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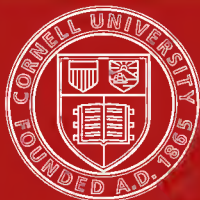
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COMMANDER MENDOZA

BY

JUAN VALERA

AUTHOR OF PEPITA XIMENEZ, DOÑA LUZ, ETC.

TRANSLATED BY

MARY J. SERRANO



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COMMANDER MENDOZA.

I.

DON FADRIQUE LÓPEZ DE MENDOZA, commonly called the Commander, was the brother of Don José, the eldest son and heir of the house of Mendoza.

Don Fadrique was born in 1774.

From his childhood up he had manifested, it is said, a perverse inclination to turn everything into ridicule and to take nothing seriously. This is of all qualities the one least easily pardoned when it is suspected to proceed, not from frivolity of disposition, but, on the contrary, from a seriousness of character which leads a man to regard things earthly and human as scarcely worthy of his serious consideration; whence, from very seriousness, spring contempt and ridicule.

Don Fadrique, according to general tradition, was a man of this kind—jocose from very seriousness.

It is plain that there are two classes of men who are jocose from very seriousness. To the one class, which is very large, belong those who are habitually so serious as to be the cause of merriment in others,

and who thus, without meaning to be so, are jocose. To the other class, never very numerous, it was that Don Fadrique belonged. Don Fadrique ridiculed vulgar and unmeaning seriousness in virtue of his own exquisite and superlative seriousness; wherefore he was jocose.

It is proper to observe, however, that Don Fadrique's wit rarely verged on insolence or cruelty, or indulged itself to the hurt of others. His jests were good-natured and courteous, and were often tinged with a certain gentle melancholy.

It cannot be denied that the predominant trait in Don Fadrique's character indicated a serious defect—a lack of reverence. As he saw in everything only its ridiculous and comical side, the inevitable result was that he respected nothing or almost nothing. His teachers and superiors deplored this greatly.

Don Fadrique was robust and active, and had never feared anything or any one, with the exception of his father, whom, besides, he tenderly loved. This affection did not prevent him, however, from seeing and even acknowledging in confidence, when speaking of his father, after the death of the latter, that, though it was indeed true that he had been a perfect gentleman, honourable to punctiliousness, a good husband, and charitable to the poor, he had been also a *Vandal*.

In support of this assertion Don Fadrique related

many anecdotes, none among which pleased him so greatly as that of the *bolero*.

Don Fadrique when a child performed this dance with much grace, and Don Diego—for so his father was called—took delight in seeing him display his ability whenever he took the boy with him to make visits, or when he received visitors at his own house.

One day Don Diego took his son Don Fadrique to the town, two leagues distant from Villabermeja, whose name I have never wished to mention, in which I have placed the scene of my *Pepita Jimenez*. For the better comprehension of the present story, and in order to avoid circumlocution, I ask the reader to understand, whenever I speak of the town, that this is the town to which I refer.

Don Diego, as I have said, took Don Fadrique to the town. Don Fadrique was thirteen, but he was very tall for his age. As he was going on a visit of ceremony, he wore a coat and waistcoat of red damask, with buttons of polished steel, shoes with buckles, and white silk stockings, so that he was like a very sun for splendour.

The clothes Don Fadrique had worn on the journey, which were very old and had, besides, several rents and stains, were left at the inn, at which the horses were also left. Don Diego desired that his son should accompany him arrayed in all his glory. The boy was delighted to see himself so fine, and with so

elegant and handsome a dress. But this same idea of the aristocratic elegance of his dress inspired him with a somewhat exaggerated feeling of the decorum and sedateness which it became the wearer of it to maintain.

Unfortunately, in the first visit Don Diego made, which was to a noble widow who had two unmarried daughters, it chanced that they spoke of the boy Fadrique—of his tallness for his age and his skill in dancing the *bolero*.

“The boy dances worse now,” said Don Diego, “than he did a year ago, because he is just in the hobbledehoy age—an insufferable age, between the schoolmaster and the barber. You have already noticed, doubtless, that boys are at that age unendurable; they begin to assume all the airs of men and they are not men. However, since you desire it, the boy will give you an exhibition of his skill.”

The ladies, who had already manifested a desire to see Don Fadrique dance, hereupon renewed their entreaties, and one of the young girls took a guitar and began to play for Don Fadrique to dance.

“Dance, Fadrique,” said Don Diego, as soon as the music began.

An invincible disinclination to dance on this occasion took possession of Fadrique’s soul. He saw a monstrous contradiction, something of what at the present day is called *antinomy*, between the *bolero* and the coat. It is to be observed that on the day alluded

to Don Fadrique wore a coat for the first time—wore this coat for the first time, if a garment can be said to have been worn for the first time which had been made over for the wearer after having been already worn first by his father and afterwards by his elder brother, for whom it was too tight and too short.

“Dance, Fadrique,” repeated Don Diego, not a little provoked.

Don Diego, whose country and travelling dress, of the fashion of the place, was in very good condition, did not, like his son, wear a coat. Don Diego wore a complete suit of dressed deerskin, with boots and spurs, and he carried in his hand the whip which he used to chastise his horse and the dogs of a numerous pack which he kept for hunting.

“Dance, Fadrique,” cried Don Diego, for the third time, his voice now showing a certain agitation due to anger and surprise.

Don Diego’s conception of parental authority was so exalted that this rebellion amazed him.

“Never mind, Señor de Mendoza,” said the noble widow. “The child is tired with travelling, and does not wish to dance.”

“He must dance now.”

“Never mind; we shall see him some other time,” said the young girl who played the guitar.

“He must dance now,” repeated Don Diego.—
“Dance, Fadrique.”

“I won’t dance with a coat,” at last responded the latter.

This was like applying a lighted match to gunpowder. Don Diego forgot the presence of the ladies, and everything else but his son’s disobedience.

“Rebel! bad son!” he cried; “I will send you to the Toribios; dance, or I will flay you alive!” and he began to flog Don Fadrique with the whip which he held in his hand.

The young girl with the guitar stopped playing for an instant; but Don Diego gave her so terrible a look that she was afraid he might compel her to play as he wished to compel his son to dance, and she went on playing the *bolero*.

Don Fadrique, after receiving eight or ten lashes, danced as well as he knew how.

At first, tears flowed from his eyes; but afterwards, reflecting that it was his father who had beaten him, and the whole scene presenting itself under a ludicrous aspect to his imagination—seeing himself as if he were another person dancing to the accompaniment of the lashes, and in a coat—he began to laugh, notwithstanding the physical pain he suffered, and danced with inspiration and enthusiasm.

The ladies applauded to the echo.

“Good! good!” said Don Diego. “By all the devils! Did I hurt you, my son?”

“No, father,” said Don Fadrique. “It could not

be helped. I needed a double accompaniment to dance to-day."

"Forget it, boy. But why were you so foolish? What objection could you have, since the coat suits you to perfection, and the legitimate and classic *bolero* is a very genteel dance? The ladies will forgive me—will you not? I am a little quick-tempered."

Thus ended the episode of the *bolero*.

On that same day Don Fadrique danced four times more in as many different visits, without waiting for more than a hint from his father.

Father Fernandez, who knew Don Fadrique very well, and from whom my friend Don Juan Fresco learned many of these particulars, used to say that Don Fadrique delighted in relating the anecdote of the *bolero*, and that he shed tears of filial tenderness, and at the same time laughed, saying, "My father was a Vandal," when he recalled the scene—his father flogging him, the terrified ladies, one of them playing the guitar without stopping, and he himself dancing the *bolero* better than he had ever danced it before.

In all this there may have been something of family pride. Don Fadrique's "My father was a Vandal" sounded from his lips almost like a eulogy. Don Fadrique, educated in the town and in the same way as his father, Don Fadrique, country-bred, would have been much more of a Vandal.

The fame of his childish pranks remained in the country long after he himself had left it to serve the king.

II.

HAVING lost his mother when he was three years old, Don Fadrique had been brought up and tenderly cared for by a maiden aunt who lived in the house, who was called Chacha Victoria.*

He had, besides, another aunt, who, although she did not live with the family but in a house of her own, had also remained single, and who vied with Chacha Victoria in petting and spoiling him. This other aunt was called Chacha Ramoncica. Don Fadrique was the apple of the eye of each of these ladies, who were both already past forty when our hero was in his twelfth year.

The two aunts, or Chachas, resembled each other in a few things, and differed from each other in many.

They resembled each other in a certain amiable and good-natured pride of birth, in their Catholic piety, and in their profound ignorance. This latter was not altogether the result of their country bringing up, but was due also to the ideas of that time.

* Diminutive of *muchacha*, girl, a term of endearment.

I imagine that our grandfathers, tired of feminine loquacity, of the Latin quotations and the pedantic display of the ladies portrayed by Quevedo, Tirso, and Calderon in their works, fell into the opposite extreme of desiring that women should learn nothing. Knowledge in a woman came to be regarded as a source of perversion. Thus it was that in noble and wealthy country families, who were of religious and quiet habits, girls were brought up to be very industrious and orderly and very good housekeepers. They learned to sew, to embroider, and to knit; many of them learned to cook; not a few could iron to perfection; but they scarcely ever learned to write, and of reading they learned barely enough to read fluently *The Christian Year* or some other devout book.

Chacha Victoria and Chacha Ramoncica had been brought up in this way. The difference in their characters and dispositions afterwards established marked differences between them.

Chacha Victoria, who was tall, fair, thin, and good-looking, was by nature, and remained all her life, sentimental and fond of knowledge. By dint of spelling she had learned to read almost fluently when she was already well advanced in years; and her reading was not confined to the lives of the saints. She also acquired some knowledge of profane history and of the works of some of the poets. Her favourite

authors were Doña María de Zayas and Gerardo Lobo.

She prided herself on her experience of life and its disillusion. Her conversation was always interlarded, so to say, with these two exclamations: "What a world is this!" "What things one sees in life!" Chacha Victoria felt, in a manner, disgusted with and weary of life from all she had seen, and this although her travels had not extended farther than five or six leagues beyond Villabermeja.

A passion that at the present day we should characterise as romantic had filled the whole life of Chacha Victoria. When she was scarcely eighteen she met at a fair and fell in love with an infantry cadet. The cadet, on his side, loved Chacha Victoria, who was not Chacha then. But the lovers, who were as poor as they were noble, could not marry for want of money. They declared their unalterable resolution, then, to continue to love each other, they exchanged vows of eternal constancy, and they determined to postpone their marriage until the cadet should be made a captain. Unfortunately, at that time advancement in the military profession was extremely slow; there were no civil wars or *pronunciamientos*, and the cadet, steadfast as a rock and faithful as a dog, grew old without having passed beyond the grade of lieutenant.

Whenever the regulations of the service permitted,

the cadet visited Villabermeja; he conversed at the window with Chacha Victoria, and they interchanged a thousand tender speeches. During the long intervals of separation they wrote love letters to each other every eight or ten days—an assiduity and frequency in correspondence at that time extraordinary.

This necessity for writing obliged Chacha Victoria to become learned. Love was her schoolmaster and taught her how to trace anarchical and mysterious scrawls which, by a revelation of love, the cadet deciphered, read, and understood.

In this way—between periods of conversing at the window at Villabermeja, and other longer periods of separation, during which they communicated with each other by letter—twelve years went by. The cadet attained the grade of lieutenant.

Then came a terrible moment—a heart-rending separation. The cadet, now a lieutenant, departed for the war in Italy. Thence letters came at very rare intervals. At last they ceased altogether. Chacha Victoria was filled with melancholy presentiments.

In 1747, the peace of Aquisgrán being signed, the Spanish soldiers returned from Italy to Spain; but our cadet, who had hoped to return a captain, neither appeared nor wrote. Only his orderly, who was a Bermejan, made his appearance with his discharge.

The worthy orderly, in the best terms he could find and with all the preparations and the circumlo-

cution which seemed to him calculated to soften the blow, gave Chacha Victoria the sad news that the cadet, just as his hopes were on the point of being realised and he was about to be promoted to the rank of captain, on the very eve of peace, had fallen in the rout of Trebia, run through the body by the lance of a Croatian.

The cadet did not die at once. He lived two or three days after receiving the fatal wound, and had time to deliver to the orderly, to take to his dear Victoria, a lock of her fair hair which he had worn in a locket next his heart, her letters, and a gold ring set with a pretty diamond.

The good soldier faithfully fulfilled his trust.

Chacha Victoria received and wept over the precious relics. The rest of her life she spent in thinking of the cadet, to whose memory she remained always faithful, and in occasionally weeping for him. All the love there was in her soul gradually transformed itself into religious fervour and into affection for her nephew Fadrique, who was three years old at the time when Chacha Victoria learned of the death of her constant and only lover.

Poor Chacha Ramoncica had always been puny and ill-shaped, very swarthy, and very ugly. A certain natural and instinctive dignity made her comprehend, from the time she was fifteen, that she was not born for love. If something of the love with which

women love men existed in the germ in her soul she succeeded in smothering it and it never budded. On the other hand, she had affection for every one. Her charity extended even to dumb animals.

From the age of twenty-four, when Chacha Ramoncica was left an orphan, and since which time she lived alone in her own house, she was accompanied by half a dozen cats, two or three dogs, and a jackdaw which possessed various accomplishments. Ramoncica had also a dove-cote full of doves, and a poultry-yard peopled with turkeys, ducks, hens, and rabbits.

A maid-servant named Rafaela, who had entered into Ramoncica's service while the latter still lived in her father's house, continued serving her all her life. Mistress and maid were both of the same age and both grew old together.

Rafaela was even uglier than Chacha Ramoncica, and, as if in imitation of her, always remained single.

With all her ugliness, there was something noble and distinguished in the appearance of Chacha Ramoncica, who was a lady of very limited intelligence. Rafaela, on the contrary, in addition to being ugly, had a most ignoble aspect, but was endowed by nature with a large fund of common sense.

For the rest, mistress and maid, while each always kept her own place and rank in the social hierarchy, identified themselves so completely with each

other that it seemed as if they both had but one will, the same thoughts, and the same purposes.

All was order, method, and regularity in this house. Scarcely anything was spent on food, for mistress and maid alike ate very little. A gown, a skirt, a basque, or any other garment lasted for years and years, used by Chacha Ramoncica or put away in her wardrobe. Afterwards, still in good condition, it passed into the possession of Rafaela, to be worn by her in her turn.

The furniture was always the same, and was kept, as if by enchantment, so neat and shining that it was a pleasure to see.

Living in this way, Chacha Ramoncica spent scarcely a third of her income, although this was very small; consequently she went on saving and laying by, so that she soon acquired the reputation of being wealthy. Yet she never ventured to indulge in any extravagance, except at the instance of her nephew Fadrique, whom, as we have said, she vied with Chacha Victoria in spoiling.

Don Diego was always in the country, hunting or attending to the farming. His two sons, Don José and Don Fadrique, remained in charge of Chacha Victoria and Father Jacinto, a Dominican friar, who had the reputation in the town of being very learned, and who served them as tutor, teaching them reading and writing and something of Latin.

Don José was quiet and good, Don Fadrique a perfect demon for mischievousness; but Don José did not succeed in making himself loved, while Don Fadrique was idolized by both Chachas, by the fierce Don Diego, and by the before-mentioned Father Jacinto, who was about thirty-six years old when he taught the language of Cicero to the two flourishing scions of the ancient and glorious branch of the Bermejan López de Mendozas.

While the gentle Don José remained in the house studying, or went to the convent to hear mass, or employed his time in other the like peaceful occupations, Don Fadrique would slip away and incite innumerable disturbances in the town.

As the second son of the house, Don Fadrique was condemned to dress himself with the garments which were too tight or too short for his brother, who, in his turn, wore the cast-off clothes of his father. Chacha Victoria made these alterations and transfers. We have already spoken of the coat and the red waistcoat which became memorable through the incident of the *bolero*, but long before this Don Fadrique had inherited a cloak which was still more famous, that had served Don Diego and Don José successively. The cloak was white, and, when it came into Don Fadrique's possession, received the name of the dove-cloak.

The dove-cloak seemed to have given new daring

to the boy, who grew more turbulent and impish than he had ever been before, from the moment it came into his hands. It might be fancied that Don Fadrique, the ringleader in every disturbance and the head of a band of the wildest boys of the town, wore the dove-cloak as a standard, as a sign that all followed, like the white plume of Henry IV.

Don Fadrique's party was not very numerous, not because he was not liked, but because he selected his adherents and followers, subjecting them to tests such as were employed by Gideon in selecting his soldiers. In this way Don Fadrique succeeded in gathering around him some fifty or sixty followers so fearless and so devoted to him that every one of them was worth ten.

An opposite party was formed, headed by Don Casimiro, the son of the wealthiest hidalgo of the place. This party was the more numerous; but, as well in respect of the personal qualities of the captain as of the valour and resolution of the soldiers, it was always far inferior to that of Don Fadrique.

On several occasions both parties came to a hand-to-hand conflict, sometimes with no other weapons than their fists, sometimes with stones, the field of combat being a plain situated below a place called the Retamal.

On every occasion of the kind Don Fadrique was the first on the field of danger; but it is certain, too,

that as soon as the rumour spread that "the dove-cloak was going down towards the Retamal" the streets and squares were deserted by the most bellicose of the boys, who all hastened to follow their idolized captain.

In all these combats victory was always on the side of Don Fadrique's band. Don Casimiro's followers made but little resistance and were soon put to an ignominious flight; but, as Don Fadrique always exposed himself more than a prudent general ought to do, it happened that twice he watered the laurels with his blood, coming out of the fight on each occasion with a broken head.

Not only in pitched battles, but in other exercises also, and while playing pranks of various kinds, Don Fadrique had, besides, broken his head a third time, wounded himself in the breast with a pair of scissors, burned one of his hands, and dislocated an arm; but from all these accidents he came out in the end safe and sound, thanks to his robust constitution and to the care of Chacha Victoria, who would look at him in amazement on these occasions, and, crossing herself, would exclaim: "Ah, my darling child, Heaven must intend you for something great when by a miracle you are still alive!"

III.

CASIMIRO was three years older than Don Fadrique, and was also stouter and taller. Angry at seeing himself always defeated as captain, he wished to measure himself with Don Fadrique in single combat. They fought then without using any other weapon than their fists, but poor Casimiro came out of the fight as before, well kicked and cuffed, notwithstanding his apparent superiority.

The Dominican friars of the town had never greatly liked the Mendozas. Notwithstanding the extreme piety of Chacha Victoria and Chacha Ramoncica and the humble devoutness of Don José, they could not endure Don Diego, and they were scandalised by the pranks and the insolence of Don Fadrique.

Father Jacinto only, who loved Don Fadrique tenderly, defended him against the accusations and the complaints of the other friars.

These latter, however, often threatened to seize the boy and send him to the Toribios, or make Brother Toribio come himself and carry him away with him.

The friars knew very well that the holy Brother Toribio had died more than twenty years before, but the institution established by him still flourished, bestowing upon its glorious founder an immortal and

mythological existence. Until well on in the second third of the present century, Brother Toribio and the Toribios in general have been constantly made the subject of the threats employed to inspire mischievous boys with a salutary terror.

The thought never entered into Don Fadrique's mind of the fervent charity with which Brother Toribio, in order to save and purify the souls of the boys he captured, martyred their bodies, inflicting cruel stripes on their naked flesh. Thus it was that the holy Brother Toribio presented himself to his imagination as a perverse and raving madman, his own enemy in wounding himself with chains girdled around his loins, and the enemy of the whole human species, killing and torturing them in childhood and early youth, when the heart opens to affection and when Nature and Heaven should smile and caress instead of inflicting stripes.

As cases had already occurred of certain mischievous boys being carried against the will of their parents to the Toribios, and as Brother Toribio had during his holy life himself gone in pursuit of such boys, not only through all Seville, but through other towns of Andalusia, whence he brought them to his dreaded establishment, the threat of the friars, taken as a jest, seemed stupid to Don Diego, and taken in earnest, more stupid still. He sent a message to the friars then desiring them to abstain from annoying

his son, and still more from threatening him, saying that he would himself know how to chastise the boy when he deserved it, but that no one else should dare lay a hand upon him. Don Diego added that the boy, although only a child, would know how to defend himself and even to act upon the offensive if he were attacked, and that, besides, he himself would hasten to his assistance in case it should be necessary, and would tear off the ears of all the Toribios that ever had been or ever should be in the world.

On these hints—and it was well known that Don Diego was fully capable of putting his words into effect—the friars checked their malevolence; but, as it must be confessed, if we wish to be impartial, that Don Fadrique continued to behave diabolically, the friars, not daring now to fight with temporal and earthly weapons, resorted to the arsenal of spiritual and eternal weapons, and never ceased trying to frighten the boy with threats of hell and the devil.

From this method of intimidation arose a grave evil. Don Fadrique, in spite of his Chachas, became an infidel through an instinctive sentiment before he was able to think and reason. Religion presented itself to his mind not under an aspect of love and infinite tenderness, but under an aspect of fear, against which his courageous and independent spirit rebelled. Don Fadrique did not regard the supernatural powers as the objects of the insatiable love of the soul and

the end worthy of his highest aspirations; he saw in them only tyrants, executioners, and shadowy bugbears.

Every age has its spirit, which seems to diffuse itself through the air we breathe, entering the souls of men, it may be, without its being necessary for ideas and theories to pass from mind to mind, through the medium of the spoken or written word. The eighteenth century was not, perhaps, a critical, scoffing, sensual, and unbelieving age because it had a Voltaire, a Kant, and the encyclopædists; but because it was critical, scoffing, sensual, and unbelieving it had those thinkers, who formulated in precise terms what floated confusedly in the atmosphere—the direction of human thought at that period of its progressive civilisation.

In this way only can it be explained that Don Fadrique should become an infidel without hearing or reading anything that might incline him to infidelity.

This new quality which appeared in him was a sufficiently dangerous one in those times. Don Diego himself was terrified by some of his son's ideas. Fortunately, the development of so evil an inclination was almost coincident with Don Fadrique's departure for the College of Marine Guards, and thus all scandal and annoyance were avoided in Villabermeja.

Chacha Victoria and Chacha Ramoncica shed many tears at Don Fadrique's departure. Father Ja-

cinto regretted it; Don Diego, who accompanied him to the island, rejoiced at seeing his son enter on the study of a profession almost more than he grieved at parting from him; and for the friars, and still more for Casimiro, the day on which they lost sight of Fadrique was a day of jubilee.

Don Fadrique returned afterwards to the town, but only for a brief visit—once when he left the college to go to sea, and a second time after he had become a naval ensign. Then years passed without any Bermejan seeing Don Fadrique. It was known that he was now in Peru, now in Asia, in the remote East.

IV.

DURING this long absence the most fantastic and absurd reports were invented and believed in the town concerning Don Fadrique's doings.

Both Don Diego and Chacha Victoria, who were the best informed and the most intelligent members of the family, died shortly after Don Fadrique's arrival in Peru. And as for the simple-minded Ramoncica and the unintellectual Don José, Don Fadrique wrote to them only at rare intervals, every letter being as short as a birth certificate.

To Father Jacinto, also, although he really esteemed and liked him, Don Fadrique wrote but sel-

dom, owing to the repugnance and distrust with which friars in general inspired him. Thus it was that nothing was ever known with certainty in the town regarding the travels and adventures of the illustrious sailor.

The person who knew most about the matter in his time was Father Fernandez, who, as we have elsewhere said, was acquainted with Don Fadrique, and had even some degree of intimacy with him. Father Fernandez communicated what he knew to Don Juan Fresco, who had been greatly influenced by the relation of the peregrinations and adventures of Don Fadrique in becoming himself a sailor, in order to follow in his footsteps.

Collecting and arranging these vague and scattered reminiscences, I shall now note them down here briefly.

Don Fadrique remained only a short time in the college, where he showed a marked disposition for study.

He soon left it to go to sea, and arrived at Havana at a most melancholy time. Spain was then at war with England, and the capital of Cuba had just been attacked by Admiral Pocock. The ship on which was our Bermejan having sunk, the crew, who were saved, were sent to the defence of Morro Castle under the orders of the brave Don Luis Velasco.

There Don Fadrique made havoc among the Eng-

lish squadron with his well-aimed cannon-balls. Afterwards, during the assault, he fought like a hero in the breach, and saw Don Luis, his chief, fall at his side. Finally, he was one of the few who escaped unwounded from the conflict when the English general, Lord Albemarle, passing over a heap of slain and making prisoners of the living, raised the British flag over the principal fortress of Havana.

Don Fadrique had the grief of witnessing the capitulation of that important place, and, as one of the garrison, was taken to Spain, in accordance with the conditions of surrender.

Then, being now a naval ensign, he went to Villabermeja, and saw his father for the last time.

The Queen of the Antilles, many millions of dollars, and the greater part of our war-ships remained in the hands of the English.

Don Fadrique was not disheartened by this tragic beginning. He was a man who was not prone to melancholy. He was an optimist, and not given to grumbling. Besides, as the eldest son was to inherit all the family possessions, he desired to acquire honour, money, and position for himself.

He remained only a few days in Villabermeja. He left it before his leave of absence had expired.

The King, Carlos III., after the melancholy peace of Paris, to which the disastrous Family Compact led him, endeavoured to improve everywhere the adminis-

tration of his vast possessions. In America it was that abuses, scandals, corruptions, tyranny, and waste most prevailed. In order to remedy all these evils, the King sent Galvez as visitor to Mexico, and a little later he sent Don Juan Antonio de Areche in the same capacity to Peru. With this latter expedition Don Fadrique went to Lima.

He was in that city when the rebellion of Tupac-Amaru took place. To the impartial and philosophical mind of the Bermejan it seemed a frightful contradiction that his Government should try to stifle this rebellion in blood at the same time that it was assisting the rebellion of Washington and his partisans against the English; but Don Fadrique, while blaming and censuring, served his Government with zeal, and contributed not a little to the pacification of Peru.

Don Fadrique accompanied Areche in his march to Cuzco, and from this point, commanding one of the six columns into which General Valle divided his forces, he made the campaign against the Indians, taking a glorious part in many affrays, enduring with fortitude privations and exposure to the rains and the cold on the rugged heights of the Andes until Tupac-Amaru was conquered and taken prisoner.

Don Fadrique, to his great horror and disgust, was an eye-witness to the tremendous punishments inflicted by our Government on the rebels. It seemed

to him that the cruelties and atrocities committed by the Indians did not justify a cultured European government in committing similar cruelties and atrocities. This was to descend to the level of that semi-barbarous people. Thus it was that he almost repented of having contributed to the victory when he saw Tupac-Amaru expire in the square of Cuzco, after a brutal martyrdom, which seemed devised by wild beasts rather than by human beings.

Notwithstanding his optimism, his cheerful disposition, and his tendency to see something comic in almost every occurrence, Don Fadrique, not being able to see anything comic in this occurrence, fell ill with a fever and was greatly discouraged in his liking for the military profession.

From this time forward he became more confirmed than ever in his mania for philanthropy, a species of secularization of benevolence which began to be very fashionable in the last century.

The precocious unbelief of Don Fadrique came, in process of time, and with the reading of the pernicious books which at that epoch were being published in France, to be based on argument and reasoning. The humorous and cheerful disposition of Don Fadrique accorded ill with the gloomy misanthropy of Rousseau. Voltaire, on the contrary, enchanted him. His most impious works seemed to him the echo of his own soul.

Don Fadrique's philosophy was the sensualism of Condillac, which he regarded as the *ne plus ultra* of human speculation.

As for politics, our Don Fadrique was a liberal anachronistic in Spain. In 1783, when he witnessed the execution of Tupac-Amaru, he was almost like a radical of the present day.

All this was linked to and based on a theodicy somewhat confused and superficial, but which was common at that time. Don Fadrique believed in God and imagined he had a knowledge of God, picturing him to himself as a free and supreme Intelligence, who made the world because he had so desired, and then ordered and arranged it according to the profoundest principles of mechanics and physics. In spite of *Candide*, a novel which made him laugh until the tears came, Don Fadrique was almost as much of an optimist as Dr. Pangloss, and was convinced that everything was admirably arranged and that nothing could be better than it was. Evil he regarded as an accident, although at times it amazed him that it should be of so frequent occurrence and of such magnitude; and good he thought the substantial, positive, and important part in everything.

With regard to spirit and matter, an ultra-mundane existence and the justification of Providence, based in compensations of eternal duration, Don Fadrique was very dubious; but his optimism was such

that in his eyes the goodness of Heaven was demonstrated, and even made patent without going beyond this sublunary world and our present existence. It is true that in order to arrive at this conviction he had adopted a theory extremely new at the time. And we say that he had adopted it and not that he had invented it, because we do not know for certain, although such may very well have been the case, that he invented it, since, when the moment arrives and the hour strikes for the birth of an idea or the formulation of a system, the idea is born and the system formulated in a thousand minds at once, although the glory of the invention is awarded to him who, in writing or verbally, expounds it with most clearness, precision, and elegance.

The idea, or rather the new theory, such as it existed in Don Fadrique's mind, was, in brief, as follows :

The philosopher of Villabermeja thought that there was an eternal and providential law governing human events, as immutable as the mathematical laws in accordance with which the stars move in their orbits. By virtue of this law, humanity, he thought, advanced continually in a never-ending perfectibility ; its upward progress towards light, goodness, truth, and beauty had neither pause nor end. In this the human race, taken as a whole, followed a necessary impulse. All the glory of the result belonged to the Supreme Being who had given the impulse ; but, within the

providential movement resulting from the impulse, every individual, in all his actions, all his ideas, all his purposes, was free and responsible. The marvellous work of Providence, the most beautiful mystery of its infinite wisdom, consisted in concerting with careful harmony all those results of human liberty, to the end that they might aid in the fulfilment of the eternal law of progress, or in having foreseen these results with such divine prevision and judgment that they should not disturb what was prescribed and ordained, as—although the comparison be an unworthy one—the inventor and expert constructor of a machine allows in his calculations for friction and the surrounding medium.

This manner of regarding events accorded well with Don Fadrique's character, confirming his contempt for trifles and his mania for characterising as trifles what most men regard as in the highest degree important, and transforming his propensity to gayety and laughter into an Olympic serenity, worthy of the immortals.

In his ethics he was somewhat severe. He had not blotted from his tables of the law a jot or a tittle of the divine commandment. All he did was to give more vigour, if possible, to the prohibition of acts which produce pain, and to relax in no slight degree the prohibition of all that he fancied brought only pleasure or well being.

In those days, as we have already said, to entertain views like these in Spain or her dominions was somewhat dangerous, but Don Fadrique was gifted with tact and moderation and, without hypoerisy, he avoided shocking prevailing opinions and beliefs.

In this he was aided by the happy art he possessed of making friends, not inspiring a moderate liking in many, but inspiring a very ardent affection in the few whom he himself liked and who were worth many in defending him and eulogizing him.

In his youth Don Fadrique, endowed with these qualities, and being besides handsome and pleasing of countenance, of a good figure, and both daring and discreet, had innumerable gallant adventures and enjoyed a wide reputation for being fortunate in love.

After the suppression of the rebellion of Tupac-Amaru he was promoted to the rank of captain of a frigate, and his fame as a brave soldier and a learned and able navigator reached its height.

Almost simultaneously with the execution of the last of the Indian defenders of the independence of their country in Cuzco, some of whom had their flesh torn with hot pincers before being executed, the news reached Lima that we had made peace with England, obtaining the independence of her colony in favour of which we had fought.

Don Fadrique was then able to obtain permission to serve under the orders of the Company of the

Philippines, and he set sail for Calcutta in command of a vessel laden with valuable merchandise. He made three voyages from Lima to Calcutta and the same number from Calcutta to Lima; and as he carried on each occasion a very good cargo, and as he had a large salary and made very profitable sales, he found himself in a short time the possessor of several millions of reals.

During Don Fadrique's long sojourns in India he conceived a strong admiration for the gentleness of the natives of that country, and came to view with greater abhorrence than before the religious and warlike fervour of other nations. Tippoo, Sultan of Mysore, had formed the determination to convert all the Hindostanees to Islamism and to extend his empire as far as Cape Comorin, where the armies of other Mussulman conquerors had never penetrated. The horrible devastation of the flourishing kingdom of Travancore under the very noses of the English was the consequence of the ambition and Mussulmanic zeal of the said sultan. The Governor-General of India resolved at last to avenge and to remedy what ought to have been prevented, and set out for Calcutta and Madras with a large force consisting of Europeans and Sepoys, and vast armaments of war. On this occasion Don Fadrique had the pleasure of at once earning many rupees, serving a good cause, and carrying to Madras in his vessel, with due

authorization, troops, provisions, and munitions of war.

It seems that shortly after this event, even before the rajah of Travancore had been re-established on his throne, and the Sultan Tippoo defeated and compelled to make peace, Don Fadrique, weary of wanderings and hardships, his ambition quenched and his desire for fortune more than satisfied, on his return to Lima obtained his retirement and returned to Europe, eager to witness the great revolution then taking place in France, whose principles were so entirely in consonance with his own, and whose fame filled the world with wonder.

Don Fadrique, however, remained in Paris only for some months—from the end of 1791 to September, 1792. This period sufficed to tire and disgust him with the great revolution, to disenchant him a little with his liberalism, and to make him doubt his theories of constant progress.

Finally, he resided for two years in Madrid, where many more of his illusions were destroyed.

Being now in his fiftieth year, although healthy and vigorous, and appearing, from the freshness of his face, his erect and graceful carriage, and the serenity and vivacity of his mind, much younger, he began to feel the homesickness to which almost all Bermejans are subject, and he took the fixed resolution of retiring to Villabermeja to end his days there in peace.

The letters which he wrote to his brother Don José and to Chacha Ramoncica, who were still living, announcing his return to Villabermeja to leave it no more, were short, although very affectionate. In exchange he wrote to Father Jacinto a long letter which is still in existence and which it will be proper to transcribe here. This letter is as follows :

V.

“ MY DEAR FATHER JACINTO: You will have learned from my brother and from Chacha Ramoncica that I have resolved to return to Villabermeja to end my life where I passed my happiest and most innocent years (fine innocence mine!) playing at marbles, at pitch and toss, at jumping the rope and sometimes at cards, and fighting my contemporaries and compatriots with my fists and with stones.

“ At that time I was a savage, but you can imagine that I have become somewhat polished during my wanderings about the world, and that my tastes are now changed and my cares very different. Your brother friars will have no need now to threaten me with the Toribios.

“ My residence in the town will give occasion to no disturbances ; on the contrary, I flatter myself that it will be productive of some advantages. I have made

money and I will employ a great part of it in Villabermeja in encouraging agriculture. The wine which is produced there is abominable and it might be excellent. With the necessary labor it can be made palatable and good.

“I am already dreaming of the pleasant evenings we shall spend together in the winter, playing *malilla* and *tute*, discussing our not very concordant systems of theology, and I relating to you my adventures in Peru, India, and other distant regions.

“I know that, notwithstanding your age, you are as strong as an oak, and I therefore promise myself that you will accompany me in long rides and walks and in shooting partridges. I have two magnificent English guns which I bought in Calcutta and with which I have hunted tigers, some of them as large as donkeys. You shall see how you will enjoy shooting, with either of these guns, the peaceable and loving partridges that will flock to the decoy in pairing time.

“In spite of our age, we shall yet employ ourselves, if you do not object, in some childish occupations. We will go to the well of the Solana, as we did forty years ago, to catch linnets and other birds, sometimes with the net, sometimes with bird-lime and feather-grass. Have ready for me a good pair of decoy pigeons.

“Everything there presents itself to my memory

invested with the charm of youth. I believe that I shall grow young again, seeing and enjoying everything. I am longing to taste again pine-nut conserve, rabbit sauce, puff-paste, *gajorros*, fritters, stewed lamb, kid fricassee, anchovy patties with chocolate, sponge cake, bread-and-onion salad, sausages, and other delicacies of the kitchen and the confectionery with which the Sybaritic Bermejans regale themselves. I do not mean, for this reason, however, to abandon the habits I have acquired in other lands; I intend, on the contrary, to take there with me a Pyrenean whom I brought from Paris, who prepares certain dishes that I am sure you will like, although they have names almost impossible for a Villabermejan mouth to pronounce; but you shall see that, without pronouncing them, you will taste them, masticate them, swallow them, and think them delicious.

“Strange though it may seem to you, I shall take some wine also with me to that land of wine. I remember that you were an excellent taster; that you had a delicate palate and a keen scent. I hope, then, that you will understand and appreciate the merit of the foreign wines that I shall take with me, and that they will not go into your stomach as if they went into the sewer.

“I am rejoiced that Chacha Ramoncica is still living. I am told that everything in her house remains as it was formerly. The same furniture, the same serv-

ant Rafaela, even the jackdaw, whether the same one also, that by a miracle of our Holy Patron is still living, or another that in due time replaced it, like the phoenix rising from its ashes.

“I am longing to embrace Chacha Ramoncica, although, be it said between ourselves, I was much fonder of poor Chacha Victoria. What a noble woman was that! I assure you that I have never met a woman to equal her anywhere. If I had, I should not now be an old bachelor.

“On that point I have not been very fortunate. I have met with only light, conceited, frivolous, or soulless women. One woman only, in Lima, loved me truly—with an ardent but criminal love. I too loved her, to my misfortune, for she had a diabolical temper, and as we loved each other ardently, the history of our love was composed of a series of daily quarrels. That love was a nightmare, not happiness. She was very devout, had been a saint, and continued to have the reputation of one, for we always behaved with prudence and circumspection. In the depths of her troubled conscience, however, in the secret recesses of her soul, at once haughty and fanatical, she was ashamed of having humbled her pride before me and of having yielded to me, and she was filled with fear and horror at having strayed for my sake from the paths of rectitude, offending God and proving false to her duties. For all this, without being very conscious of what she

was doing, she wished to make me pay, considering me culpable in the extreme. There are no words to describe what I was obliged to endure. Believe me, Father Jacinto, my fault brought with it its own punishment. So that I had enough of serious passion to last me for years, and thenceforward I devoted myself to frivolous ones. Why voluntarily torture one's self in a matter that should be all amenity, delight, and joy?

“For this reason, perhaps, and not because it is hardly to be found in *rerum naturæ*, I never obtained the love of a young Chacha Victoria. Had I done so, I am not very tender-hearted, but be sure that I should either have died blessing her, as the cadet died, or through her and for her I should not only have won the grade of captain, but I should have conquered the world.

“But youth is past, and it is idle to indulge in romantic fancies.

“I am disenchanted and weary of everything, although the disenchantment is gentle and the weariness mild.

“Ambition is dead within me; I have no desire for fame; I do not aspire to be pointed out to idle admiration; I have more of this world's goods than I need; I long for rest, for obscurity and quiet, and for all these reasons I shall retire to Villabermeja, not to spend my days in doing penance, but to enjoy a pleasant, tranquil life—a life of order and comfort, taking

care of my health to see how long a Commander Mendoza, well preserved, will last. So far I have been this. I look to be, not fifty, but less than forty. Not a gray hair. Not a wrinkle. They still call me *Señorito*, instead of *Señor*, and there are not wanting elegant women who call me a splendid-looking fellow, thereby offending my modesty.

“My chief disenchantment has been in the matter of my ideas and beliefs, although, indeed, it has not been great enough to make me change them.

“God forgive me if I deceive myself through believing in his goodness. Believing in him and picturing him to myself as a person, I must picture him to myself as a being as good as it is possible for any person to be. Consequently, the glory of a future life, immense though it may be, not completing my conception of his goodness, I suppose our present life, notwithstanding that it may serve to gain the other, to have an end and a purpose in itself, not its ultramundane purpose only. This end, this purpose, is to advance towards perfection, and, without ever reaching it here, to draw ever nearer to it. I believe, then, in progress—that is to say, in the gradual and constant improvement of society and the individual, as well physically as morally, as well in speculative knowledge as in the knowledge which is based on observation and experience, and which creates industry and the arts.

“The best means for the furtherance of progress and at the same time its best result in these days is, in my opinion, liberty. The essential condition of this liberty is that we shall all be equally free.

“Imagine how enchanted I was with the French Revolution and its Constituent Assembly, which propended to realise these principles of mine, which proclaimed the rights of man!

“I asked my retirement, gave up my profession, and came, filled with impatience, from the other hemisphere to bathe in the immortal light of the great revolution, and to kindle my enthusiasm at the sacred fire which burned in Paris, where I imagined the heart and the intellect of the world to be.

“My illusions soon vanished. The apostles of the new order of things seemed to me, for the most part, either infamous scoundrels or frenzied madmen, filled with envy and thirsting for blood. I saw genius, virtue, beauty, knowledge, elegance, all that in any way excels on earth, become the victims of those fanatics and those envious wretches. The exploits of the soldiers of the revolution fighting against the allied kings of Europe could not stir me to admiration. They seemed to me not the serene defence of men who confide in their valour and the righteousness of their cause, but the feverish courage of madness produced by the intoxication of blood and by means of horrible assassinations. Paris seemed to me a hell,

and I cannot now understand why it was that I remained in it so long. Everything was changed; brutality was called energy; an indecent slovenliness, simplicity; rudeness, frankness; and a heart closed to pity, virtue. I recalled the periods of greatest tyranny, and I could find no worse epoch, especially if it be considered that we were in the centre of Europe and had inherited the culture and civilization of so many centuries. There was not one tyrant, but many, and they were all vile and filthy in body and soul.

“I fled from Paris and came to Madrid. Another disenchantment. If I had witnessed there an abominable and barbarous tragedy, here I found myself in the midst of a grotesque, disgusting, and lascivious farce. There blood; here filth.

“But I did not therefore apostatize from my optimism or renounce my belief in endless progress. What I did was to see that I had made an error of time in my calculations, in making which I had not counted with the sanguinary and hideous French Revolution.

“In view of this revolution, the comparative well-being, the state of liberty and progress which I had imagined as near at hand, receded two or three centuries at least into the bosom of the future.

“As I shall not by that time be alive, and as I am tired of active life in the present state of the world, I have resolved to take refuge in meditation; and, in

order to enjoy the spectacle of human affairs while participating in them as little as possible, I am going to settle down, as an unconcerned spectator, in Villabermeja.

“ My brother, who has now a marriageable daughter for whom he naturally desires that an eligible suitor should turn up, is going to live in the neighbouring city, where he has already taken a house, leaving me to the undisturbed enjoyment of the ancestral house of the Mendozas, where I will give him a lodging whenever he comes to the town on business.

“ I hold to the proverb which says, ‘ Either the capital or the country ’ ; and, since I am fleeing from Paris and Madrid, I do not wish to go to a provincial city, but to a village.

“ In the great house of the Bermejan Mendozas I shall be like a pea in a dish of stew, but I take books enough with me to fill several rooms.

“ We are going to lead an enviable life ; and I say we, for I suppose and hope that you will often bear me company.

“ My resolution is fixed. I shall return to my native town, never again to leave it, except when, by way of a pleasure trip, I may go on horseback to pay a visit to my brother and his family in the neighbouring city, which, notwithstanding its pompous title of city, has also a good deal of a small country town, be it said without offence and in all good will.

“Good-bye, most holy father. Commend me to God, on whose favour I rely to enable me to escape from the ridiculous confusion of the capital and give you soon, in enchanting Villabermeja, a cordial embrace.”

VI.

TWENTY days after the receipt of this letter by Father Jacinto the illustrious Commander Mendoza made his solemn entry into Villabermeja.

From Madrid to the capital of the province, which was then called a kingdom, our hero travelled in a coach drawn by mules harnessed with collars, spending nine days on the journey. In the capital of the province he met his brother Don José, Father Jacinto, and other friends of his childhood, who had gone there to meet him. Chief among them was Uncle Gorico, a master leather-dresser, a skilful artificer in skins, and notable in the difficult art of plugging broken skins. He had been the wildest boy in the town, next to Don Fadrique, and the lieutenant of the latter in all the affrays, combats with stones, and other warlike encounters with Don Casimiro's band.

Uncle Gorico had but one fault—his too ardent devotion to spirituous liquors. Anise-seed cordial was his especial delight. And as, when dawn peeped

above the narrow horizon of Villabermeja, Uncle Gorico, according to his own expression, was already "killing the worm," it followed that for almost the whole of the day he was in a half-tipsy condition, for the fire kindled within him at the first ray of morning was kept alive during the remainder of the day by frequent libations.

For the rest, Uncle Gorico never lost the use of his wits; what he did was to interpose between his eyes and the light of heaven a thin veil through which it showed as through a beautiful lantern, making him see the things of the external world and the interior of his soul and the treasures of his memory, as through a magic glass. He never reached a state of complete intoxication, and only once in his life, he said, had he had the falling sickness in his legs. Thus he was a man of spirit in divers senses, and no one had wittier sallies, or told spicier anecdotes, or was a more useful or agreeable companion on a hunting expedition.

In the town he enjoyed an enviable celebrity for many reasons, among others because he played the *rôle* of Abraham in the procession on the morning of Holy Thursday so admirably that his equal was not to be found for leagues around. With a woman's dress for a tunic, a bed-quilt for a mantle, a linen turban and beard, he had a truly venerable aspect. And when he ascended Mount Moriah, which was a wooden

platform covered with greenery, erected in the middle of the plaza, he acquired the pathetic majesty of a good actor. But where he most shone, drawing shouts of enthusiasm from the spectators, was when he made an offering of Isaac to the Almighty, before proceeding to sacrifice him. Isaac was a boy of at least ten. With his right hand Uncle Gorico raised him toward heaven and thus, his arm extended as if it were made, not of flesh and blood but of finely tempered steel, he remained fourteen or fifteen minutes. Then came the moment of greatest emotion—tragic terror in all its force. Abraham tied the boy to the altar and drew the fierce-looking Turkish scimitar which he carried in his girdle. Three or four blows descended with indescribable violence. The women covered their eyes and uttered frightful screams, thinking the throat of the boy who prefigured Christ already cut; but Uncle Gorico arrested the blow before striking, as if not daring to consummate the sacrifice. At last an angel with wings of gilded paper appeared on the balcony of the Town Hall and sang the romance beginning:

“ Hold, Abraham, hold ;
Kill not thy son Isaac,
For now my God is satisfied
With thy good intention.”

The sacrifice of the lamb instead of the son, with the rest of the representation, Uncle Gorico performed with no less mastery.

On more than one occasion he had been offered a large sum to take the part of Abraham in other towns; but he would never prove false to his native place, depriving it of the glory he thus conferred upon it.

Don José, Father Jacinto, Uncle Gorico, and the Commander's other friends, very happy at having embraced Don Fadrique, who was on his side very happy to find himself among the companions of his childhood, set out on horseback for Villabermeja, where, having risen early and making a free use of the spur, they arrived, after a journey of ten hours, on the evening of a beautiful day in the spring of the year 1794.

Doña Antonia, the wife of Don José, and her two children, Don Francisco, aged fourteen, and Doña Lucía, who was now eighteen, accompanied by Chacha Ramoncica, welcomed the Commander, now the master of the ancestral house, with expressions of joy, with embraces, and a thousand other manifestations of affection. Don José and his family had established themselves in the city, and had come to the town only for a couple of days for the purpose of seeing their dear relative.

The latter, as he was naturally very modest, was surprised and delighted to see how much greater was the popularity he enjoyed in Villabermeja than he had supposed it to be. All the friars, from the

highest down to the lay brothers, the physician, the apothecary, the schoolmaster, the alcalde, the notary, as well as many of the common people, came to welcome him.

On the day after his arrival Chacha Ramoncica wished to make a display, and she did so, giving a magnificent *pipiripao*. When Don Fadrique heard this word he was obliged to ask what it meant, and was told that it was a sort of banquet. On the other hand, they still talk in Villabermeja of Chacha Ramoncica's embarrassment when, on returning home that evening, she tried to remember what it was that her nephew had asked her to have at the feast, in order that she might procure it for him, as she wished to please him in everything. The word with which her nephew had signified the thing he desired had escaped her mind. At last, consulting the matter with Rafaela, and by a great effort of memory, she was able to recall the word and to say that what her nephew had asked her to have was economy.

"What is that, Rafaela?" she asked her faithful servant. And Rafaela answered:

"Señora, what should it be? Frugality!"

There was none of it at the banquet, however. Chacha Ramoncica on that day threw economy to the winds.

On the following day it was the Commander's turn to make a display, and, in spite of all his phi-

losophy, it rejoiced his heart to see his relations and fellow-townsmen looking with wondering admiration at his porcelain service, his plate, and the other rare and beautiful objects which he had collected in his voyages, and which he had sent on before him with his confidential servant. Even the strange physiognomy of the latter, who was an Indian, amazed the Bermejans, to the great satisfaction and delight of Don Fadrique. It gave him unspeakable pleasure, also, to relate his adventures, to describe distant lands and strange customs, and to tell of singular events which he had either taken part in or witnessed.

Nothing of all this should cause us to lessen our good opinion of the Commander. This sort of vanity, puerile as it may appear, is more common than is supposed. Who does not like, when he returns to his native place, to give himself airs of importance, without intending offence to any one, to show how considerable is the part he has played in the world?

And there are people who do not wait to return to their native town for this. I had a friend who was born in a small village in Andalusia who, becoming a personage of great consideration, in the enjoyment of many honours and titles, found his greatest happiness in sending every year to his native town a copy of the *Foreigner's Guide*, with all the pages marked on which his name was printed, and the admiration of his fellow-townsmen, communicated to my friend by letter,

caused him happiness that almost bordered on beatitude.

There is no less pleasure in describing prodigies than in relating adventures and events. Hence, doubtless, the saying: "Long roads, long lies." Let it suffice, then, to say, in praise of Don Fadrique, that this proverb was in no sense applicable to him, for he was veracity itself. What we cannot assure our readers, however, is that what he related was always believed. Country people are suspicious and distrustful; they are apt to have a standard of judgment peculiar to themselves, and often the truest things seem to them false or improbable, and lies, on the contrary, appear to them like the truth. I remember that the Andalusian major-domo of a certain renowned and witty duke, who was at one time ambassador at Naples, went on leave of absence to visit his native town. On his return we rallied him, saying that we supposed he had told a great many lies. He confessed to having done so, and even added, boasting of it, that they had believed everything he said with the exception of one thing only.

"What was that?" we asked him.

"That there is a mountain near Naples," he answered, "which sends out flames from its summit."

In this way our Don Fadrique, while not departing a tittle from the truth, might very well fail to be believed in some things without his townspeo-

ple venturing to say to him, as they said to the Duke's major-domo when he spoke of Vesuvius: "That's a hoax!"

On the third day after Don Fadrique's arrival his brother Don José returned with his family to the city, and the Commander was then free to give himself up with more tranquillity to another and a no less delightful pleasure—that of revisiting the scenes dearest to and most frequented by him in his youth, and those in which something memorable had happened to him. He went to the Retamal and the plain near by it, where he had twice had his head broken. He went to the fountain of Genazahar and the Pilar de Abajo, he ascended the Laderón and the Nava, and extended his excursions to the hill of Jilena and Mount Horquera, covered at that time with majestic secular oaks.

Don Fadrique finally took real possession of his dwelling, settling himself comfortably in it, arranging the articles of furniture he had brought with him, putting the books in their places, and hanging the pictures.

During these operations, directed by him, Father Jacinto was almost always present, and finally Don Fadrique was installed, making for himself a retreat at once rustic and elegant, and a pleasant solitude in the place where he was born.

VII.

DON FADRIQUE was enchanted with his mode of life. In reading, in chatting or walking with Father Jacinto, in making excursions into the country and hunting expeditions, also with Father Jacinto and with the learned and agreeable Uncle Gorico, the time passed in the most delightful manner. Don Fadrique felt no desire to go to any other place, abandoning Villabermeja; but Don José had caused a room to be made ready for him in his house in the city, and pressed him so urgently to make him a visit that Don Fadrique had no resource but to comply.

The Commander went to the city to spend there the month of May. He arrived on the afternoon of the last day of April, and, as the journey is no more than a pleasure excursion, he stayed up that night till nearly eleven o'clock, which in 1794 was to sit up very late indeed. Two or three gentlemen of the place, the same number of ladies of mature years, two girl friends of Lucía's, Don Fadrique's niece, a worthy priest, and a young man of distinguished appearance from a neighbouring town, composed the party at Don José's house, which assembled before nightfall.

None of them attracted the attention of Don Fadrique, who was very absent-minded. In order that he should notice people, it was necessary that they should either please or displease him, and people rare-

ly pleased him, and still more rarely displeased him; so that, while he behaved politely to every one, he scarcely noticed any one.

The refreshments were served at the sound of the Ave Maria bell.

First, two maids passed around distributing plates, napkins, and silver spoons; then two other maids came in carrying large trays filled with small glass cups of various kinds of syrup. Each guest, remaining in his seat, took a cup of the syrup which he preferred. The maids who carried the trays passed around a second time collecting the empty cups, and pressing each of the guests to take another cup of a different syrup, as many indeed did.

History, prolix on this point, relates that the syrups were green walnut, angel's hair, tomato, and orange flower. There was also peach syrup.

The nymphs of the kitchen, very neatly attired and with many flowers in their hair, afterwards handed around small glasses of rossolis, of which the men only partook; and, lastly, they brought in chocolate, with sponge-cake, *polvorones*, oil-bread, and pancakes. The whole ended by the maids serving water in glasses and in odoriferous earthen vessels.

This lasted until the ringing of the bells for the *animas*.*

* Evening prayer for the souls in purgatory.

The refreshments were partaken of with all ceremony and almost in silence, the chairs placed close against the walls and every one remaining seated, neither throwing one leg over the other, nor bending to either side, nor leaning very far back.

After the refreshments were partaken of there was something more of freedom and expansion, and Lucía ventured to ask the young stranger to recite some verses.

“Yes, yes!” cried almost all the guests in chorus; “recite something.”

“I will recite something of Melendez,” said the young man.

“No, something of your own,” replied Lucía.—“You must know, uncle,” she added, turning to the Commander, “that this gentleman is a fine poet and a great student. You shall see what beautiful verses he composes.”

“You are very amiable, Señorita Doña Lucía. The friendship you have for me misleads you. Your uncle will be disappointed when he hears me.”

“I have so much confidence in the good taste of my niece,” said the Commander, “that I doubt if she be mistaken, however fervent may be the friendship with which you have inspired her. I am almost certain that the verses will be good.”

“Come, recite them, Don Carlos.”

“I am at a loss to know which to select that will

least tax your patience and reflect most credit upon you as their sponsor and me as their author."

"Recite," answered Lucía, "your last poem to Chloris."

"It is very long."

"No matter."

Don Carlos did not wait to be urged further, but, with measured intonation and a certain timidity that would have gained for him the sympathies of his auditors even if he were not in himself deserving of them, recited the following poem :

The sleeping brook awakes,
Its icy fetters breaks,
And down the vale diffusing bloom descends
In current crystal clear.
Flora her pomp the Cyprian goddess lends ;
Phœbus resplendent shines in the celestial sphere,
And in the silent night
Her sleeping swain the goddess chaste,
Enraptured, kisses by his tremulous light.
Now from the ancient roof to hang her nest
The roving swallow has returned again ;
Sweet warbles in the woodland Philomel ;
Peace the unruffled sea, the cloudless sky exhale.
Zephyr alone, on hill and plain
Bending the grass, the early flowers,
 wooing with amorous sighs in verdant bowers,
With music and with fragrance stirs the air.
In this sweet season, Love
Each heart to vague unrest doth move,
But in the swain Myrtilus' breast
He dwells a constant guest.
With cunning art the god has fashioned there

A pattern of enchanting grace,
The faithful likeness, limned with care,
Of Chloris fair, the gentle shepherdess
For whom Myrtilus pines, love-lorn.
Chloris, compassionate and kind, the swain
Would not kill with her disdain ;
Yet will she not his love return.
Rather to a shepherd old the maid
Means to give her hand, 'tis said.
With jealous thoughts the swain his pain augments,
And hidden in the wood he thus laments :
" Thou knowest not what love is, enchantress mine !
Thy virgin innocence it is misleads thee ;
I may unworthy be those charms divine,
But say what strange illusion leads thee
So rich a treasure, stainless held—
Treasure unvalued, gift bestowed in vain—
To bestow on withered old ?
The poppy of the plain
Its petals blushing with love's rosy hue
Unfolds not to the view
Until the sun's enkindling ray
Into its veiled heart has stol'n its way ;
Nor dares the early rose
Its calyx open amid frosts and snows.
Let Galatea the Cyclops adore—'tis fit
That beauty should with strength and valour mate ;
Fit that around the oak's rude trunk the vine
With close and loving clasp should twine,
But never yet the hapless wight
Who scarce the load of years can bear
That weigh him down, did love invite
His chains, though sweet, that heavy be to wear.
Uncheerful Age the Muses puts to flight ;
If he upon the flute of Pan would play,
His voice, converted to no tuneful air,
In harsh, discordant, quavering accents there,
Provoking mocking laughter dies away.

His tottering step can ill join in the dance
Of nymphs; and in the Mænad's jocund round
And sonorous song, the doleful sound
Of his complaints and sighs makes dissonance.
For in the sacred orgies not to him
The hierophant the thyrsus twined with ivy leaves,
And tipped with aromatic pine cones gives;
Nor will he to Parnassus' summit climb.
Ah! Chloris, say what madness 'tis deceives
Thy sense? Since thus I waste on thee
My love and all my vigorous youth, a hoary head
Crown not now with mockery
Of myrtle green and dewy roses red.
The leafy poplar let the vine embrace;
The ruinous wall, defaced and bare,
Let the unsightly, stinging nettle grace.
What danger would my love not dare,
What toil not bear for thee? For thee would I
The wild beast vanquish in the forest shade.
For thee the fury of great Mars defy.
And he, the monarch of the mead
Who bears his brazen front upon
A weapon terrible,
Like to the fulgent disk of the new moon,
The sharp prick of my javelin's steel
His haughty, untamed neck shall feel.
The shepherd by the weight of years oppressed,
Thy constant cares solicitous would claim,
O Chloris! while to ocean's depths at thy behest
Would I descend that on thy throat might gleam
Its pearls, their lustre shamed by its white loveliness;
The murderous wolf would I pursue to win,
With lead or steel, its shaggy skin,
A carpet for thy dainty foot to press.
Deluded, simple maid,
Ah! cast the fatal madness from thy brain,
The aged shepherd that would make thee wed.
What! Have I given thee of my love in vain

So many proofs? Thou seest that for thy sake
The Temple of Minerva have I left, the gardens fair,
Watered by Betis' silver flood.
Father and mother I forsake,
And from my faithful friends I flee to bear
A cruel maid's ingratitude.
Not for that I am poor dost thou my suit disdain,
So base a feeling in thy heart no place
Could find, nor to the hoary shepherd does the swain
Yield, or in riches or in pride of race.
Only a fatal error, of delirium born,
O Chloris! rose of the celestial garden, could impel
Thee 'mid the sapless branches of the thorn
Thy freshness and thy fragrance to exhale;
Thy delicate, fair petals to unfold,
Not in warm April airs but in December's cold.
If thou wouldst kill me, strike not thus the blow,
For killing me, thyself thou killest too."

When the verses were ended they were loudly applauded by the indulgent audience; but, if the truth must be told, neither Don José nor Doña Antonia gave any attention to the recital; the older ladies were lulled to sleep by the monotonous sound; the priest found the composition altogether too materialistic and mythological and not a little tiresome, and Lucía's girl friends were more enthusiastic about the good looks of the poet than about the literary merit of his work.

Don Carlos was in fact an attractive-looking young man of twenty-two or twenty-three. His complexion was dark; his eyes, large and brilliant, glowed with the fire of inspiration. His bluish-black hair, now

unpowdered, was as glossy as the raven's wing. The movements of his lips when he spoke were graceful. The teeth which he allowed to be seen were white and even; his nose was straight, and his brow open and serene.

Don Carlos dressed with extreme elegance, according to the latest Paris fashion. He was a complete dandy. He seemed like the prince of the gilded youth, transported by magic from the banks of the Seine to the heart of Andalusia. His shirt-collar, and his lawn cravat which was tied in a bow, were worn low enough to show the throat and the well-moulded neck on which the head was gracefully set. He was of tall rather than medium stature and of slender build. The close-fitting cashmere trousers, the white silk stocking, and the shoe with its silver buckle allowed the gallant to display a well-formed leg and a small foot, long and raised at the instep.

Doubtless the girls found more to attract their attention in all these things and took greater pleasure in the sweetness of the young man's voice than in what we venture to call an idyl, half of whose words were Greek for them.

Don Fadrique had taken note of everything. Like most absent-minded people, he was very observant, and gave close attention to what he deigned to notice at all.

The verses he thought tolerable—not inferior to

those of Melendez, although not so good, by a great deal, as those of André Chenier, which he had heard recited in Paris. As for the young man himself, he thought him very good-looking.

He observed, too, with some pleasure mixed with anxiety, that Lucía, his niece, had listened to the verses in the attitude and with the expression of one who understood them, and with a certain interest which he could not determine if it were merely literary or had its source in a more personal and deeper feeling.

For the present, in consequence of these observations, he mentally characterised his niece, whom hitherto he had scarcely noticed, as pretty and discreet. It may be said that he now looked at her conscientiously for the first time, and he saw that she was fair and rosy, that she had blue eyes, a graceful figure, and an air of great distinction. He could not but rejoice at these discoveries, like the good uncle he was ; but he made, or thought he made, other discoveries which mortified him somewhat. "Perhaps I am over-suspicious," he said to himself.

At ten punctually the party broke up.

The family now being alone, Doña Antonia assembled the servants and all recited the rosary aloud.

Finally—the chocolate and the syrups, which might pass for a collation, not being sufficiently substantial

for people who dined, as they did in those days, shortly after midday—the indispensable supper was served.

During this time Don Fadrique sought and found an opportunity of conversing apart with his niece, to whom he spoke in the following terms :

“ I see, child, that you like verses better than I had supposed.”

Lucía, at the first word uttered by her uncle growing very red and looking prettier than ever, answered with some embarrassment :

“ And why should I not like them? Although I have been brought up in a country town, I am not quite uncultured.”

“ It is enough to look at you, my child, to know that you are not that. But your liking poetry is not incompatible with your liking poets.”

“ Of course I like poets. Fray Luis de Leon and Garcilaso are my favourites among the Spanish lyric poets,” said Lucía, with the utmost naturalness.

Don Fadrique’s suspicions were almost set at rest. So much dissimulation seemed unlikely in a girl of eighteen, who recited the rosary every night, went regularly to mass, and confessed with frequency.

Don Fadrique had no time for subterfuges or circumlocution, and went straight to the point which troubled him.

“ Frankly, niece, was it for you that Don Carlos composed the verses we heard to-night? ”

“What nonsense!” answered Lucía, bursting into a laugh.

“And why should it be nonsense?”

“Because nothing of all that applies to me—because I am not Chloris.”

“You might very well be Chloris. The poet does not describe her. He declares vaguely and indefinitely that Chloris is beautiful, and you are beautiful.”

“Thanks, uncle; you flatter me.”

“No; I only do you justice.”

“Be it as you will. But tell me, where shall we look for my old shepherd; for I can’t imagine who he can be?”

“Well, I fancied I had found him.”

“How could that be, uncle, when there was no one in the party but the reverend father?”

“And I—am I no one?”

“What do you mean by that?”

“I mean that I am fifty years old, thirty-two years older than you, and that I am not crazy enough to aspire to be loved; but poets feign what they wish, and the smooth-faced Don Carlos may have invented that tissue of absurd falsehoods in order to write his idyl. If that be so, all that about the old shepherd being stiff in his joints and being unable either to dance, or run, or fight, or hunt wolves, like the swain, is not very conformable with the truth. In spite of my fifty years, I would not be afraid to compete in them all

with that same Don Carlos. I am even certain that if I should undertake to dance the *bolero* I could do it better now than when my father made me dance it to the tune of the whip; and in respect of lungs and breathing power, I think I have more than enough, not to say to climb up Parnassus in chase of bacchantes, not to play all the flutes and clarionets in the world only, but to move the arms of a wind-mill."

"But, uncle, Don Carlos has never dreamed of you nor thought of me."

"Come, girl, don't be a little hypocrite. I have got the notion into my head that that boy is in love with you; that he knew I was coming to spend a month here; that he heard I was old; and, starting with these facts, the insolent boy has imagined the rest."

Don Fadrique said all this laughingly, in order to tease his niece, and, although doubtful about the justice of his suspicions, somewhat piqued at the poet's audacity, which, however, did not altogether displease him.

"Uncle," said Lucía, at last, with all the gravity she could assume, "you are not the old shepherd. The old shepherd is a Villabermejan like you; he has been settled here for the past two years, and he deserves in reality the epithets which the poet lavishes upon him, because he is very infirm and decrepit.

The old shepherd is called Don Casimiro. You must know him."

"Of course I know him! You may well say that I know him!" said the Commander, calling to mind his old adversary and victim in his boyish days. "But who, then, is Chloris?" he added immediately afterwards.

"Chloris is a beautiful girl, a very intimate friend of mine. Her mother lives in great seclusion, and neither goes out herself nor allows her daughter to go out in the evening. For that reason Chloris was not here to-night; but she is my neighbour, and her mother allows her to go walking with me, accompanied by my mother. If you wish to accompany us to-morrow, we will walk to the gardens, through shady paths, after breakfast, at about ten o'clock. Chloris will come, and you shall become acquainted with Chloris."

"I will go with much pleasure."

"O uncle! for Heaven's sake don't hint to any one that Don Carlos is in love with my friend, and that she is Chloris. Remember that it is a secret. No one in the place knows it but me. It is necessary to be very cautious, for her parents will have no one but Don Casimiro, and they have no suspicion of Don Carlos's love. I have confided it to you, so that you might not think I was Chloris, and that without any sort of reason we had converted you into an old, de-

crepit shepherd, in order to find a subject for the verses."

"I am satisfied, girl, and I will say nothing. I assure you now that your friend Chloris interests me, and that I am curious to see her."

In this way Don Fadrique unexpectedly came to have a secret with his niece immediately on his arrival, and to figure in intrigues and love affairs.

Thinking of this, he retired to his room, as all the others did to theirs, and slept until eight o'clock next morning as soundly as a boy of twenty.

VIII.

DOÑA ANTONIA awoke with a terrible sick headache, a malady to which she was very subject. She was therefore obliged to keep her bed, and was unable to accompany her daughter Lucía on her walk; but as her illness was not a serious one, and as Lucía had already arranged the excursion with her friend, it was decided that the Commander should accompany them.

Lucía's friend lived in the adjoining house. The yards of the two houses were separated by a wall. At the appointed hour, half past nine precisely, Lucía, dressed for the street and with her uncle beside her, called from the foot of the yard wall:

“Clara” (so Chloris was called in real life), “are you ready?”

The answer was not long in coming.

First the voice of the maid-servant was heard, saying :

“Señorita, señorita, Doña Lucía is calling you.”

A moment later was heard a silvery and sympathetic voice from the adjoining yard, answering :

“I will be with you directly. Come out to the street ; there is no need of my going into your house.”

Don Fadrique and Doña Lucía went into the street, and found Doña Clara waiting for them at the hall door.

The Commander, notwithstanding his habitual absent-mindedness, looked at Doña Clara with extraordinary interest. She was a girl of a little over sixteen. Her complexion was a clear brunette, tinted on cheeks and lips with the freshest carmine. Her skin was so soft, delicate, and transparent that the blood could almost be seen flowing beneath it through the blue veins. Her eyes, large and black, and generally half veiled by their lids fringed by long, curly lashes, were dreamy in expression, although, when they opened in a look of interest or curiosity, a mild fire and brilliant light streamed from them. Everything in Doña Clara revealed health and exuberance of life, and yet around her eyes, making them look larger

and brighter, was a dark circle of the colour of the purple lily.

Doña Clara was taller than her friend Lucía, who yet was above the medium height; but, although she was slender, she was beautifully formed and already fully developed. Doña Clara's hair was intensely black, her hands and feet were small, her head was graceful and well set.

Both friends were dressed in black, in the mantilla and basque, and wore roses in their hair.

Lucía informed her friend of her mother's indisposition, saying that her uncle, the Commander, recently arrived from Villabermeja, would accompany them in their walk. With the exception of the usual compliments and ceremonies, nothing worthy of recording was said until the three companions had left the city and were in the country.

The little city is surrounded on all sides by gardens. Many paths run through these in various directions. On either side of every walk there is a hedge of pomegranates, blackberry bushes, osiers, and other plants. Many of the paths are bordered on each side by a crystal rivulet; others on one side only. All are abundantly shaded in spring, summer, and autumn, thanks to the poplars, the large, leafy walnut trees, and other trees of various kinds that grow in the gardens.

The soil is there so rich and fertile that it would

be impossible to imagine the profusion of flowers and the mass of verdure that grow along the banks of the rivulets, diffusing around a grateful rural odor. Bell-flowers, musk-roses, purple and white violets, lilies, and daisies there open their cups and display their beauty.

The radiant sun shining in the cloudless sky and gilding the clear atmosphere adds to the splendour of the scene. Innumerable birds enliven and gladden it with their warblings and carols. In Andalusia the birds, flying from the more arid regions in search of water and shade, take refuge in these irrigated oases, where are to be found coolness and thick foliage.

Such was the scene through which the Commander walked with the two beautiful girls. As soon as they left the city they took the walk called the middle walk. The girls gathered flowers, listened with delight to the linnets singing, or laughed without knowing why. The Commander meditated, was filled with a sense of well-being, and enjoyed everything, although more quietly than the girls.

On reaching a broader walk, not a path but a road, the three companions, who, owing to the path being almost always very narrow, had walked one behind the other, now walked abreast. Clara was in the middle. Lucía then said, turning to her uncle :

“ Well, I suppose you have now satisfied your curi-

osity. This is Chloris. Is it not true that she is worthy of inspiring the idyl?"

Dofia Clara, who, although younger than Lucía, was more thoughtful and serious, regretted that her friend should have confided this secret to her uncle, and could not refrain from showing her annoyance, frowning and looking grave, while at the same time her cheeks flushed with shame and displeasure.

Dofia Clara, however, said nothing; but Lucía noticed her annoyance, and went on as follows:

"Don't be angry, Clarita. Don't call me a chatterbox. My uncle put me last night between the sword and the wall, and I was obliged to confess everything to him. I had to exculpate myself and to exculpate Don Carlos. My uncle had taken it into his head that he was the old shepherd and that I was Chloris. Besides, my uncle is very discreet, and will say nothing to any one.—Is not that true, uncle?"

"Make your mind easy, señorita," answered the Commander, turning to Dofia Clara, who grew redder than before; "no one shall learn through me who it was that inspired the idyl, which is, indeed, charming."

The Commander noticed that Clara became more tranquil, although in her confusion she could not utter a word.

Dofia Lucía continued :

“ You may well say that the idyl is charming! Believe me, uncle, from the days of Vicente Espinel down to our own times, Ronda has produced no finer poet than our friend Don Carlos de Atienza, the heir of an illustrious house of that city, who lives in Seville with his parents, who is trying to obtain in the university there the doctor’s bonnet, in both branches of the law, and who is at present neglecting his studies to follow Chloris, who has come here from Seville with her family—whom you probably know—who intend to settle in the city.”

“ I cannot say, niece, whether or not I have the honour of being acquainted with this young lady’s family, whose name you have not yet told me. How is a stranger, lately arrived here, to guess to what family a young lady belongs of whom he only knows that she is called Chloris in poetry and Clara in prose ? ”

“ Why, that is true ! How forgetful I am ! I did not tell you my friend’s name. Well, then, uncle, this young lady is called Doña Clara de Solis y Roldan. And now what have you to say ? Do you know her family or not ? ”

On hearing from Lucía’s lips the family name of her friend, and her last innocent question, the Commander started and looked agitated ; it seemed as if the red flush which had a moment before dyed Clara’s delicate cheeks had passed, with added force, to

Don Fadrique's manly countenance tanned by the sun of India and by the winds of remote seas.

Lucía, without observing her uncle's agitation, continued :

“ But why do I say her family? It is possible that you know Clara herself, only you do not remember her. When she was a little thing, perhaps when she was born, you were in Lima.”

At last, conquering his emotion, the Commander answered his niece :

“ I could hardly either remember or forget this young lady, whom I never saw before. The person I do remember, however, and whom I knew very well, is her father, and I also had the pleasure, notwithstanding the secluded and austere life she has always led, of knowing and enjoying the friendship of Señora Doña Blanca Roldan.—How is the señora your mother, señorita? ”

“ She is well,” answered Doña Clara,” but, absorbed more completely than ever in her devotions, she sees scarcely any one.”

“ And Señor Don Valentin is well? ”

“ He is so, God be thanked ! ” said Clara.

“ He has retired from the magistracy,” added Lucía ; “ he inherited the large fortune of his elder brother, who died without leaving any children, and he lives here, where his finest estates are situated, of which Clara is sole heiress.”

The blood rushed again to the Commander's face, dyeing it crimson. Recovering himself after a moment, he said in the most natural manner to his loquacious niece :

“So that this young lady, in addition to being a beauty, is also very rich?”

“For a place like this, yes. Is it not strange, uncle, that they should wish to marry her to Don Casimiro? If you could see how old and ugly he is! Why, it is an offence against God! If I were the Pope, I would refuse the licence they will have to ask from him.”

“Why,” said Don Fadrique to Clara, “are you such near relations, then?”

“Don Casimiro Solís is the nearest relation my father has,” answered Clara.

“He would be his next heir if Clara were not living,” added Lucía, who never failed to tell all she knew when she was talking to persons whom she was so familiar with, and for whom she had so much affection, as Clara and her uncle.

Don Fadrique did not pursue the conversation any further. He remained silent and apparently thoughtful and melancholy.

They continued to walk on in silence then until they reached the *source*. In the middle of a wood of oaks and olives where the gardens terminate, rises a steep hill formed of rocks and huge bowlders that

seem to hang in air and threaten at every moment to topple over.

Wild fig trees, rock-roses of various species, rosemary, and thyme grow in the fissures of the rocks and clothe the places where the stone is not entirely bare and their roots can find sufficient earth to afford them a foothold and nourishment.

In many places in the hill openings in the rocks lead into grottoes and caves; and at its base, which is below the level of the road, the stones are as if hollowed out, forming a grotto more spacious and with a wider entrance than any of the others. At the farther end of this grotto, whose interior is completely visible from the outside, springs from a cleft in the rock what, without exaggeration, may be called a river. For this reason the place is called the source of the river, or simply the source.

The water that flows from the rocks falls with a pleasant murmur into a natural lake, the bottom of which is strewn with round, white pebbles. In this lake the water rises and falls with gentle swell, continually forming and dissolving short-lived circles; but in spite of these circles, so transparent is the water that the bottom of the lake, although this is nearly five feet in depth, can be seen clearly through it, and every stone can be counted.

On the margin of the little lake grow reeds, bulrushes, cresses, and other aquatic plants.

The pond or lake fills the grotto and extends for a good distance outside of it, reflecting the heavens on its crystal surface. On either side is a trench, through which the water flows, separating afterwards into innumerable rivulets, and going to irrigate the fifteen hundred gardens which make the outskirts of the town a green and flowery paradise.

As in that part of the country the ground is rugged and uneven, the water descends to the valleys with impetuous force, at times falling in cascades, at times serving to turn water mills, fulling mills, and copper mills. Near the source, however, the water flows on level ground with a tranquil current and a gentle murmur, the loudest sound in this pleasant solitude being that produced by the source itself—the noise of the water flowing from the rock and falling into the grotto.

On the borders of the sylvan lake are several willows, and beside the trunk of the tallest and most leafy of them is a stone seat or bench. Here the Rondan poet, Don Carlos de Atienza, was seated when the Commander, his niece, and Doña Clara arrived there.

Don Fadrique, as if wishing to banish from his mind melancholy and disturbing thoughts, out of harmony with his character and his optimistic philosophy, passed his hand across his forehead and, making an effort to recover his naturally serene and cheerful temper, said aloud :

“Hallo, illustrious poet, what new idyl are you composing in these solitudes?”

Don Carlos rose from his seat, and, advancing towards the new-comers, said :

“Good day, Señor Don Fadrique.—Your most humble servant, young ladies.”

The Commander smoothed the way for Don Carlos to propose to accompany himself and the young girls in their walk. He spoke to Don Carlos of his studies, expatiated on the delight he himself took in poetry, praised the idyl, and made him recite it for him again.

He could not have given Don Carlos a greater pleasure nor gratified his vanity more deeply, for, like all who write, have ever written, or ever will write poetry, Don Carlos was fond of reciting his verses to an indulgent and discriminating audience, and he was always inclined to think an audience discriminating that was indulgent.

While Don Carlos was reciting his idyl, Don Fadrique observed Clara furtively but with much attention. If he had still entertained the slightest doubt that Clara was Chloris, that doubt would now have vanished. On Clara's face, to use a common but very picturesque expression, the colours chased each other while the recitation lasted. Now she turned pale, now her cheeks were dyed with crimson. And when Don Carlos exclaimed, in the course of the recitation :

‘What! Have I given thee of my love in vain so many proofs?’—

Don Fadrique saw or fancied he saw Doña Clara’s lids droop more than ordinarily, as if to keep in and conceal the tell-tale tears, ready to gush from her beautiful eyes.

After reciting the verses Don Carlos, less daring in prose, hardly ventured to approach Clara, nor did he say a word to her that everybody could not hear. Only to Lucía he spoke in a low voice and, as it seemed, confidentially.

All four walked farther into the country, returning to the city by a different road through a shady poplar grove. Here Clara, either by walking on in advance or remaining behind, leaving the Commander to walk with his niece, might have conversed at her ease with Don Carlos, but it almost seemed as if she was afraid of him, as if she feared to listen to his voice without witnesses, and desired to show the Commander that she did not wish to belong to Don Carlos but to Don Casimiro. However that may be, in the wildest spots Clara did not stir from Don Fadrique’s side, as if she feared that a wild beast might rush out and devour her, and sought from him protection and defence.

Who can say what passed during those moments in the Commander’s soul? Certain it is that he scarcely ventured to speak to Clara. On one occasion,

however, when Don Carlos and Lucía, who had walked on in advance, were lost to view among the trees, the Commander stopped Clara, looked at her strangely and sweetly, and, while his countenance assumed a solemn and in a certain manner a venerable expression, he exclaimed :

“ My child ! You are very good, very beautiful—innocent of everything. God bless you and make you as happy as you deserve to be ! ”

And saying this he raised his hands, as if to bestow a benediction upon the girl, then took her head between them and pressed a kiss upon her forehead.

Clara, no doubt, thought all this very odd and out of the ordinary usage and custom ; but Don Fadrique’s countenance was so serious and his expression so noble and sympathetic that, notwithstanding certain ideas with which devout persons had precociously sullied the young girl’s mind, talking to her of sins and errors, Clara could read there no audacious thought.

Still more was she confirmed in her belief of the purity and sinlessness of this strange and sudden kiss when the Commander said to her :

“ Don Carlos seems to me an excellent youth. Do you love him very much ? ”

There was a gentle imperiousness in Don Fadrique’s accents which Clara was unable to resist.

“ I have loved him very much, ” she answered,

“but I shall be able to give up loving him. I have been very culpable. Without my mother’s knowledge I have loved him. Henceforth I will not love him. I will be a good daughter. I will obey my mother. She knows what is for my good better than I do.”

Don Fadrique did not venture to make any reply, or to pronounce a discourse subversive of maternal authority.

Shortly afterwards the others joined them.

Before re-entering the city, Don Carlos took his leave of the Commander and the two young ladies, and went away in another direction.

When Lucía and her uncle had left Clara at her own door, Don Fadrique asked his niece :

“What did Don Carlos say to you ?”

“What should he say? That he is in despair ; that Clara scorns him, that she repulses him ; and that, to obey her mother, she will marry Don Casimiro.”

“And Don Valentin, what does he do ?”

“Nothing. What would you have him do? Why, do you not know that Don Valentin is a henpecked husband? A glance from Doña Blanca confounds and terrifies him ; a word of displeasure from that terrible woman makes Don Valentin tremble like a leaf.”

“So that it is Doña Blanca who has arranged Clara’s marriage with Don Casimiro ?”

“Yes, uncle ; Doña Blanca is the one who arranges

everything in that house. She commands and the others obey. They scarcely dare to breathe without her permission. It cannot be denied that Doña Blanca is very clever and that she is a saint. She knows more about heavenly things than all the preachers put together. She prays a great deal; she reads and studies pious books, she leads an exemplary and penitent life, and gives a great deal in charity and to the churches; but in spite of all her virtues and excellent qualities she is not by any means amiable. On the contrary, she is terrible. She makes me afraid."

"I do not doubt it, niece; she was just as you describe her even when I knew her."

"O uncle! And did you see her often?"

"Not often, niece; but I met her occasionally."

"Don't let it surprise you if they should not come to the house for a week, even for politeness' sake. Doña Blanca's thoughts are always so far away from everything earthly, and she is so unwilling to hear anything of the outside world that might distract her mind from the inward meditation in which she lives, that no doubt neither she nor her poor husband yet knows that you have arrived. I do not believe Don Valentin to be very spiritually minded or much given to holy contemplation, but, as he stands in such terror of his wife and always tries to please her in everything, he, too, leads a life of devotion, se-

cluded from the world, and I even believe him capable of scourging himself, not so much through love of God as through fear of Doña Blanca.”

Don Fadrique listened in silence. He was evidently in a taciturn mood. Lucía, who was fond of talking, gave her tongue the rein and went on :

“Poor Clara! Fancy what an amusing life she must lead. I have not the slightest doubt but that she will go to heaven; but cannot one go to heaven in an easier way than that? I could not tell you the prodigies of craft, the miracles of cunning, although it may not seem fitting that I should praise myself, that I have had to perform to obtain, in some slight degree, the good-will and the confidence of Doña Blanca, and her consent to her daughter’s maintaining a friendly intercourse with me and going out occasionally in my company. If it were not for me, Clara would be buried alive within four walls. I don’t know how she has been able to come to an understanding with Don Carlos. Fortunately, he is very clever and equal to anything. Clara has been, I will not say in correspondence, but almost in correspondence, with him. The fact is, that Clara fell in love with him. Afterwards she felt remorse for loving a man without her mother’s knowledge, and the more so as her mother intends her for another; so that now she repulses poor Don Carlos, and the unhappy swain Myrtilus is dying of grief.”

The Commander listened to his niece with interest, without once interrupting her by so much as an exclamation. It seemed as if he had either been struck dumb or did not know what to say.

“Clara,” continued Lucía, “now that she thinks it a sin to love Don Carlos, and not considering it possible to oppose her mother’s wishes, sometimes thinks of becoming a nun; but she does not venture to confide even this desire to her mother. She thinks, in the first place, that she has not a true vocation, that she wishes to take the veil through pique and in desperation, so to say; and, besides, she thinks that to say to her mother that she wishes to be a nun is an act of rebellion, is to oppose her desire of marrying her to Don Casimiro. What do you think of my unhappy friend’s situation?”

The Commander, questioned thus directly, was at last obliged to break his silence, but he answered laconically:

“The situation is in truth a bad one; but who knows? Everything has a remedy but death. Meantime,” added Don Fadrique after a short pause, speaking slowly and in a low voice, letting the words fall one by one as if it cost him a great effort to utter them, and as if, instead of answering his niece, he was talking to and answering himself—“meantime Doña Blanca is sensible; she is pious and she is a good mother. She has very weighty reasons, no doubt, for

wishing to marry her daughter to Don Casimiro. In short, girl, continue to be a good friend to Clara, but do not blame or judge Doña Blanca's conduct. I am going, besides, to make you another request."

"Command me, uncle."

"It is something very difficult that I am going to ask of you."

"How so?"

"Because you are fond of talking, and what I ask of you is to be silent."

"And what am I to be silent about? You shall see how silent I will be. I do not wish you to be displeased with me, or to form a bad opinion of me."

"Well, then, be silent about your having told me of the love of Don Carlos and Doña Clara for each other, and be silent also in regard to all you know about that love."

"Uncle, for Heaven's sake don't think me so fond of telling everything! That wretched idyl is altogether to blame. But for the idyl I should not have told even you anything."

On hearing this the Commander gave his niece a smile, and as they were by this time in the house he separated from the girl, going away with a somewhat thoughtful and abstracted air, as if he was trying to solve some very difficult problem.

IX.

WHILE the Commander and Lucía were holding the conversation we have just recorded, Clara had gone to her mother's room.

Doña Blanca was sitting in an arm-chair. Before her was a small table on which books and papers were lying. Don Valentin was also in the room, sitting in a chair not far from his wife.

Doña Blanca was of a noble and distinguished appearance. Dressed as she was in a severely simple style, there was yet noticeable in her attire a certain elegance and stateliness. Doña Blanca might be a little past forty. Her originally black hair was now of an ashy hue, owing to the many grey hairs sprinkled through it. Her countenance, full of austere gravity, was very handsome. Her features were all of the most perfect regularity.

Doña Blanca was tall and thin. Her white hands looked transparent. Her eyes, black like her daughter's, had in them a strange, indescribable fire, as if all the passions of heaven and earth and every angelic and demoniac feeling had met together to kindle it.

Don Valentin, a timid and peaceable man, who had loved his wife during the first years of their married life, and afterwards cherished for her a respect that bordered on reverence, scarcely dared to utter a

word in her presence unless when she commanded him to speak.

Don Valentin was a virtuous gentleman, but he was weak and pusillanimous. He had been, through love and regard for his honour, an upright magistrate. Nothing could turn him aside from the fulfilment of his duty, and he had even shown admirable firmness beyond the precincts of his own house, where it is sufficient that firmness, however great it must be, need last only for a moment; but in his house, subjected to the domestic tyranny of a woman endowed with an iron will, whose pressure was perpetual and constant, Don Valentin had found it impossible to maintain resistance, and had abdicated completely. The estate, their affairs, the education of their daughter, all depended upon and were directed and managed by Doña Blanca.

Don Valentin's appearance was insignificant and may be best described by negatives.

He was neither tall nor short, neither dark nor fair, neither slender nor stout. With all this, however, he seemed a gentleman, so to say, who was very correct in his manners, his bearing, and his speech. His devoted submissiveness to his wife added to this quality of correctness a tinge of meekness.

Don Valentin had been in his youth a very good Catholic, but without penitential fervour, or any inclination to mysticism or holy meditation. Now, in

order not to displease his wife, he strove to be a St. Hilarion or a St. Pachomius.

Don Valentin was verging on sixty, but he looked much older, for there is nothing that ages more and sooner breaks down the spirit and courage of a man than that voluntary and terrible servitude to which, by a strange mystery of the will, many men subject themselves, yielding to the diabolical persistence of their wives.

Clara had no sooner entered the room than Doña Blanca said to her :

“ Where have you been, child ? ”

“ At the source, mamma. ”

“ I don't know how Señora Doña Antonia has feet to go on such wild expeditions. The walk there and back is almost a league. ”

“ Doña Antonia was not with us to-day, ” said Clara, not daring to tell a falsehood, nor even to dissemble the truth.

Doña Blanca's countenance assumed an expression of surprise and great displeasure.

“ Then who accompanied you in your walk ? ” she asked.

“ Don't be angry, mamma ; we had very good company. ”

“ Yes, but whom ? Some kitchen-maid ? Some old woman or other ? ”

“ Listen, mamma ; Doña Antonia had a headache,

and was unable to accompany us. Lucía's uncle went with us in her place."

"And who is Lucía's uncle?"

"A naval officer, who has been in India and Peru; who says he knows you; who went a short time ago to live in Villabermeja, and who came to the city last night on a visit."

"That must be Commander Mendoza," said Don Valentin, with a certain pleasure in the knowledge that an old friend had arrived in the town.

"Precisely, papa; that is his name—Commander Mendoza; a very polished gentleman, although a little odd."

"See, Blanca, we must make a visit to the Commander, who is no doubt staying at his brother's," exclaimed Don Valentin.

"We will comply with that duty, which is one that society imposes upon us," said Doña Blanca, with serene dignity and composure.—"But you, Clara, must never again go out walking or hold any intercourse with that impious and wicked man. If the holy faith of our fathers were not so lost, if the perverse doctrines of French freethinkers had not contaminated us, that man, instead of wearing the honourable uniform of a naval officer, would wear the *sanbenito*; instead of going about the world free, to be a stone of offence, a leaven of impiety and yeast of hell, corrupting in the social body what has still re-

mained sound, he would be in the dungeons of the Inquisition, or he would have already expired at the stake ! ”

Clara was horrified to hear this diatribe from her mother's lips. The Commander presented himself now to her mind as a diabolical personage, and, remembering the kiss she had received from him, she was filled with terror and shame.

Don Valentin, at the recollection of the Commander, which brought back to his memory happier times, when he was not so old and not so submissive, felt himself, contrary to his habit, with the courage to contradict instead of yielding a passive assent. Consequently he said :

“ Good heavens, wife ! What a want of charity ! You are unjust to our old friend. I won't deny that he was something of an *esprit fort* in his youth, but no doubt he has reformed. For the rest, the Commander was always honourable, noble, and upright. What have you to say against his morality ? ”

“ Hold your tongue, Valentin ! You are talking only folly ; and I call it folly in order not to call it blasphemy. What morality, what nobility, what virtue can there be where there is neither religion nor faith, which are their basis ? Without the holy fear of God, all virtue is a lie, and every moral action is an artifice of the devil to deceive fools who boast of their wisdom, and who do not subject their judgment to

those who know more than they do. I have already said, and I repeat it, the Commander Mendoza was an unbeliever and a libertine, and will continue to be so. We will visit him, to avoid giving offence, managing so as not to find him in the house, and to see only Doña Antonia and her saintly husband. As for Clarita, you must find some pretext to prevent her from going out again with Lucía, exposing herself to the risk of being in the company of that renegade, Jacobin, Voltairean, and atheist. I would rather confide Clara to the care of the vilest and most sinful of women. Such a woman, with the help of religion, might reform and at last become a saint; but of the man who denies God or who abhors him, of the man who has been a hardened sinner all his life, what hope can justly be conceived?"

Clarita and Don Valentin were filled with remorse and terror by Doña Blanca's sermon, and could find nothing to answer her.

It was resolved, then, that Clarita, through the Commander's fault, in order that she might not be contaminated, should not again go walking with Lucía.

X.

THE resolutions of Doña Blanca Roldan were irrevocable and effective. She knew how to carry them out with calm determination.

Neither before nor after this visit did Doña Blanca allow herself nor did Don Valentin allow himself to be seen by any neighbour or friend. Secluded in the interior of the ancient mansion in which they lived, under pretence of illness they refused to see any one, difficult and odious as it is to deny one's self to visitors, being at home, when one lives in a small town.

It was in vain that Lucía tried repeatedly to take Clara out for a walk. Whenever she sent a message, the answer was returned that Clara was indisposed or that she was very busy, and that it was impossible for her to go out.

Lucía went herself to visit Clara, but was able to see her only twice, and then in her mother's presence.

These proofs of coolness and even of dislike were softened by an extreme courtesy on the part of Doña Blanca; although it was plain to be seen that if that lady made use of every means suggested by politeness to avoid giving motive for offence, she preferred to offend, if any one chose to take offence, rather than yield a jot in her purpose.

With the single exception of the day on which she visited Doña Antonia, Doña Blanca left her house only to go to the church to hear mass and perform other devotions. Don Valentin almost always accompanied her, like a lay brother or humble charity child, and Clara accompanied her always, scarcely daring to lift her eyes from the ground.

Lucía, wondering as to the cause of this almost complete rupture of relations, began to fear that Doña Blanca had heard of the love existing between Clara and Don Carlos de Atienza, the presence of the latter in the city, and the intimacy and favour which he enjoyed in her house.

Doña Clara was not given to soliloquising, nor did she correspond with her friend; from the servants nothing could be learned, for Doña Blanca's were almost all from other towns, and were either strangers in the house, or led devout and retired lives, in this way imitating and pleasing their master and mistress.

All that could be affirmed with certainty was, that the only person who visited Don Valentin's house was his near relative, Don Casimiro.

In this way ten days passed, that to Don Carlos, Lucía, and the Commander seemed ten centuries, when one day, towards the close of a lovely afternoon, the Commander was alone with his niece in the courtyard of the house. The latter was maintaining an animated conversation with her uncle, showing him the plants and flowers that, in beds and in innumerable pots, adorned the yard, which, as we have already said, adjoined that of Don Valentin's house. Passing over the dividing wall the sound of the speaker's voice could reach the next yard, and did in fact reach it; for in the midst of their conversation Lucía and the

Commander heard the noise of a small, heavy object falling at their feet. Lucía stooped down quickly to pick it up, and she no sooner had it in her hand than she whispered joyfully to her uncle :

“ It is a letter from Clarita. How good she is! She loves me indeed. It is necessary to know her as I do to appreciate the value of this evidence of her friendship. To elude, for my sake, her mother’s vigilance! To write to me clandestinely! Why, uncle, it seems impossible. For my sake that poor girl, who is a saint, has failed in the duty of filial obedience! And how, where, when can she have written to me? Why, I tell you it is a miracle of affection. And, the sly creature, how anxiously she must have been watching for an opportunity to throw me the letter with the certainty that I should pick it up! Blessed be her hands!”

While speaking she had untied the paper from the stone to which it was fastened by a thread, and was devouring it with kisses.

“ Come to read that letter,” said the Commander, “ where there is light, and where we shall be interrupted by no one. In the study there is no one, and the lamp has just been lighted. Come, it is already dark, and you cannot see here.”

Lucía accompanied her uncle to the study, and in an agitated voice, and almost whispering the words in the Commander’s ear, read what follows :

“MY DEAR LUCÍA: You well know how much I love you. Think, then, what a grief it is to me to see you so seldom, and never to be able to speak to you. Do not suppose that my mother has any suspicion of my shameless conduct towards Don Carlos de Atienza. I tremble when I think that she might have suspected it. No one but yourself, the Commander, and I knows that Don Carlos is my suitor; but God knows my sin, of which I repent. It was horrible perversity in me to encourage that man with tender glances and profane smiles—almost involuntary, I swear it. But they do not on that account weigh the less heavily on my conscience. Something I must have done, impelled by my innate wickedness or tempted by the enemy of mankind, to disturb that young man’s mind, make him abandon his university and his studies, and induce him to come here in pursuit of me. In the midst of everything I have much motive for gratitude to Jesus and the Holy Virgin that they have taken pity upon me, notwithstanding my unworthiness, and ordained that my fault should not be attended with scandal. It is by a supernatural favour of Heaven, doubtless, that the motive which impelled Don Carlos to come here has remained a secret; every one thinks he has come here and remains here on your account. How much do I not owe you for bearing the blame of this! If I had not been bold, if I had not encouraged Don Carlos, if

I had had the necessary severity and circumspection, I should not now find myself in so miserable a situation. Ah, my dear Lucía! the human heart is an abyss of iniquity—and of contradictions. Will you believe that if, on the one hand, I am in despair at having given occasion for Don Carlos to come in pursuit of me, on the other it flatters, it delights me, that he should have come, and I am conscious that if he had not come I should be even more unhappy than I am! In the midst of all—do not doubt it—I am very wicked. I am ashamed of my hypocrisy. I am deceiving my mother, who is so clear-sighted. My mother thinks me better than I am, and watches over me as the miser watches over his treasure when the treasure has been already stolen. I do not know how to tell you without offending you, and yet I wish to tell you—I should not obey the dictates of my conscience if I did not tell you—that the cause of my mother's separating me from you is your uncle. He seemed to me a very polished and excellent gentleman, but my mother declares—how horrible!—that he does not believe in God. Can it be possible, child, that the devil strikes the eyes of some souls with such abominable blindness? Is it conceivable that the copy, the image, the likeness, should deny the divine original that lends them the only worth and noble being they have? If this be true, if the Commander continues obdurate in his wickedness, arm yourself

with prudence, and pray Heaven to save him. Endeavour, too, to bring your uncle into the good path. You are possessed of extraordinary intelligence, and the gift of expressing yourself with justness and enthusiasm. Doubtless the Most High makes the weak at times the instruments of his greatest victories. Remember David, a youth, who was a weak shepherd, and who conquered and destroyed the giant in the Terebinthine vale. How many sisters, daughters, mothers, and wives there are who have succeeded in converting their erring husbands, brothers, sons, or fathers! You should aspire to a like glory, and God will reward you and give you the strength to attain it. As for me, young as I am, I am a miserable sinner, and I find it task enough to weep for my follies and to calm the tempest of conflicting emotions which ravage my soul. Give me a last and the greatest proof of your friendship. Persuade Don Carlos not to love me. Tell him to leave me and return to Seville. Convince him that I am ugly, that I like Don Casimiro, that my ingratitude towards him deserves his contempt. I should have said all this to him, but I am so weak and so foolish that I should not have known how to tell it to him, and perhaps I should have stupidly induced him to believe the contrary. For the love of God, my dearest Lucía, dismiss Don Carlos for me! I cannot, I ought not, to be his. Send him away; let him not neglect

his studies ; let him not give cause for scandal, as he would if it were known that he had come here for my sake ; and that I am a wicked girl, a temptress, perhaps. Good-bye. I am greatly afflicted. I have no one to confide my affairs to, no one to whom I can unburden my griefs, or from whom I can ask counsel and help. I await anxiously the arrival of Father Jacinto, who is the oracle of this house. I know that what I tell him will be as if it had been dropped into a well, and that his counsels are wise. He is the only man who has any influence over my mother. When will he come from Villabermeja? Good-bye, again, and love and pity your
CLARA.”

XI.

THIS innocent letter, these sentiments, so natural in a modest girl of sixteen, brought up devoutly and in retirement from the world, pleased the Commander greatly, but also gave him food for reflection. We shall not seek to look into the depths of his soul, or analyse his secret thoughts, but confine ourselves to saying that as a result of hearing this letter he formed three resolutions :

The first was, to seek an opportunity of seeing and speaking with the severe Doña Blanca ; the second, to sound the depths of Don Carlos's soul, to determine

whether he truly loved the young girl, and was worthy of her love; and the third, to consult with Father Jacinto, and secure in him an ally in the war which he might find himself obliged to declare against Clarita's mother.

In order to obtain the first, instead of writing to ask an interview, which, under some pretext or other, she would have politely refused him, Don Fadrique decided to rise very early on the following morning, wait in the street until Doña Blanca should leave her house to go to mass, and then walk straight up to her and address her boldly.

This the Commander did. Before six o'clock Doña Blanca made her appearance in the street, accompanied by Clarita and Don Valentin. They were going to the principal church of the place to hear mass. As soon as Don Fadrique saw them he approached them resolutely and, taking off his hat and courteously saluting them, he said :

“Your humble servant, Señora Blanca. Happy the eyes that behold you and your family!—Good morning, friend Don Valentin.—Good morning, Clarita.”

Don Valentin, hearing himself called friend so gently, and by a familiar and sympathetic voice, was unable to restrain himself; without reflecting he yielded to his first affectionate impulse and advanced towards Don Fadrique with open arms. Fortunately for him-

self, however, Don Valentin had the deep-rooted habit of never doing the slightest thing without first looking at his wife to see how she viewed it, whether she withheld him from consummating or encouraged him to consummate his intended act. Notwithstanding the enthusiasm, then, with which he was about to embrace Don Fadrique, he instinctively looked at Doña Blanca before giving the embrace. What he then saw in his wife's flashing eyes is not to be described. The effect produced upon him by that look is almost indescribable. Don Valentin thought he could read in it the most profound contempt, as if she were accusing him of a stupid humiliation, an infamous baseness, and he thought he saw at the same time anger and an imperious prohibition to carry into effect what he had started forward to do. Terror took such complete possession of Don Valentin's soul that he stopped short and stood suddenly motionless as if he had been turned into stone, only that, in a dying and almost inaudible voice, he exhaled at last, like a languid sigh a—

“Good morning, Señor Don Fadrique.”

“Good morning,” said Clara, also, with as little spirit as her father.

Doña Blanca measured the Commander from head to foot with her glance, and in calm, suave tones, without being discomposed or disconcerted in the slightest degree, spoke to him in this wise :

“Caballero—God, who is infinitely merciful, have you in his holy keeping! Not by love of him, which you have not, but by the worldly honour of which you boast, and by the respect and consideration which every man of gentle birth owes to a lady, I entreat you not to distract us from the course we are pursuing, nor to disturb our devout and retired life.”

And having said this, Doña Blanca made a cold and ceremonious reverence to the Commander, and resumed her walk with tranquil gravity, followed by Don Valentin and preceded by Clara.

Don Fadrique returned her reverence with another, stood for a moment as if bewildered, and then muttered:

“It is decided; it will be necessary to resort to other measures.”

When the Solís family had walked on some thirty steps, the Commander saw that Doña Blanca turned round to speak to her husband.

It is plain that the Commander did not hear what she said, but the novelist knows everything and hears everything. Doña Blanca, who always treated her husband with the greatest politeness when she preached him a sermon or gave him a reprimand, spoke to him in the following terms while Clara went on in advance:

“I have told you a thousand times, Señor Don Valentin, that that man, whom you insisted on introducing into our house in Lima, is a rude and impious

libertine. His acquaintance, if it would not contaminate, would stain the good reputation of any woman. I was obliged almost to turn him out of the house. His want of politeness and even of respect would have been sufficient motive in a more barbarous age to have given him, forgetting the divine law, a severe lesson, such as gentlemen were accustomed to give in those days. This could not be; it was impossible. Nothing could be more repugnant to my conscience, nothing more opposed to my principles; but there is a just medium. It is a crime to kill one who has offended us—but it is baseness to embrace him. Señor Don Valentin, you have no blood in your veins.”

All this Doña Blanca, his terrible wife, uttered word by word, slowly and in a low voice, almost in the ear of Don Valentin.

The last phrases were so cruel and pitiless that Don Valentin was on the point of raising the standard of rebellion, making a scene in the street, and answering his wife as she deserved; but the perfume of a thousand flowers regaled the nostrils; people were passing along with a cheerful aspect; the day was enchanting, peace reigned in the heavens, a fresh spring breeze cooled and calmed the most feverish brow; the Solises were on their way to the bloodless sacrifice of the mass; Clara walked in front, looking so beautiful and so serene—how disturb all this with a horrible dispute? Don Valentin clenched his hands

and confined himself to exclaiming, in a voice in which there was a touch of fury :

“Señora !”

Then he added to himself, taking good care that Doña Blanca should not hear him :

“Accursed be my fate !”

But the moment Don Valentin had uttered this exclamation he was terrified at the blasphemous rebellion against Providence which his exclamation implied, and for a moment he regarded himself as first cousin to Satan himself.

As we see, the Commander's success in this first attempt to renew friendly relations with the Solises could not have been more unfortunate than it was.

XII.

OUR hero was not daunted by this.

He waited for a while in the middle of the street, so that Doña Blanca might neither say nor think that he was following her, and then went to the principal church of the city, to which he knew the Solises had gone.

Don Fadrique did not go there, however, with the intention of approaching Doña Blanca again and suffering no doubt a fresh repulse, but in order to find Don Carlos, who he thought could not but be in the

church, now that he had no other means of seeing Clara.

Don Fadrique, then, entered the church and proceeded to look for the poet in the shadow of the pillars and the most retired corners of the building. He soon found him behind a pillar not far from the principal altar. Don Carlos seemed so absorbed in his prayers or in his reflections that nothing belonging to the external world except Clara could have drawn him from them or attracted his attention.

Don Fadrique, consequently, walked close up to him unperceived. He then observed that Clara was at a little distance, kneeling at her mother's side; that Don Carlos was looking at her, and that she, although she kept her eyes fixed almost constantly on her prayer-book, raised them swiftly from time to time to glance, with a mixture of fear and tenderness, in the direction of her lover, showing when she saw him that she was rejoiced to see him, but that she had a dread and a certain terror of profaning the temple and sinning gravely, deceiving her mother and encouraging the man whose wife she told herself she could not be.

It need cause no surprise that all this was to be read in Clarita's glances. They were transparent glances, in whose depths shone her soul like a pure diamond shining marvellously by its own light in the bosom of a tranquil lake.

The Commander stood watching this scene for a time, and convinced himself that neither Doña Blanca nor Don Valentin suspected anything of the young girl's love. He considered, however, that his presence there might attract the attention of Doña Blanca, arouse her anger anew, cause her to notice the handsome youth who was at his side, and make her suspect what thus far she had not suspected.

Then, although sorry to interrupt this ecstatic and rapturous contemplation, he touched Don Carlos on the shoulder and said to him, almost in a whisper :

“Forgive me for distracting you from your devotions and disturbing the beatific vision which you are doubtless enjoying ; but it is necessary that I should speak with you without delay. Do me the favour to come with me, as I have to talk with you on matters which are of the utmost importance to you.”

Without waiting for an answer, Don Fadrique walked towards the door, and Don Carlos, although much to his dislike, could do no less than follow him.

When they were outside the church Don Fadrique walked towards the country ; Don Carlos followed him, and when they found themselves in a retired spot where no one could hear them or interrupt their conversation, Don Fadrique declared himself in the following terms :

“Once more I ask your pardon for my daring in obliging you to leave the church, and still more for

mixing myself up in your affairs without sufficient title to do so. I scarcely know you. This is the seventh or eighth time that I have spoken to you. Clarita I have seen to-day for the second time in my life. Nevertheless, I am deeply interested in Clarita's welfare and in yours. Attribute this to an absurd sentimentalism, to the affection I entertain for my niece Lucía, which is reflected on you; to what you will. What I entreat of you is that you will believe me to be loyal and sincere, and that you will not doubt my good will or my good intentions. I desire and I am able to be of great service to you. In exchange I wish you to listen to my counsels and to follow them."

Don Carlos listened attentively, and with an appearance of deference and respect to the Commander. Presently he answered him :

"Señor Don Fadrique, both for your own sake and because you are the uncle of Señorita Doña Lucía, who is so amiable and so good, I am disposed to hear you, and even to obey you, as far as lies in my power, without regard to the advantage which you promise me for my obedience."

"I see that I have not expressed myself clearly," replied Don Fadrique. "I promise you no reward for your obedience; what I wish to signify is that by following certain counsels of mine you will obtain without difficulty what otherwise you might fail to obtain, to the great grief of everybody."

“ Explain yourself further,” said Don Carlos.

“ I mean,” continued Don Fadrique, “ that your present method of courting Clarita has been misleading people for some time past. Thus far no one in the town suspects your love, thanks to my niece. As, two months ago, she was in Seville, where you made her acquaintance, and as you came here shortly afterwards, and as you go every evening to her house and spend a great deal of time conversing with her, and not seldom in private; and as my niece is young and lovely and graceful, if my affection as an uncle does not deceive me, every one thinks that you have come here on her account; that you are paying your addresses to her, that you are her lover. Who could suppose that so young and pretty a girl would be contented to play the poor and little dignified *rôle* of confidante? For this reason, then, curiosity is misled and your love remains a secret; but Lucía pays for it. Confess that this is very generous on her part.”

“ I—Señor Don Fadrique—”

“ Make no excuses. I do not speak of this that you may excuse yourself, but in order to place things before you as they are. Every one in the town believes that you have come here, abandoning your parents, your home, and your studies, to pay your addresses to Lucía. But this deception cannot continue. Fancy the wonder, the gossip, the talk you will give rise to, the day it becomes known, as it cannot but be

known, that you are courting Clarita, whom every one believes to be the promised wife of Don Casimiro de Solís."

"That shall never be while I live!" exclaimed Don Carlos vehemently.

"Let us endeavour to prevent it," resumed Don Fadrique calmly. "I will help you as far as I can, and I repeat that something I can do; but all your energy and all the caution I may use will be of no avail if you neglect to listen to my warnings and to follow my counsels."

"I have already told you that I desire to follow them."

"Well, then, friend Don Carlos, it is necessary for you to be convinced that Clarita, of whose love for you I am persuaded, has been brought up in so holy a fear of the Lord, and with so great and even, if you will, exaggerated and irrational a respect for her mother that, to obey her, not to displease her, not to be rebellious, she would be capable of marrying Don Casimiro, even though she were to die of love for you the day after her marriage, even though her wedding dress were to be her shroud."

"But if Clara tells her mother that she does not love Don Casimiro—"

"Clara will not dare to tell her mother that."

"If she declares to her mother that she loves me—"

“She would die rather than confess that love to her mother.”

“But if she fears her mother so greatly, can she not fly with me?”

“I do not believe she would ever take so wrong a step. At all events, even if so wrong a step were possible, it should not be had recourse to until every prudent and judicious means had failed. I repeat my assertion, then. I believe Clarita capable of dying of grief, but I do not believe her capable of lending herself to the scandal of an elopement.”

“Then what do you wish me to do?”

“In the first place, to return to Seville to your parents, and to leave Doña Clara in peace with hers.”

“It is easy to see that you are not in love. At your age—”

“There you are with your folly, Señor poet—I am neither an old man nor a shepherd—nor do I resemble in any respect the shepherd of the idyl. Set out for Seville this very day. Leave the town before Doña Blanca perceives that there are Moors on the coast. I will watch here over your interests, and if they should be in any danger, if it should be necessary to have recourse to extreme measures, rely also upon me—even for an elopement. I run little risk in making you this promise, for I am convinced that Clara will not allow herself to be carried away.”

“And why and with what purpose should I go to Seville?”

“Have I not told you that already? Because here you only injure yourself without profit or pleasure. I am certain that all you will be able to obtain will be to see Clara at church, more to the poor girl’s anguish than delight. And this so long as Doña Blanca discovers nothing. The day on which Doña Blanca discovers your game, will be a terrible day for Clarita, and you will never see her afterwards. Go, then, to Seville.”

“And what shall I gain by going away?”

“That I will be able to work for you with more tranquillity. You interfere with my plans. If you remain here you will precipitate the marriage with Don Casimiro, and cause them to send post haste to Rome for a license. If you go away, I do not affirm that I shall be able to prevent Clara’s marriage to the old shepherd, and obtain that she shall belong to Myrtilus; but either I am of little account, or I shall succeed in obtaining time, and—who knows?—I promise nothing. I only entreat you to go away. Go this very day.”

The interest manifested by the Commander, his persistency in urging him to go away, the determination with which he interfered in his affairs, all displeased Don Carlos and made him distrustful and uneasy.

The Commander exhausted every argument, touched every chord, but especially that of entreaty. The young man answered him several times with ill-humour, and it required all the Commander's calm superiority to soothe and restrain Don Carlos, and prevent him from offending the man who was advising, almost commanding him.

In the end, Don Fadrique entreated, promised, and agreed to such purpose that Don Carlos was obliged to yield, and to depart that very day for Seville, consenting to absent himself, however, only for a little more than a month—until the beginning of the summer vacation. In exchange, he exacted and obtained from Don Fadrique a promise to write to him, giving him news of Clara, and warning him if there should be the slightest appearance of danger, in order that he might fly to her immediately.

Although Don Carlos was neither timid nor stupid, he had never been able to succeed in persuading Clara to receive a letter from him, still less to write to him. But what wonder, if Clara had never even given him to understand, in as many words, that she loved him! And yet Clara loved him. The lover knew well that his complaint that

Chloris, compassionate and kind, the swain
Would not kill with her disdain;
Yet will she not his love return—

was false, through pure modesty.

Clara loved him, and in spite of herself, against her will, she had declared her love; but only with her eyes, through which her soul went out towards the gallant and handsome student; nor were all her religious and filial scruples powerful enough to hold it back.

Don Fadrique convinced himself during the long conversation which he had with Don Carlos, that the passion of the latter for Clara was genuine and profound. Of Clara's love for the Rondan poet he was even more fully convinced. With this twofold conviction, at which he was rejoiced, he hastened still more the departure of Don Carlos, and before noon he had the satisfaction of seeing him leave the town for Seville.

Don Carlos left the city on horseback with his servant, and Don Fadrique, on horseback also, joined him at the Common and accompanied him on his way for more than a league, encouraging his hopes, and talking to him of his love. On arriving at a cross-road, Don Fadrique bade an affectionate farewell to the young man, and took the road back to Villabermeja, with the intention of conferring with Father Jacinto.

The simplicity and modesty of this holy man had prevented Don Fadrique from observing the immense importance he had acquired during his long absence.

As a preacher the priest enjoyed an extraordinary reputation throughout the district. He was equally celebrated for his three styles of preaching. In the simple or homiletic style he delighted the country people, and brought questions of religion and morality within the reach of their understanding, enlivening these serious lessons with jests and witty remarks, which a severe critic might have condemned, but which were well calculated to make the rude peasants acquire a taste for his discourses and take pleasure in listening to them. In sermons on grand occasions, on days of ceremony, Father Jacinto was another man—he used many Latin phrases, spoke in deep, impressive tones, and embroidered his discourse with a whole garden of flowers, a veritable thicket of exuberant ornamentation, pleasing the discriminating and cultured persons of these regions also. And he had, finally, the pathetic style of Passion Week and Holy Week, during which sermons, rather than spoken, were, in those days, as they still are, chanted in Villabermeja, nor does any other style please them there. A sermon in Holy Week, unless delivered in what is there called the *tonillo*,* pleases no one, nor is it considered a sermon. Whenever a priest from any other place goes to Villabermeja, even now, he has to learn the *tonillo*. In this *tonillo* Father Jacinto was a pat-

* A sing-song, monotonous tone in reading or speaking.

tern of perfection, whom up to the present time no one has ever surpassed. Listening to him, it is said, although the reminiscence be a profane one, that it could be understood how Caius Gracchus caused himself to be accompanied by a flutist when he pronounced in the Forum his most impassioned discourses. Father Jacinto preached also in the Forum, that is to say, in the middle of the public square, during Holy Week. There all the events of the Passion were acted in character, and the priest explained them in his sermon according as they were represented. Thus, there were sermons that lasted for three hours, and without the priest ever abandoning the *tonillo*, which did not hinder him from giving the proper expression to the most diverse passions—as pity, grief, and anger. When the town-crier appeared on the balcony of the town hall and read the sentence of death pronounced upon Jesus, the Bermenjas can still remember the fury with which the priest turned towards him, exclaiming:

“Be silent, false, wicked, stupid, and vile crier, and hearken to the voice of the angel speaking!”

And then a splendid angel appeared on another balcony of the square and sang the ineffable mystery of the redemption, beginning—

“This is the sentence ordained by the Eternal Father,” and all the rest that we who are from there have so often heard.

But, returning to Father Jacinto, I will say that his merit as a preacher was perhaps the least of his merits. His chief value was as a spiritual director. He spent whole hours in the confessional. He was obliged to go frequently from the Bermejan convent to the convent of the neighbouring town, where he had not a few spiritual daughters among the gentry. He was, besides, a man of counsel and wisdom in worldly affairs, and every one went to consult him who found himself in tribulation, embarrassment, or difficulty. In short, Father Jacinto was a skilful physician for the soul, although the remedies he applied were at times harsh and severe. He liked to make use of heroic remedies, as happens with other country doctors, who will prescribe for a man a medicine that would be suitable for a horse. Notwithstanding this, the priest had so much authority and discretion, he was so agreeable in his manners, and so resolute a protector and defender of women, that he enjoyed immense popularity among them, and was fervently revered as well by humble workwomen as by the haughty ladies of the nobility.

Although verging on seventy, he was still strong and vigorous, though he had lost a certain youthful impetuosity for which he had been famous, and which had led him at times to imitate the Divine Redeemer, rather in the outburst of indignant anger in which he scourged the merchants out of the temple

with a whip of cords, than in his meekness. Father Jacinto had been a tall, strong, and robust man, and he had thrashed soundly some heartless and contumacious sinners, especially husbands who got drunk, spent their money in wine and play, and beat their wives.

Towards this class of men Father Jacinto had been severe indeed. He had not now the fire of his youth, but his virtue and his moral strength, united with the remembrance of his physical strength, inspired the rustics with great respect.

Such were the principal qualities and such was the brilliant position of the Commander's former master, whom he was now on his way to consult and confer with regarding difficult matters, and from whom he hoped to obtain powerful assistance.

XIII.

WHEN the Commander arrived at Villabermeja he left his horse at his own house and walked to the convent, which was only a few steps distant, and where, as it was the hour of the *siesta*, he found Father Jacinto in his cell, not sleeping, but seated at the table reading.

My readers, from what has been thus far narrated, will have formed an approximate idea of the nature

and disposition of the friar. It remains to be said, in order to make the portrait complete, that he was tall and thin, that he could see and hear well, that he addressed every human being in the second person singular, and that he prided himself on not being mealy-mouthed—that is, on saying all that came into his head with a frankness that bordered upon and even overstepped at times the prescribed limits, entering with banners flying the jurisdiction and region of effrontery. To Don Fadrique alone did the priest show respect and deference, probably having, in spite of himself, an affection for his former pupil which made him overweak.

“Boy,” he said to Don Fadrique, the moment he saw him enter, “what good wind blows you here so unexpectedly?”

“Master,” answered the Commander, “I have come expressly to consult you.”

“To consult me? And what about? What is there that you do not yourself know better than I or any one else?”

“What I wish to consult you about is a matter of the greatest importance.”

“Well—let us hear what it is.”

“It is—it is—nothing less than a case of conscience.”

On hearing the words “case of conscience,” the priest stared at the Commander with an expres-

sion of incredulity and suspicion, and finally exclaimed :

“ See, my son, if you are growing tired in this place, and want to jest and amuse yourself, take a board and a pair of horns, and don't jest or amuse yourself with me. The corn is too old now to make a pipe of.”

“ And what makes you suppose that I am jesting or amusing myself? I am speaking seriously. Why should I not seriously lay before you a case of conscience?”

“ Because every man of good education, brought up in the midst of Christian society, although he may have lost the belief in our Lord Jesus Christ, has a conscience as clear as I have, and there is no case which he cannot himself resolve without any need of consulting me. If you were a believer, you might come to me in search of the consolations of religion. As you do not come to me for these, what can I tell you that you do not already know? Your system of morality is identical with mine, although it may have a different basis. And, in short—and you know it well—there is no merely moral case of conscience whose solution presents any difficulty to a cultivated understanding. God, no doubt in order to exercise our mental activity and to sharpen our intelligence, or to give greater value to our faith, has surrounded with darkness the great metaphysical

problems; he has wrapped them in mystery at times impenetrable; but in all that concerns practical morality, in all that concerns the fulfilment of our duties, there is no mystery whatever; everything is as clear as water. Our sovereign Lord, in his infinite goodness and mercy, has not desired, in spite of our wickedness, that any one should need to be a Seneca to know perfectly well what his duty is, and much less that any one should need to be a wonderful hero to fulfil it. What, then, do you seek from me?"

"Many arguments might be urged in disproof of what you say, but I do not wish to discuss but to consult. I am willing to agree that there is nothing recondite in morality, and that it is not so very difficult to comply with its laws."

"That is to say," interrupted the priest, "in all those countries where the light of the gospel has penetrated. You think that natural reason has sufficed to men to formulate the moral law; I believe they have needed revelation to do this; but you and I agree that, once this law is formulated, human reason accepts it as self-evident. It is great wickedness to suppose that this law is obscure and vague, and to invent terrible cases, frightful conflicts between the natural feelings and the simple fulfilment of a duty. This would be equivalent to supposing that it would be necessary to be a well of science and to be capable of superhuman efforts to be a decent person. You

will see at once that this would be to excuse and almost to justify villainy. After all, all men are not sages, nor have they iron muscles or hearts of adamant. To exalt morality in this way is almost to render it impossible except for a few privileged individuals of the highest order, with more philosophy than Chrysippus and more fortitude than Regulus."

"Much the case I wish to lay before you has to do with all you are saying. It is not idle curiosity but a very deep interest that makes me wish to resolve a doubt."

"Impossible—you can have no doubt."

"Let me finish. I have no doubt in this matter. I have formed my judgment, which seems to me as incontestable as that two and three make five. My doubt is whether you, for reasons based on the inexhaustible goodness of God, are less strait-laced than I am, or whether, for reasons based on the positive law in which you believe, you are more so. Do you understand me now?"

"I understand you very well; and I will tell you at once that I am neither more nor less strait-laced than you are. We should both judge alike of a sin, a fault, a crime, and of the obligation which might spring from it. Theological arguments have to do with penitence, expiation, pardon, paradise or hell in another world, and with all this you have no need to

concern yourself now. Let us hear this case, then, since you wish to consult me."

"You will agree at once, without discussion, that what has been stolen should be restored to its owner?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And when, through a deception, something belonging to one person has come into the possession of another, what should be done?"

"The deception should be put an end to, so that what is held unlawfully by another may return to the possession of its legitimate owner."

"And how, if from putting an end to the deception other evils, clearly greater, should arise?"

"Here we must distinguish. If you are called upon to declare the truth, you should never tell a lie, however great may be the evils which would result from telling the truth. The profitable as well as the hurtful lie is to be condemned. You should not tell a lie not even to save a fellow-creature's life, nor to save any one's honour, nor for the good of religion; but I venture to maintain that you should not speak the truth, when you are not called upon to tell it, when from the telling of it more evil than good would result. To think otherwise is folly. I affirm this without hesitation: I will explain my position in a few words. You commit a sin. You tell a lie, for example. The evils which spring from your crime you should remedy as far as it is possible and lawful to do

so—that is, without committing a fresh crime to remedy the former one. God, in order to make clear to us the enormity of our sins, at times permits evils to spring from them, the human remedies of which would be worse than the sins themselves. To try yourself to avoid them or to remedy them, is not humility, but pride, satanic pride; it is to strive against God; it is to seek to play the *rôle* of Providence; it is to strike in the dark; it is to try to right the wrong you have yourself committed, making crooked and oblique that which is straight, and tending to disturb the natural order of things.”

“Speaking frankly,” said the Commander, “your doctrine seems to me a very convenient one. I see that you are less strait-laced than I had supposed.”

“Get away with you, Commander!” responded the priest, not a little displeased. “I was never yet thought complacent. You make the worst accusation against me that can be made against a confessor. A saint has said, *Non est pietas, sed impietas, tolerare peccata*, and I am very far from being impious. It all comes, doubtless, from your confounding things. We are not now speaking of penitence, of expiation, of the chastisement of sins. On this point I have no need to tell you what I should require from a penitent in order to give him absolution. We are speaking now only of the obligation to make satisfaction for the injury

which results from a crime. And to this I have given a plain answer. The sinner or the delinquent should go as far as it is possible and lawful for him to go. If he must commit fresh crimes, if he must commit new wrongs and irregularities, it is better for him to let the matter rest, and not to try to remedy the evil he has done. Why! would it be well, for instance, that you should wound some one, and then, without knowing anything of surgery, should try to cure him, and finish killing him? You say this is a convenient doctrine. Where is its convenience? Although I excuse you from applying the remedy, I do not exempt you from penance, remorse, and punishment. On the contrary, the opposite doctrine is the convenient one—to remedy the evil in an evil manner, and then to think yourself free, to regard yourself as absolved. In this way an awkward servant might break the most precious vase you have brought with you from China, then stick it together clumsily with glue, and remain as unconcerned as if he had not done you the slightest injury. What the servant should do is always to go about cautiously, in order not to break the vase, and, if he breaks it, to be very sorry for his fault; and, since he can neither mend the vase nor buy you another new one like it, to suffer with humility the reprimand you will bestow upon him.”

“I am glad to see that we are of one mind in regard to the doctrine in general. In its application to

particular cases it is that I perceive room for much subtlety. Contrary to your opinion, the right path appears to me very dark and intricate. How determine always how far that which I desire to do to repair the evil is possible and lawful?"

"It is very simple. If, in order to repair it, you cause a greater evil, let the first remain, since it is the least, and this, even although in the second injury you cause there should be no sin on your part. If there must be a new sin, a new infraction of the moral law in the remedy, although this second sin be less than the first which you committed, you must not commit it. God, if he so desires, will remedy the evil that has been already caused."

"So that there is nothing to be done but to fold one's arms—to let the ball roll?"

"There is nothing to be done but to let it roll, since by stopping it you may make everything roll. The Holy Scriptures here come to my support with not a few texts. David says, *Abyssus abyssum invocat*; Solomon, *Est processio in malis*; and the prophet Amos, *Si erit malum quod Dominus non fecerit?* by which he gives it to be understood that God permits or ordains evil as the punishment of sin and as a warning to man; and the same Solomon, before quoted, says in the most explicit manner that we can neither add to nor take away from what God has made in order that he might be feared: *Non possumus*

quidquam addere nec auferre quæ fecit Deus ut timeatur."

"In spite of your texts, in spite of your Latin quotations, this cowardly resignation is repugnant to me."

"How cowardly? Where have you learned that there can be cowardice towards God? And, besides, resignation to his will does not imply that you are to set your mind at rest and be filled with self-satisfaction. Continue to mourn your fault. Scourge your soul with the whip of conscience and your body with cruel thongs; make of your life in this world a purgatory; but be resigned, and do not seek to remedy what only God can remedy. Even common sense will tell you this, looking at human actions from the point of view of utility and expedience, which, rightly understood, are in accord with morality and justice. How wise is the proverb which says, 'What I am sorry for is not that my son should have lost, but that he should try to win back what he has lost'! If it is wrong to gamble, it is still worse to go on gambling; to relapse into sin, to remedy the evil caused by sin. But, meantime, you have talked only of generalities, and the case of conscience you spoke of does not present itself."

"I am going to state it now," said the Commander.

"I am all ears," responded the friar.

"What must he do who, not being the child of the

man who passes for his father before the law, usurps a name, position, and fortune that are not rightfully his? ”

“Magnificent! After so long a preamble you come out with an insignificant question like that? I will not speak now of the difficulty or impossibility which that supposititious son would find to prove his mother’s crime. I know nothing about the laws, but my reason tells me that against proofs afforded by the certificate of baptism and by the series of acts and official documents which have made you pass up to the present day for the son of a certain well-known López de Mendoza, only testimony of an exceptional kind, of a kind almost impossible to obtain, would avail. I will concede, however, for argument’s sake, that you possess such testimony. I would still decide, I think, that you ought not to make use of it. You know the commandments of the law of God? You know that the order in which they follow one another is not arbitrary? Well, what does the seventh say?”

“ ‘Thou shalt not steal.’ ”

“And the fourth?”

“ ‘Honour thy father and thy mother.’ ”

“It is evident, then, that in order to rid yourself of the sin against the seventh commandment you were going to sin against the fourth, dishonouring your father and your mother, for your father would always be the man who regarded you as his son, who brought

you up, who fed you and educated you, even if he did not beget you.”

“You are right, Father Jacinto. And yet, the possessions which are not mine—how shall I go on enjoying them?”

“And who tells you to enjoy them? What! Is it so difficult a matter to give, without telling why you give? Give them, then, to those to whom you ought to give them. They will accept them. In accepting them there will be no deceit. And if, by a strange chance, you should find some one incredibly scrupulous in accepting, contrive some way of making him accept. Far from opposing, I demand, I applaud the reparation, always provided that to carry it out it be not necessary to commit a greater crime than the one you seek to remedy.”

“Very good; and if it be not the child but the mother who is guilty—what ought the guilty mother to do?”

“The same as the child—not to dishonour her husband publicly, not to embitter his life, not to make him suffer so frightful an undeception, not to add to her sin of frailty the sin of cruel and heartless shamelessness.”

“But the mother has not the means of restoring the wealth that through her fault will pass or has passed into the possession of one to whom they do not belong.”

“ Well, if she has not, how can she help it? I have already told you—she must be resigned. She must submit to the will of God. All this she ought to have foreseen before sinning, and not have sinned. After the sin reparation is not incumbent upon her, if this involves a new sin, but penance is. Have you now stated the whole case? ”

“ No, father ; it has other complications and other aspects.”

“ Tell me what they are.”

“ What, in your opinion, ought the man to do who has sinned—the accomplice of the woman in the crime—whose consequence is the robbery, the usurpation of which we have just spoken? ”

“ The same as I have said the son and the mother ought to do.”

“ And how, if he possesses wealth sufficient to repair the injury done to the heirs? ”

“ He should repair that injury, but with such circumspection, discretion, and secrecy, that nothing of the matter shall be known. In the book of Proverbs it is written : ‘ *Melius est nomen bonum quam divitiæ multæ.* ’ So that for a question of money no one should injure another’s good name.”

The historian of these events writes to narrate and not to prove. He does not, therefore, take it upon himself to decide whether Father Jacinto was right in what he said or not ; whether he spoke, guided by

common sense or by the teachings of Christian morality, or by both criteria in perfect accord; nor does he incline to believe, on the other hand, that the said priest had a loose and common system of ethics, and the daring and self-confidence of an ignorant rustic. Let the judicious reader decide for himself as to this. Suffice it to note here that the Commander manifested extreme satisfaction at seeing that his master, as he called him, thought exactly as he wished him to think.

Father Jacinto, mistrustful, like a true villager, did not observe the keen interest with which his former pupil had interrogated him, and still thinking the Commander's questions to be a joke, a species of examination made by him to pass away the time, he resumed with some pique :

“It appears to me that I am more than simple. What is your purpose in putting all these idle questions to me? Do you wish to examine me? Do you mean to have my license as a confessor revoked, if you do not think me well instructed?”

“Nothing of the sort, master. I do not know whether you are in accord or not with your big works on moral theology, but you are in accord with me, which flatters me; and you are also in accord with my plans, which fills me with hope. I sought in you an ally. I always counted upon your friendship, but I did not know whether I could also count upon your

conscience. Now, I know that your conscience is not opposed to me. Your friendship, consequently, free from every impediment, will come to my assistance."

Father Jacinto knew at last that a practical, real case, and not an imaginary one, was in question, and he promised to aid the Commander in all that was just.

Anticipating, then, an important revelation, he wished to prepare for it by a short intermission; and to solemnize the revelation he went to a closet near by, and taking from it a bottle of wine and two glasses, he placed them on the table and filled the glasses to the brim. He said to the Commander :

"This wine has neither alcohol, nor drugs, nor adulteration of any kind. It is pure, unmixed, and stainless. It is as God made it. Drink and refresh yourself with it, and then tell me what you have to tell."

"I drink to the success of my plans," answered the Commander, draining his glass.

"Amen, if it be the will of God," replied the friar, drinking also, and preparing to give all his attention to Don Fadrique.

XIV.

THERE was but little in the cell to attract attention. On the table, or desk, which was of walnut, were a writing-desk, and a breviary and some other books. Two arm-chairs which stood facing each other with the table between them, and in which our two interlocutors were seated, were also of walnut. Besides the two arm-chairs there were four chairs ranged against the wall. All the chairs had rush bottoms. An *Ecce-homo* in oils, to which might be applied the saying, "For a poorly painted Christ plenty of blood," was the only picture which adorned the walls of the cell. There were not wanting, in compensation, other more natural adornments. In the window, sunning themselves, were two blooming rose bushes; in the room were four pots of knee-holly, and hanging on the walls were five cages—two with singing partridges, and three with linnets, all excellent decoy birds. Another pretty linnet, a skilful decoy, held prisoner by a string which was fastened to a projecting rod attached to a pine table, flew every few moments as far as the length of the string would allow, to return again and alight gracefully upon the perch.

The linnets would occasionally enliven the room by their warbling. In a corner, resting against the the walls, were two fowling pieces.

And, lastly, in a little alcove, which was half concealed by the green baize curtain that hung in front of the little door that opened into it, was the bed of the good friar. The closet from which the latter had taken the wine, and which was of considerable size, served at once as storehouse, wardrobe, pantry, cash-box, and library.

Everything, although poor, looked very clean.

Father Jacinto, with his elbow resting on the table, his cheek in his hand, and his eyes fixed on Don Fadrique, waited for the latter to begin.

Don Fadrique, in a low voice, spoke as follows :

“Although I do not come as a penitent to make confession, I exact the same secrecy as if I were in the confessional.”

The priest, without making any verbal answer, nodded affirmatively.

Don Fadrique then continued :

“The man of whom I spoke to you, the sinner who caused the deception and the theft, is myself. The levity of my character had made me forget my crime, and neglect to think of the fatal consequences which must result from it. Chance—why do I say chance?—an all-wise God, in whom I believe, has brought me once more face to face with my accomplice, and has made me see all the evils that have arisen from my fault and that still threaten to arise from it. I am ready to repair the evils that have al-

ready arisen, and to prevent, in accordance with your doctrine, those that might still arise from it, as far as it may be possible and allowable for me to do so. It is a consolation to me to see that you are in accord with me. I am not going to seek a remedy worse than the disease; but there is a person who is seeking such a remedy, and that person must be prevented, at all costs, from finding it. That would be abomination on abomination."

"And who is that person?" asked the priest.

"My accomplice," answered the Commander.

"And who is your accomplice?"

"You know her. You are her spiritual adviser. You have probably a great deal of influence over her. My accomplice is— Remember, master, that I have never before made this revelation to any one. At least no one could ever accuse me of giving public scandal. Seldom has an intrigue been kept more secret. The good name of this woman shines still, after seventeen years, brighter than gold."

"Finish: who is your accomplice? Consider that you are throwing your secret into a well. I know how to be silent."

"My accomplice is Doña Blanca Roldan de Solís."

Father Jacinto was overwhelmed with amazement. He stared at the Commander with eyes and mouth wide open, and hastily crossed himself half a dozen times in succession, uttering these pious ejaculations:

“Hail Mary, most pure! Praised be the Blessed Sacrament! Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!”

“What is it that amazes you so extraordinarily?” asked the Commander, thinking that the priest was surprised that so virtuous and austere a matron should ever have succumbed to an evil temptation.

“What is it that amazes me, boy—what is it that amazes me? Does it seem a little thing to you, then? They may well say, Live and learn. The devil is the very devil! See—and I don’t say it to offend any one—see with what a bunch of carnations the enemy of man allured and seduced you! With a handful of furze! A sweet flower you transplanted to the garden of your love! A pine thistle! Doña Blanca must have been handsome—she is so still; but good Heavens! Why, she is a hedgehog! I—without offence to the absent—did not think her impeccable, but I did not believe her capable of sinning through love.”

Don Fadrique answered only with a sigh, an inarticulate exclamation, which the priest fancied implied that seventeen years ago Doña Blanca was a very different woman, and that the very harshness of her character and the resolute inflexibility of her disposition caused her to feel every passion, including that of love, once it found entrance to her breast, with more vehemence than other women.

Having recovered to some extent from his amazement, Father Jacinto said :

“And tell me, my son, what effort is Doña Blanca making to repair the evil? What are the projects she entertains which alarm you so greatly?”

“Who would be her husband’s next heir if she had not a daughter?” asked the Commander.

“Don Casimiro Solís,” was the answer.

“And why does she wish to marry her daughter to Don Casimiro?”

“Sinner that I am—stupid fool!” exclaimed the priest with violence, striking the table repeatedly with his clenched hand, “will you believe that I am so egotistical that my egotism blinded me? I saw no evil design in Doña Blanca’s plan. It appeared to me natural that she should wish to marry Clarita to her uncle. All I considered was my vile interest—that no one should take Clarita away from this place. For you must know that Clarita has me bewitched. For her sake, and for her sake only, do I put up with her mother. What I wanted, like an arrant villain, was that she should remain here—so that I might go to her house and that she might pet me, as she pets me now when I go to her mother’s, bringing me with her own lovely white hands mugs of chocolate and cups of syrup. I had fancied that Clarita was a doll for my amusement. I did not consider, I did not reflect; I only thought that if she was married she would make an excellent mistress of a house, and that I should sit at her hearth, and that I would take her

gifts of flowers and fruits and birds. If you were to see the doe I have brought for her from the Sierra Morena! It is a beauty. I have it down in the courtyard—and I was going to take it to her to-morrow. What an idea! Was ever anything so barbarous? Without ever thinking of the marriage. Now I comprehend it all. How monstrous! To marry that jewel to such a conceited ass! Of course, she does not object—she doesn't understand—who the devil would?—but I understand now—and it makes me shudder—it horrifies me!”

“And you have reason to be horrified. She does object; she does understand—but she believes that she ought not to resist the maternal authority.”

“That is to carry obedience too far. That would be a fine thing! She must obey her mother, but she must first obey God. “*Diligendus est genitor, sed præponendus est Creator.*” That is a saying of St. Augustine’s.”

“Besides,” said the Commander, “Clarita loves another.”

“How is that? What do you tell me? What lie, what falsehood have they made you believe? If Clarita loved a gallant, she would have confessed it to me.”

“She herself does not know that she loves him; but I know that she does.”

“Ah, yes, now I understand: certain glances and smiles exchanged with a little student. She has con-

fessed them to me. But she has repented— With a little student! A fine thing it would be for Clarita to lead a vagabond's life."

"Father Jacinto, you are doting."

"What impudence! How dare you tell me that I am doting?"

"The little student is not one of those who go about in a torn cloak, with a spoon stuck in their cocked hat, asking alms, but a gentleman of rank, a rich landowner."

"Indeed! That is flour from another bag, then. The innocent lamb told me nothing of this. Tell me—and is he handsome?"

"As a golden pine."

"A good Christian?"

"I think so."

"Honourable?"

"In the highest degree."

"And does he love her very much?"

"With his whole heart."

"And he is sensible and brave?"

"As a Gonzalo de Córdoba. In addition, he is an elegant poet, a good horseman; he possesses a thousand other accomplishments, is very well informed, and understands bull-fighting."

"I am glad, I am heartily glad—I am more than glad. We will marry him to Clarita, let Doña Blanca rave and storm as she will."

“Yes, my dear master, we will marry him; but it is necessary that we should be very prudent.”

“*Prudentes sicut serpentes.* Don't be uneasy. I know too well what Doña Blanca is. The sway she exercises over her daughter is absolute. The respect and the fear with which she inspires her are beyond expression. And then, what energy, what a will that lady has! In obstinacy no one can beat her.”

“I am not less obstinate—and I will not consent that Clara shall be made the price of any one's redemption; that our sins shall be visited upon her, who is sinless; that Doña Blanca shall sell her to purchase her own liberty. However, it is necessary that we should be very cautious. Doña Blanca, driven to extremity, might commit some insane act.”

This long conversation over, and the Commander and Father Jacinto having come to a perfect understanding, the former returned that same day to the city, in order that his absence might not occasion remark.

Father Jacinto promised to go to the city on the following morning.

The details and conduct of the plan which they were to follow were left to be decided upon on the ground.

It was agreed, however, that they must proceed with the utmost secrecy and circumspection in all things, and that they must conceal, as far as was pos-

sible, the close friendship which existed between the friar and the Commander, so that the former might not be regarded with suspicious or hostile eyes by Doña Blanca.

It was decided, finally, notwithstanding the gravity of the situation, that there was no impropriety, nor was there any comical or censurable inopportuneness in Father Jacinto's taking the doe to Clarita as a present.

XV.

ON his return to the town that night the Commander was put through a regular course of cross-questioning by his niece, who was the most curious and inquisitive girl in the whole district. She had, besides, a manner of questioning, affirming what she desired to ascertain, which rendered inefficacious Father Jacinto's doctrine of concealing the truth without telling a falsehood. He must either tell a lie or declare the truth—there was no middle course.

"Uncle," said Lucía, the moment they were alone, "you have been in Villabermeja."

"Yes, I have been there."

"And what took you there? I wonder if Nicolasa's divine eyes have bewitched you?"

"I don't know the Nicolasa you speak of."

“You don’t know her? Bah! Who does not know Nicolasa? She is a marvel of beauty. A great many noblemen and very wealthy men have already solicited her hand.”

“Well, I am not one of the number. I repeat that I do not know her.”

“Nonsense! uncle. How do you suppose you can make me believe that you don’t know the daughter of your friend Uncle Gorico?”

“Well, for the third time I say that I do not know her.”

“Then what is there to see in Villabermeja? Did you go to visit Chacha Ramoncica?”

“I did not visit her.”

“Ah, I understand now. How good you are!”

“Why am I good? Because I did not visit Chacha Ramoncica, who is so fond of me?”

“No, uncle. You are good—in the first place, because you are not bad.”

“A fine and logical mode of reasoning.”

“I mean that you are good because you are not like some other gentlemen who, although they may have one foot already in the grave—which is far from being the case with you, thank God—are always flattering the daughters of artisans and workmen, and unsettling their minds. Not now—on account of the engagement; but formerly—Don Casimiro used to visit Nicolasa.”

“ Well, I haven’t visited her.”

“ Well, that is the first reason why I say that you are good. Nicolasa is an honest girl, and it is not right that gentlemen should try to put foolish notions in her head—”

“ I am pleased with your severity. And the second reason you have for calling me good—will you tell me what it is ?”

“ The second reason is, that since you went there to see neither Nicolasa nor Chacha Ramoncica, there could have been no other motive for your rushing off in such a hurry than to see Father Jacinto, and to try to win him over to the side of Myrtilus and Chloris. I wager you went for that purpose.”

“ I can not deny it.”

“ Thanks, uncle. It would be impossible for you to imagine how proud I am.”

“ And why ?”

“ Why, because, however kind you may be to every one, after all you would never take so great an interest in two persons who are almost total strangers to you, if it were not for the affection you entertain for your little niece, who desires to help those two persons.”

“ That is true,” said the Commander, telling a white lie, notwithstanding Father Jacinto’s theory.

Lucía blushed with pride and pleasure, and went on :

“I wager you have gained the good-will of his reverence. Is he on our side now?”

“Yes, niece; he is on our side, but for Heaven’s sake say nothing about it, for secrecy is all-important! Since you have guessed everything, try to be silent about it.”

“You shall have no cause to find fault with me. I will be silent, and you in return will keep me advised of everything. You will tell me everything, won’t you?”

“Yes,” said the Commander, obliged to tell an untruth for the second time. After a moment he resumed:

“Lucía, you have just told me something that interests me. What sort of relations would you have me to understand existed or exist between Don Casimiro and the beautiful Nicolasa you speak of?”

“None, uncle. Have I not already told you so? It was before the engagement with Clarita. Don Casimiro’s intentions were not honourable, and Nicolasa always repulsed him; but Father Jacinto will inform you better on that subject than I can. I will only say one thing in addition—that this same Don Casimiro seems to me a hypocrite and an artful villain.”

“It is well to know it,” thought the Commander.

“Ah! tell me, uncle. I know already that Don Carlos has gone to Seville. He sent a message taking

leave of us and excusing himself for not doing so personally for want of time. It is evident that you have spoken plainly to him and persuaded him to go, convincing him that it was necessary to the success of our project that he should do so. Is it not so, uncle?"

"It is so, niece," responded the Commander. "I see that it is impossible to hide anything from you."

XVI.

WHEN the events which we are relating took place there were not so many high-roads in Spain as there are now. At the present day the journey from Villabermeja to the city can be made in a carriage. In those days it could be made only on foot or on horseback. The road was not a road but a path, trampled by the footsteps of the passengers, rational and irrational. When there were great rains the path became impassable; it was what is called in Andalusia a high-way for partridges.

Father Jacinto possessed a donkey unrivalled for size, docility, and sure-footedness. On this donkey he journeyed to and fro like a patriarch between Villabermeja and the city. A robust lay brother accompanied him on foot. On the journey which he made to the city on the day following his long colloquy with the Commander, in addition to the lay brother a

secular or profane rustic accompanied him, to take care of the doe.

Followed, then, by the lay brother, by the doe, and by the rustic, and riding his gigantic donkey, Father Jacinto entered the city, safe and sound, at ten o'clock in the morning. As the convent of Santo Domingo is hard by the entrance, the priest was not obliged to cross any street with this retinue. At the convent he dismounted, and, as soon as he had taken a little rest, directed his steps to the house of Don Valentin Solís, or rather to the house of Doña Blanca. The wretched Don Valentin had sunk into such complete insignificance that no one in the place called his house the house of Don Valentin. His vineyards, his olive plantations, his orchards, and his farms were known as the vineyards, the olive plantations, the orchards, and the farms of Doña Blanca, and not as his. This marital nullification had not, however, reached the extreme of that of some Madrid husbands, who are scarcely known except through their wives, whose notoriety and glory are reflected on them and make them conspicuous.

But let us drop comparisons and instances that might seem to savour of censoriousness, and follow Father Jacinto and enter with him Doña Blanca's house, which it was so difficult for common mortals to enter.

Thanks to the reverend father's authority, and

following him, ourselves invisible, every door is opened to us.

We are now in Doña Blanca's drawing-room. Clara is embroidering at her mother's side. Don Valentin, at a respectful distance, is sitting at a table playing patience with a pack of cards. Don Casimiro is conversing with the mistress of the house and her daughter.

Our readers already know Don Casimiro, as we might say, by fame, by name, and even by nickname, for they are not ignorant that for Don Carlos, Lucía, Clara, and the Commander, he was the old shepherd. Let us now endeavour to draw his corporeal likeness.

He was tall, had thin arms and legs, and a protuberant abdomen; he had a dark complexion, a scanty beard, which he shaved once a week, and light-green eyes, that squinted slightly. His face was already full of wrinkles, and the vivid carmine of his nose harmonised ill with the paleness of his cheeks. His person itself gave little evidence of care or cleanliness, but in his dress were observable the attention and pulchritude which were wanting in his person, denoting plainly that Don Casimiro took care of his clothes rather because he was orderly and economical and liked his garments to last him a long time, than through love of cleanliness. He was dressed punctiliously as a man of rank, although in the fashion of fifteen or twenty years before. His coat, his waist-

coat, his trousers, and his silk stockings were all spotless, and if there was any rent in any of them it had been skilfully and beautifully darned. He wore a powdered wig with a queue, and displayed many trinkets on the chains of the two large watches which he carried in his two waistcoat pockets. His snuffbox, which he showed continually, for he took snuff incessantly, was a marvel of art, from the enamel and precious stones with which it was adorned. Don Casimiro spoke with a certain solemnity and in sing-song tones, but his voice was harsh and disagreeable; it being affirmed that this was partly owing to the fact that he had no aversion to brandy, and still more because, in his own house, and divested of his gala attire as a lover or amorous suitor, he smoked a great deal of black tobacco.

His expression, his manners, and his gestures were not antipathetic; they were insignificant; only, that one could not but recognise by them that Don Casimiro was a person of rank, although brought up in a small town.

It was plain, lastly, from his whole aspect, that Don Casimiro suffered from many ailments. His ill health gave him a prematurely aged look.

This superficial and unfortunately unfavourable description of Don Casimiro being given, we may now flatter ourselves that we know all the persons who were in the room when Father Jacinto entered it.

Doña Blanca, Clarita, Don Valentin, and Don Casimiro rose to receive him, and all kissed his hand with humility. The priest, on his side, was smiling and amiable, and he gave Clarita, as if she were not a woman, but a child of eight, with the privilege which his seventy years conferred upon him, two soft taps on her fresh cheek, saying :

“Blessed be God, girl, who made you so good and so handsome!”

“Your reverence flatters and honours me,” answered Clarita.

Doña Blanca lamented the length of time which the priest had remained without coming from Villabermeja, and all the others echoed her words. They urged the priest to take something while waiting for dinner, but the priest refused to take anything more than a comfortable seat. Here he chatted with gaiety and animation, resolved to wait for Don Casimiro to go, and Don Valentin and Doña Clara to leave the room, to speak in private with Doña Blanca.

Doña Blanca guessed the friar's intention ; her curiosity was aroused, and she soon found a means of getting rid of Don Casimiro and sending Don Valentin and Clarita out of the room.

When the clearance was effected, Doña Blanca said :

“I hope and suppose that after so long an absence you will honour our table by dining with us to-day.”

Father Jacinto accepted the invitation, and Doña Blanca continued :

“I thought I could perceive that you were impatient to speak to me in private. This has awakened my curiosity. I shall always hear with interest whatever you may have to say to me. Speak, father.”

“You are not dull of comprehension, my daughter,” answered the priest. “Nothing escapes you. I did indeed desire to speak to you in private. And I desired it so much, that I shall wait until after your dinner—in which I will join you with pleasure—to present to our Clarita something which I have brought her as a gift and with which she will be delighted. Just think!—it is a beautiful doe; so tame and domestic that it will eat out of the hand and follow you about like a dog. But let us come to the point; let us come at once to the subject on which I wish to speak to you. But, for Heaven’s sake, don’t get angry! You have a very hasty temper; you are as hot as pepper.”

“It is true; I am very unfortunate, and it is not easy for the unfortunate to be good-humoured. You, however, have no reason to complain of my temper. When was I ever disagreeable or cross to you since we have known each other?”

“That is very true. But you must confess that I have never given you any reason for being so. I am not like many other friars, who undertake to give ad-

vice which is not asked from them, and who wish to govern both the temporal and the eternal and to direct everything in every house they enter. Is not that so?"

"That is so. I have to complain, rather, that you advise me too little."

"Well, you will have no complaint to make on that score to-day. Perhaps, indeed, you will complain of my giving you too much advice, and say that I am interfering in what does not concern me."

"I shall never do that."

"We shall see. In any case I have an excuse. You know that Clarita is my delight. She has me bewitched. Every one knows my predilection for women. It required all my severity, in my younger days, to keep evil tongues from slandering me. Now, daughter (some compensation old age must bring with it), with the weight of seventy years on my shoulders I can, without fear of censure, love you all in my own way and treat you with the friendly familiarity which delights me. I confess to you that, in order to love men, I am often obliged to remember that they are my fellow-beings and to love them for the love of God. Women, on the contrary, I love not only without an effort, but from natural inclination. You are sweet, benignant, compassionate, and much more devout than men. If it had not been for you, I am quite certain that we should have lost even the

vestiges of the primitive culture and revelation of paradise, and men would never have emerged from a state of barbarism. If I were a learned man, I should compose a book showing that all there is in the Europe of to-day, all the social progress of which the world boasts, are due, humanly speaking, chiefly to women. Calculate, then, how exalted and how flattering is the opinion I entertain of you. Well, in my latter years your daughter Clara has raised still higher this opinion. I had in my mind an ideal type of perfection to which none of the women I had ever known approached, not by ten leagues: Clarita has gone beyond it. What rare innocence is hers, joined as it is with discretion and intelligence! What sound and correct religious belief! What love toward her mother and what obedience to her commands! Clara is a little saint on earth, and seeing her one must praise God who created her in order to allow us to conjecture and divine through her what the angels and the blessed virgins in heaven may be."

"These encomiums of Clarita," interposed Doña Blanca, "are very flattering to my maternal pride, but my love for truth compels me to think them exaggerated. I account for them in a way which I shall be frank enough to tell you. In the pure love which you entertain for women in general there is something of the feeling of the ancient knights-errant—something of the charm which the strong feel in pro-

tecting the weak and helpless. In the conception, superior to the reality, which you have formed of women, there are great benevolence and instinctive poetry. All those noble sentiments of yours have been expended, during a long and holy life, on countrywomen, workwomen some of them, gentlewomen or rich women others, but most of them rude in comparison with Clara, who has been brought up in great cities, with another kind of polish, with higher culture, with greater delicacy and refinement. These advantages, external merely and due to chance, have surprised and deluded you, and have made you think that what is only superficial is essential; that more distinguished manners, greater circumspection and moderation in speech, and a certain courtesy and politeness which result from a more careful education and which are mechanically acquired through habit, are virtues and excellences which spring from the very essence of a soul superior to others.

“No, my daughter, nothing of all that suffices to explain my predilection for Clarita.”

“How should it not suffice? Be frank. Do you not love and esteem Lucía almost as much as Clara?”

“Comparisons are odious, and more especially where the affections are concerned. Let us suppose, however, that I esteem and love Lucía almost as much as Clara. That would only prove that Lucía is almost as good as Clara.”

“And that both have been more carefully educated than the other women you have known.”

“Very well. And what then? Granted that it be so. Who has denied the power of education? What I deny is that education could have this power over a barren or ungrateful spirit; and what I deny also is that its influence goes below the surface and penetrates the heart and improves the nature. It is plain, then, that Clara owes much to God, and after God to you who have brought her up well; but what she owes to you is not superficial and external; manners, speech, courtesy, and politeness are not vain signs. When they are not the result of affectation it is because they spring from the soul itself, better educated by God or by men than its sister souls. It is true that I have never in my life seen or known any other people than those of this city and of Villahermeja, but I can guess and even be very certain that there must be duchesses and even princesses whose polish would not deceive or delude me. I should know on the instant that it was false and artificial, and that at heart those ladies were more vulgar than your cook. It is evident, then, that it is not because I am fascinated that I praise Clara.”

“And may there not be a fascination,” said Doña Blanca, “in the candid and spontaneous propensity of Clarita to make herself agreeable?”

“Undoubtedly there may; but that same propen-

sity, being spontaneous and candid, proves the goodness of soul of its possessor."

"And do you not know, father, that that propensity is called by a word, recently introduced into the language, which has an unpleasing sound and is almost a term of reproach?"

"What word is that?"

"Coquetry."

"Well, if the coquetry is without malice, if the desire to please and the effort which is made to do so do not transgress certain limits, and if the end which a woman proposes to herself in pleasing does not go beyond the pure delight of inspiring cordial affection and gratitude, then I approve of coquetry."

Doña Blanca and Father Jacinto were afraid of each other. She feared the friar's boldness, and the friar feared her violent temper. As a result of this mutual fear they usually treated each other with extraordinary politeness and the most delicate circumspection, lest they might end any conversation with a quarrel or a dispute.

Influenced by such considerations Doña Blanca made no attempt to confute this defence of coquetry. Satisfied with the protest made by her maternal modesty, she accepted in the end as just and deserved the friar's encomiums on her daughter Clara.

Presently she added:

“In short, my daughter is a prodigy. Your praises do her nothing but justice. I am delighted. What greater gratification could there be for a mother? I imagine, however, that so flattering a panegyric might very well have been pronounced in the presence of others. What you had to tell me in private still remains to be said.”

Father Jacinto stopped to reflect, seeing himself so directly interrogated, and almost repented having undertaken to discuss the question of Clarita's marriage, allowing himself to be carried away by his impatient zeal, without first coming to an understanding with the Commander, as had been agreed upon between them; but Father Jacinto was not a man to retreat after he had once taken the first step, and after a moment's hesitation, which he succeeded in hiding from the lynx-like eyes of his interlocutor, he spoke as follows :

“I am coming to it, daughter—have patience; everything in due time. My praise of Clarita was very much in place, for it is of Clarita I am going to speak to you. As her spiritual director, I know that she will obey you in everything; but tell me, don't you think that in some things, things which are of the greatest importance, it would be proper to consult her wishes?”

“And who has told you that I do not consult her wishes when it is proper to do so?”

“You have asked Clara, then, if she wishes to marry at so early an age?”

“I have, father, and she has said yes.”

“You have asked her if she will accept Don Casimiro for a husband?”

“Yes, father, and to this also she has answered yes.”

“And may not the fear and the respect with which you inspire your daughter have had some share in these answers?”

“I think that I deserve to inspire my daughter not with respect and fear only, but also with affection and confidence. Availing herself, then, of the affection and the confidence with which I ought to inspire her, my daughter might have answered that she did not wish to marry Don Casimiro. No one has forced her to say that she wishes to do so. She must wish to do so, since she says she does.”

“You are right; she must wish to do so, since she says she does. Nevertheless, in order that a decision of the will should be valid, it is necessary that the will should be previously illumined by the understanding in regard to that on which it decides. Do you believe that Clarita knows what she wishes and why she wishes it?”

“You have just made the highest eulogiums on my daughter, and now you want to persuade me to believe that you take her for a fool, for a born idiot.

How do you suppose that a girl of sixteen should be ignorant of the duties which holy matrimony brings with it?"

"She is not ignorant of them, but don't come now with your sophistries—a girl of sixteen does not know all the importance of the yes she is going to pronounce at the foot of the altar."

"Therefore she has her mother to enlighten, advise, and direct her."

"And you have enlightened, advised, and directed her, according to your conscience?"

"The slightest doubt on this point, merely to ask such a question is a terrible and gratuitous offence. How can you suppose, how can you suspect, even for an instant, that I should advise my daughter contrary to the dictates of my conscience? Do you think me so wicked?"

"Forgive me; I have not expressed myself clearly. I do not think, I cannot think, that you have advised your daughter contrary to the dictates of your conscience; but I can think that your understanding is capable of error, and that, having fallen into error, you are persuading your daughter to take a deplorable step."

"I am greatly surprised at your manner of reasoning to-day. How differently you talked formerly! What change has taken place in you? I may indeed be the victim of an error, and by reason of that error

I may give bad advice and take fatal resolutions; but you knew this long ago, and you made no opposition before an engagement had been entered into. How has the error suddenly become patent to your eyes which before they did not perceive? What heavenly light has illumined your soul? What saint or holy angel has come down to earth to point out to you the good and enable you to distinguish it from the bad?"

Dofia Blanca, as is evident, was beginning to lose her self-command and her forced sweetness. Father Jacinto, too, was beginning to lose his temper, but he made a heroic effort, and, instead of persisting and rousing the storm, he endeavoured to calm it by every means he could think of.

"You are more than right," he said, with much humility. "I ought to have dissuaded you in time from arranging this marriage. The error I note in you I confess that I have shared. At least, it was atrocious carelessness, unpardonable thoughtlessness on my part not to have spoken to you before as I am speaking to you now. But if I erred, by acknowledging the error and putting it from me, I instigate you to follow my example, although by so doing I give you weapons to use against me. What you affirm proves my inconsistency, but it proves nothing against my advice."

"What do you mean by saying it proves nothing against your advice? It takes away from your advice

all the authority it might otherwise have had. Counsel given so suddenly might even be suspected—not to be based on the counsellor's own judgment.”

Doña Blanca, as she uttered these last words, darted a sharp and scrutinising glance at the priest. The priest, although he was by no means a timid man, was for a moment confounded, and cast down his eyes. But, recovering himself almost immediately, he responded :

“The only authority in question here is the authority of reason. To give you the advice, let the friendship and the affection which I entertain for yourself and your family be my warrant; in your acceptance or rejection of it, I do not pretend to attempt to influence you by any other means than the power which I ask God to grant me to carry conviction to your soul.”

“Very well. Will you tell me what are the reasons why Clara should not marry Don Casimiro? You are Clara's confessor. Does Clara love another?”

“For the very reason that I am her confessor, if Clara loved another and had confided the fact to me I would not reveal it to you except by her permission, which I should ask and even exact, in case of necessity. Fortunately, the question whether Clara loves another or not has nothing to do with the subject we are discussing.”

“Don't begin now with your circumlocutions and

subtleties. I have brought up my daughter with so much strictness and in such seclusion that I am absolutely certain that she has never had any attachment. Clara has never exchanged a glance of love with any man."

"That may be; but may she not do so to-morrow? May she not love in the future even if she has not loved in the past?"

"She will love her husband. Why should she not love him?"

"Well, señora," said Father Jacinto, whose patience was now becoming exhausted, "she will not love her husband, because he is ugly, old, sickly, and disagreeable."

"I will suppose," answered Doña Blanca, with the calm *hauteur* which she assumed when she was most terrible—"I will suppose that your charitable epithets are perfectly applicable to the individual, to the member of my family whom you honour with them. Your exquisite taste in the arts of portraiture has made you find Don Casimiro ugly; your medical knowledge has made you comprehend that the poor man is in bad health; and the amenity and lively wit in which you excel naturally disgust you with all other human beings who are not so agreeable and witty as yourself—a thing which, unfortunately, is very rare; but you will not deny that my daughter, less well instructed in the proportions and the beauties of the masculine

form, may not think Don Casimiro ugly, as she does not think him so; less learned in the science of medicine, she may believe him to be healthier than he is; and less witty than you, she may very well discover some wit in Don Casimiro and not find his conversation tiresome. And, besides, even if my daughter saw in Don Casimiro the defects which you point out, why should she not love him? What! Is a woman of honour, a good Christian, to love only physical beauty and a fluent speech? Must we seek as a husband for her, not a gentleman of her own rank, honourable, God-fearing, virtuous, and full of consideration for her, and desirous of making her happy, but some robust mountebank, some amusing buffoon to excite in her with his low jests indecorous laughter and unseemly mirth?"

"See, Doña Blanca," said the friar, who, however angry he might be, never abandoned the familiar style, "don't imagine that it is necessary to be an Apelles or a Phidias to know that Don Casimiro is ugly. His ugliness is so patent and on the surface that it is not necessary to go very deep to discover it. And as for his infirm health and his scant amenity, I assure you that the same thing is true. Without having studied medicine, without being a Hippocrates, any one can see that Don Casimiro is completely broken down. And without having studied Huarte's Disquisition on the Intellectual Faculties, it may at once be seen

that Don Casimiro's are obtuse and barren. I do not pretend that you should seek for Clarita a Pythagoras and a Milo of Crotona in one; but what diabolical fancy induces you to wish to give her a Thersites for a husband?"

Father Jacinto abstained from using Latin quotations when he was talking to women, but he could not refrain from citing, when he was speaking to ladies of distinction, such facts, personages, and sayings of classic antiquity and of the sacred Scriptures as served to illustrate his discourse. For the rest, the meaning of his words was so evident that Doña Blanca, even if she had not known, with more or less vagueness, the condition of the persons alluded to, would not have had the slightest doubt as to the friar's meaning. Thus it was that she answered:

"Reverend father, those are insults and not counsels; but you can never make me angry. All I will say is that all the defects which you now discover in my future son-in-law must be less obvious than you suppose them to be, since you did not discover them before. For, if you discovered them before, why did you not tell me of them? I repeat that some one has been enlightening your clear understanding. Some one has induced you to take this step. There is no use in dissembling. Be honest and frank with me. You have spoken to some one about the proposed

marriage of Clarita. Your counsels are not counsels, but a message in disguise."

Father Jacinto was a self-possessed man, but with Doña Blanca no amount of self-possession was of any avail. The poor friar was confounded, and he blushed to the very tips of his ears. The saying, "His ears were as red as a friar's on a visit," indicating that the person so alluded to has received a severe mortification, might have been expressly invented for him.

Even his tongue, which was in general so fluent, stammered, and was unable to answer.

Doña Blanca, noticing his silence, urged him to explain himself, adding :

"There is no doubt of it. You stand convicted, and you have almost confessed. You disapprove to-day of what you approved yesterday, because an enemy of mine has filled your head with absurd ideas. Deny this to be so if you can."

Questioned thus, accused with such unmeasured audacity and such insolent calmness, Father Jacinto made a desperate effort to regain his lost ground ; he set aside the cause of his unaccustomed timidity, which was only the fear of injuring Clara's interests and those of his friend and former pupil ; and, now free from impediments, he answered with so much energy and wisdom that his answer, the reply to which it gave rise, and all the remainder of the conversation

assumed a distinct and solemn character, for which reason they deserve a separate chapter, which will be one of the most important of this history.

XVII.

FATHER JACINTO, without being disconcerted, imitating the haughty composure of his illustrious friend, answered as follows :

“ I have frankly confessed that I ought to have given you my advice before. I did not do so, not because I approved of your plan, but because, influenced by shameful levity and gross and wicked indifference, I did not observe all the horror of the marriage you have arranged. Do I owe the having observed it now to my own intelligence or to that of another, who has enlightened me? This is a point which interests you God only knows why, and which might possibly affect my reputation as a wise man, but which can in no wise alter the value of my counsels. I cannot nor do I wish to justify my inconsistency. I can and ought, however, to try to mitigate in some degree the harshness of your accusation, and I shall do so, stating the reasons in which I found my present counsels. I should be sorry to express myself with impropriety, although I expect that you will be fair-minded enough not to dispute with me about words, if you understand

my ideas and the sound intention with which I express them. Perhaps Clara has been educated with a strictness that borders on a dangerous extreme. Fearing that she might one day fall, you have overestimated the obstacles in her path. Fearing that the vessel might capsize and sink, you have exaggerated the number of the rocks and shoals which are in the sea of the world, the impetus and the violence of the winds which buffet the vessel, and even the vessel's frailty and misgovernment. This, too, has its dangers. This inspires a mistrust in one's own strength, which borders on cowardice. This makes us form a conception of life and of the world much worse than the reality. How is a believer to deny that as a result of our sins the world is a vale of tears; that the devil is continually spreading his nets to ensnare us; that our weak nature is prone to evil, and that the favour of Heaven is necessary to keep us from falling into temptation? All this is undeniable, but it is well not to exaggerate it. If we once greatly exaggerate it, we must either flee to the desert or lead the ascetic life of hermits, and then all goes well, for the beauty and the goodness which we do not see on the earth, we hope for, we foresee, we almost behold already in heaven, in raptures and ecstasies; or we must fall, lacking divine love, lacking fervent charity, into a despairing self-contempt and such scorn and hatred of everything created as well as of our fellow-beings, as would

make the person who should lead such a life odious and offensive to himself and to every one else. I don't know, daughter, whether I explain myself clearly or not, but you are perspicacious, and you will understand me as I go on. Another grave danger also springs from your method of education. The conscience finds itself, indeed, forewarned and forearmed by it for the fight: but in defiling everything it defiles itself; in vitiating everything it vitiates itself; in foreseeing in everything a sin, an impurity, it provokes and even evokes impurities and sins. Clarita has a sound understanding, an excellent disposition, but do not doubt that, by force of torturing her soul to make it confess faults of which it has not been guilty, she might one day distort and pervert the purest sentiments and convert them into sinful sentiments; she might conceive, through the scruples of her conscience, inquisitive of sin, sin itself before it existed. I need not assure you that, for a thousand reasons, I have not sought to relax the strictness of the principles which you have inculcated in Clarita, although my own nature leads me, on the contrary, to be indulgent; to see in everything its good side, to be slow to see its bad side, and not to discover it until after long meditation. Thus it was that in the beginning, confining ourselves to the subject of the marriage, I saw only its good side. I saw that Don Casimiro was a gentleman of your own rank, honourable, religious, attached to Clarita, and

desirous of making her happy. I saw that, marrying him, she would remain here, she would not be taken away from her mother and from us, who love her so dearly. I saw that with her large property and that of her husband she would do immense good in this place, occupying herself in works of charity. And I saw, in the very austerity with which she has been educated, the guarantee that for Clarita marriage would not be the means of satisfying and even of sanctifying by a sacred and indissoluble bond a violent, profane, and somewhat impious passion, since it consecrates to man a certain adoration and worship due only to God, and a perishable, ephemeral illusion which vanishes the more quickly, the more vivid and glowing the colours in which fancy paints it. All this I saw, and since I saw it I try to justify to myself, if not to excuse, my not having opposed the marriage before. I supposed, besides, that it was not distasteful to Clarita. Clarita has told me nothing since, but my eyes have been opened, and now I comprehend that in her secret soul she views it with unconquerable repugnance. I now comprehend that Clarita does not see in marriage only a vow of devotion and sacrifice. Clarita desires to love, and she desires that marriage should sanction and purify her love. Marriage, therefore, cannot be for her the mere fulfilment of a social duty, an act of abnegation, a suffering to which she must be resigned, a penitence, a test, a punishment. The pro-

found respect which she has for you, the blind obedience with which she submits herself to your will, the belief that almost everything is a sin, would not allow her ever to confess to herself what I have said to you; but I do not now doubt that she feels it. Now, then, has Clarita deserved this penitence? Does she merit this punishment? What right have you to impose it on her? And if it is a test, who has given you the right to put her goodness to the test? If the seriousness and harshness of a duty, as marriage is, can be mixed and combined with lawful enjoyments which lighten the cross, and with satisfactions and pleasures which smooth the ruggedness of the path, why do you wish for your daughter only the ruggedness of the path and the weight of the cross, and not also the permitted sweetness?"

Doña Blanca listened, impassive and apparently very tranquil, to the good friar's sermon. When she saw that he did not continue, she said, after a moment's silence:

"Even granting that marriage with an honourable man, full of affection and good sense, were a penance, a cross, Clarita ought to carry this cross with resignation. Woman has not come into the world for her pleasure, and for the satisfaction of her will and her appetites, but to serve God in this temporal life and to enjoy him in the eternal. And you will agree with me, unless you have been associating of late with peo-

ple who have confused your reason and led you from the right path, that the best way in which a daughter can serve God is to obey her parents. You yourself acknowledge that the holy sacrament of matrimony was not instituted to sanctify passion. True, it is better to marry than burn, but it is better still to marry without burning, in order to be the faithful companion of a just man and to found or perpetuate with him a Christian, exemplary, and pious family. This pure, Christian, and eminently honourable conception of marriage is not easy to realise; and it is for that reason that I have brought Clarita up with so much strictness; that, through the grace of God, she might have the glory of realising it instead of seeking in marriage a means of making lawful and tolerable the gratification of ill-regulated desires and impure passions. I might say more in my own favour on this subject, but this is not an academic discussion. I have neither the necessary learning nor the fluency of speech required to discuss with you the general question whether marriage ought to be as hard and austere a state as any other on which one enters to serve God, and not a worldly expedient to conceal sensuality. Here we must confine ourselves to the single case of Clarita, and for this I repeat what I have said: I require, I demand that you shall be honest and candid with me. Who has sent you to speak to me? Who has advised you to advise me? Who

has opened your eyes that were before so tightly shut, and has made you see that Clarita, if she does not love now, will love at some future time? Come, answer me. Why disguise it or conceal it? There is a man who has spoken to you about all this."

"I will not deny it, since you are determined that I should declare it."

"That man is Commander Mendoza."

"He is Commander Mendoza," responded the friar.

After this declaration, fully foreseen though it had been, both interlocutors remained silent, and seemingly buried in profound meditation for a full minute, which seemed to them a century.

Presently Doña Blanca, showing now, although there was no precipitancy in her tones, in the tremulousness of her voice and the glitter of her eyes, keen and painful emotion, suppressed with difficulty, spoke thus:

"You know all, and I am glad of it. Perhaps I was wrong in not telling it to you myself the first time I knelt before you in the tribunal of penance. Let it be my excuse that my chief sin had been confessed several times before, and the consideration that each time I confess it anew I bring to the knowledge of one person more the dishonour of him whose name I bear. You know it all without my having told it to you. Blessed be God who humiliates me as I deserve

without obliging me, who am already so guilty, to commit the fresh sin of dishonoring my poor husband! Well, then, knowing as you do, everything, how can you dare to give me the advice you do? How can you desire to dissuade me from the course I have taken, the only possible one by which reparation, although incomplete, can be made? If, contrary to your opinion, if, contrary to the law of decorum, we should stain Clara's conscience by revealing to her her origin, what do you suppose she would do? Would you not despise her if she did not seek to make reparation? And to do so, without making public her mother's infamy, and the infamy of him whom she ought to venerate as a father, what choice remains to Clara but to enter a convent or to give her hand to Don Casimiro? Why, you will say, should Clara suffer for the fault which she has not committed? Dearly enough I pay for it, father. Remorse and shame are killing me. If this seems to you iniquitous, become an infidel, and blaspheme against Providence, and not against me. Providence, in its inscrutable designs, through my fault, has placed my daughter in the alternative either of sacrificing herself or of being an impostor and the unworthy possessor of riches which do not belong to her."

"I will not be the one, assuredly," interrupted the friar, "to disguise or to underestimate the difficulty of the situation or the truth of what you say. I agree

with you. I know Clara's nobility of soul. If she were to know who she is— But no, it is better that she should not know."

"What do you suppose she would do if she were to know it?"

"Without hesitation, Clara would retire to a convent. Your plan of marrying her to Don Casimiro would seem to her absurd, wicked, not because Don Casimiro is ugly and old, but even if he were handsome and she were in love with him. By this marriage the evil born of fraud and imposture is not remedied, nor does your daughter despoil herself of the wealth which is not hers."

"It is, however, although incomplete, the only reparation possible, while Clara remains in ignorance of the motive for reparation. I concede that Clara's entering a cloister would be a better, a less incomplete way of remedying the evil. But how could the daughter of an atheist have a vocation to become the spouse of Christ?"

As she uttered these last words the countenance of Doña Blanca assumed a sublime expression of grief; her cheeks were dyed with carmine, ominous as the flush of fever; two large tears sprang suddenly from her eyes.

To Father Jacinto Doña Blanca seemed transfigured; he saw, under her asperity and ill temper, a womanly heart which he had not before even sus-

pected, and he felt sorry for her and looked at her compassionately. She continued :

“I have meditated during long, sleepless nights on the solution of this problem, and I can see nothing better than Clara’s marriage to Don Casimiro. Do not suppose that I have not the courage for any other course. It is not that I lack courage, it is that I have too much pity. A thousand times, desiring that he might kill me, have I been on the point of revealing my sin to the man whom I offended committing it. I would willingly have myself put the dagger into his hand ; but I know him : the unhappy man would have wept like a child ; I should have caused him to die of grief instead of receiving from him the chastisement I deserved ; with evangelical meekness he would have pardoned me, and in my hardness of heart and my diabolical pride, far from being grateful to him for the pardon, I would have despised him still more for having granted it to me. Meek, peaceable, kind, Valentin would have drained to the dregs the cup of bitterness and gall on hearing my revelation ; instead of being an inexorable judge, he would have finished being my victim, and I, reprobate, full of satanic pride, would have choked up the spring of compassion and tenderness with scorn, with loathing, of a holy resignation, which the devil himself would have represented to me as an unmanly weakness. My duty, then, was to be silent, to make as little bitter as

possible the life of the weak and gentle companion whom Heaven has given me; to dissemble, to conceal, as far as it was possible to conceal, my want of love, my unjust, my impious, irrational, involuntary want of esteem. This is the explanation of the deception and the persistence in the deception, but I am not capable of the baseness of theft. My soul would not suffer it. That wicked atheist perhaps desires that I should degrade myself by theft. What reason, what right, what paternal sentiment can he invoke who so utterly forgot for long years the fruit of his love—and of the divine wrath? You say well, the best course would be for Clara to immure herself in a convent, to consecrate herself to God. I have done all that it was possible to do to disgust her with the world, painting it to her in horrible colours; but youthful confidence, the accursed ardour of the blood, the delight and the exuberance of life, have had more power over her than my words. What choice is left me but to marry her to Don Casimiro? Why do you pity her? Is she not the gainer? The child of sin ought to have neither wealth nor honour, nor even a name, and all these she will preserve, all these she may enjoy without remorse, without shame.”

During the latter part of her discourse Doña Blanca was beautiful, with the sublime beauty of an angry panthress that has received a mortal wound. She had risen to her feet. It seemed to the friar as if

she had increased in stature until her head touched the ceiling. She had spoken in a low voice, but each of her words had the sharpness of a steel-tipped arrow.

Father Jacinto saw that he had relied too much on his assurance and his readiness of speech. He was utterly confounded, and had not a word to say. So great was his embarrassment, that Clarita's return to the parlour relieved his mind of a weight, affording him a respite and enabling him to reply at a more propitious moment and after due meditation.

Dofia Blanca, the moment her daughter entered the room, recovered her self-control and with it her habitual calmness.

A little later the gentle Don Valentin returned, and they all went to dinner as if nothing unusual had occurred.

Father Jacinto pronounced the benediction at the beginning of the meal, and recited a prayer on taking his seat at the table and on rising.

After dinner the pleasant surprise of the presentation of the doe took place. Clarita thought her charming. The doe allowed Clarita to kiss her on a white star which she had on her forehead, and ate four biscuits from her hand.

Don Valentin wondered at, sympathised with, and was even touched by the gentleness of the beautiful animal.

When Father Jacinto, everything being ended, left Doña Blanca's house, he hurried to that of the Commander, who was impatiently waiting for him, not having seen him on his arrival from Villabermeja, as the friar had come to the city an hour earlier than had been agreed upon between them. Having excused himself for this, and for his precipitation in taking the step he had done without consulting the Commander, Father Jacinto related to the latter all that had taken place.

Don Fadrique López de Mendoza was not one of those who condemn all that is done without consulting them. He approved of the step his master had taken, and applauded it. Even the final confusion and silence of the friar he thought advantageous, because they had left him uncompromised, because he had given no pledge. We have already said that the Commander was optimistic by philosophy and by nature cheerful.

XVIII.

WHEN he had been informed of the substance of the conversation between the friar and Doña Blanca, it was by an effort that the Commander abstained from taking a hasty resolution. He contented himself with begging his master not to return to Villaber-

meja, to continue his visits to Doña Blanca's house, and to endeavour to dissipate that lady's suspicions by giving her his promise neither to speak to Clarita of the projected marriage, nor to say anything to her in disapprobation of her mother's wishes.

The Commander desired to reflect, and he reflected long, on the subject. His reflections (we have already said that the Commander was an unbeliever) could not have been very pious. The Commander was, besides, cheerful, cool, and self-possessed, and his reflections could not therefore have been angry, but his analytical intellect placed clearly before him all the difficulties of the case.

It did not admit of a doubt that the beautiful and sympathetic creature who owed her being to him was condemned either to live as a base usurper of what did not belong to her, to marry Don Casimiro, or to be a nun. One of these three extremes was inevitable, if a frightful scandal was to be avoided, unless a ransom, difficult of realisation, could be effected.

Doña Blanca was in the right, then; but that was no reason why she should be so rude and disagreeable to every human being, beginning with her unfortunate husband.

Don Fadrique had an economic theory more deeply rooted than his political theories. This theory was that all wealth, all property, shall one day, when society has reached ideal perfection, be the infallible sign

of industry, of talent, of integrity in their possessors; that to be rich will be, as it were, an incontestable title of nobility, won, whether by one's self, or by the progenitor who has left one the riches he enjoys.

Don Fadrique knew very well that this time was still far distant; but he knew too that the quickest way to reach it was to transact all business as if it had already arrived—that is to say, as if there were no ill-gotten wealth in the world. The contrary would be to give sanction to the vile proverb, “He who robs a robber gains a hundred years’ indulgence,” and to contribute to make life, history, civilisation, and social progress a never-ending web of knaveries. In accordance with these principles, Don Fadrique cast aside the idea that in every city, town, and village in the world there must of necessity be a swarm of mothers in the same case as Doña Blanca, and a multitude of daughters or sons in the same case as Clarita, for whom the difficult moral problem which tormented Doña Blanca was as if it did not exist, allowing them to enjoy the possessions which Fate and the law conceded to them in the utmost tranquillity and without the slightest scruple. He cast aside also the idea, somewhat ludicrous, but more than possible, that Don Casimiro himself, owing to similar circumstances, might have even less right than Clarita to the inheritance, although it was all entailed; that Don Valentin, his father, and his grandfather might have

had no right to it either ; and that God alone knew, although perhaps the devil might not be ignorant of them, through what subterranean channels and by what intricate paths every one has come by the inheritance which he enjoys. In these cases faith must save ; but in the case of Doña Blanca no faith could avail against the evidence which she possessed. To close one's eyes and put a bandage over them, and pretend faith, would be baseness. Don Fadrique, while his heart and his serene intellect condemned Doña Blanca's outbursts of fury, yet applauded and extolled her for thinking with rectitude and nobleness. To whom it may go, whether he deserve it or not, whether he has a right to it or not, is a matter of slight consequence compared with the higher consideration that I know that this property is not mine, and that I enjoy it only through deception, crime, or falsehood.

As Don Fadrique was a person of a great deal of intelligence and common sense, although he lived in an epoch of reforms, systems, and dreams of all sorts, he did not think of condemning the right of inheritance. Without the great satisfaction of leaving our riches to our children, the chief stimulus to labour, to order, to application, to the development and exercise of the faculties, would be lost. Don Fadrique perceived, however, that if the day was still distant in which it would be almost impossible to acquire unjustly what one acquires one's self, the day was still

much more distant in which it would be almost impossible to inherit unjustly what one inherits. The way to avoid deferring to a still more distant future the dawn of that day was to give a good example in the other direction. Doña Blanca's reasoning always emerged triumphant from every labyrinth of reflections in which Don Fadrique entangled himself.

There existed a moral evil which called for remedy. Thus far Don Fadrique was in accord with Doña Blanca's idea. Was the remedy worse than the evil? The remedy was severe, but Don Fadrique comprehended that it was not worse than the evil, and that it was necessary to apply it, since there was no other.

The remedy might be applied in two ways: either marrying Clarita to Don Casimiro, and this was easy; or making her take the veil. This latter, in spite of the worldliness, impiety, and anti-religiousness of Don Fadrique, seemed to him a thousand times the better. He comprehended, however, that in order that Clarita should enter a convent, without knowing why she did so, it would be necessary for some one to inspire her with a vocation. This task her mother could not undertake. Only Father Jacinto could persuade Clarita to retire to a convent.

To a man imbued with the spirit of the eighteenth century, nourished on the writings of the encyclopedists, a believer in God, but always talking of Nature,

it is unnecessary to say here how horrible seemed this sacrifice of beauty, life, youthful exuberance of spirits, already fervently anticipating love, no doubt, and demanding it, on the altar of a mysterious sentiment, to accomplish a purpose in his opinion impalpable and even incomprehensible. The Commander thought this a nefarious and monstrous act, but he preferred it to seeing, to imagining Clara in the withered arms of Don Casimiro; and in his pride as a hidalgo, in his desire not to be himself a liar and a cheat, not to show himself less noble-minded than a fanatic and violent woman, he preferred anything rather than to see Clarita enriched by Don Valentin's possessions on the death of the latter.

The end of Don Fadrique's reflections was always the same, no matter by what diverse paths or circuitous ways it was reached. He did not wish Clara to be the possessor of what he knew was not hers; he did not wish her to be Don Casimiro's wife; he did not wish her to be a nun; nor yet did he wish to give scandal and embitter Don Valentin's life by a humiliating disclosure. It was indispensable, then, that he should be the deliverer, the redeemer of Clarita.

Although the Commander was greatly preoccupied by these thoughts, he exercised so much control over himself that he allowed no one to perceive it.

He walked with Lucía in the gardens or chatted with her, and tried to avoid her inquisitorial questions.

In this way eight days passed. During this time the Commander informed himself, with the utmost caution and diligence, of the exact value of all Don Valentin's possessions. This exceeded four millions of reals.

He regretted not a little—we ought not to disguise the fact—to find that Don Valentin had become so rich. The Commander's own fortune, summing up the values of several small estates which he had purchased near Villabermeja, and the funds he had deposited in various banking houses in Great Britain and in Madrid, exceeded this amount but slightly. His resolution, however, in spite of his regret, remained unaltered.

The Commander knew and appreciated the value of money. His pride in having acquired it honourably and by his own ability gave it a greater charm in his eyes. But in what better way could he employ his fortune, the earnings and the savings of the whole of an active life, the fruit of energy, labour, and intelligence, than in ransoming a being so dear to him and so worthy of being so?

Despoiling himself of four millions, the Commander would see himself reduced to the melancholy condition of a country nobleman, obliged to go seek his fortune again, or else resign himself to living poorly and humbly in Villabermeja. This did not terrify him.

Various solutions, then, being eliminated, the prob-

lem remained clear and simple. The only difficulty to be surmounted was that of placing in Don Casimiro's possession, in so natural a manner as to arouse no suspicion, the sum of four millions, and to make this sacrifice known to and appreciated by Doña Blanca, as was just, in order that that terrible lady might acknowledge her daughter to be free of all obligation and qualified to receive, on his death, all the possessions of Don Valentin, as a restitution and not as an inheritance.

XIX.

THE Solís family continued to lead a life of complete isolation.

The only persons who ever entered the house were Don Casimiro and the friar. The latter, in spite of his unwelcome advice, had been again received into the favour and confidence of its severe mistress. It is not so easy a matter to cast off a spiritual director whom one holds to be a saint, or little less, even though this director should oppose our views, and, still worse, should act in opposition to them. The chief fault of Father Jacinto—what Doña Blanca could with difficulty understand—was that that virtuous man, that son of St. Domingo de Guzman, should be so

intimate a friend of a man whom he ought rather to send to the stake, if the times were not so perverted and Christianity so relaxed.

Dofia Blanca was not silent on this point, and on several occasions manifested her surprise to the friar, but the friar always answered her :

“ Daughter, think whatever you choose in the matter ; I don't wish to bother my head explaining it to you. Let it suffice you to know that I regard Don Fadrique as my very good friend, although he is an unbeliever, as he regards me as his very good friend, although I am a friar. Cavilling about the question frightens me, and I prefer not to be frightened. I do not wish to have to convince myself that there is in the souls of men something which, in spite of a radical difference of beliefs, may form a bond of friendly and unalterable union between them and the foundation of high mutual esteem.”

“ You are very right, then, not to cavil,” answered Dofia Blanca. “ Do not cavil, lest you should fall into heresy in your old age, imagining that there is something more essential, more sublime, than religious belief.”

“ I shall not fall into heresy,” replied the friar, who, as we have already said, was audaciously outspoken—“ I shall not fall into heresy when you have not fallen into it. My friendship can never be more inexplicable than was your love.”

At this Doña Blanca exhaled a sigh in which there was a touch of rage, and became subdued and was silent.

For the rest, Father Jacinto was loyal and did not abuse his privilege of talking in private with Clarita by exciting her to rebel against the marriage with Don Casimiro.

One piece of information only did he venture to give Clarita—at the instigation of Don Fadrique—that Don Carlos, admonished by the Commander, had returned to his parents' house in Seville.

In this way Clarita's mind was tranquillised and she was neither surprised nor alarmed at not seeing Don Carlos at church in the mornings. The person whom she did see several times, almost in the very spot where Don Carlos had been in the habit of stationing himself, was the Commander, of whose wickedness her mother had told her so much, but whom she herself was irresistibly impelled to believe good.

The Commander, as if in atonement for having neglected for so many years this pledge of his love, did not content himself with resolving to make a great sacrifice for her, but he longed to see and admire her, although at a distance.

Thus events were moving slowly on when one morning Doña Antonia, having one of her headaches and being disinclined to leave the house, Lucía went for a walk with the Commander. They proceeded to

the spring or source of the river, with which we are already acquainted. Seated in the shade of the willow, listening to the murmur of the water, they talked of the stars, of the flowers, of a thousand different matters, towards which the uncle tried to draw the attention of the niece, in order to divert her curiosity from Clarita's affairs.

Lucía, her curiosity not being sufficiently diverted, at last said :

“ Uncle, you are going to make a *savante* of me. Now you speak to me of the sun, and you tell me how large it is and how it attracts the planets and comets ; and again you describe to me the depths of the skies, and you point out to me the most beautiful of the stars, and you tell me what their names are and how immense are their distances from us, and the length of time which the winged rays of their light take to strike our eyes. All this delights and amazes me, making me form a more adequate conception of the infinite power of God. You have also explained to me strange mysteries of the flowers, and this has interested me even more, inspiring my soul with a loftier idea of the goodness and wisdom of the Most High. But, laying aside dissimulation, I suspect that you are giving me all this instruction only in order to avoid answering my questions concerning your plans with regard to Clarita. This suspicion, I confess, takes away my desire to hear your lessons, which, other-

wise, would delight me; this suspicion diminishes the value of those lessons, which I fancy to be interested and malicious; rather than as a means of instructing me, they seem to me a means of hoodwinking me."

"The malice is on your side, niece," responded the Commander. "My conduct is perfectly simple. All there is to know about Clarita you know better than I do. What can I add to what you already know?"

"Listen to me, uncle; although I am only a girl, it is not so easy to deceive me as you may imagine. There are here several points which are obscure, inexplicable, and I shall not rest until I have cleared them all up."

"If you don't rest until then you have a weary time before you, niece. I am afraid you are doomed to perpetual unrest."

"Let us not confound terms. I am quite easy, without any explanation, regarding many points on which you, unfortunately, are not easy. I do not speak of those, I speak of simpler matters, matters more within the scope of my intelligence. On these I require an explanation, and without an explanation I can have no rest. What the mischief was that hard word you used the other day to signify a supposition which one makes to explain things, and which is held to be true if it explains them?"

"That word is *hypothesis*."

“Well, then, all I do is to form a hypothesis, to see if I can find the explanation of certain things. Do you wish to hear such a hypothesis of mine?”

“State it.”

The Commander’s voice, as he gave this permission, expressed serene indifference; but he grew red with the fear that Lucía, by some magical art, or little less, might have guessed the tie that united Clara to him.

Lucía, availing herself of the permission she had received, and encouraged by the slight confusion which she observed in her uncle, thus stated one of her hypotheses :

“Well, then, at first I was blinded by excess of vanity; I thought that the affection which, as an uncle, you entertain for me, had led you, in order to please me, to interest yourself in Chloris and Myrtilus, and to try to bring about a happy ending to their love. I have now changed my opinion. The hypothesis I have now formed is a different one. Your interest is too great to be a reflected one. I notice, too, that it is very unequal—less than moderate for Myrtilus; immense for Chloris. Ah, uncle! Can it be that you are trying to play an unhandsome trick on the poor swain? Everything becomes known. Why, do you suppose it has not come to my knowledge that you have grown devout (would to Heaven the devotion

were genuine!), and that you go to the principal church of the city to hear mass every morning at daybreak?"

"Niece, don't talk nonsense," interrupted the Commander.

"I am not talking nonsense. I think your devotion too strange to be explained by a merely ordinary sympathy, and I suspect that the saint who has inspired you with it has bound you captive with sweeter chains than those of piety."

"I tell you again not to talk nonsense," the Commander repeated, growing very serious. "I confess that it may seem difficult to explain the extraordinary affection with which Clarita inspires me. I assure you, however, upon my word of honour, that there is nothing in it of what you imagine. If you care for me at all, if you respect me, I entreat you—and if you think I may command you, I command you—to put that thought away from you. I love Clarita, although between her and me there are no ties of blood, in the same way that I love you who are my niece, with an almost paternal love—with an old man's love."

"But you are not an old man, uncle."

"Even so. I love Clarita only in that way. And though you should still think this strange, do not cavil or look for any other hypothesis to explain it satisfactorily to yourself."

“Very well, uncle. I will leave off forming hypotheses for the present.”

“That is the wisest course you can pursue.”

“Since hypotheses are of no use, is it of any use to ask questions?”

“Ask them.”

“Do you still persist in favouring Myrtilus’s love?”

“I still persist in doing so, and I will persist so long as I believe that Clara loves him.”

“Do you hope to conquer Doña Blanca’s obstinacy and prevent the marriage with Don Casimiro?”

“I hope to do so, although it will be difficult.”

“May I venture to ask what means you intend to employ to conquer that difficulty?”

“You may venture, but I will also venture to tell you that there is no reason why you should know those means. Trust in me.”

“Although you are so reticent with me, uncle, that you will tell me nothing, I am going to act generously; I am going to tell you my secrets. I know that Don Carlos de Atienza writes to you. He has written to me also. But you have not done what I have done. You have not put the poor exile in communication with Clara. I have done this. I have written to Clara no fewer than three letters, which, by dint of entreaties, I have persuaded Father Jacinto to deliver to her. In those letters I have copied some

paragraphs from the letters which Don Carlos has written to me."

"That secret I knew in part. Father Jacinto told me that he had delivered your letters."

"Well, I wager there is something else you do not know."

"What is that?"

"That Clara has answered me. The answer came yesterday, through the air, like the former letter, which we read together."

"Have you this last letter here?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Will you read it to me?"

"You don't deserve that I should do so; but I am so good that I will read it to you."

Lucía drew a paper from her bosom.

Before beginning to read it she said:

"In truth, uncle, this letter makes me very anxious and uneasy. Clara has changed greatly in these few days during which she has been alone. Her letter is full of so singular an exaltation, such profound sadness, such bitter thoughts!"

"Read, read!" said the Commander, with keen emotion. Lucía read as follows:

"BELOVED LUCÍA: A thousand thanks for all you are doing for me. I should be dishonest if I were to conceal anything of what I feel from you. Not even

in Father Jacinto have I confided up to this; but to you I confide everything. Something strange is taking place within me, something which I cannot understand. I still love Don Carlos. And, notwithstanding, I know that I ought to give him no hope, that I ought never to marry him, that it is my duty to obey my mother, who desires my marriage with Don Casimiro. But the strange thing is, that in these days so profound a sentiment of humility has taken possession of my soul that I find myself unworthy even of Don Casimiro. When alone with myself I have descended into the depths of my conscience, and there I have lost myself in dark abysses. When my mother, who is good and who loves me, finds in me I know not what leaven, I know not what germ of perverseness, I know not what stain of original sin blacker than that which stains other creatures, my mother must be right. Yes, Lucía, perhaps in my breast, tranquil in appearance, under the innocence and apparent simplicity of youth, vehement and evil passions are gradually acquiring life and vigour, like a nest of vipers under clustering roses. I know it—my mother trembles for me; she fears for my future, and she is right. I examine myself, I study myself, and I am terrified. I discover in myself the propensity, difficult to resist, to everything evil. I see my native wickedness and my instinctive inclination to sin. How otherwise comprehend that I, brought up in

such strict seclusion and in such holy ignorance of the things of the world, should have had the diabolical wickedness to enter into relations with Don Carlos, to make him believe that I loved him, looking at him only (imagine with what perversity I looked at him!), and to draw him here, obliging him to follow me, and all with such diabolical dissimulation that my mother knows nothing of it? There is something in me still worse, if possible; I note it, I perceive it, and I cannot, I do not desire, I do not dare to examine it. What I do declare to you is that for me the world must of necessity be more dangerous than for other women, who are better by nature. What there is not in me by nature I ought to ask through grace from Heaven. On Heaven I fix my hopes. It follows, then, that I should withdraw from the world and seek the favour of Heaven. You know with what repugnance I have hitherto regarded the thought of embracing a religious life. I did not judge myself worthy to be the spouse of Christ. In this I have not changed, except to judge myself still less worthy. In what I have changed is in recognising that, however wicked one may be, one should never despair of the goodness of God. His Divine Majesty, if I lead a holy life, if I repent, if I mortify myself during the novitiate, will give me the strength and the merits afterwards to take the veil, without being guilty of insolent audacity in taking it. I have said nothing to any one

yet of this recent resolution; but my mind is made up. I will speak of this to Father Jacinto, that he may speak to my mother, convince her that it is best for me and that I desire to be a nun, and, in view of my resolution, undeceive Don Casimiro. Do you, on your side, undeceive poor Don Carlos. I will not deny to you that I loved him, that I love him still; but do not tell him so. Tell him I love another; that in my heart there is an immense void where awful darkness reigns. Don Carlos does not suffice to fill and illumine this void; and if God does not fill and illumine it I shall die of terror, and the least dreadful thing that can happen will be that my perturbed imagination will fill it with horrible spectres rising from my afflicted conscience. Adieu."

XX.

THE reading of this melancholy letter disturbed the pleasure of the walk of the Commander and his niece. They scarcely spoke again until they reached the house.

This sudden crisis of Clara's soul made Don Fadrique taciturn.

The ideas which came to his mind were not of a nature to be revealed to his niece.

The Commander perceived that the perpetual friction of Doña Blanca's spirit with that of her daughter, the pressure which the severe and atrabiliary character of her mother exerted on this girl of sixteen, and the terror with which she had weighed down her conscience, kept poor Clara in a state of mind not far from madness. The letter to Lucía was the danger signal which Clara gave of that state.

The Commander, however, although filled with anxiety, decided to refrain from all interference for the present. The resolution of the crisis might be favourable if he did not interfere. His intervention might increase its danger.

Clara's sincerity was evident. Suddenly, without Father Jacinto or any one else influencing her in the matter, she had changed her intention and had resolved to be a nun. It will be readily understood that to the Commander, entertaining the religious views he did, this resolution appeared a fatal one; but in virtue of this resolution it was almost certain that Don Casimiro would be dismissed. One obstacle would be removed, one adversary disposed of.

Don Fadrique then determined to wait with calmness, without neglecting to be on his guard.

He did not give Father Jacinto any hint as to the conduct the latter was to observe. He trusted entirely to the friar's sound common sense, and left him to follow freely his own inspirations.

The Commander's prudence was crowned with success at the end of a few days.

Doña Blanca, persuaded that her daughter's sudden vocation was true and profound, had a very affectionate and serious conversation with Don Casimiro in which she gave him his passport.

Father Jacinto extolled Clara's fervour and encouraged Doña Blanca to allow her to enter a convent of barefooted Carmelites which there was in the city, as a novice, with as little delay as possible.

Don Valentin agreed to everything without a murmur.

Clarita, then, would have at once entered a convent, as she desired and asked to be allowed to do; but her spiritual crisis had exercised a powerful influence over her beautiful body. The circles under her eyes were darker and larger than ordinarily, she had grown very thin; the pallor of her countenance would have inspired terror if her countenance had not been so beautiful; her dreamy abstraction made her seem at times rather like a being of the other world than a creature of this; and in her faltering step and in the fleeting brilliancy of her eyes, a brilliancy which was always followed by the prolonged dullness of those divine orbs, there was something ominous, a prophetic announcement, as it were, which could not but disturb the stern conscience of Doña Blanca, bend her

inflexibility in a great measure, and at last terrify her.

The causes of the change in Clara were vague and confused, but Doña Blanca saw clearly that from her method of educating Clara, from her involuntary and obstinate desire to mortify her and inspire her with the fear of the dangers of the world, and of her own sinful condition, and from the severe subjection in which from infancy she had held the conscience of her unhappy daughter, arose in great part the situation in which she now was. The immediate cause, or, to speak more correctly, the occasion of the exacerbation of the malady, and of its sudden manifestation, accompanied by symptoms so alarming, was a mystery for every one. This did not prevent Doña Blanca from beginning to fear that she might fall into the crime of filicide through trying to avoid the crime of theft.

Doña Blanca, therefore, proceeded with unaccustomed gentleness and exquisite discretion; but without belying her character and without yielding in her chief purpose.

Not content with being morally persuaded of Clara's firm resolution of taking the veil, she made her promise that she would profess. And this in such a way that the promise did not seem drawn from her at the instigation of Doña Blanca, but in opposition to her wishes. In this way Doña Blanca assured herself that

her daughter, renouncing the world, would renounce the possessions of Don Valentin, and would be unable to transmit them to any one.

But Doña Blanca did not wish to kill her daughter. She tormented herself in anticipation with the remorse of seeing her enter the convent despairing and wounded to death. She desired to see her profess, but cheerful, blooming, full of life; not looking like a victim, but with the delight, the joy, and the satisfaction of a spouse who flies to the arms of her gallant and happy bridegroom.

In order to obtain this, Doña Blanca laid aside her habitual severity; she began to treat Clara even with indulgence, and, anxious that she should regain her gaiety and health, she removed the interdict, opened her doors to Lucía, and consented that Clara should go out walking with her again, the Commander notwithstanding.

Doña Blanca, however, before giving this permission, put her daughter on her guard against Don Fadrique, painting him as a monster of impiety and wickedness, and charging her strictly to speak to him as little as possible.

Doña Blanca, meantime, resolved to remain garri-soned in her great house, seeing no one but Father Jacinto, and perhaps, Lucía.

XXI.

OF all the persons who figure in this history Don Casimiro had the strangest and most capricious fate. He had arranged his life with enviable method, and he spent very little. Thus it was that, although Don Casimiro was far from possessing extraordinary ability in anything, he had succeeded, by the practice of economy and judgment, in accumulating so large a fortune that, for Villabermeja and those times, he was a wealthy man. This he owed to himself, and he might with reason be, as he was, proud of it. What he owed to chance, to a combination of circumstances for him inexplicable, was his momentary exaltation to the position of *fiancé* of his rich and lovely niece, Señorita Doña Clara.

With his fifty-six years, not a few ailments, and the appearance we have already described, Don Casimiro himself, in spite of his *amour propre*, which was not small, had found it in the secret depths of his consciousness somewhat incredible that they should wish to marry him to that rosebud. *Amour propre*, however, is very ingenious, this ingeniousness being almost always in inverse ratio to the intelligence of the person concerned; wherefore Don Casimiro soon came to imagine that in his soul there must be hidden treasures of goodness and beauty, and that in his man-

ners and bearing such noble distinction and inborn elegance were revealed as, being discovered by Doña Blanca's penetrating glance, were enough and more than enough to make her desire to have Don Casimiro for a son-in-law. Don Casimiro, then, from the first days of his engagement to Clara, became more pompous and self-satisfied than ever.

His disappointment when Doña Blanca dismissed him was terrible. His inward anger was no less terrible, but he was shy and awkward in expressing himself. Dona Blanca spoke well and with an air of authority and command, and Señor Don Casimiro swallowed his anger and received his passport as meekly as a lamb.

As happens with all who are at once weak and proud, Don Casimiro's anger gathered strength in his heart later on when he had time to reflect upon the disappointment he had suffered, and the signal slight he had received.

True, the rival for whom Clara had deserted him was God himself, but this thought did not appease Don Casimiro.

"Perhaps she wishes to be a nun," he said to himself, "in order to avoid marrying me. If so, it would have been better to have thought of it earlier, and not to have placed me in this ridiculous position now. Doubtless it is less cruel for me that she should desert me for so holy a motive, than that she should desert

me to marry another man. I would not have consented to that. The deaf should have heard us. I would have fought with my rival. But against God what can I do?"

Don Casimiro consoled himself somewhat with the thought of the impossibility of fighting with God, and also with the reflection that it was a pious duty to be resigned.

His bitterness against Doña Blanca and Clarita did not diminish, however. There was not a cat or dog for ten leagues around to which Don Casimiro had not communicated his happiness. Now, his fall and his misfortune must be and were no less talked about, and, unfortunately, very much more applauded.

The vanity of the Bermejan hidalgo received some crushing blows. But how avenge himself?

"Vengeance is the pleasure of the gods," exclaimed our hidalgo to himself, "but assuredly I am not a god. What, then, is the wisest course for me to pursue? It is a saying of the friars, and a very wise one, that 'the injury that cannot be well avenged should be well dissembled.' Let us dissemble, then. There is also another proverb which says, 'Bide your time and nurse your spite.' Let us follow these precepts. The chief thing now is to show that Clarita's scorn does not afflict me. If she does not love me, there is another woman who is as good as she and better, who, I know,

will. I will renew my addresses to Nicolasa. She is not rich, but she is handsomer than Clarita."

Without abandoning, consequently, his intention of avenging himself, if a convenient opportunity to do so should offer, Don Casimiro resolved to pay his court openly to Nicolasa, hoping in this way to pique the future Carmelite, or to prove to her, at least, that he had a woman of a great deal of merit for a sweet-heart.

Nicolasa was such in fact. The daughter of Uncle Gorico by his first wife, she had become famous throughout the province for her singular beauty, discretion, and magnificence. Gentlemen, rich land-owners, and even nobles and men of title, less common then than now, had sighed in vain for Nicolasa, who, with modest dignity, had always answered in prose what a certain lady in one of the old comedies answers in verse to no less a person than the king :

" For your mistress too high,
For your wife too low."

Nicolasa had inherited from her mother certain gifts which are of more value than riches, for they preserve these where they exist, and they are generally able to procure them where they do not exist. She had the art of commanding and of winning the goodwill of all those with whom she came in contact, extraordinary firmness of character, and perseverance in her plans. She had resolved either to be a lady of sta-

tion or to remain a vestal, and, taking this resolution as her rule of conduct, she adjusted to it all her acts.

Although Uncle Gorico had married a second time, and Nicolasa had had a stepmother instead of a mother almost from her infancy, this, far from causing her to be brought up with less indulgence, had the contrary result. Nicolasa's mother had been a woman of a violent and domineering temper—a rustic Doña Blanca; while Juana, the second wife of Uncle Gorico, was gentleness itself, always submissive to her husband, who in his turn obeyed every caprice of Nicolasa. Nicolasa was all-powerful in her father's house, except in preventing Uncle Gorico from drinking.

The amorous preliminaries of Nicolasa, who was between twenty and thirty, had been innumerable. All her love affairs had died at their birth. The suitors of rank Nicolasa had sent away by speaking of the priest. The suitors of her own class she had scorned as soon as they became serious and themselves spoke of the priest.

Nicolasa, however, like all cold, calculating, and coquettish women, had known how to hold in her snares, in that twilight of love which is called Platonic affection, various perpetual sighers of the kind called in Italy *patitos*. One, especially, among her numerous adorers might serve as a notable example of these, from his patience and devotion. This was Tomasuelo, the son of the master blacksmith.

From seventeen to twenty-five, which was his age at the time we speak of, he had lived in a state of bitter-sweet captivity. Nicolasa had never told him that she loved him as a lover, but she had never deprived him of the hope that she might one day so love him. On the other hand, she continually declared to him that she liked him in a friendly way more than any other human being, and, when she told him this, the boy smiled so broadly that he showed every tooth in his head ; he experienced a sensation of supreme beatitude, and he considered his unceasing and in other respects unavailing sighs well expended.

And let it not be supposed that Tomasuelo was sickly, mean-spirited, or foolish. Tomasuelo was manly, intelligent, and strong—the handsomest youth in the place ; but Nicolasa had bewitched him. With a flash of her eyes she could give him a dose of fancied bliss that would last him for a week. With a single word she could make him cry like a four-year-old child.

The chains in which Tomasuelo at once groaned and rejoiced to find himself bound Nicolasa softened for the young man, and in a certain manner justified to the public, with notable ability and profound insight. Tomasuelo had been able to enter Uncle Gorico's house when he chose, see Nicolasa, court her, cast loving glances at her, accompany her in her walks—in short, wait on her and protect her without any one ever

having dared to criticise his doing so. Although between Nicolasa and the blacksmith's son there was not the remotest degree of kinship, Nicolasa had proclaimed Tomasuelo her brother. God had not given her a brother on whom to fix her sisterly affection, but she, who felt this affection keenly and deeply, chose for herself Tomasuelo to devote it to him. In simple phrase and with imperturbable calmness Nicolasa explained in this way her peculiar relations with Tomasuelo; and as Tomasuelo made a boast of his spiritual adoration and lamented with resignation not being loved in another way, every one in the place, far from criticising, admired the pure and angelic bond which united those two souls.

Every one who presented himself as a suitor to Nicolasa was respected by Tomasuelo, who never placed the slightest obstacle in his way during the preliminaries—the flirtation; but if, later on, the suitor should transgress the limits and show that he came with evil designs, then he might well fear the anger and the heavy hand of this adopted brother, jealous of his family honour. So, too, Tomasuelo became uncivil and disagreeable in his intercourse with every rival who, having for one reason or another been definitively dismissed, still continued importunate.

Don Casimiro, previous to his engagement with Clara, had had a long flirtation with Nicolasa, who,

with exquisite prudence, had skilfully moderated the machine of the emotions so as not to hurry the hidalgo into such declarations and demonstrations as would leave him no other alternative than to propose marriage or abandon the enterprise. Thanks to this conduct, which was more than skilful and bordered on high art, Don Casimiro had not been dismissed; his love for Nicolasa had been like the aurora, the poetic dawn of a day which never broke, owing to the interposition of the engagement with Clarita. This engagement being now at an end, Don Casimiro might return, previously obtaining pardon for his fickleness (a pardon asked humbly and accorded magnanimously), to the same point at which he had left off: to the dawn—to the aurora.

Things were so arranged that, instead of a suitor being frightened away by Tomasuelo, the first step he had to take was to entreat the good will of this spiritual brother, so jealous, so vigilant, and so deeply interested in his dear sister's welfare. Don Casimiro obtained the confidence and permission of Tomasuelo, and this he considered a good sign.

Don Casimiro, leaving the city and returning to his estate, proceeded to court Nicolasa with the imprudence and the ardour of pique. She was too sensible not to know that it was now or never; that Fortune offered her the opportunity, and that she must seize it. Don Casimiro sought in Nicolasa a refuge

from and a compensation for Clarita's disdain. Don Casimiro was in her power.

Nicolasa provoked a serious and definitive declaration. This done, she stated the two alternatives of the fatal dilemma—a formal promise of marriage, or a separation and another much-talked-of rejection. Don Casimiro could not resist, and proposed marriage.

A terrible day of trial for the Platonic Tomasuelo was that on which he learned of this triumph. Hitherto he had had no rival who had been more favoured than himself. Now he had one. The poison of jealousy embittered his heart; tears welled from his eyes.

When he was alone with Nicolasa he said to her in a tremulous voice, his eyes red with weeping :

“So you have bestowed your affections on Don Casimiro? So you are going to be married? So you are determined to kill me?”

“Hold your tongue, foolish boy!” she answered. “What are these complaints about? Have I ever deceived you?”

“No; you have not deceived me.”

“Would you want me to let so good an opportunity to be a lady of station and a millionaire escape me? Do you wish me so ill as that, selfish boy?”

“It is not because I wish you ill, but because I love you without measure, that I grieve for it, and that I cry.”

And Tomasuelo cried in fact.

“There, don't cry, foolish fellow. If you could see how ugly you look! Who ever saw a man as big as a castle crying?”

“But if I cannot help it?”

“Yes, you can; make an effort, be courageous and control yourself. Consider that in future you will have in me not only a sister but a sponsor and a powerful protectress.”

“And what does all that matter to me? Nothing. What I coveted was your affection.”

“And have you not got it the same as before, ingrate? Why! do good brothers and sisters cease to love each other when one of them marries?”

“Don't be sophistical; don't try to confound me. You know very well that the attachment I have for you will not bear—”

“Come, come, leave off childish talk. Who do you suppose occupies and fills the chief, the choicest, the innermost place in my heart? You. My soul is yours. I gave it all to you with all the love that is in it, with the affection of a sister. How can it be to your prejudice that I should be the lawful wife of Don Casimiro? Must we for that reason cease to care for each other as we have hitherto done—more than we have hitherto done? We will love each other as much as you choose and as much as it is possible for us to love each other without offending God. I suppose you do not wish to offend God? Answer me.”

“No, girl, how should I wish to offend God? Am I not a good Christian?”

“You are. That is one of the things I esteem most in you. Therefore I trust that you will remember that I am going to be the wife of another, and that you will not covet what belongs to another. Such covetousness is a deadly sin. Remember the commandments.”

“Hear that! And is it in my power not to do so?”

“It is. Be silent; say nothing to any one, not even to yourself, when you feel the temptation to covet, and silence will kill the feeling.”

“It will kill me first.”

Tomasuelo cried more bitterly than ever. His tears fell like rain, and were accompanied by a tempest of sighs.

“In the name of all that is most cowardly!” exclaimed Nicolasa, “what madness is this? Calm yourself, for Heaven’s sake, and be courageous and resigned.”

Nicolasa with the utmost gentleness dried the young man’s eyes with her own handkerchief; then she gave him three or four taps on the back of his thick and robust neck; then she made a few faces at him, mimicking his disconsolate looks; and finally she gave his nose an affectionate and arch-familiar pull.

Tomasuelo was unable to resist so much kindness

and favour. Like the sun shining through the clouds, his eyes shone with joy and satisfaction through his tears. His lips parted, showing his white and perfect teeth, but he did not smile, for he remained with his mouth open, as if transfixed.

Nicolasa then repeated the taps on the neck; in addition to pulling his nose she pulled his ears also, and Tomasuelo felt as if he was being transported to paradise, and thought himself for the moment the happiest of mortals.

In this condition of soul he agreed that Nicolasa ought to marry Don Casimiro; that he himself ought to continue being her brother, without thinking, or at least without saying that he thought, of being anything more to her; and he comprehended clearly, persuaded rather by the gentle taps on the neck and the pulling of his ears than by reasoning and argument, all the gentleness, charm, consistency, and delight of the spiritual love which bound him to Nicolasa.

In this way Nicolasa overcame all obstacles and insured her projected marriage with Don Casimiro.

Rumour at once spread the news through Villabermeja; then, crossing its borders, she carried it to the city, to the ears of the Commander, of his family, and of the Solises.

The Commander had been visited by Don Casimiro and had returned the visit. Neither had found

the other at home, so that they had not seen each other. The coldness of the relations existing between them did not render more frequent intercourse necessary.

As soon as the Commander learned of the intended marriage between Don Casimiro and Nicolasa he went to Villabermeja, saw Chacha Ramoncica, and had a long conference with her, the purport of which the curious reader will learn later on. After this, Don Fadrique returned to the city.

XXII.

CLARA resumed her walks with Lucía, accompanied by the Commander and Doña Antonia; but Clara was changed.

Her pallor and debility were such as to inspire serious fears. Her constant abstraction also alarmed the Commander. When the latter addressed her, Clara trembled as if she had been wakened from a dream, as if the soaring flight of her spirit had been suddenly cut short, and she had fallen from heaven down to earth, like a bird that has been wounded by the lead in the upper regions of the sky.

In spite of the amiability and gentle disposition of Clara, Don Fadrique noticed, with pain, that that lovely creature avoided conversing with him; she

hardly ever answered when he spoke to her except with monosyllables, and she even tried to prevent him from speaking to her.

With Lucía Clara was more communicative, and Lucía still continued to be communicative with the Commander. Through the medium of Lucía, then, the Commander still penetrated into the mind of that beloved being and to some extent communicated with her.

The news Lucía gave him was, in substance, always the same, although each time more disquieting.

“I don’t understand it, uncle,” Lucía would say, “but at times I begin to wonder whether they have not given Clara a philter. She has such causeless terrors! She feels such irrational remorse! I don’t know what it can be. Doña Blanca has filled her soul with such terrible scruples, she has inspired her with such distrust of her own impassioned nature, that the poor girl thinks herself a monster when she is in reality an angel. Perhaps she imagines that she is pursued by the furies of hell, by the enemies of the soul, by a whole legion of devils, and that she can only be safe by taking refuge at the foot of the altar. We must warn Don Carlos to come soon and see if he can deliver Clara from this species of madness.”

The Commander and Lucía both wrote on the same day to Don Carlos de Atienza, informing him of Don Casimiro’s dismissal, of Clara’s resolution to re-

tire to a convent, and of the unsatisfactory state of her health. Don Carlos left Seville on the instant and was soon in the city.

With the same secrecy and caution as before, Don Carlos joined Clara again in her walks with Lucía; but Clara's delicate health filled him with concern. And still more, if possible, did it torment and afflict him to see her shy and timid, as she had never been before, to see that she kept apart from him, and that she would scarcely speak to him, although she would cast at him at times involuntarily, evidently in spite of herself, tender glances by which she asked, rather than love, pity, commiseration, and even pardon, for her fickleness in abandoning him, for having encouraged his hopes, and now destroying them by entering a cloister.

Don Carlos de Atienza's despair was now at its height. With not a little bitterness he accused the Commander of being to blame for everything.

"For this it was," he said, "that you obliged me to go away. This is what your promise to arrange everything in less than a month has resulted in—that Clara is dying, and that, in addition, she has ceased to love me and wishes to be a nun; that she will end by taking the veil, and then the shroud. But I will die too. I will not survive her. I shall kill myself if I do not die of grief."

The Commander did not know what answer to

make to these complaints. He tried to console Don Carlos, who thought him indifferent and strange; who did not know that he had greater need of consolation than himself.

Don Fadrique went to Father Jacinto to seek this consolation from him. He went also to seek from him some light on this mystery; but, strange to say, Father Jacinto, all frankness and joviality before, had become very grave, very mysterious, and very silent.

Don Fadrique perceived, however, that Father Jacinto approved of Clara's resolution to become a nun. This put him beside himself, and at times he was on the point of breaking with Father Jacinto and setting him down in his own mind as a disloyal friend or a pitiless fanatic.

In spite of these tribulations, however, the Commander controlled himself and did not lose his calmness. He had taken his measures. He had traced his plan of conduct, a plan which he firmly resolved to adhere to, and he awaited the result with tranquillity.

This was not long in coming.

Early one morning a servant arrived from Villabermeja, bringing a letter to Don Fadrique. Don Fadrique, who was still in bed, read the letter rapidly. He then rose hurriedly, dressed himself, and went to the convent of Santo Domingo in search of his master.

The priest had just risen, and he received Don Fadrigue in his cell. Both being seated, as in the other cell in Villabermeja, they spoke as follows:

XXIII.

“FATHER JACINTO,” said the Commander, with an air of joyful triumph, “Clara is now free! It is not necessary that she should either marry Don Casimiro or be a nun.”

“How is that, my son?”

“I have given for her a sum equal to the value of all Don Valentin’s possessions.”

“To whom?”

“To Don Casimiro.”

“And for what reason? With what pretext can he have accepted it?”

“He has accepted it for a reason regarding which he has promised to be silent—for a secret reason.”

“Good Heavens, my son! What madness! What a useless sacrifice! And tell me—this secret reason—to confide to Don Casimiro in this way the honour of an illustrious family!”

“I have confided nothing to him.”

“What means did you employ, then?”

“A falsehood—but an indispensable falsehood, and one by which no one suffers.”

“ May I know what this falsehood is ? ”

“ You shall hear everything.”

The priest lent the utmost attention.

Don Fadrique continued :

“ You know only too well that Paca, Uncle Gorico’s first wife, was a black sheep.”

“ Of course. May God have forgiven her her sins ! ”

“ Paca’s good reputation has nothing to lose.”

“ Absolutely nothing.”

“ Well, then, by a happy coincidence Nicolasa was born a few months after my departure from Villabermeja, on my return from Havana.”

“ Well ? ”

“ I have made Chacha Ramoncica believe, in the first place, enjoining on her the greatest secrecy, that Nicolasa is my daughter. I have told her that an imperious duty, imposed upon me by my conscience, obliges me to give her a dower, now that she is going to be married. Chacha Ramoncica knows very little about arithmetic. She was amazed, however, when I named the enormous sum which I intended to give as a dower. But I gave myself grand airs, pretending to be a great deal richer than I am. To the remonstrances which she made me I answered that my resolution was unalterable. I have persuaded Chacha Ramoncica, finally, that it is not fitting that Nicolasa should know of the tie which unites me to

her, and that it is more delicate and proper that it should be known only to the man who is to be her husband. I induced Chacha Ramoncica, then, to undertake to persuade Don Casimiro to accept what I wish to give freely, although secretly, to his future wife. I do not suppose that Chacha Ramoncica had to expend much eloquence in convincing Don Casimiro that he ought to accept. Don Casimiro has written me this letter, in which he says that he accepts, lavishes praises upon me for my generosity, and promises to be silent regarding the gift, and, as far as may be possible, regarding the motive of the gift which I am making him."

Father Jacinto read the letter which Don Fadrique handed him. The latter then took from his pocket a package of papers, which he placed on the table, saying :

"Here are all the documents necessary to the legal conveyance of the gift, which I desire may be happily effected through your means. This is a power of attorney, executed in the presence of a notary of this city ; with this you may sell, give, or do whatever else you may think fit with all that belongs to me. Here are letters to the bankers with whom my funds are deposited, placing these at your orders. This, finally, is the list, inventory, statement, or whatever else it may be called, of all that those bankers now have of mine in their possession ; and this other paper is an

estimate of the value of Don Valentin's possessions, appraised by experts. The amount of mine will barely cover the value of this gentleman's possessions; but you know that I have some landed property, and, if there should be any deficiency, I will supply it. Dear master, you will be the prompt and faithful executor of my determined will, of which I desire that you should give notice and testimony to Doña Blanca, requiring from her, on my part, in exchange, my daughter's liberty; for if she does not give her her liberty, if she does not endeavour to put out of her head the insane notions with which she has filled it, if she does not resolve to cure her of the mortal malady of soul and body which her pride, her fanaticism, and her remorse, a thousand times more odious than her sin, have caused, I shall avenge myself by making the most shocking scandal the world has ever seen! I hope that you will willingly accept my charge."

"I accept it," responded the priest, "but not without certain conditions. I am not going to be the instrument of your ruin, if your ruin is to be useless."

"And why should it be useless?"

"Because Clara, in my opinion, will not now desist from her purpose of taking the veil."

"What do you mean by saying she will not desist? The iron yoke of her mother's will weighs upon Clara. Let us remove this yoke, and she will love her

gallant student again, and she will marry him and be happy."

"I doubt it."

"I do not doubt it. What I cannot understand is why you have become so gloomy."

"I fear it is now too late," said Father Jacinto, sighing.

"By all the devils in hell," replied Don Fadrique; "it is not yet too late if Fortune favours us! Go you this very day to see Doña Blanca. Inform her of everything. Convince her that Clara is free; that the possessions which she is to inherit from Don Valentin are already paid for. Let Doña Blanca know that I have secretly ransomed her daughter. Let her know also that if she does not admit the ransom I will throw off every restraint; I will proclaim everything; I will be capable of a villainy; I will dishonour her publicly; I will read to Don Valentin letters of hers which I still have in my possession; I will commit a thousand barbarities!"

"Come, man, calm yourself. I will go at once to speak to Doña Blanca. She is an early riser. She will be already astir, and she will receive me. Wait for me in your house, and I will go there to give you an account of my interview."

"I will wait for you there. Make haste, father, for I am consumed by impatience."

With this the friar and Don Fadrique rose and

went together from the friar's cell into the street, along which they walked until the one entered his brother's house and the other that of Doña Blanca Roldán.

Pacing his room in the utmost agitation, after rudely sending away the inquisitive Lucía who had put her fair head in at the door to ask, as usual, what news there was, Don Fadrique waited for more than an hour and a half.

The friar at last arrived ; but, before he had opened his lips, Don Fadrique divined from his melancholy expression that he was the bearer of bad news.

As soon as the friar was in the room, the Commander locked the door, so that they might be free from interruption, and then said in a low voice, while he and his old master seated themselves :

“Tell me all that passed. Do not conceal anything from me.”

“I will give you the substance of it, in brief, for the discussion was long. Doña Blanca praised your generosity. She says she cannot understand how an infidel can be capable of so noble an action. She supposes it is the work of pride, but at any rate she praises it. But she does not on that account encourage you to consummate the sacrifice. She declares that it would be useless, and she begs you not to make it. Doña Blanca considers that her daughter has now a true vocation ; that God calls her to be his spouse ;

that God wishes to remove her from the dangers of the world; that God wishes to save her, and that she cannot, without the gravest guilt, now dissuade her daughter from her holy purpose."

"Hypocrisy! Refinement of wickedness!" interrupted Don Fadrique. "And you did not threaten her with my vengeance? You did not tell her that I am determined to go to all lengths; that I will tear the mask from her; that I will give her cause to remember me; that her mockery of me will not remain without an ignominious punishment?"

"I told her all that; but Doña Blanca answered that, although she believes you to be a man without religion, she still holds you to be a gentleman, and that she does not fear from you those acts of villainy and baseness with which in your rage you threaten her. She adds, however, that even if she be deceiving herself, even if you were to forget your honour and to avenge yourself in the way you say, she would endure it all rather than seek to dissuade her daughter from what her conscience dictates."

"That woman is mad, Father Jacinto, that woman is mad, and I believe that her madness is contagious; that she has already made you and Clara mad, and that I will soon become so. But I swear by my honour, by God, by all that is most sacred, that my madness will be of a very different nature! What! Does she suppose that I am a second Don Valentín? Does she

suppose that I will submit to her monstrous caprices? Does she think that I am a fool, and that I am going to believe whatever she wants me to believe? Clara's head has been turned, and therefore she desires all at once to become a nun. What vocation can she have when I know that she was, that she still is, in love with that boy from Ronda, with whom she could be supremely happy? There is some abominable mystery here. Something has been done to infect Clara with madness, and to confuse her naturally clear understanding. I neither can, nor will, nor ought to consent to such criminal extravaganees. Does not that satanic woman understand that the education which she has given her daughter, that those terrors with which she has inspired her, are like a poison? Does she wish to satiate her hatred towards me by assassinating her daughter because she is my daughter also?"

"Commander, be calm; you deceive yourself. Clara does not feel the religious vocation now because of her mother."

"It matters little to me whether it be to-day or yesterday that her mother gave her the poison. My heart tells me that Clara's eccentricities, her extravaganees, proceed from the spiritual torture which her mother has been inflicting on her ever since the girl has had the use of reason. It is necessary that an end should be put to this. If Clara, when her mind is

completely calm and serene, when she is sane in body and in spirit, still persists in her desire to be a nun, let her be one; I will not oppose it. My sacrifice will have been in vain. I will not utter a complaint. But while Clara is ill, almost out of her mind, with constant fever, I will not allow this feverish state to be mistaken for religious ecstasy, and these nervous attacks for a divine vocation. She is my daughter, by Heaven! and I will not suffer them to kill her. I am going this very moment to see Doña Blanca. I will force my way into her presence. I will break the head of any one who tries to oppose my entrance. If I do not see her and speak to her, I shall explode like a bomb-shell. Don't try to stop me, Father Jacinto. Let me out!"

The Commander had opened the door, had put on his hat, and was endeavouring to force his way past Father Jacinto, who was trying to hold him back.

"It is you who are crazy," the priest said to him. "Where are you going? Do you not consider the scandal of what you purpose doing?"

"Let me go, father!—I consider nothing."

"This is ruin. God has forsaken you. Listen to me quietly for a moment, and then do what you wish. I am not strong enough to hold you."

Father Jacinto ceased his resistance, and the Commander stopped, to listen to him.

“You wish to see Doña Blanca, and you shall see her, but with less risk of disturbance and scandal. The day after to-morrow Don Valentin is going to the farmhouse with the overseer to sell some jars of wine. You can then see and speak to Doña Blanca. To avoid greater evils I will go with you myself. I will keep Clara’s attention occupied so that you may speak alone with Doña Blanca, and say to her all that you have to say. You see to what I descend. You see what I undertake to do. Your visit will give a disagreeable surprise to Doña Blanca. Your conversation will be something like a duel to the death; but I prefer to intervene in it, to be an accomplice in the crime of your terrible dialogue, rather than that worse things should happen. In the name of the souls in purgatory, Commander, wait until the day after to-morrow! You shall go with me. You will see Doña Blanca. By the friendship you bear me, by the passion and the death of Christ, I entreat you to be calm until then, and try to make the interview I am going to procure for you as little cruel as possible.”

The Commander agreed to everything, and thanked Father Jacinto for the counsels which he gave him and the support he promised him.

XXIV.

DON FADRIQUE awaited with feverish impatience the expiration of the term of delay which the priest had asked of him.

There is no appointed term, however long deferred, that is not fulfilled at last; and this term, too, was finally fulfilled. The prognostications of the priest were also fulfilled. Don Valentin set out with the overseer very early on the morning of the appointed day for the farmhouse, whence he was not to return until after dark.

The Commander, who had been on the watch, then made ready for the promised interview. Father Jacinto did not delay long in coming for him.

Recognizing that the least dangerous course, and the one which seemed least likely to be productive of evil consequences, was that both accomplices should meet and endeavour to come to a mutual understanding and agreement about the beautiful Clarita, the priest did not propose to Doña Blanca a conference with the Commander, for he was certain beforehand that she would refuse to consent to it, and that, being on her guard, she would render it difficult, if not impossible, for him to bring the Commander into her presence. He determined, then, upon a surprise. He knew the habits and the hours of the house, and he arranged everything easily and skilfully.

Before ten in the morning, about an hour after breakfast, Clara retired to her own room, and Doña Blanca remained alone in the parlour in which she usually sat.

The priest set out punctually at ten, taking the Commander with him. They entered the outer hall, and the priest gave a double knock at the door.

The voice of a servant was heard calling from above :

“ Who is there ? ”

“ Hail Mary most pure ! Friends,” answered the priest.

The girl, who recognized the voice, pulled the cord from a window on the first floor, which overlooked the courtyard. By means of this cord the door could be opened without going down stairs.

The door opened and the Commander and the friar entered, unseen by any one, even by the servant who had opened it for them ; for, between the courtyard upon which the window looked out at which the servant stood, and the street door, there was another hall from which ascended the principal or family stairs.

As soon as Father Jacinto and his companion entered, the former closed the door again and said aloud :

“ God keep you, girl ! ”

“ God keep your reverence ! ” she answered.

Then the Commander and his guide mounted the stairs quickly. When they were in the antechamber, which was also deserted, the friar said to Don Fadrique, pointing to a door :

“Doña Blanca is in there. Go in—speak to her ; but be prudent.”

Don Fadrique, with a resolute mind and undaunted courage, walked towards the door to which the priest had pointed, entered the room, and closed the door behind him. Don Fadrique had scarcely disappeared when the servant arrived.

“Hallo !” said Father Jacinto. “Is Doña Blanca alone ?”

“Yes, father. Won’t your reverence go in and see her ?”

“Not now ; by and by. Leave her in peace. Don’t go in now ; she is probably busy. Let us not disturb her. Is Clarita in her room ?”

“Yes, father.”

“Well, then, go and attend to your duties. I will go and see Clarita.”

And Father Jacinto and the servant went off, accordingly, each in a different direction.

Meantime, Don Fadrique found himself in the presence of Doña Blanca, who was surprised, astounded, enraged at such unexpected audacity. Seated in an arm-chair, she had raised her head at the noise made by the turning of the knob and the opening of the

door, had seen some one enter and close the door behind him, and had at once recognized the Commander, and she still sat almost motionless, looking at him fixedly, wondering if she was not dreaming, and scarcely daring to trust the evidence of her eyes.

The Commander slowly advanced two or three steps. He uttered no greeting; he pronounced not a single word; doubtless he could find no form of salutation which should not seem discordant with the occasion; but his air, his manner, his expression, all proclaimed him to be a gentleman respectfully and humbly entreating pardon for the audacious artifice which he had been obliged to employ to enable him to reach her presence. In his countenance could be read the excuses which he did not offer in words. If he trampled upon ceremony he had all-sufficient reasons for doing so. Along with these things there was also to be read on the manly countenance of the Commander the firm resolution not to leave that room until he had been heard.

Dofia Blanca comprehended all this on the instant. She knew this man so thoroughly that at times she had no need to hear him speak to know what his thoughts and his feelings were. Dofia Blanca comprehended that the least evil course would be for her to listen to him; that she could not turn him out of her house without exposing herself to the risk of giving the greatest possible scandal.

She did not wish, however, to appear at once resigned to this course. She rose from her seat, and, without waiting for the Commander to speak, said to him :

“Go away, Don Fadrique, go away. What words, what explanations could there be between us that would not rouse a storm, especially if we talked without witnesses? Why do you seek me? Why do you provoke me? We cannot speak to, we can scarcely look at each other, without wounding each other mortally. Are you so cruel that you desire to kill me?”

“Señora,” answered the Commander, “if I had not been convinced that in coming here I comply with an imperative duty, I should not have come. If I have made my way stealthily to this room, it is because I have all-sufficient reasons for doing so.”

“What reasons can you adduce for coming to trouble my peace?”

“The interest with which a being to whom I am bound by a very close tie inspires me.”

“You have kept that interest very well hidden, very well concealed, for sixteen years. You did not remember that being until you stumbled across her by chance. It was necessary that you should go out walking with a niece of yours, and that that niece should have a friend, and that that friend should accompany her in her walk, in order that your paternal affection, which remained latent and unsuspected, even, in the depths of your magnanimous heart, should reveal

itself suddenly and give a striking and generous proof of itself. If chance had not brought us to live in the same city, or if Clara had not been Lucía's friend, even though we lived in the same city, confess that your interest, your paternal affection, your imperative duties, would have slept tranquilly in the depths of your enviable and very accommodating conscience."

"It is just that you should censure me. I ought not to seek to defend myself. I confess my fault. I am going, however, to endeavour to explain and to extenuate it. I could not suspect that at your side, under the protection of an affectionate mother, my daughter would have been exposed to any danger, would have had any cause to be unhappy."

"Her unhappiness does not proceed from me alone. Her unhappiness proceeds from the sin in which she was conceived, and from which neither you nor I, who are the sinners, can save or redeem her."

"She is not responsible; no one is responsible for faults which he does not commit. Such a transmission would be an absurdity. It would be a blasphemy against the sovereign justice and the goodness of the Eternal."

"We will not discuss those questions, Señor Don Fadrique. If what I believe appears to you blasphemy, all that you say and think seems to me impiety and blasphemy. To what purpose, then, speak

to me of God? Let God alone, if happily you believe in him, in a fashion of your own. My daughter's unhappiness, call it fatal, call it as you please, springs from her birth. What! have not you yourself acknowledged this unhappiness, in wishing to deliver my daughter from it by making a great sacrifice, for which I thank you, but which I deem to be useless?"

"There is some truth in what you say. I acknowledge that Clara, without fault of her own, was condemned by Fate, either to sacrifice herself or to be a base usurper."

"We are both of one mind, except that what you call fate I call sin, and not her sin, but the sin of others. This seems iniquitous to you, who do not respect the inscrutable designs of Providence. It is only mysterious to me. Therefore it is better that we should not touch upon these questions. Let us speak of what we can agree about. We are agreed that Clara, without any fault of her own, was condemned to a punishment."

"We are agreed; but we agree also that I have freed her."

"If you have freed her it has been by a series of fortuitous events—because you saw Clara and recognised her; because Clara is pretty, since if she had been ugly you would not have been so zealous, nor would a father's vanity have stimulated a father's love; and because, in short, you have money enough to give,

and you find a nobleman with little enough shame to take it without a just motive.”

“In my turn, I entreat you, let us not enter on the discussion of useless questions. I have not come here either to dispute or to philosophise.”

“I am neither disputing nor philosophising. I am saying what is true. The sin was not accidental; it was not something independent of our free will. That you should have met Clara; that she should be pretty, which makes you think that she ought neither to marry Don Casimiro nor be a nun, and that you should possess more than four millions, are not things that have depended on your will. To you they seem fortuitous, although to God they were foreknown and foreordained by him, like everything else that occurs in the universe.”

“Come, Señora, do not try my patience too far. All this is as fortuitous as that I should have met you in Lima, that you should be lovely and not a monster of ugliness. What was not fortuitous but voluntary was the fall; but neither is the ransom fortuitous, but voluntary. It may be fortuitous and independent of my will that I should have four millions; but it is voluntary, it is my will to give them. Clara, not by chance, but by a free act, is now redeemed from the captivity into which, as you think, and not without reason, she was thrown by another act, which I do not suppose you regard in the clear light of your con-

science as more voluntary, more carefully considered, or more deliberately planned."

Up to this point in the conversation they had remained standing. Doña Blanca had neither sat down herself nor offered a seat to the Commander. The latter, after a moment's pause, seeing that Doña Blanca did not immediately respond to his last argument, said quietly :

"See, Señora, I have no wish to enter into lengthy or irrelevant discussions, but I have much to say; and in order that our conference should be brief, it is all-important that we should proceed without confusion. To do this, ease and quiet are indispensable. Do you not think, then, that it would be well for us to sit down?"

Doña Blanca, without answering, darted at the Commander a half-angry, half-contemptuous glance, and dropped into her arm-chair. The Commander then also seated himself, and went on :

"My resolution," he said, "is irrevocable. Let the cause be what it may,—a caprice because Clara is pretty, because I have stumbled upon her by chance, for whatever reason you choose, I have ransomed her. All that she would inherit through the death of your husband, the man who would inherit it if Clara were not alive will now enjoy with years of anticipation. Let Clara live, then. I come to ask you for her life."

“What you have come for is to insult me. Am I perchance killing Clara?”

“Far from me be the intention of insulting you. Without intending it you might perchance kill Clara, and this is what I have come to prevent. To do so I am ready to employ any and every means.”

“Do you threaten me?”

“I do not threaten. I declare my intention without disguise.”

“And what must I do, in your judgment, to prevent Clara from dying?”

“Dissuade her from being a nun.”

“That is impossible. I do not believe that to become a nun is to die, but to lead the better life.”

“I have already said that I will neither dispute nor discuss theology with you. I concede, then, that the life of the cloister is the better life; but it is when there is a vocation to lead it; when one does not enter the cloister despairing, mad almost, full of unreasoning terror.”

“I ask you again to leave me, Señor Don Fadrique. Why talk further? We would only torture ourselves without coming to any understanding. You call unreasoning terror the holy fear of the Lord; despair, the contempt of the world; and madness, Christian humility and the fear of falling into temptation and failing in one’s duties. You regard as death the life which in this world most resembles the life of the

angels. How then can we come to an understanding? You do me more honour than I deserve, while thinking that you condemn me, in supposing that I have inspired my daughter with such ideas and such sentiments."

"For the love of Heaven, Señora Doña Blanca—I do not know by what to conjure you, in whose name to entreat you—not to confound things, to hear me without prejudice, to think of your daughter's welfare, and to believe that I have come here to trouble you with my presence and mortify you with my words without prejudice also, and impelled solely by my desire for that welfare. Why should I condemn the holy fear of the Lord, the contempt of the world, if it is reasonable, and Christian humility, which leads us to distrust our weak and sinful nature? What I condemn is madness. I would even now consent to Clara's taking the veil, if she took it only after thoughtful consideration; if she took it impelled by a fervent devotion, even; but what I cannot consent to, what I cannot permit, is that she should take it in a fit of despair. It would be an abominable and sacrilegious suicide."

"And what leads you to suppose that Clara is in despair? Who has told you so? What motives has she for despair?"

"No one has told me so. It is enough to look at Clara to know it. You yourself know it. If you did

not fear even for her material life, would you not have already allowed her to enter the convent? In giving her now the liberty you give her, do you not do so influenced by the desire that her health should improve? As for the motives of her despair, in the concrete I am ignorant of them; but I have a vague idea of them. You have made her distrust herself more than you should have done, without foreseeing this fatal result; you have inspired her with the thought that she is predestined to sin if she does not seek a refuge at the foot of the altar. In short, you have poisoned her with such self-distrust that, feeling the quick pulsations of her youthful heart, the exuberance of life in its budding springtime, seeing the pure and shining fire of her eyes, hearing the voice of Nature, which incites her to love, dreaming, it may be, of lawful happiness to be attained in this world at the side of a being of the same human condition, she has imagined that she was the prey of impure passions, she has thought herself pursued by monsters from hell, and in order that she should not be a monster she has wished to take refuge in the sanctuary."

"Let us grant that all this be true," replied Doña Blanca imperturbably. "Let us grant that the facts are the same for us both. The difference in our manner of regarding them will always exist. If Clara enters the cloister, not through the pure love of God, but through the fear of offending him, through cou-

sidering herself too weak to resist the storms of the world, and through fear of herself and hell, Clara, in my opinion, does not act madly; Clara acts with sound judgment and consummate prudence. The motives of her vocation for the religious life, if not the most elevated, are good. Far be it from me to endeavour to dissuade her, even if it were possible for me to do so. In order that Clara may enjoy an ephemeral and uncertain happiness on the earth I will not oppose her desire to take the road which may lead her most directly to heaven. Not in order to please you will I counsel Clara, when her life's bark is about to enter a safe and secure harbour, to turn the prow and plunge into a stormy sea where it may capsize and sink forever."

"Yes," interrupted the Commander, whose patience was now at an end, "the best thing is that she should die, in order that she may be saved!"

"And how deny it?" responded Doña Blanca, beside herself. "It is better to die than to sin. If she is to live to be a sinner, to her eternal condemnation, to her shame and her opprobrium, let her die! Take her to thyself, my God! Would that I had died thus! How much better it would have been for me never to have been born!"

"The same insane ideas as ever! It seems as if you were tormented by an evil spirit. I knew how it would be. I am to blame for it all. I ought to have

stolen my daughter from your house and brought her up with me, and made her happy, and given her my name."

"Blessed be God that you did not do so! My daughter brought up by an infidel! What would have become of her? A woman without religion must be horrible!"

"I don't know what a woman without religion may be, nor would it have been my purpose that my daughter should not have had religion. What I do know is that a woman who allows herself to be carried away by religious fanaticism may make herself insufferable."

"How happy for me had I appeared such in your eyes from the beginning! How many evils would have been thus avoided! But you thought differently then, and you followed me persistently, you would not be denied; and there were no means of seduction, no lie, no deception, no endearing epithet, no flattery of lovesick swain, no promise to give me your whole soul, that you did not employ to conquer my virtuous coldness. You succeeded in deluding me to the extreme that I desired to go to perdition in order to save you. What a frenzy was that! For did I not even fancy that by falling myself I could redeem your soul and raise it from the impiety in which it was plunged? For did I not flatter myself to the point of believing that by falling with you in sin, I

should raise you and afterward bring you with me into the path of purification and penitence? What artifices does not the devil employ to entangle us in his nets! I was blind. I believed you to be an erring man who had fallen in love with me, who was attached to me, whose soul I was going to win through his love for me, making it capable of a higher love. I did not observe that you were not capable even of the low and criminal love of earth. You sought only the gratification of a caprice, an easy pleasure, a triumph of vanity. You thought that, my indifference once conquered, after an instant of passion and self-abandonment, all would be peace, that I would forget everything for you, and that you would find me always submissive, gay, and smiling. You imagined that I was going to kill in my soul all remorse, all shame, all idea of the duty to which I had been false, all fear of God, all respect for my honour, all bitter feeling at its loss, all fear of the pains of hell, all the pangs of conscience. You found yourself mistaken, and therefore I seemed to you insufferable. You were the lord of my soul, but, as in a conquered land whose brave and magnanimous sons can never forget what they owe their country, the fierce conqueror possesses only the earth he treads, you possessed me only when I forgot even myself. At other times I rebelled against you. I tried to wash away my sin with penitence, and I struggled unceasingly to free myself. How proud

would every one of your victories have made you, however, pious as you were, if you had been capable of comprehending the sublime and stormy grandeur of the great passions! Those constant struggles were horrible, but when you triumphed you triumphed not only over me but over the angels who aided me; over my profound faith, over the Heaven which I invoked; over the principle of honour rooted in my soul, and over my conscience, accusing and severe against myself. You, who sought only joy and delight, grew weary of the struggle. Thus I freed myself from the base captivity. Praised be God who ordained it so! Praised be God who has since punished my sin so justly; but, I confess to you that the punishment which has always pained me most, which pains me most now, is to have to despise the man whom I have loved. Now you know the truth. You think me insufferable; I think you despicable. Go from here. Leave this room, or I will have you driven from it! Do you wish to betray me? Do you wish to proclaim my guilt? Do so. I fear now neither unhappiness nor humiliation, however great they may be. Know, once for all, I am rejoiced that Clara should enter a convent. I will not be so vile as, through fear of you, to be false to my duty, persuading her to the contrary. Now go away, leave my house, leave me in peace."

Dofia Blanca, who had once more risen to her feet, pointed to the door with an imperious gesture as she

ordered the Commander to leave the room. What could he do? what could he say? Doña Blanca, in the eyes of the Commander, who was filled with pity, almost with terror, seemed mad. He feared to be cruel and unchivalrous if he answered. He kept silence. He saw his cause was lost, at least in this quarter, and he did not wish to prolong further the double martyrdom.

Don Fadrique bent his head and left the room greatly afflicted. Gaining the antechamber, he descended the stairs, opened the hall door, and rushed into the street, breathing the outer air with a feeling of relief such as a drowning man may experience who succeeds in lifting his head above the submerging waters.

XXV.

IN spite of his optimistic and cheerful philosophy, in spite of his natural propensity to laugh and to look at things on their comical side, Don Fadrique during the rest of the day was thoughtful and silent, and oppressed with a melancholy strange enough in him.

At dinner he scarcely tasted a morsel, he scarcely spoke to his brother, his sister-in-law, or his niece, each of whom in a different way overwhelmed him with attentions.

Don José was an excellent man, whose only occupation was to take care of his property, play cards at the reunions in the pharmacy, and please Doña Antonia.

This lady had one of the best dispositions in the world ; she attended carefully to her house, she sewed and embroidered. She was a good Christian, went to mass every day, and said the rosary with the servants every night ; but in all this there was something mechanical, something of formula, custom, or routine, without Doña Antonia's entering deeply into religious questions. She emerged from her habitual calmness and manifested a certain passionate enthusiasm only in behalf of the Virgin of Araceli, of Lucena (Doña Antonia was a native of Lucena), preferring her to all the other Virgins, and considering her miracles more efficacious.

For her spiritual director Doña Antonia had a fervent and eloquent capuchin, whose fame at that time eclipsed that of Father Jacinto, who, as more lukewarm in preaching and in reproving, made fewer conversions and drew fewer strayed sheep to the fold than his bearded *confrère*.

Lucía had Father Jacinto for a confessor, and she was on such excellent terms with her mother that the only discussions that ever arose between them were in regard to the merits of their respective confessors. For the rest, as Doña Antonia had neither a will nor an opinion of her own, and as she did not trouble

her head greatly about anything, it was in truth no great proof of submissiveness and deference in Lucía never to dispute with her mother, except about the capuchin, and sometimes, but very rarely, regarding the Virgin of Araceli. Lucía was not very devout, and, as there was no other Virgin whom she preferred, she readily conceded to her mother the superior excellence of hers.

Their only cause of disagreement, then, was Father Jacinto, whom Lucía thought superior in understanding and learning; but, in the end, like the good daughter she was and in order to please her mother, she admitted that the capuchin had brought together innumerable undutiful couples who had separated and had been living apart and constantly at war with each other, and had succeeded in inducing many sinful men and women to give up bad company and worse conduct and to lead a penitent and exemplary life; in all which matters Father Jacinto had much less to boast of, whence Lucía inferred that Father Jacinto was the best director for those who were in the right path or inside the fold. The one served to conquer and reduce rebels to obedience, the other to govern the submissive wisely and gently.

With this Doña Antonia was pacified, and she lived in sweet and holy peace with her daughter, whom she had instructed in all her own domestic accomplishments, the mistress acknowledging joyfully and with-

out envy that the pupil already excelled her in almost all of them. Lucía embroidered exquisitely on linen, in silk and in gold. In open work, backstitch, and hemstitch few could equal her, and in sauces and sweetmeats no one ever ventured to compete with her who was not put to shame. Only in the labours of the hog-killing did Doña Antonia still shine superior. She was a prodigy of judgment in spicing and seasoning black puddings and sausages of various kinds, in pickling the loin to preserve it cooked the whole year, and in giving their respective savours, by means of the proper spices, to the haslets which, when prepared, are called spleens, doubtless because they rejoice the spleens of those who eat them, and the kidneys, liver, and other viscera which are prepared in various ways with cloves, pepper, and other finer spices, excluding cumin seed, ground pepper, and marjoram.

The reader must not be surprised at our entering into these details now. It was proper that they should be given, but, occupied with the main thread of our story, we had not yet done so.

The young heir, the son of Don José and Doña Antonia, had gone, a short time before, to the College of Marine Guards of the Island, carrying letters of recommendation from his uncle.

Doña Antonia was always going from one place to another with her keys, now to the preserve closet,

now to the pantry, now to the oil, wine, or vinegar vault.

The house had all these, as being a husbandman's as well as a gentleman's house; for Don José, in removing to the city, had brought to it many of his fruits, which he could dispose of there more readily and at a higher price.

Don José, when he was not looking over accounts with the farmer, either gave audience to the stewards, who came from the farms to make their reports to him; or he went to the pharmacy, where there was a perpetual assembly and card-playing morning, noon, and night.

The consequence was that the Commander, except at meal-times and for a short time in the evening when there were visitors, of whom Don Carlos de Atienza was always one, found himself in a pleasant and peaceful solitude, broken in upon only by his fair-haired niece, who was constantly seeking him to ask him what news there was regarding Clara.

Don José and Doña Antonia, who were always in the clouds, knew nothing about the Commander's anxieties and cares. Lucía was partially acquainted with them, but she was far from imagining, in spite of her hypothesis, that Clara was bound to her uncle by so close a tie.

The servants of the house and the public still continued in error with regard to Don Carlos de Atienza.

Seeing that he was young, elegant, and handsome, that he came with frequency to the house, and that he was always whispering with Lucía, they supposed, with some appearance of reason, that he was her lover, and in the house they always called him the young lady's lover.

Such was the situation of each of the secondary personages of this history at the time when the Commander, after his interview with Doña Blanca, was so greatly troubled.

During dinner they heaped attentions upon him, thinking that he was indisposed. Doña Antonia, fancying he had a headache, urged him to go and take some rest. Don José, after giving the same advice, went off to the pharmacy. Lucía, with deeper interest, made a thousand attempts to discover the cause of her uncle's distress, but was successful in none of them.

The Commander, when he found himself alone, could think of nothing but his interview with Doña Blanca, conceiving the most contradictory fancies, none of which, however, were very pleasing.

Now he thought that lady had satanic pride and an infernal temper, and then he blamed himself for not having stolen his daughter from her; for having left her in her possession to turn her brain and make her unhappy. Again, he thought, on the contrary, that from her own point of view Doña Blanca was right in everything.

The Commander then called his persecution of Doña Blanca and his final victory (which in times past he would have regarded as pardonable levity, youthful gallantry) as iniquitous and wicked conduct, looked at from whatever point of view, and, judged even by his own moral standard, most lax in certain particulars.

“Truly I do not deserve pardon,” Don Fadrique said to himself. “My accursed vanity made me a villain. There were so many handsome women when I was a young man, to whom a slip more or less would have mattered little! Why, then, since I was not carried away by a violent passion—for I have not even that excuse—go to disturb the peace of mind of that austere lady? She is more than right. I deserve that she should abhor or despise me. The only thing that lessens in some slight degree the enormity of my crime is the bad opinion I then had of almost all women. It did not enter into my head that any of them could (afterwards especially) take sin or remorse so seriously. In short, I did not foresee what happened afterwards. If I had foreseen it, I should have taken good care not to court Doña Blanca. Even if there had not been another woman on the face of the earth, her heart should have been left entire to Don Valentín, without my seeking to rob him of it. But no—this vile habit of mine of mocking at everything—of seeing only the bad side of everything— She pleased me, she inspired

me with love—no doubt of that; I was in love—and as I fancied that her pious prudery was a spice that would make more piquant and palatable the gratification of my desire and would by and by disappear, I insisted, persisted, employed diabolical arts—yes, I employed diabolical arts. I made her conscience a hell; for a trifling and fleeting pleasure I left in her mind a gnawing grief, a horrible instrument of torture which for seventeen years has unceasingly tormented her soul. All because of this mocking spirit of mine! But the jest turned to earnest. The jest was a cruel one. But, my God! how could I have imagined it? Though all the world had foretold it to me, I would never have believed it! I repeat it, it did not enter into my mind. I could not understand repentance so cruel and so persistent, simultaneous almost with the sin. I had not measured all the violence of a passion which, in despite of the fierce and rebellious cry of conscience, in spite of the merciless lash with which the spirit chastises it, throws off all restraint and reveals itself triumphant. When, about to yield to an irresistible impulse, against which she struggled notwithstanding, she cried: ‘My God! kill me before I fall from thy grace! I prefer to die rather than to sin!’—when she said this, which she repeats to-day in regard to her daughter, it did not inspire me with compassion, it did not turn me from my evil design; it was rather a spur which stimulated my unbridled

passion. How beautiful she seemed to me when, her voice broken by sighs, she uttered those words, to which I lent only a vague, poetic meaning, and in whose profound truth I did not believe! Even the sweetness of her piety itself was perverted and vitiated in my mind, interpreted by my evil thoughts, neutralizing in my eyes her desolation, the anguish with which she regarded and resisted the fall, without having strength to avoid it. I dared to decide that that could not be so great an evil which was so easy to remedy. I transformed myself into the redeemer of the soul which I captivated, into the saviour of the soul which I ruined, parodying the Divine words, saying within myself, 'Rise; you are forgiven because you have loved much. Ah, Heavens! Why seek to conceal it from myself? I acted like a villain. I was so base and so vile that I never comprehended the strength, the energy of the passion which, without deserving it, I had inspired. I was like the savage who, without knowing how to use a gun, discharges it and inflicts a mortal wound. The greatness and the omnipotence of love were as unknown to me as the persistence and the indomitable power of an upright conscience which accepts duty and fulfils it, or, if it does not fulfil it, never pardons itself for not doing so. Am I, then, a wretch? Are the friars and the priests right in maintaining that there can be no true virtue without true religion?'"

In this way Don Fadrique tormented himself in a painful soliloquy in which he repeated the same things to himself a hundred times over.

That Father Jacinto had not come to tell him the result of his interview with Doña Blanca inspired the Commander with the greatest inquietude. Several times he looked out of the window of his room, which commanded a view of the street, to see if he were leaving Doña Blanca's house. Several times he went out and walked to the convent of Santo Domingo, although it was some distance away, to ask if Father Jacinto had returned. Father Jacinto was nowhere to be seen.

Towards evening, when Don Fadrique was in his room, he heard the noise of horses stopping near by. He went out into the balcony and saw Don Valentin, who had returned from the farm, dismounting.

Night fell, and Father Jacinto had not yet appeared.

Don Fadrique indulged in the most sinister imaginings. He formed the strangest and most painful conjectures. "What can have happened?" he asked himself.

At last, at eight o'clock, the Commander saw Father Jacinto standing in the doorway of his room.

When he saw him his heart gave a bound. The priest wore the gravest and most melancholy expression that he had ever worn in his life.

“What is this? What has happened?” said the Commander. “Where have you been all this time?”

“Where should I have been? In Doña Blanca’s house, where I was wrong and doubly wrong to introduce you treacherously. A fine thing you have done! What evil spirit counselled you when you were speaking? What did you say to the poor woman? She has had a dreadful fit! She is seriously ill. God grant that she may not become worse!”

The Commander, who was filled with consternation, answered nothing. The friar continued:

“Clarita is a saint. I left her there taking care of her mother. I don’t know what is the use of all these annoyances. The child is resolved, firmly resolved. It is all in vain. You might just as well have avoided your diabolical conversation with the mother. There is still time to avoid ruining yourself without rhyme or reason.”

The Commander, recovering his speech, answered:

“What is done is done. I am not given to repenting. I do not break my promises. I never draw back. The promise I have made to Don Casimiro, and which he has accepted, must be fulfilled. But what is this illness of Doña Blanca’s that you tell me of? Is Clara still possessed by her melancholy madness? I swear by all the devils and lost souls in hell that I would never have dreamed that she could be the victim of such distorted sentimentalism!”

The Commander strode excitedly up and down the room. The priest watched him with an expression of sorrow and bewilderment.

At this point Lucía, who had seen the priest enter, put her lovely blonde head in at the door, which had remained ajar, and said with gentle anxiety:

“What is the news, uncle?”

“Nothing, child. For Heaven’s sake leave us in peace now! We are going to discuss very serious matters.”

Lucía withdrew, hurt at inspiring so little confidence.

XXVI.

WHEN Father Jacinto and the Commander were once more alone, the latter closed the door and asked the priest in a low voice what Doña Blanca had told him, and what he had said to Clarita; but he did not succeed in obtaining any definite information.

Father Jacinto seemed like another man. He appeared preoccupied; he answered the questions put to him evasively; his mystery and his reticence filled his interlocutor with a vague alarm.

At last Don Fadrique was obliged to let the friar depart without having learned anything more than he already knew.

That night he did not leave his room; he refused

to see anybody; he feigned indisposition in order that he might remain alone and undisturbed.

Hour after hour passed, but, although he threw himself on the bed, he could not sleep. A thousand melancholy ideas tormented him and kept him awake.

Overcome by fatigue, he at last dropped asleep for a moment, but he had frightful dreams.

He dreamed that he had murdered Doña Blanca, and that he had murdered his daughter. Both pardoned him sweetly after they were dead; but this sweet pardon hurt him more deeply than the sharp words he had heard that day from the mouth of the woman he had once loved. She and Clara presented themselves to his imagination pale as death, with eyes fixed and glassy, but appearing triumphant and serene, slowly ascending through the air towards the heavenly realms, and singing an ancient religious hymn which had always affected the nerves and conflicted with the somewhat heathenish sentiments of the Commander, from its funereal tenderness, its identification of love with death, and its misanthropic exaltation of the life of the spirit above all the delight, satisfaction, hope, consolation, or good possible on the earth.

The two women sang as they ascended to heaven; and Don Fadrique could hear, through the tranquil air, the last lines of the hymn which said:

“ Mors piavit, mors sanavit
Insanatum animum.”

With these two lines running through his head, Don Fadrique awoke.

He had scarcely dressed himself when he heard some one knocking softly at the door.

“Who is there?” he asked.

“I, uncle,” said Lucía’s gentle voice. “I have something to say to you. May I come in?”

“Come in,” answered the Commander, with some anxiety, lest Lucía should be the bearer of bad news.

Lucía’s face was altered; her eyes were slightly reddened, as if she had been shedding tears.

“What is the matter?” said Don Fadrique.

“Doña Blanca is very ill. Clara has written to me, telling me so, and she begs me to have the charity to go and keep her company.”

“And do they know what is the matter with Doña Blanca?”

“I do not know, uncle. The attack came suddenly. The servant who brought me the letter from Clarita says that her mistress’s illness came as suddenly as a thunderclap; that the lady was delicate indeed, but that she was in fair health, almost as well as any one else, when all at once, as if she had seen and wrestled with an evil spirit, she fell into such a state of prostration that they had to put her to bed, where she still lies ill with a fever.”

Don Fadrique felt a sudden chill run through his frame, striking to the very marrow of his bones. He

fancied that his hair must stand on end. He remained silent, but in his own mind he said :

“Can I have been so brutal that I have killed her?”

Then, noticing that Lucía had finished speaking and was expecting him to say something, the Commander made an effort to appear calm and said to his niece :

“Go, child, go to Clarita and fulfil the duty which charity and friendship enjoin. Try to console her. Heaven grant that Doña Blanca’s illness may not have worse results!”

“I will go on the instant,” replied Lucía.

And without further delay, for she had already received her mother’s permission, she went down stairs and into the next house.

XXVII.

THE Commander’s niece was of as cheerful a temper as her uncle. She was by nature as optimistic as he. She saw almost everything in a rose-coloured light, but, being compassionate and good, she distressed herself for the ills and the troubles of others, although she endeavoured rather to console or to remedy than to share them.

In this disposition of mind Lucía entered Clara’s

room. As soon as the two girls saw each other they threw themselves into each other's arms.

Clara, in contrast to Lucía, was of a melancholy, vehement, and ardent nature, like her mother. In addition to this natural predisposition to melancholy, Doña Blanca's strict bringing up, her continual talk about our natural perversity, her conception of the world and of life as a vale of tears and a time of trial, and her fear of eternal damnation and of being tempted to fall into sin, had diffused through Clara's soul a shade of bitter sadness and timid self-distrust. Happily, Clara was wanting in the pride, the imperiousness of her mother, and the dark and gloomy side of her spirit was softly illumined by a celestial ray of humility, resignation, and meekness.

Clara had a far more loving disposition than her mother, and she abandoned herself freely to the sweetness of loving, although always with the fear that she sinned in doing so.

The two friends were in a room adjoining Doña Blanca's bedroom.

The unhappy Don Valentin did not know what to do; he walked about restlessly from place to place, not venturing to enter his wife's bedroom lest she should cry out to him to go away and leave her in peace; and afraid, on the other hand, not to remain near her lest she should accuse him of being indifferent, selfish, and heartless, of not troubling himself

about her sufferings, even to the extent of asking her how she was. In this state of perplexity Don Valentin went in and out of the room, putting his head in at the bedroom door from time to time, to see if Doña Blanca would notice him and tell him to come in; and, unable to summon courage to enter without permission, he would ask Clara how her mother felt, in a voice not so loud as to arouse Doña Blanca's anger, nor so low that Doña Blanca could not hear him, and so see that her husband did care for her and was not a heartless man.

This eminently prudent conduct availed him nothing, however. Once, after he had peeped in at the bedroom door two or three times in succession, Doña Blanca had said :

“What are you doing there? Have you come to annoy me? You look like an owl, staring at me with those frightened eyes. For Heaven's sake, leave me in peace!”

A little later Don Valentin, forgetting himself for a moment, raised his voice slightly in asking Clara how her mother was, and the latter exclaimed from her room:

“What a nightmare of a man! He is determined not to let me rest. One would think he was hollow. Speak low, Valentín, and don't kill me.”

Don Valentin, thus driven away, quit the room in which Clara and Lucía were, leaving them alone.

Although Doña Blanca was a good Christian,

these outbursts of ill-temper against her husband may be understood and explained as being in a certain sense independent of her will. Doña Blanca had not found in him an atom of the romance nor a spark of the sublime fire which, in her inexperience, she had dreamed, in her youthful days, of finding in the man to whom she should give her hand. Afterwards, for seventeen years, she saw in Don Valentin only a man whose calmness was a constant sarcasm on the tempests of her heart; whose union with her had made of what might have been a lawful good, a sanctified felicity, an abominable crime, and whose physical health seemed a mockery of the ailments and sufferings which tormented her. Even the patience with which Don Valentin bore with her was odious to Doña Blanca, as if it implied baseness, a willingness to avoid getting angry to save himself annoyance, scorn, or contempt.

It was in vain that Doña Blanca endeavoured to form a better opinion of her husband, in order that she might be able to respect him, as she knew, when she reflected, was her duty. Don Valentin's best qualities of soul were transformed in Doña Blanca's mind, perhaps through the intervention of some crafty demon, into ridiculous defects. In vain Doña Blanca asked God to grant that, if she could not love, she might at least esteem her husband. God did not hear her prayer.

Don Valentin, then, being driven out, Doña Blanca remained alone in the bedroom, immersed, no doubt, in deep and bitter reflections, and Clara and Lucía, almost in whispers, spoke thus :

“What does the doctor say, Clara? What is the matter with your mother?” asked Lucía.

“So far,” responded Clara, “the doctor has said only what is plain to us all—that my mother has a fever; but the fever is only a symptom of a malady the nature of which the doctor has not yet been able to determine. Last night the fever was very high, and we were greatly alarmed. Towards morning it abated.”

“Come, Clarita, I see that you exaggerated in your letter, and that you alarmed me without sufficient motive. Your mother will soon be well again. I wager that the whole cause of her indisposition has been some fit of anger against Don Valentin.

“You are mistaken, then. My mother was not in the least angry with any one yesterday. Papa was in the country all day.”

“Then I can very well understand that she was not angry with him. But was she not angry with you?”

“For days past my mother has been very gentle to me. Yesterday, as I said, mamma was angry with no one; she did not scold any of the servants; she was quiet and silent.”

Clara, although a girl of remarkable intelligence, had formed the strangely mistaken idea that a good mistress of a house must of necessity scold; so that what she said was spoken in all simplicity and without any thought of censuring her mother.

Lucía did not persist in seeking to discover the origin of Doña Blanca's illness; she inclined to believe that the illness was a trifling one in order to avoid distressing herself; and, turning the conversation to other matters, she asked her friend:

"Clara, do you still remain firm in your resolution to take the veil?"

"I am more resolved than ever. A secret voice cries to me from the depths of my soul that I ought to fly from the world; that the world is sown with dangers for me."

"I confess that I do not understand you. What dangers can the world have for you that it has not for every one else?"

"Ah, dear Lucía! the disorder of my spirit, the strange impulses of my heart, the violence of my affections!"

"But, child, what violence and disorder do you mean? I see neither disorder nor violence in your loving Don Carlos, who is young and handsome, and in your not liking Don Casimiro, who is old and ugly. That seems to me perfectly natural."

"It may be natural because nature is sin."

“Where is the sin?”

“In disobeying my mother, in deceiving her, in having attracted Don Carlos with loving and profane glances, in taking pleasure in his liking me and in his following me, in desiring that he should continue to follow me even to this moment when I am resolved not to be his. In short, Lucía, my soul is a web of artifice and deceit woven and devised by the devil himself. Besides, I have promised my mother to be a nun, and, in order to be one, I have dismissed Don Casimiro. How break my word now, mocking my mother and even Christ, whose spouse I have promised to be? Would you have me guilty of such infamy?”

“The case is in truth a difficult one; but, child, what made you say you wished to be a nun and promise to be one? Why did you not courageously tell your mother that you did not want to marry Don Casimiro, but that you did not want to be a nun either?”

“God knows,” responded Clara, “that I would willingly relieve my overburdened heart by reposing in your friendly bosom the secret of my unhappiness, by confiding everything to you; but I myself comprehend myself only in part, and what I do comprehend is so confused that I can not find words in which to describe it. I feel the reason and cause of all my actions, but I do not perceive them clearly enough to be

able to explain them. I wish, however, to justify myself and to try to prove to you that my conduct is not absurd. I will make the attempt to do so. I have loved, I still love, Don Carlos de Atienza. I detest Don Casimiro. This is true; but my love for Don Carlos and my dislike of Don Casimiro have never been strong enough to make me brave my mother's anger, telling her that I loved the one and disliked the other. So that I assure you that for months I was resigned to stifle in my soul the love that had sprung up there for Don Carlos and to marry Don Casimiro, in order to be an obedient daughter. I would have preferred to everything else to be the spouse of Christ, but I considered myself unworthy. I felt myself with the strength to become the wife of Don Casimiro. I hoped to conquer my fatal inclination for Don Carlos, and, having succeeded in this, to be a good wife, to take care of the sickly Don Casimiro, and even to love him, imposing affection upon myself as a duty. While in this frame of mind new and strange sentiments struggled for mastery in my breast and made my soul distrust itself still more. I was filled with terror. In my humility I did not think myself worthy even of being Don Casimiro's wife. I was terrified at my weakness, at the perversity of my inclinations, and then I thought of taking refuge in a convent. Judging myself less worthy than before of being the spouse of Christ, I thought of

the infinite goodness of the Sovereign Lord, Father of Mercies, and I comprehended that, utterly unworthy though I be, I might yet go to him and take refuge in his bosom, certain that he would not reject me, that he would receive me lovingly, purifying and sanctifying me by his grace.”

“You speak of new and strange feelings, but without telling me what they are,” said Lucía. “There is some mystery here which you will not allow me to penetrate.”

“Alas!” exclaimed Clara, “how explain it to you when I am scarcely able to penetrate it myself? See, Lucía, I know that I still love Don Carlos. If I could be completely free to choose my life, I think I would choose to be the wife of Don Carlos. His genius, his goodness, his delicate tenderness, all make me feel that I should be happy with him. I will confess to you that, in spite of the abhorrence with which my mother has inspired me of the gratification of the senses, the material image of Don Carlos, his carriage, the beauty and grace of his form, the elegance and pulchritude of his dress, the fire of his eyes, the lively animation of his countenance, the freshness of his lips, all trouble and torment me and distract me from my pious meditations.”

“I repeat to you, Clara, that in nothing of all that do I see the work of the devil; in nothing of it do I discover supernatural influences; it is all supremely

natural, and if, as you affirm, nature is sin, then God must give us supernatural means of conquering it, or generously pardon us when it conquers us. Where are those strange feelings which disturb you?"

"Lucía, you speak with too much levity. Your reasons have I know not what basis of impiety. You make me afraid. My mother was not mistaken. Intercourse and conversation with your uncle must be very dangerous."

"Don't talk nonsense, Clara. My uncle has never thought of giving me lessons in impiety. If what I sustain be not very pious, the fault is altogether mine. It is I who am diabolical. But let us drop these questions, and go to the important point. Tell me what are the strange feelings that assail your soul, inspiring you with the humility, the profound self-distrust, which induce you to take the veil."

"I cannot tell you; I am afraid."

"Come, courage; tell me what they are."

"My mother has done nothing but talk to me of your uncle ever since the time when he first made his appearance in this city, ever since the afternoon on which I first saw him and walked with him. She described him to me as if he were Satan himself, still surrounded by the glorious splendours of his primitive angelic nature, brave, audacious, intelligent beyond other men! She has made me believe that he exercises such dominion over the souls of others that

he attracts them, and captivates them, and ruins them, if he chooses; that in his glance there is a sinister light which blinds or misleads; in his speech a seductive music which charms the understanding and deafens conscience to the voice of duty. According to my mother, your uncle is evil incarnate, a pattern of impiety, a rebel against God, who must be avoided to escape contamination. In short, all that my mother has said of your uncle ought to inspire me with the greatest hatred and aversion. I know from my mother that the Commander is a reprobate. There is no hope of his salvation. He is damned. He is like Satan. And yet, far from my mother's words producing in me the hatred she desires against the Commander, such is my perversity, by so sinful a spirit of contradiction am I possessed that they have quickened my sympathies towards your uncle. I ought not to tell it to you; I do not know how I have the shamelessness to tell it to you. To no one but my confessor have I shown something of what I feel in the black depths of my heart. But if I do not tell you, to whom shall I unburden myself? Lucía, you are my best friend—I have an inexplicable affection for the Commander. I feel myself drawn towards him. I believe him to be as wicked as my mother declares him to be, but I believe that God, through special favour towards the Commander, will pardon him as I pardon him. Is not this monstrous? Is not this affection for a person

who is almost a stranger to me an aberration of the mind? I condemned myself formerly for my inclination for Don Carlos, in spite of, unknown to, my mother. Now almost the same thing happens to me as to you—my inclination for Don Carlos appears to me almost natural. What is diabolical, what is abominable, is my inclination for your uncle. It is so different a feeling that it neither destroys nor diminishes my affection for Don Carlos. This proves my degenerate nature, my sinful and perverse disposition. I know not under what pretext, with what claim, by what endearing name I could present myself to him, and this I desire to do. The detestable qualities my mother attributes to him I fancy do not exist in him, because he is a being of a higher order and exempt from the laws that govern common mortals.”

With a fixed gaze, with an expression not smiling, as was her wont, but serious and melancholy, and without interrupting her by a word, Lucía had listened to Clara’s unexpected confession.

After a few moments’ silence Clara continued :

“ You answer nothing ; you say nothing ; you are silent ; you see that I am a monster. It may be with another kind of love, an undefined sentiment, which has no name in the classification and history of the passions, but I love your uncle, and I love him from that very description through which my mother sought to make me abhor him.”

At this point in her confession Clara was interrupted by Doña Blanca's voice crying :

“ Daughter, daughter ! ”

Lucía and Clara both started. Although it was impossible that Doña Blanca should have heard them, they imagined for an instant that she had done so by a miracle, and that she was going to take a terrible part in the conversation.

“ What do you wish, mamma ? ” said Clara, trembling.

“ Water. Give me some water. I am choking ! ”

The two friends hastened to the bedroom to give the sick woman the water she had asked. They then perceived to their grief and dismay that the fever had increased. The palpitations of Doña Blanca's heart were so violent that they could almost be heard.

“ What do you feel, señora ? ” asked Lucía.

“ A sense of distress—of oppression,” responded Doña Blanca ; “ my heart beats with such violence.”

Lucía placed her hand gently on Doña Blanca's breast. She then observed with uneasiness that the heart-beats had lost the natural rhythm ; they were irregular and abnormal ; but she said nothing, so as not to alarm the sick woman or her daughter.

The attention which Doña Blanca required did not permit Clara and Lucía to resume their interrupted conversation.

XXVIII.

YEARS of suffering and remorse had gradually undermined Doña Blanca's health. Her ceaseless sadness, her hidden shame, which she had continually present to her mind, without being able to seek relief by confiding it to some friend; the struggle between compassion and contempt for her husband, and love and hatred for the Commander; her horror of the sin which she felt hanging over her, and which weighed upon her like a loathsome and incurable leprosy; her wounded pride; her fear of hell, to which at times she thought herself foredoomed, and the incessant preoccupation of her thoughts by the fate of Clara, whom she loved fervently, yet whom she at times hated as a living witness to her gravest fault, her most unpardonable humiliation—had exercised a deplorable influence over all her vital organs.

Doña Blanca had for a long time past suffered from hysterical attacks. There were moments when it seemed to her that she was choking; a lump seemed to rise in her throat, almost preventing her from breathing. Then she would be attacked by convulsions, ending in sobs and tears. Afterwards she would become calm, and remain tranquil for some days, although pale and weak.

The violent temper of this woman, exacerbated by

continually brooding over a misfortune which her gloomy fancy exaggerated, impelled her to treat her husband, her daughter, and many of those around her with a coldness, a cruel harshness, of which in the depths of her heart, which was good, she repented afterwards, this repentance being fruitful only in new motives of ill-humour and bitterness.

The violence of the passions had thus little by little materially affected Doña Blanca's heart, by exciting it to beat with a force superior to its strength. She did not suffer only from the nervous palpitations which manifested themselves on this occasion. There was reason to fear that Doña Blanca (so at least the physicians declared) had chronic disease of this important organ.

Notwithstanding its fatigue, perhaps excessive exercise had enlarged and strengthened to a dangerous degree this too active heart.

However this may be, Doña Blanca had long been tired of life.

Her one idea, her one object, her only aim in still desiring to live, was the fulfilment of a terrible duty—to prevent her daughter from being Don Valentin's heir.

When her daughter gave her her solemn promise to enter the cloister, and when she learned later from Father Jacinto, and afterwards from the lips of Don Fadrique himself, of the ransom of Clara, although

she refused it and thought it useless now, she was relieved, thinking her object accomplished in either event, and regarding herself as detached from the world; with nothing to do in it now but torture herself, and without any reason to desire, to esteem, or to preserve life.

When Doña Blanca's mind was tranquillised in regard to this difficult problem, of which she believed she had found the solution, a reaction set in, and she fell into a state of extreme prostration, of dangerous debility. On the other hand, however, her imagination, active in tormenting her, showed her a thousand reasons for grief and rage. The Commander's generosity humiliated her pride, and, try as she would to belittle it or to censure or vilify its motives, characterising them as vulgar, absurd, or capricious, this generosity still shone resplendent and offended her.

Doña Blanca had an iron will; in pertinacity and determination she had few equals; but her mind was vacillating and never allowed her to be at rest. Once she had entered on any course of action, the slightest objection that occurred to her was sufficient to make her dissatisfied with what she had done, but was not sufficient to make her adopt a different course. It only produced a new and fruitless mortification.

Thus it was that Doña Blanca was keenly aware of the pressure which she had exerted over her daughter's mind; aware that, without wishing to do so, she

had perhaps made her unhappy, and that her daughter was about to retire to a convent, not through devotion but through despair. The Commander's cruel accusations during their fatal interview—accusations against which she had defended herself with courage and ingenuity—when that war of words was over, recurred to her mind with added force, without the Commander uttering them; and when, no longer sustained by the heat of discussion, she could not repel them, cutting deeply into her soul.

The ardent love with which the Commander had inspired her, become the cause of her humiliation had changed to an intense hatred; and, without losing this character, without returning to its first state—because this was not now possible, for her soul contained too much bitterness to be able to love—had, notwithstanding, acquired new force in her bosom during the interview with the man who inspired it.

It is not to be wondered at that all these sorrows, tribulations, and spiritual combats should have produced in Doña Blanca an acute malady, exacerbating her chronic ailments.

Shortly after the conversation between Clara and Lucía which we have just recorded, the two best physicians in the city were called in to see the sick woman. Both agreed that her illness was serious. Both discovered an alarming irregularity in the circulation which was not to be explained solely by the fever.

The heart was morbidly active and greatly enlarged. The pulse was hard and irregular. The left side of the patient's chest heaved with the palpitations. A vivid carmine dyed Doña Blanca's cheeks, ordinarily pale.

The physicians augured ill from these and other symptoms; the chief disease was complicated with many others. Unable, then, to apply for the time an efficacious remedy, they prescribed some palliatives, among them digitalis in small doses.

Although they concealed from them in a great measure the unfavourable nature of their diagnosis, they left the two girls deeply distressed.

All that day Lucía remained at Clara's side, sharing her labours and cares; but the occasion was not now a fitting one to return to their confidences.

But if Clara did not again speak of the state of her soul, it was evident, from her preoccupied air, that she thought of it. What, before confiding in Lucía, she had perceived in vague and confused images, acquired in her mind form and substance once she had given it expression in words; so that, even in the midst of her anxiety and grief on her mother's account, Clara tormented herself with the thought of her inclination for a person in regard to whom, by some magic spell, all the reasons she had been given to hate him were converted into causes and motives for sympathy and affection.

Lucía, too, was thoughtful and melancholy in the extreme. Her taciturn sadness, considering her cheerful disposition, seemed greater than the grief which it would be natural for her to feel on account of Doña Blanca's illness, or even than the anxiety which the distorted ideas and the fantastic sorrows of her friend ought to cause her.

Don Valentin, his mind agitated by the opposing sentiments of pity and fear with which his wife inspired him, continued to go with frequency to inquire about the patient's condition; but, instead of entering the room and looking into the bedroom, he now remained in the hall and looked only into the room to say to his daughter:

“How is your mamma?”

“The same,” Clara would answer, and Don Valentin would go away.

With the exception of the confidential servant, who came occasionally to bring a message or to render some indispensable assistance, no one but Father Jacinto entered the room in which Clara and Lucía were.

At nightfall Doña Blanca's feverish agitation reached its height. Father Jacinto was accompanying the two friends and helping them to take care of the sick woman.

The latter, who during the afternoon had been drowsy and very weak, began to show symptoms of intense excitement. She complained that her head

ached ; her features worked convulsively ; she uttered phrases without order or connection. The words she most frequently repeated were :

“Go away, Valentin. Leave me. Don't torment me.” Doubtless the sick woman was under the hallucination that she saw Don Valentin, who was not in the bedroom.

In this condition Doña Blanca remained until near ten o'clock. Then the malady took a turn for the worse, and she became violently delirious.

The disease of the heart from which the unhappy woman suffered reacted strongly upon the brain. All the thoughts which for years had tortured her, and which during the past thirty hours had gathered new strength, mingled in tumultuous confusion ; they rebelled against the will, made themselves independent of it ; threw off every restraint, and, mechanically and instinctively seeking and finding fitting words in which to express themselves, burst forth in disordered exclamations.

Doña Blanca sat up in bed, and, looking wildly at Lucía, Clara, and the friar, spoke as follows :

“Go away, Valentin ! Why do you wish to kill me with your presence ? Kill me with a dagger—with a pistol ! Put a rope around my neck and strangle me ! Do not be a coward. Take fitting vengeance.”

“Be calm, Doña Blanca,” responded the friar, whom she had addressed as if he were Don Valentin—

“be calm; your husband is outside.—Go away, girls,” he added, turning to the two friends. “Leave me alone with the patient, to see if I cannot quiet her.”

Both Clara and Lucía remained motionless, as if riveted to their seats. Doña Blanca continued:

“Have courage and kill me. Your honour demands it. You must kill the Commander, too. He is damned; he will go to hell, and take me with him!”

“Mother, mother, you rave!” exclaimed Clara.

“No, I do not rave,” responded Doña Blanca.—“And you, fool,” she added, addressing the friar, “are you blind? Do you not see her?” and she pointed to her daughter. “How she resembles him! My God! how she resembles him! She is his image.—Go away from my sight, living witness to my shame!”

Clara listened with a mixture of horror and of eager curiosity to her mother’s wild utterances, striving to comprehend the full meaning of the tremendous secret. At the last words, addressed to herself, Clara covered her face with both her hands.

“You may well be satisfied,” continued Doña Blanca. “He had forgotten your existence, but at last he remembered you and he made an immense sacrifice for you. He has paid in advance what you will inherit from my husband. He has ransomed you from God to deliver you up to the world. Remain in the world. You cannot be a nun. The bad blood

of the Commander boils in your veins. How doubt that you are the accursed daughter of that infidel?"

Clara, on hearing these last words, gave an inarticulate cry and fell fainting into Lucía's arms.

Lucía, supporting Clara under the arms, half-led, half-carried her out of the bedroom.

Dofia Blanca meanwhile, unable to support longer her violent emotion, sank back on the bed, faint and exhausted, a convulsive trembling seized her, the muscles became rigid, then gradually and slowly relaxing, profound prostration followed.

Father Jacinto then hastened to Clara, whom Lucía meanwhile had laid on a sofa.

Clara, coming to herself, gave a sigh and then burst into a flood of tears.

"Clara, dear friend," said Lucía.

"Calm yourself, child, calm yourself," cried Father Jacinto.

"Holy and merciful God!" said Clara, "thy omnipotent hand wounds and heals me at the same time. Poor, poor mother! How unhappy you have been! And he—ah! he—cannot be impious and perverse as you supposed. Now I understand why and how I loved him!"

XXIX.

THE disease had continued to gather strength. Three days after the scene we have described Doña Blanca was so much worse that there no longer remained any hope of saving her.

Her daughter and Lucía had nursed her and watched over her with the utmost care and devotion.

The fits of delirium had returned, with long intervals of prostration.

Doña Blanca's mind towards the end became perfectly clear; but her condition was pitiable, her voice was hoarse and hollow, her respiration short and difficult; unable to breathe in a recumbent posture, she was obliged to remain sitting up in bed.

The physicians announced to Father Jacinto that a serious obstruction to the circulation had supervened in the heart itself, and that if this obstruction increased death would follow.

The priest informed Clara of this terrible prognostic as gently as possible, and he confessed the patient and administered the last sacrament to her.

In this supreme moment, on the threshold of eternity, Doña Blanca laid aside her ill-temper, her pride, and her bitterness, and retained in her soul only her lively faith, which caused ultramundane hopes to spring up again within it and unsealed the fountain of the purest consolations.

Doña Blanca sent for Don Valentin, embraced him, and entreated his forgiveness. Don Valentin, deeply distressed and very tearful and no less humble, answered that he had nothing to forgive; that it was he who needed forgiveness, since he had not known how to make so good and holy a woman happy.

Doña Blanca's emaciated countenance flushed faintly and her lips exhaled a melancholy sigh.

Doña Blanca called Clara to her, kissed her on the forehead, and whispered in her ear in a scarcely audible voice :

“Tell your father that I forgive him. Do you, my daughter, follow the impulses of your heart. You are free. Be virtuous. Do not marry him unless you love him dearly. See that you do not deceive yourself. I know all—Father Jacinto has told it to me. If you love him and he is worthy of your love, marry him.”

A few moments later Doña Blanca breathed her last, uttering in a faint and submissive voice :

“Jesus, help me !”

Clara's grief was profound. She wept silently for her mother's death.

Lucía wept with her and endeavoured to soothe by her affection her friend's grief.

Father Jacinto, accustomed to the sight of death and familiarized with it, piously closed the dead woman's eyes and mouth, which had remained open,

crossed her hands, and gently laid her down on the bed.

The weak Don Valentin, when he saw that his wife was dead, felt on the one hand a keen sorrow, for he still loved her; but on the other—if evil tongues, of whom there are always more than enough, are to be believed—he felt a certain relief, a certain sense of ease, a certain vile delight in his soul, as if an enormous weight had been removed from him, as if he had been freed from bondage. These contradictory feelings, battling together in his nervous and weak organization, caused him to break into a hysterical laugh. Then he was frightened at himself; he regarded himself as worse than he was; he was afraid of the devil; he was ashamed that God, who sees everything, should see the sinful depravity of his conscience, and he was filled with remorse and terror. Then there came back to him the recollection of his past love, of the sweet days of illusion, the days when his wife loved him—all which affected so profoundly his far from manly breast that the wretched man burst into tears, and uttered sighs and sobs and even cries, so that all who saw and heard him were moved to pity.

Father Jacinto carried the news of the catastrophe to Don Fadrique.

Don Fadrique, shut up in his room, had been waiting anxiously for news of the sick woman. When he

looked at Father Jacinto the Commander read in his countenance what had happened.

“She is dead?” said the Commander.

“She is dead,” responded the friar.

The Commander answered not a word. He stood silent and motionless, his heart full of mingled grief and remorse. Two large, bitter tears rolled down his cheeks.

“She has forgiven you,” said Father Jacinto.

“Ah, father, I can not forgive myself. The recollection of an unavenged insult, of a base action which I committed, of a stain on my honour, would be less intolerable to me. In any other circumstances it would be easier for me to be reconciled to myself. Although God may forgive me, I can not forgive myself.”

XXX.

Six months had passed since Doña Blanca's death; it was midwinter, and every evening there gathered around the hearth, in an upper room in the dwelling of Don José, the head of the house of López de Mendoza, besides himself and his wife and daughter Lucía, the Commander Don Fadrique, the widower Don Valentin, Clara, and occasionally Father Jacinto.

Don Carlos de Atienza had gone to Seville twice

or thrice to see his parents, but on each occasion had returned almost immediately. He had left the university; he thought no longer of his studies or his profession. He had devoted himself entirely to the task of idolising, consoling, and adoring Clarita, whom he now saw daily without any difficulty.

Don Fadrique and Father Jacinto made frequent visits to Villabermeja; but most of their time they spent in the city.

The conveyance of Don Fadrique's possessions had been made in due legal form and with the utmost secrecy.

Don Fadrique lived modestly on his pay as a retired officer. He resided, however, in the ancestral house in Villabermeja, adorned with all the rare furniture which he had brought with him from abroad.

Don Fadrique's disposition had not changed, but it had become modified. His natural optimism suffered frequent interruptions. A dark cloud of melancholy often overshadowed the brightness of his frank and open countenance.

Although time had gradually mitigated the grief of all for Doña Blanca's death, Clara remembered her with tender melancholy, and the Commander with mingled affection and remorse.

Don Valentin, only, who ate like a vulture, who had grown fat, and who had now no one to scold him or domincer over him, considered himself still obliged

to weep when, perhaps, he least desired to do so; then the thought of the obligation under which he conceived himself to lie, and the consciousness that tears and grief did not come, filled him anew with compunction, which had the effect of producing in him the desire and the flow. Don Valentin was dissolved in tears two or three times every week.

Clara, now seeing Don Carlos and Don Fadrique constantly, had learned to distinguish the difference between the two kinds of affection which bound her to them, and found these feelings every day more compatible with each other. The Commander inspired her with ever-increasing veneration, tenderness, and gratitude for his generous sacrifice. Don Carlos appeared to her every day more graceful, more handsome, more loving, more clever, and more a poet.

Thus passed several months more. Spring came. Summer arrived. The first anniversary of Doña Blanca's death was solemnised with tears and with masses and other devotions.

Clarita's scruples about failing to keep her promise to be a nun gradually disappeared. Her mother, at her death, had absolved her from her promise. The love she felt and inspired urged her not to fulfil it. The good Father Jacinto, Clara's confessor, assured her that the promise was void.

Clarita at last annulled it, making another promise, a promise supremely sweet, to Don Carlos. She prom-

ised to give him her hand, confessing at last that she loved him.

An overstrained scruple had made Clara delay in giving her consent to Don Carlos. She thought it probable that Don Casimiro would die without issue, and that a part of the ransom would come to her; but this last scruple, which, although tenuous and subtle, troubled her, was finally entirely dissipated.

Nicolasa, or rather Señora Doña Nicolasa Lobo de Solís, lawful wife of Don Casimiro, gave birth to a healthy child.

When the Commander brought this news with him one day from Villabermeja, Lucía was the first to whom he communicated it.

“Don’t tell me, uncle!” exclaimed the girl; “a child of Don Casimiro’s must be a ridiculous object; it must look like a skinned rabbit.”

“No, niece,” answered the Commander, “the newborn Solís is as strong as a calf.”

This was the truth, as we learned later. The first-born of the Solíses was not only like a calf, but like a bull.

Don Casimiro was the happiest man on earth. He was filled with pride and delight to be so beloved by his wife, and to have for a son a Theban Hercules, without thinking of Saturn or considering himself an Amphitryon, for he was ignorant of mythology.

Uncle Gorico, on Nicolasa’s marriage, had begun

to insist on being called Don Gregorio ; he had given up his *rôle* of Abraham and retired from his trade of leather-dresser, and he spent his time in drinking brandy and rossolis, and in expatiating on the happiness and grandeur of his daughter, her virtues, and the blissful life her distinguished husband led with her.

After the baptism of the child Uncle Gorico went from house to house, telling of the delight of his son-in-law, who kept walking backward and forward between the bed in which Nicolasa lay and the cradle in which the baby lay, stopping from time to time midway between the bed and the cradle, to exclaim, raising his hands to heaven :

“ My God !—my God ! What have I done that I should be so blest ! ”

In effect, his happiness was too much for Don Casimiro, and it soon carried him to his grave.

Although it be anticipating events, we will say now that the widow led a life of seclusion for a year, seeing no one but the Platonic Tomasuelo, and that she had posthumous twins, who, if the first-born deserved to be called a Hercules, deserved no less to be called a Castor and a Pollux.

The rectitude of Doña Blanca's conscience and its severe decisions, which found a loyal and devoted executor in Don Fadrique, thus produced their natural results, bestowing a rich inheritance on these

mythological angels, lusty scions of the house of Solís.

Be this as it may, a person of refined and noble nature will give no heed to the base and knavish actions of more vulgar mortals or the advantages that may result from them; he will accept only in a humorous and burlesque sense the ignoble advice of the proverb :

“ Take it, I tell you ; for if you don't choose
To eat it, why, another won't refuse.”

So that Don Fadrique smiled at the consequences of his disinterestedness, but applauded himself none the less for having shown it. What concerned him was that his pure and beautiful daughter should not enjoy anything that was not hers, or for which he had not given more than its equivalent.

The marriage of Clara and Don Carlos de Atienza was celebrated on a beautiful day in the month of October, 1795, a year and a half after Doña Blanca's death.

The parents of Don Carlos came from Seville to be present at the wedding.

The newly married pair settled in the city in which the scene of our story is laid.

During the year and a half whose events we have summed up so briefly, the Commander had lived partly in Villabermeja, partly in the city, in his brother's house.

His affection for Clara attracted him to the city; but, as Clara was wrapped up in her lover, and as she was very happy, she did less to console the Commander's sorrows than his fair-haired niece.

The latter it was who sent for the Commander when he delayed too long in coming from Villabermeja; who wrote to him most frequently, urging him to return, and who sent messages to him by the muleteer and the overseer to abandon his Bermejan solitude.

As Lucía was now acquainted with all her friend Clara's secrets, and as, besides, no events of importance were taking place, there was neither motive nor pretext for Lucía's going every moment to her uncle to ask him, as formerly, what news there was. In exchange, however, Lucía, relieved now from the anxiety in which her friend's fate had hitherto kept her, felt awakened in her mind the most lively curiosity regarding the sciences. Astronomy and botany that had displeased her so long as there were secrets of Clara's which she wished to discover, now enraptured her, and she was never weary of the lessons given her by her uncle at her own instance. The longest lesson seemed to her short. There was not a mystery of the flowers which she did not desire to penetrate. There was not a star which she did not desire to know. The pupil often put the teacher in a dilemma, for if the subject was the movement of the stars, their magnitude, their

distances from the earth, and other facts of the kind, she wished to receive demonstration of the truth of these facts, and Don Fadrique thought it nonsensical and even ridiculous to teach mathematics to a niece who was so handsome, so sprightly, and so graceful; and if, on the other hand, the subject was the flowers, Lucía desired her uncle to explain to her what life was and what organism was, and here the Commander found that there was no science corresponding to mathematics, which would explain anything. Unconsciously he was led into profound disquisitions on primitive and fundamental philosophy, and Lucía listened to him absorbed and, according to the vulgar saying, she put in her oar also; for every person of imagination and quickness of intellect can talk philosophy, and talk it well, if he wishes to do so.

In short, Lucía was becoming a *savante*. The more she learned, the more her taste and her desire for learning increased. The lessons and lectures lasted for whole hours.

The Commander became so accustomed to this sweet mastership that the day on which he gave no lesson it seemed to him as if he had not lived.

The days he spent in Villabermeja became gradually fewer, and those he spent with his pupil gradually increased in number.

When he returned from Villabermeja the Commander would bring his pupil books from his library,

flowers and plants from his garden, and birds which he caught alive. Lucía was very fond of birds, and, thanks to the Commander, there was now no species of bird in all the province, whether birds of passage or permanent, of which Lucía had not a couple of specimens in her aviary.

All this being observed by Clara and Don Carlos, occasioned on their part many innocent jests, which embarrassed the Commander and made Lucía blush scarlet.

The lovers would rally Lucía on her extraordinary love for the sciences.

In short, even if the Commander and Lucía had themselves neither known nor desired to know what was passing within them, Clara and Don Carlos would have made them reflect, look into their hearts, and discover the truth.

The Commander and Lucía, in spite of the difference in their ages, were desperately in love with each other.

Lucía admired her uncle's good sense, the nobility of his character, his learning, and the natural elegance of his bearing and manners. She thought him handsome, with a manly beauty, and it seemed to her impossible that there could be another such man in the whole world.

Don Fadrique thought Lucía as beautiful, as good, and as intelligent as Clara, which was the highest

praise that, in his estimation, he could bestow upon any one. Lucía's gaiety, besides, accorded much better with the Commander's character than the somewhat melancholy seriousness which Clara had inherited from her mother.

The Commander, who, after all, was no inexperienced boy, soon knew that he loved Lucía and that he was loved by her; but, having in mind his age and the idyl of Don Carlos, he did not venture to declare his love, although he manifested it by his constant solicitude in serving Lucía.

She, meanwhile, could not comprehend the timidity of the Commander, whom she believed to be in love with her.

Hence they bestowed upon each other all sorts of affectionate and endearing epithets, which, taken literally, might be regarded as the expression of a tender friendship, but in which the ardor of true love was concealed.

Besides his age, Don Fadrique believed that there existed another obstacle which should in honour prevent him from aspiring to Lucía's love. This other obstacle was his poverty; but in Lucía's eyes his poverty and the motive which had caused it were reasons the more for loving and admiring the Commander. The careless disdain, the cheerful tranquillity, and the easy and uncomplaining liberality with which Don Fadrique had despoiled himself of more than four

millions, outweighed a thousand millions in Lucía's romantic and generous mind.

The latter at times went so far as to ask her uncle (we know that she had the defect of being very inquisitive) why he did not marry.

When her uncle answered that he did not marry because he was old, Lucía said that he was still a young man, and handsomer than the handsomest young man. When he answered that it was because he was poor, Lucía declared that the pay of a retired officer was more than sufficient to marry upon; that, besides, Chacha Ramoncica had saved up a fortune, and that she would make him her heir; and, finally, that he might marry a rich woman.

All this Lucía said, with a thousand circumlocutions and disguises; but the Commander, although, indeed, he understood her, still thought that she might have deceived herself, and mistaken for love sentiments of respect and an affection that was almost filial. Wherefore he thought it neither just nor honourable to take advantage of what was perhaps a delusion on the beautiful girl's part to obtain his own happiness.

Thus matters stood between the Commander and Lucía on the evening on which the wedding of Clara and Don Carlos was celebrated in Don Valentin's house.

The Commander was cheerful, although deeply

moved on this solemn occasion, when a being so dear to him was united in indissoluble bonds to the man who was to make her happy.

Don José and Doña Antonia returned home early.

Lucía remained a little longer with Clara, as did also the Commander.

They returned home together. The night was beautiful, the street silent and solitary, the air warm and fragrant, the sky full of stars, but moonless.

Lucía was silent and happy, thinking of her friend's happiness.

Don Fadrique was no less dreamy and pensive.

The walk from the one house to the other was short, but they prolonged it, stopping by a common impulse in the middle of the street to gaze at the spacious vault of the firmament, as if they wished to question the eternal stars that glittered there, regarding the fate of the newly married couple, and perhaps their own fate also.

Lucía, breathing a sigh, said at last :

“Do not doubt it—they will be very happy!”

“Be glad only, and not envious,” responded the Commander ; “you, too, will find a man worthy of you, who will love you and whom you will love with all the strength of your heart.”

“No, uncle, he will not love me,” replied Lucía. “I am very unfortunate.”

And Lucía sighed again. The Commander then

saw by the mild and faint light of the stars that two tears were rolling down Lucía's cheeks. The light of the stars was flashed back by those liquid diamonds in rainbow hues.

The Commander was no longer master of himself. He bent towards Lucía and kissed away one of those tears. Then he cried :

“ I love you ! ”

Lucía answered not a word. She walked on towards the house ; she knocked ; the door was opened and she entered, followed by the Commander.

When she reached the foot of the stairs she turned round and said to him :

“ Good night, uncle. Good-bye until to-morrow. Mamma will be waiting for me.”

The Commander put on the most distressed face in the world, seeing that the girl responded so coldly, or rather, that she did not respond at all to his sudden and vehement declaration.

Then, taking pity on him, no doubt, she added smiling :

“ Speak to mamma to-morrow—”

“ And then ? ” interrupted Don Fadrique.

“ Ask the license from Rome.”

Having said this, Lucía ran up stairs, very much ashamed but very happy, leaving the Commander no less happy than she was herself.

When Clara learned that Lucía and the Com-

mander had resolved to be married, she was greatly rejoiced.

Don Carlos de Atienza shared his wife's joy; and bethinking himself that he owed, in some sort, a satisfaction to the Commander, who had thought himself alluded to in the idyl against the old shepherd which he had heard him recite, he composed another idyl in defense of a shepherd not so old, and in praise of the love of old shepherds.

This second idyl, which is a sort of palinode of the first, is still preserved in the archives of Villabermeja, whence my friend Don Juan Fresco has transmitted to me an exact and faithful copy of it, which I transcribe here in conclusion. The idyl is as follows :

Now on the vine, amid o'ershadowing leaves,
With topaz tints the swelling clusters glow :
The early rain refreshment gives
The sun-parched earth, that bounteously
Her fulness offers : now new juices flow,
The abundant fruit on olive and on almond tree,
Dweller among the rocks, to nourish and expand.
The sparkling stream, shrunk to a rivulet
Erewhile by summer's arid heat,
Flows with recovered wealth throughout the smiling land.
The acorn harsh and crude
Ripens and sweetens on the majestic oak,
Among whose foliage, in the sacred wood,
The winds to men in primal ages spoke,
Declaring in prophetic tones the will of Jupiter.
Not now as in the vernal year
In variegated bloom are groves and meadows dressed ;
Then the tired husbandman in flowers placed

His hopes, and now the harvest ripe repays
His anxious cares and toil-filled days.
The quince with its aroma scents the air,
And in the luscious pear,
And in the lemon and ripe apple glows
The carmine, gleams the gold that earlier
Shone in gillyflower and rose :
While the pomegranate, jealous of its blossom,
Bursts its hard rind, whose parting sides disclose
The ruby treasure they imbosom.
In autumn's cool the grass again
Springs up and clothes the pallid, stubble-covered plain
With verdure. In the sky serene and clear
Towards the glowing west the sun descends,
On an October evening calm and fair,
As Phyllis, pensive shepherdess,
Rivalling the dawn in loveliness,
Her tranquil dwelling leaves and wends
Towards the sacred grotto of the Nymphs her way.
Instead of flowers a basket she doth bear
Of fragrant fruits, an offering to lay
Before the Nymphs who here below confer
Being on little wanton Cupids, enemies
Of the celestial god, that they may cease
To oppose her love. No sooner does she tread
The grotto's sacred ground,
Where silence and obscurity profound
Prevail, than pious awe seizes the timid maid.
Her offering she lays
Upon the wood nymph's altar, and her prayer,
In careful, concise phrase,
Inspired by the god, her rosy lips prefer :
"Nymphs, be not angry at my indifference,
Nor the rude swains my favour who essay
To conquer, lend your countenancee.
Like rose bushes are they
That in the time of flowers adorn the field,
But harsh and bitter fruit that yield.

The ardour of their arrogant youth is evidence
Not of love but of desire,
And all too plainly do their words proclaim
That no romantic fire
Ennobles or refines its earth-born flame ;
And that the instinct in each human breast
By Nature planted burns in theirs,
Unpurified, unblest
By light descended from celestial spheres.
The Cupids, well I know,
Your darling sons, bestow
Fecundity upon the earth ; but Love,
Who dwells in heaven above,
And everywhere diffuses vital power,
Of evil and of death the conqueror,
This very virtue has bestowed on them.
And can the maid the mysteries supreme
And occult of celestial Love
Who seeks to know, obtain
The knowledge from a rude, unlettered swain ?
Shall we not rather joys divine who would prove
Seek the sage on whom the god bestows
The living splendour of his light divine ?
Therefore, Nymphs, my Irenæus I adore.
As in a sacred shrine,
He guards, his spotless soul within,
Of Love the treasure, and its flame still glows
Beneath the early snows
With which, like hoary Mongibelo's, now
Unwearying intellectual toil has crowned his brow.
Thus Irenæus for what th' inclemency
Of time hath robbed him knowledge doth indemnify.
With tireless hand how many a swain
Touches the rebec in vain,
For lack of genius and of mastery,
While Irenæus with his matchless skill
And with his divine quill
Makes entrancing melody,

And when he strikes the chord whate'er he will
Causes the soul to feel !
If the awkward swain pursues
The new-fledged partridge in its flight, or he
Catches it half-dead or else he doth it lose ;
While Irenæus, cautiously
Stealing his hand into the hidden nest
In which the bird doth careless rest,
Nor tires its wings, nor its young feathers breaks,
And for his friend the fledgling captive takes.
Nor less resplendent shines the genius
Of the learned Irenæus
In composing melodies
And in relating curious histories.
When the green walnut or the tender almond he
Pulls for me from the verdant bough, the best
He chooses and uninjured leaves the rest.
When some young lambkin strays from me,
He looks for it and home he brings the wanderer.
To please me is his constant care,
He proves his love sincere,
From cherry-stones now carving skilfully
A pretty basket or a little boat,
Now teaching my pet linnet from my lips to take
The seed with its sharp beak.
Only, at times, sleep from my eyelids banishing,
Irenæus' soul to lofty realms takes wing,
Where of his earthly love I doubt.
But if he truly loved me, then,
A greater triumph it would be
The victory to win,
Not over some fair shepherdess,
But over poetry,
Over learning, art, and fame." Irenæus, unseen,
Phyllis had heard, and now before the maid
Appearing, clasped her in a fond embrace.
And thus with modest gentleness he said :
"In vain the tender bond that makes my happiness,

Phyllis, wouldst thou explain with subtle arguments;
Ah, innocent Phyllis! dost thou then not know
That, spite of the accomplishments
And graces manifold
With which thy partial fancy doth endow
Thy shepherd, if he had lost all the fire
Of youth he could not love in thee inspire?
If thou my love dost to the swain's prefer,
Not for that I am old,
But that I am the master dost thou hold me dear.

THE END.



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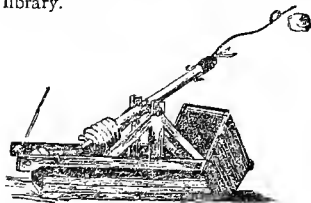
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