

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER 1-Don Esteban Varona. Ouban planter, possesses a great treasure ye." card. This wealth has been hidden in on the estate by Sebastian, a slave, only he and his master know the secache. Don Esteban's wife dies at birth of twins, Esteban and Ross. ton Esteban marries the avaricious Donna eabel, who knows there is hidden treaswhen the slave refuses she tries burt him by having Evangeline, his Soughter, whom he loves dearly and who the special servant of the twins, sold

CHAPTER II-Through Donna Isabel's scheming Don Esteban risks Evangelina cards and loses. Crased by the loss of de daughter, Sebastian kills Don Esteand himself

CHAPTER III.

"The O'Reilly."

Age and easy living had caused Don Mario de Castano, the sugar merchant, to take on weight. He had, in truth. become so fat that he waddled like a penguin when he walked; and when he rode, the springs of his French victoria gave up in despair.

In disposition Don Mario was practical and unromantic; he boasted that interest outside of his business. And pet, on the day this story opens, this prosnic personage, in spite of his buiging waisthand and his taut neckband. in spite of his short breath and his prickly bent, was in a very whirt of pleasurable excitement. I on Marto, in fact, suffered the greatest of all illucions: he was in love, and he believed himself beloved. The object of his adoration was little Ross Varona, the Caughter of his one-time friend Esteban. To be sure, he had met Rosa only twice since her return from her Yankee school, but twice had been enough; with prompt decision he had resolved to do her the honor of making her his

Notwithstanding the rivulets of permiration that were coursing down every fold of his flesh, and regardless of the fact that the body of his victoria was tipped at a drunken angle, as if druggling to escape the burdens of his ment weight. Don Marto feit a jauntius of body and of spirit almost like routh. He saw himself as a prince riding toward the

contain her curtosity when she came to tion here in Cuba, where, from the very man to inconvenience himself by mere to be more rapid than in the New York | Americans so bitterty social visits. Their first formal greet office of his firm. tags over Don Mario surveyed the bare. A dancing eye speaks every lanliving room and remarked, lugubri

"I see many changes here." the widow agreed "Times have been hard since poor Es teban's death."

"What a terrible calamity that was himself serenely to his surroundings I shudder when I think of it," said be "A shocking affair, truly' and one shall never get out of my mind."

"Shocking, yes. But what do you went all his complacency. His contentthink of a rich man, like Esteban, who would leave his family destitute? Who would die without revealing the place where he had stored his treasure?"

Donna Isabel, it was plain, felt her wrongs keenly; she spoke with as much epirit as if her husband had permitted himself to be killed purely out of spite accident, twice by design, and three toward her.

"As if it were not enough to lose that treasure," the widow continued. stormlly. "the government must free all our slaves. The! The! And now that there is no longer a profit in agreeable of all cities, since it consugar, my plantations..."

"No profit in sugar? What are you for man's happiness. Yet, despite the caying?" queried the caller. "If your crops do not pay, then Pancho Cueto not at all pleased with himself, for, as is cheating you. Get rid of him. But I it happened, there was another girl didn't come here to talk about Este back home, and during his first year ban's hidden treasure, nor his plants. of loneliness he had written to her tions, nor Pancho Cueto. I came here more freely and more frequently than a Spanish child in Cuba. We are Cuto talk about your step-daughter, any man on such a salary as his had a bans, Ross and I. I go everywhere, and Ross."

"So?" Donna Isabel looked up Inasmuch as her father was O'Reil-

quickly. "She interests me. She is more beau. Rosa Varona's home-coming seriously tiful than the stars." Don Mario rolled | complicated matters, not only from a his eyes toward the high ceiling, which, sentimental, but from a business standlike the sky, was tinted a vivid ceru- point. lean blue.

went on, ecstatically, "and so alto de Esteban, late on the afternoon of gether charming. But why waste Dan Mario's visit. Instead of going ditime in pretty speeches? I have de rectly to the house, as the merchant cided to marry her."

"Ross has a will of her own," guard- road and, after tethering his horse in

edly ventured the stepmother. Don Mario broke out, testily: "Nat- on foot. He did not like Donna Isabel. ly. urally; so have we all. Now let us nor did Donna Isabel like him. Morespeak plainty. You know me. I am a over, he had a particular reason for There'll be time enough when-" person of importance, I am rich avoiding her today. Just inside the Varona premises he enough to afford what I want, and I pay well. You understand? Well, then, paused an instant to admire the out- uneasity and dropped his eyes. O'Rellyou are Rosa's guardian and you can look. The quints commanded an excel- ly laid a hand upon his arm. "You bend her to your desires."

What tempers—just like from the city to gaze over into that glance. their father's! They were to be their urable surprise at finding it still there. she cate and dogs."

O'Reilly." Donna Isabel gave the name its Spanish pronunciation of "O'Rail-

But what has he to offer a woman? He ed: "That's what robs the affair of its it's a magnificent business ability that

is little more than a cierk."

"That is what I tell her. Ob. it basn't gone far as yet." "Good!" Don Mario rose to leave, for the exertion of his ride had made

him thirsty. "You may name your own

"You May Name Your Own Reward."

reward for helping me and I will pay

It the day Ross marries me. Now kind-

ly advise her of my intentions and tell .

gunge; a singing beart gathers its own

audience Before the young Irish-

American had more than a bowing ac-

qualitatance with the commonest Span-

ance with summe of the most exclusive

people of Matanana. He had adjusted

when Hemn Varona rearried from

school but with her coming, away

ment vanished, he experienced a total

change in his opinions, his hopes, and

He discovered for example, that Ma-

tanzas was by no means the out-of-the-

contrary, after meeting Ross once by

times by mutual arrangement, it had

chief city of Cuba, if not, perhaps, the

hub around which the whole world re-

volved; certainly it was the most

tained everything that was necessary

thrill of his awakening. O'Reilly was

ly's "company" it may be seen that

ate ambittons.

right to do.

ish "erts he had a calling acquaint

her I shall come to see her soon."

her dimpled hand I'm holding." "Ob-h " The girl allowed his grasp will you. Home ?" to remain. "But lashed's hand isn't! "1? Miss you?" Ross lifted her dimpled: it's thin and bony. I've felt brown in pretended amazement. "You it on my ears often enough."

telt called upon to tell her, somewhat

of mingled pleasure and surprise.

dreamed that I see you as often as I

do- Well-" Bosa lifted her elo-

quent hands and eyes heavenward.

good lady's life totally unbearable."

After judicious consideration, O'Reil-

"There's no fun in wreaking a hor-

it's your idea to irritate your stepmoth-

so dearly love to spite her."

low you to come any more."

made love directly to her."

ly pretended to agree.

tremendously angry."

bel, my little darling-" 'Isabel' exclaimed a voice, and the lovers started guiltily apart. They turned to find Estaban, Ross's twin solvedy would have me? The richest brother staring at them oddly. "Ion man in Maintenas has asked for my

bel?" he repented. "What's this?" "You interrupted our theatricals. I was rebearant an impassioned prepossal to your beloved stepmother." (rHeilly laughed with relief, and annoyance.

"Yes, Senor C'Reilly believes he can infuriate lasted by laying slege to her. He'n a fescilish perment " Resm's cheeks were faintly flushed and her color deepened at the ammement in Enternation of on "He makes love wretchedly " "What little I overheard wasn't bad."

Entelian declared; then be took O'Reilly's hand.

Coteman was a handsomen boy. straight, alim and manly, and his re-With a look engaging in its frank di-

restress, he said: "Ross told me about thom he had practously chosen to be friends called him-had little in the teay. I'm serry we can't invite you way of worldly advantage to offer any late our house, but-you understand? His arrival threw Donna Isabel in girl, and it was precisely because of Rosa and I are not like her; we are Butter; the woman could scarcely this fact that he had accepted a post- quite liberal in our views; we are almeet him, for he was not the sort of nature of things, promotion was likely ony that's what makes Isabel hate

"Wouldn't it please her to know that I'm becoming ('ubanized as fast as ever I can?" ventured the caller. "Oh, she hates Cubans, too!" laughed the brother. "She's Spanish, you know. Well, it's fortunate you didn't see her

tenday. Br-r: What a temper: She'll: walk in her sleep tonight, if ever. Ross nodded soberty, and O'Reilly, suppressing some light reply that had

eprung to his lips, inquired, curiously, "What do you mean by that?" Brother and sister joined in explain ing that Donna Isabel was given to pecultar actions, especially after periods of excitement or anger, and that one of

her eccentricities had taken the form of somnambulistic wanderings. "Oh, she's crazy enough," Esteban conway place he had considered it; on the "I believe it's ber evil con-O'Reilly scanned the speaker silently for a moment; then he said, with a dawned upon him that this was the gravity unusual to him, "I wonder if

you know that you're suspected ofworking for the insurrecto cause." "Indeed? I didn't know." "Well, it's a fact." O'Reilly beard

Ross gasp faintly. "Is it true?" be "I am a Cuban."

"True. But no Spaniard ever raised

"Cuban? Your people were Span-

the Spanish officers talk plainly before me. Somebody must be the eyes to his. and the ears for Colonel Lopez." "Colonel Lopez!" excisimed O'Reilly. Esteban nodded

Ross's face, as she looked at the two men, was white and worried. For a It was in a thoughtful mood that he | time the three of them sat silent; then "She is now eighteen," the fat suitor | rode up La Cumbre toward the Quinta | the American said, slowly, "You'll be shot if you're caught." "Some one must run chances." Este-

ban averred. "We're fighting tyranny had done. O'Reilly turned off from the all Cuba is ablaze. I must do my part. "But sooner or later you'll be disa cluster of guava bushes, proceeded covered—then what?" persisted O'Reil-

Esteben shrugged. "Who knows? "What of Ross ?" At this question the brother stirred

lent view of the Yumuri, on the one have no right to jeopardize her safety. "If that were only so!" exclaimed hand, and of the town and harbor on Without you, to whom could she turn? the woman. "She and Esteban—what the other; no one ever climbed the hill The girl flashed her admirer a grateful

ter of the open space was an old well, But for once O'Rellly's ready tongue was silent. The laughter was gon from his blue eyes when he turned to When Ross at last appeared, O'Reilly the girl at his side,

"You say you are going away?" Rosa inquired, breathlessly, "But why?" "I'm going partly because of war and partly because of -something else. I tried to tell you yesterday, bu he had ever made to her, she blushed When the revolution start prettily, flashing him a dimpled smile ed everybody thought it was merely a local uprising, and I wrote my company to that effect; but, bless you, it has spread like fire, and now the whole eastern end of the island is ablaze. Business has stopped, and my employ-"It's that stepmother-Inabel. If she ers have ordered me home to find out

what's happened to their profits." "You said there wins something suppose that's why I enjoy doing it--- | else---"

O'Reilly's besitation became an em-

"I see!" O'Reilly puckered his barrassed silence. He tried to laugh brows and nodded. "But why, in that It off. "There is; otherwise fd stny right case, haven't you seen me oftener? We might just as well have made the whistle for their profits. It seems I'm "Silly! She knows nothing about "Juan O'Reilly? O'Reilly? Oh, yes! it." With a firtatious sigh Ross add- have noticed it? No? Well, perhaps chief pleasure. Since it does not bother I have. Anyhow, the president of my

> him a good son-in-law." "I-- Oh!" cried Ross. And at her tone O'Reilly hurried on :

rible revenge, when your enemy tan't surd ideas. I suppose I'll have to---" "Then you are in love, senor?" wise to it," he acknowledged. "Since The young man nodded vigorously. er, perhaps it would annoy her if I "Indeed I am with the sweetest girl shook his head. in Cuba. That's the whole trouble. Ross tittered, and then inquired, That's why I'm hurrying home to remoment be ventured. "Will she-er- bushand."

tre amuning of course, but - I won't "Don't interrupt," he told her. "Inn. have much time to think about you. for I am so seem to be married."

erty with the rest of his valuables, and "Married? What? Nonsense!" "Indeed: In you think I'm so ugly hand this very afternoon."

"Who? Mario de Castano?"

(FReilly explained, with a pretense of though Ross tried to look offended, know," she admitted, "and he makes time you. Well, to be honest, so

rich men." "I hate 'em!" announced O'Reilly, to which you have no right?" Then for a second time be took Hosa's dimpled hand, saying, earnestly: "I'm sure you know now why I make love so badly dear. It's my Irish conectence. And you'll wait until I come

back won't your "Will you be gone-very long?" she

O'Retily looked deeply now into the dark eyes turned to his, and found that at last there was no coquetry in them



"Will You Be Gene--- Very Long?" She Asked.

coherent exciamation he held out his crucified her proud spirit. arms. Ross Varona crept into them; All day she brooded, and by the time force. "It's old Don Esteban your fa about. But the place was secluded; he then with a sigh she upturned her lips evening came she had worked herself ther. They say he walks at midnight was unobserved. When he finished

"I'll wait forever," she said.

CHAPTER IV.

Retribution. bel had been sure in her own mind that merely a matter of a dagger or a pis- emerged from the shadows into the One afternoon, perhaps a week later, Pancho Cueto, her administrador, was tol, while he slept-but further thought open moonlight; then he sighed with Don Mario de Castano came puffing robbing her, she had never mustered revealed appalling risks and difficult relief: "Ab-b! Now I see! It is my and blowing up to the quinta, demandcourage to call him to a reckoning. ties, and she decided to wait. Poison stepmother. She is asleep." Nevertheless. De Castano's blunt accu- was far safer.

Cueto was plainly curious to learn appeared, but for once he neither why he had been sent for, but since cursed nor threatened her; and Estehe asked no questions, his employer ban, when he came, was again the progress toward the mouth of the well inquired the girl. was forced to open the subject her- lover who had courted her in Haself. Through dry, white lips she be bane. It was amazing, delightful.

plantations are falling, and so-" Pan- telling her about his casks of Spanish not to hear. She turned her head to not leave this insurrection to your che Cueto's even were set close to his sovereigns, about those boxes bound listes, but continued to walk.

eban would rise from his grave. It was his wish that the plantations

go to his children intact." "And his wish is sacred to you, eh! Cueto nodded his approval, although his smile was disconcerting. "An ac mirable sentiment! It does you honor But speaking on this subject, I am reminded of that dispute with Jose Oroz over the boundary to La Joya. I have with the proofs about the boundary was written upon the thinnest of pa- was the last to be roused by Esteban's line. That would be better than a per, and when it was finished the outeries. When he had burriedly lawsuit, wouldn't it?"

But-I will settle with "Decidedly!

him myself." Cueto lifted an admonitory hand, his face alight with the faintest glimmer of tronic mirth. "I couldn't trust you to the mercies of that ruscal," he said here and tell my penurious friends to piously. "No. I shall go on as I am, even at a sacrifice to myseif. I love cursed with a fatal beauty. You may Don Esteban's children as my very own; and you, senora-"

Isobet knew that she must win complete victory at once or accept ir-

her in the least, I think I will not al- company has a notion that I'd make retrievable defeat. "Never!" she interrupted, with a tone of finality. "I can't accept your sacrifice. I am not worthy. Kindly "These rich men have the most ab- arrange to turn over your books of account at once."

Then Pancho Cueto did an unexpected thing: he laughed shortly and

Donna Isabel was ready to faint and her voice quavered as she went on: naively, "Can you make love, senor?" sign before I'm fired." Not during to "Understand me, we part the best of "Can It's the one ability an look too long or too deeply into Rosa friends despite all I have heard against O'Bellly inherits. Listen to this new." Varona's eyes until she had taken in you. I do not believe these stories Reaching forth, he took Hosa's fingers the whole truth, he waited, staring at people tell, for you probably have enin his: "Walt!" he cried as she resist his feet. "I m sort of glad it has come emies. Even if all they said were I tell you we have to be careful these. The treasure for which the woman had ed. "Pretend that you're Mrs. Varons, to a show down and I can speak out, true, I should force myself to be leniyour own steptnother, and that this is I'm hoping she il miss me." After a ent because of your affection for my

The man rome, still amiling "It is I who have been lenient, said be-

"Et: Spenk plainly." "Clindly I have long suspected that I son Esteban hid the deeds of his prop-

now that you admit --Donna Inabel recoiled sharply. "Admit! Are you mad? Deeds' What ore you talking about?" Her eyes met him." his bravely enough, but she could feel her ligs trembling loosery.

Casting aside all pretense, the overseer exclaimed: "Por el amor de Pion! An end to this! I know why you sent she was forced to smile. "He's fat, I for me. You think I have been rule funny notions when he breathes, but he have. Why should I toll as I do while to richer than Croesus, and I adore you and those twins live here in luxury and idleness, squandering money

"Have I lost my reason?" gasped the widow "No right?"

"At least no better right than I. I hom't you understand? You have no title to these plantations. They are mine, for I have poid the taxes out of own pockets now these many rears.

"Taxes' What do you mean?" I paid them. The receipts are in

"Heaven! Such perfidy! And you who knew him !"

"The deeds have been lost for so long that the property would have reverted to the crown had it not been for me. You doubt that, ch? Well, appeal to the court and you will find that it is true. Now, then, let us be frank tnesmuch as we're both in much the same fix, hadn't we better continue our present arrangements?" He stared unblinkingly at his intener. "Oh. mean it! Is it not better for you to be content with what my generosity prompts me to give, rather than to risk ruth for both by grasping for ton

"The outrage! I warrant you have grown rich through your stealing Inabel's voice had gone flat with con-

sternation. "Rich? Well, not exactly, but comfortably well off " Cuete actually smiled again. "No doubt my frankness is a shock to you. You are angry at my proposition ch? Never mind. You will think better of it in time, if you are a sensible woman. But now, since at last we enjoy such confidential relations, let us have no more of these miserable suspicions of each other. Let us entirely forget this unpleasant intennderstanding and be the same good friends as before."

Having said this, Pancho Cueto stood silent a moment in polite expectancy : then receiving no intelligible reply, he bowed low and left the room.

To the avaricious Donna Isabel Cueto's frank acknowledgment of theft was maddening, and the restigation anywhere-nothing but a lonesome, that she was helpless, nay, dependent hungry yearning-and with a glad, in- upon his charity for her living, fairly

Esteban and she were walking through

Esteban Varona sat until a late hour that night over a letter which required writer inclosed it in an envelope of the slipped into his clothes in response to same material. Esteban put the letter, the pounding on his door, the few servin his pocket without addressing it, ants that the establishment supported Letting himself out into the night, he had been thoroughly awakened. Cueto took the path that led to the old sunken garden. He passed close by the well, and its gaping mouth, only half protected by the broken coping. reminded him that he had promised Ross to cover it with planks. In its present condition it was a menace to animals, if not to human beings who

were unaware of its presence. Seating himself on one of the old stone benches, the young man lit a cignrette and composed himself wait. He sat there for a long time. grumbling inwardly, for the night was damp and he was sleepy; but at last ged negro, dressed in the fashion of hoist the dripping, hert weight which the poorer country people.

"Well, Asensio, I thought you'd never come. I'll get a fever from this!" Esteban said irritably.

ed himself. "One hears a great deal, had scarched to no purpose whatso There is fighting in Santa Clara, and it in her arms Maceo sweeps westward."

his perket. Esteban said. "I have an town Cueto drew Esteban uside and other message for Colonel Lopez." "That Lopez! He's here today and there tomorrow; one can never fluid

"Well, you must find him, and immediately. Aserssio. This letter contains important news so important, in fact"-Esteban laughed lightly "that if you find yourself in danger from the Spaniards I'd advise you to chew it up and swallow it as quickly as you can." "I'll remember that," said the negro, "for there's danger enough Still, fear these Spaniards less that the guerrilleros: they are everywhere. They call themselves patriots, but they

Asensio paused abruptly. He seized Donna Isabel's death is no disappoint his commention by the arm and lean ment to anyone. Anythody could seeing forward, tared across the level garden into the shadows opposite hatch red and white. "You seem to Something . . moving there, under imply something outrageous." the trees; the men could see that it : was white and formless, and that it stand you perfectly my boy. But an

pursued an erratic course. breath became audible. Esteban was stepmother when she plunged into that



"What's That?" Gasped the Negro.

into such a state of nerves that she carrying his head in his two hands, reading he rose, smiling. He no longer could eat no dinner. Some time during Young Varona managed to whisper, feared Esteban. On the contrary, he the course of the evening a wild idea with some show of courage "Hush" rather pitied the young fool; for here came to Isabel. Knowing that the man. Wait! I don't believe in ghosts. Nev. between his fingers was that which ager would spend the night beneath ertheless, he was on the point of set not only promised to remove the boy her roof, she planned to kill him. At ting Asensio an example of undignified from his path forever, but to place in Although for a long time Donna Isa- first it seemed a simple thing to do- flight when the mysterious object

For a moment or two they watched delay. With a directness unusual even sation, coupled with her own urgent Constant brooding over the treasure the progress of the white-robed figure; in him, Don Mario began: needs, served to fix her resolution, and had long since affected Donna Isabel's then Esteban stirred and rose from his "Rosa, my dear, you and Esteban on the day after the merchant's visit brain, and as a consequence she often sent. "She's too close to that well, have been discovered! I was at lunch she sent for the overseer, who at the dreamed about it. She dreamed about There is-" He started forward a with the commandante when I learned time was living on one of the plan- it again tonight, and, strangely enough, pace or two. "They say people who the truth. Through friendship I preher dreams were pleasant. Sebastian walk at night go mad if they're awak. valled upon him to give you an hour's ened too suddenly, and yet---"

"Donna lambel!" Then be repeated it patiently. "Don't you see you can louder. "Donna Isabel! Wake up." trust me? Heaven! The recklosses "My dear Pancho, times are hard. The the grounds of the quinta and he was The woman seemed to hear and yet the folly of young people! Could you

and damp, wet grass rose to her knees. | clutching at random while the earth and crumbling cement gave way beneath her; then she slid forward and disappeared, almost out from between Esteban's hands. There was a noisy rattle of rock and pebble and a great splash far below; a chuckle of little stones striking the water, then a faint bubbling. Nothing more. The stepson stood in his tracks, sick, blind with horror; he was swaying over the open-

ing when Asensto dragged him back. Pancho Cueto, being a heavy sleeper.

minds until he learned what had be fallen the mistress of the house. Then being a man of action, he too issued swift orders, with the result that by the time be and Esteban had run to the well a rope and lantern were ready for their use. Before Esteban could form and fit a loop for his shoulders there was sufficient help on hand to

lower him into the treacherous abyss. That was a gruesome task which fell to Esteban, for the well had been long anused, its sides were obzing silme, its waters were stale and black. He was gloom and on the point of fainting when he finally

be had found at the bottom Old Sebastian's curse had come true; Donna Isabel had met the fate he had called down upon her that day "It is a long way. Don Esteban, and when he hung exhausted to his chains intrigued so tirelessly had been her "What is the news? What did you death. Furthermore, as if in grimmest irony, she had been permitted at Assensio sighed gratefully as he sent the very last to find it Living she but one never knows what to believe, ever; dying, she had almost grasped

Once the first excitement had absted Taking the unaddressed letter from and a messenger had been out to

que Honed him. "A shocking tragedy and most pecultur," said the overseer Softling could amaze me more. Tell me how did you come to be there at such an

Estation naw the malevolent curion ity in Cueto's face and started. "I That is my affair. Surely you don't

"Come come! You can trust me." The overseer winked and smiled.

"I had business that took me there," stiffty declared the younger man. "Exactly" And a profitable busiare nothing more than robbers, ness it proved " Cueto hughed openly now. Well I don't mind telling you

"Stop " Esteban was turning alter

Now let us be semible I underofficer of the Guardia Civil may arrive "What's that?" gasped the negro. He at any moment and he will want to began to tremble violently and his know how you came to be with your

compelled to hold him down by main trup. No prepare sourself Young Antion was watching his ininimiter from with a fulfill -for alative The to White the treater transfer throughout the

tetian sold "Your would like me to conferm to manyther foliately transferred than there we conside there we the faction friends a to Marin Constitute the fire that I was not more ton the but that the there is a remark to the interest to the in quick tempered and for veirs tothe resident against on instinctive the trans and distinct of the plantitutions minimizer Tremember that I have be-

the manufacturer and a million decition to think r your own affairs than of mine. I intend to have a careful reckoning with you. I think you know I have a gond head for figures. Turning his back upon the elder man, he walked away. Now it did not occur to Cueto really to doubt the boy's innocence, though the circumstances of Lenna Isabel's

death were suspicious enough to raise

a question in any mind; but in view

of Esteban's threat he thought it wise

to protect himself by setting a back-

carries the heart of the house and your

As he sat on an old stone bench. moodily repicturing the catastrophe as Esteban had described it, his attention fell upon an envelope at his feet. It was sealed; it was unaddressed. Cueto idly broke it open and began to read. Before he had gone far he started; then he cast a furtive glance

When the somnambulist's deliberate "What do you mean, Don Marie?"

"Come, come!" the planter cried, imelders? Or perhaps you thought it a