

EXECUTION OF THE BROTHERS AGUERO.

Sketch of Their Career—Pursuit and Capture—
Wonderful Feat of Endurance—Their Trial
and Sentence—Sympathy for Their
Fate—Unexampled Heroism—De-
tails of the Execution.

HAVANA, May 17, 1870.

On Saturday last Spanish Havana was gratified with the execution by the garrote of two young men of good birth, superior education and gentle manners, for the crime of resisting Spanish domination in this island and fighting for what the Americans deem the inalienable right of self-government. They died with perfect calmness and serenity, winning reluctant admiration from their enemies and many an expression of sympathy from others.

Gaspar and Diego Agüero, respectively twenty-six and twenty-two years of age, were born in the city of Puerto Principe, sons of Don Constantino and Donna Graciana Agüero, both belonging to the old blue-blood families of Camaguey. The oldest was educated in Paris, the other in New York, in which latter place both had resided for a considerable time. They were both highly accomplished adepts in all physical exercises, speaking many languages and acquainted with the literature of all. Gaspar was in Puerto Principe when the insurrection broke out, having recently returned thither from France. He was among the first who took the field after the inauguration of the Yara insurrection, and was placed in command of one of the small parties of insurgents. He took possession of San Miguel after its abandonment by the Spaniards, of which place he was named Governor. On the retreat of Valmaceda from Bouilla he marched out of the town and waited for the troops near Paso del Saladillo. Here his raw recruits ran away after firing a few shots, whereupon he dropped upon one knee, with his Spencer carbine in his hand, and continued firing with deadly aim upon the Spaniards until he was surrounded and captured. He was tried and sentenced to death; but upon the intercession of the Spanish officers, who were struck with his audacious heroism, his sentence was commuted to imprisonment for ten years. He was sent to Havana and placed in the Morro, from whence he was released under the amnesty proclamation of Dulce, but was ordered to Spain. Arrived there he was unconditionally released by the Regent and at once proceeded to New York. He accompanied the Llan expedition, which, it will be recollected, proved a failure, the vessel putting into Wilmington, N. C., when it was seized by the American government.

Proceeding to New York, he at once commenced preparations for another attempt to reach the island. Though it cannot be positively stated, yet it is probable that his brother was with him the greater part, if not all, the time after his return from Europe, where they had met and sailed together for New York. Be this as it may, a short time before the last expedition of Golconda the two brothers, with four others, left one of the Bahama Keys in an open boat and safely reached the island. Here they served with the insurgents, joining Golconda on his arrival and remaining with him until he was directed to proceed on his mission to Mexico, whither they were to accompany him. The facts of the discovery of the party as they were about putting off from the Key, Guajaba by one of the gunboats, their return and compulsory abandonment of their boat, is familiar to the readers of the HERALD, and need not be repeated here. After wandering about for a few days and realizing that they must soon be captured or die of hunger the brothers determined to swim to the Cayo Romano, a distance of one and a half miles, the current running at the rate of five miles an hour and the channel known to be the resort of a large number of sharks. Notwithstanding the difficulties and dangers of the passage, their high physical training enabled them to accomplish it in safety; but on approaching Cayo Romano, in a state of nudity, they were observed by a party of marines and captured. From that moment their march to the scaffold commenced. They were placed on board a gunboat, from thence transferred to the steamer Pajaro del Oceano, and, in charge of an officer and four marines, brought to Havana. From the time of their capture they maintained the most perfect serenity, eating, sleeping, reading and chatting with the officers, as though on a pleasure excursion.

The brothers were tried by court martial, and sentenced to die by the garrote. Even the Spaniards, who seldom have a tear for their enemies, were affected by their unassuming, yet noble, bearing, and it is stated that the Spanish officer who defended them at one stage of the proceedings broke into an uncontrollable fit of weeping. After the sentence was read to them they turned and grasped each other's hands, with a cheerful smile, and spoke a few words in English, not understood by those around them, but regarded as words of affection and encouragement. They were at once placed in the capilla, when two Jesuit priests were sent them. These they received with gentle courtesy, but declined to receive the consolations of the Church, professing themselves Nationalists. The priests were fascinated by their manner and bearing, and afterwards were loud in their encomiums upon them. They were subsequently taken to the Principe fortress, the hour of four Saturday evening being fixed for the execution. An immense crowd gathered, and it is estimated that full 7,000 people were present. The scaffold had been built very high in order that the spectacle—for as such was it intended—might be witnessed by all.

Before being taken to execution the brothers were removed from them that they might bid each other farewell. As the chains dropped from them they embraced each other, the elder quietly remarking in French, "*Mourons tranquillement et sans parler*"—Let us die tranquilly and without speaking. The youngest leaped from the fortress first, and was marched on foot to the fatal spot, a distance of near half a mile. He walked quietly, smoking the Cuban's inevitable cigarette, which he threw from him at the foot of the scaffold. Remarking the distance, he said to the priest, "the way is very long; I shall be tired before I reach there." On arriving he, of his own motu, seated himself in the chair, and observing that it was too high rose again that it might be adjusted. He placed his head in the collar when the priest checked the executioner for a moment, again requesting him to confess. His only response was "*Acaba pronto*" finish quickly! The huge negro behind turned the fatal crank, a spasmodic thrusting forward of the lower part of the body followed, and a hero sat there dead. The corpse was taken from the chair and laid upon the platform, covered by a piece of canvas.

When the elder brother, who meanwhile had been marching from the fortress, mounted the scaffold, he gazed at his dead brother lying there, and, looking around upon the people, seemed about to speak, when the drums began beating. An amused smile stole over his features. He seated himself in the chair, declined the offer of the priest and in an instant had gone to join the other, while loud shouts of "*Viva España!*" broke from the volunteers in attendance and the populace.

In personal appearance the brothers Agüero were unusually prepossessing. Of the two the younger was the taller. They had dark eyes and hair, like their race, and in their death manifested a stoicism worthy of the Indian blood which doubtless flowed in their veins.

The fact that they were brought here to suffer an ignominious death by the garrote instead of being shot has caused much speculation and no small share of indignation. Even the Spanish officers say, "We all think it was wrong to garrote them. The government state that it was owing to their being part of the filibustering party of Golconda. The truth doubtless is that they were sent here that their death might afford gratification to the uneasy spirits among the volunteers and to create the impression that the insurrection is at an end. Be this as it may, the indignation among foreigners and neutrals here is beyond description, and curses loud and deep are uttered by many who have been wont to hope for an early triumph of the Spanish cause.