Of course, no one wanted a prolonged war; but a brisk campaign with plenty of fighting, that would last through the winter, would be a most pleasing diversion from the ordinary monotony of military life. It was not supposed, however, that the Seminoles would fight. Major Francis Dade was so certain of this, that he volunteered to march across the Indian country with only a corporal's guard at his back.

Among those who prayed most earnestly for a taste of fighting, in which they might prove the metal of which they were made, were several lieutenants recently emancipated from West Point and ordered to duty on this far southern frontier.

A few days before Christmas, 1835, a jovial party of three young officers was assembled in the hospi-

table house of a planter, a few miles from Fort Brooke. They were to dine there, and at the dinner table the sole topic of conversation was the impending war. The Indians had been given until the end of December to make their preparations for emigration, and to assemble at the appointed places of rendezvous. On the first day of January, 1836, their reservation was to be thrown open to the throngs of speculators already on hand, and with difficulty restrained from rushing in and seizing the coveted lands without waiting for the Indians to vacate them.

General Clinch had decided to send Major Dade, not, indeed, with a corporal's guard, but with two companies of troops, to reinforce the garrison at Fort King. From that post, which was well within the reservation, he was to move against the Indians and compel them to move promptly on January 1, if they showed a disinclination to do so of their own accord.

Several of the young officers assembled about the planter's dinner table were to accompany this expedition, and their anticipations of the pleasures of the campaign were only equalled by the regrets of those who were to be left behind.

Some one suggested that there might be some fighting before the troops returned, and that their march might be attended with a certain amount of danger.

“Danger?” cried Lieutenant Mudge, the gayest spirit of the party, and the most popular man at the post. “Let us hope there will be some danger. What would a soldier’s life be without it? A weary round of drill. Hurrah, then, for danger! say I. Louis, fill the glasses. Now, gentlemen, I give you the toast of ‘A short campaign and a merry one, with plenty of hard fighting, plenty of danger, and speedy promotion to all good fellows.’”

The toast was hailed with acclamation and drunk with a cheer; while after it the calls for Louis grew louder, more frequent, and more peremptory than ever. It was “Here, Louis!” “Here, you nigger!” “Step lively now!” from all sides, and the bewildering orders were so promptly obeyed by the deft-handed, intelligent-appearing young mulatto, who answered to the name of Louis, that he was unanimously declared to be a treasure. Those of the officers who were to remain at Fort Brooke, envied the planter such a capital servant, and those who were to accompany the expedition to Fort King, wished they might take him with them to wait on their mess.

“Well, I don’t know but that can be arranged,” remarked the planter, thoughtfully. “Major Dade was asking me to-day where he could obtain a reliable guide, and Louis, who overheard him, has since told me that he is intimately acquainted with the country between here and Fort King. Isn’t that so, boy?”



"Yes, sir," replied the mulatto; "I was born and brought up in this country, and I know every foot of the way from here to Fort King like I know the do-yard of my ole mammy's cabin."

This answer was delivered so quietly, and with such an apparent air of indifference, that no one looking at the man would have suspected the wild tumult of thought seething within his breast at that moment. For months he had waited, planned, hoped, and endured, for such an opportunity as this. At last it had come. He was almost unnerved by conflicting emotions, and to conceal them, he flew about the table more actively than ever, anticipating every want of his master's guests, and waiting on them with an assiduity that went far to confirm the good impression already formed of him.

Once, Lieutenant Mudge, happening to glance up at an instant when Louis was intently regarding him, was startled by a fleeting expression that swept across the man's face. For a second his eyes glared like those of a famished tiger, and his lips seemed to be slightly drawn back from the clinched white teeth. Although the devilish look vanished as quickly as it came, leaving only the respectful expression of a well-trained servant in its place, it gave the young soldier a shock, and filled him with a vague uneasiness that he found hard to shake off. He spoke of it afterwards to his host, but the latter only laughed and said:

“Nonsense, my dear boy ! It must have been the champagne. I have had that nigger for nearly a year now, and a more honest, faithful, intelligent, and thoroughly reliable servant I never owned. If Dade will pay a fair price for him, I will let him go for a few months, and thus you will secure a reliable guide and a capital table servant, both in one.”

In answer to some further inquiries concerning Louis, he said : “I’d no idea he was born in this part of the country or knew anything about it, but as he says he does, it must be so, for I have never known him to tell a lie. He knows it would not be safe to lie to me. I got him from a trader in Charleston last spring, and only brought him down here a couple of months ago, when I came to look after this plantation. But you can depend on Louis. He don’t dare deceive me, for he knows if he did I’d kill him. I make it a rule to have none but thoroughly honest servants about me, and they all know it.”

The reader has doubtless surmised ere this that the servant whom his master praised so highly was no other than Louis Pacheco, friend of Coacoochee, the free dweller beside the Tomoka, whom the slave-catchers had kidnapped and carried off.

Inheriting the refinement of his Spanish father, well educated, and accomplished, Louis would have killed himself rather than submit to the degradation

of the lot imposed upon him, but for one thing — the same spirit that actuated Osceola during his imprisonment restrained Louis from any act against his own life. He lived that he might obtain revenge. So bitter was his hatred of the whole white race, that at times he could scarcely restrain its open expression.

He managed, however, to control himself and devoted his entire energies to winning the confidence, not only of the man who had bought him, but of all the other whites with whom he was thrown in contact. Thus did he prepare the more readily to carry out his plans when the time came. He saw his aged mother die from overwork in the cotton-fields, without betraying the added bitterness of his feelings, and was even laughingly chided by his master for not displaying greater filial affection. He planned a negro insurrection, but could not carry it out. Then he conceived the project of inducing a great number of negroes to run away with him, and join his friends the Seminoles, but this scheme also came to naught. He was planning to escape alone and make his way to Florida, where he hoped to find some trace of the dearly loved sister from whom he had been so cruelly separated, when chance favored him, and his master brought him to the very place where he most desired to be.

In Tampa, he quickly learned of the condition of affairs between the Indians and whites, and he



looked eagerly about for some means of aiding his friends in their approaching struggle.

The proposed expedition of Major Dade, for the relief and reinforcement of Fort King, was kept a secret so far as possible, for fear lest it should delay the coming in of numbers of Indians, who were supposed to be on their way to the several designated points of assembly. It was, however, freely discussed in the presence of Louis Pacheco, for he was supposed to be so well content with his present position, and to have so little knowledge of Indian affairs, that it could make no difference whether he knew of it or not.

So Louis listened, and treasured all the stray bits of information thus obtained, and put them together until he was possessed of a very clear idea of the existing state of affairs, and of what the whites intended doing.

Through the field hands of the plantation he opened communication with the free negroes who dwelt among the Indians. Thus he soon learned that his friend Coacoochee was now a war-chief and an influential leader among the Seminoles.

Now the hour of his triumph, the time of his revenge, had surely come. If he could only obtain the position of guide to Major Dade's little army, what would be easier than to deliver them into the hands of Coacoochee? What a bitter blow that would be to the whites, and how it would

strengthen the Seminole cause! How far it would go toward repaying him for the death of his mother, the loss of his beautiful sister, his own weary slavery, and the destruction of their happy home on the Tomoka! Yes, it must be done.

The day after that of the dinner party his master concluded arrangements with Major Dade, by which Louis was engaged as guide to the expedition and steward of the officers' mess. So the slave was ordered to hold himself in readiness to start on Christmas Day.