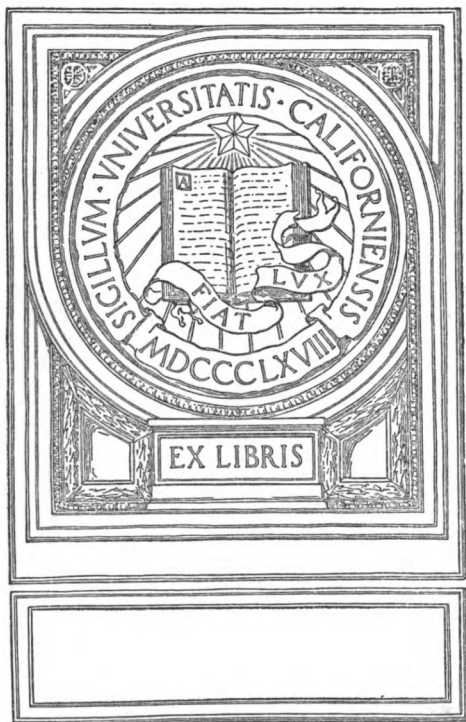


THE VALLEY OF ADVENTURE

by
George W. Ogden



Aug. 1927.

~~Ralph Challenger.~~

THE VALLEY OF ADVENTURE

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*A Romance of California
Mission Days*

By
GEORGE W. OGDEN

Author of **THE RUSTLER OF WIND RIVER, THE LAND OF LAST
CHANCE, THE BONDBOY, TRAIL'S END, THE ROAD
TO MONTEREY, etc.**



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CHAPTER I

MAGDALENA'S GUESTS

WHITE as a dove that had come to rest in that green valley with her breast against the warm fair earth, the mission of San Fernando Rey de España appeared to one approaching from the north, its small grey adobe buildings nestling around it like an unfledged brood. From the south, along the Camino Real, or royal road, the traveler came upon it in a manner unexpected, there in its place called the Valley of the Encinas, that is to say, the evergreen oaks. But come to it from what direction one might, white-plastered adobe walls and soft-red tiles partly hidden behind green boughs of oak and willow, the savor of its kitchen came on the wind to greet him like the word of a hearty host.

It seemed there was always a roast upon the mighty grate—it would uphold the carcass of an ox—that stood under the archway built against the kitchen wall; for guests came at all hours of

the day to the broad doors of the hospice, from which none departed unfed. Here Magdalena Lozano, cook extraordinary to the mission fathers and all who put feet beneath their plenteous table, reigned in dignity, with hams and bacon hanging on the joists which crossed the deep chamber midway between floor and roof, the unctuous condensations of countless dinners caked black and thick upon her walls.

There was no chimney to Magdalena's grill, where meats were roasted and broiled above the living coals, and vast cauldrons hung on giant cranes to boil and mingle their savory contents. It was not the fashion of the Franciscan padres who built their thick-walled missions in Alta California to trifle with such vain comforts as chimneys in kitchens. An arch thrown against the kitchen wall to confine the coals, and perhaps shunt the smoke out over the cook's head, diffuse and spread it better among the hams and bacon hung to cure and keep in the weevil-discouraging atmosphere, was all a right-minded cook, duly grounded in the faith, could require. So it had been in Spain for a thousand years; so it was in Mexico, whence the padres marched to the conquest of souls in Alta California. It was enough. The baking was done outdoors, in the great cave of an oven that looked like a cistern standing above ground.

The kitchen in itself was a chimney, some thirty feet high from tiled floor to the eaves of tiled roof, and was not so smoky and stifling as one might

think, judging from the appearance of the walls, except in falling weather and times when the santanas blew from the northeast, carrying clouds of sand. Then one must shut the door to fend off the pestiferous drafts, and the smoke was sluggish between walls, and slow to find its way out under the rafters and through the tiles.

And a pleasant smoke it was which came from the dry cedar under Magdalena's grill, sweet with the incense of old romances; blowing down, it seemed, from the camp fires of the beginning, when mankind was young on the mountains and in the green forest glades. There is a mystery in the scent of sweet cedar blazing lazily on an open fire, a reminiscent melancholy, a quickening of strange, dear things which struggle in the recollection for voices, yet all of them commingled and obscure, woven in the fibre of mind and memory, indefinable, unknown. No other smoke will move such out-reaching, vain soft gropings in the human mind. It is the incense of romance.

Magdalena, wife of Geronimo Lozano, mayor-domo of the mission estate, was not so much interested in the company gathered at table in the great dining-hall that autumn evening as she was in the company at hand: two men who sat under her smoky joists with a candle between them, feeding from the sheep's haunch set for their refreshment. Her eyes were more than half for them as she stood before her grill where a saddle of mutton was sputtering over the coals, her ears wholly for them,

eager for the refreshment of news which seldom came to her kitchen from the far places of Alta California and the world beyond. The usual route of news was by way of the great front doors and the dining-hall, through the ears of the padres, with a word here and there which splashed over that one might pick up like a bird catching drops from a fountain. Only such news as the padres believed would not disturb the tranquillity and decorum of the mission ever passed to the kitchen and the mayordomo's quarters in the quad behind the vast building. Padres as censors of the news were most unsatisfactory creatures, as Magdalena would have told anyone who would have permitted her his ear.

It was no hard matter, either, for Magdalena to secure auditors, for she was a comely woman, with a sweet tongue in her teeth. Tall, under forty, supple and quick; her face not rounded and short in the general Spanish mold, but rather spare, as with Gipsy leanness, which lent sympathy and seriousness to her look; dark, with eyes brown and clear as polished agate, small even teeth, white as mother-of-pearl, which quickened her face like a light when she parted her serious calm lips in an unexpected smile.

Handsome, this Magdalena, to have come so far from the gaieties of life, the never-ending marvel of travelers who were so fortunate as to behold her at the kitchen door. When she served the grill, as now, she bound her smooth black hair under a red and yellow kerchief, drawing it tight

across her forehead and knotting it behind. This added to the Gipsy piquancy of her dark face, the Gipsy mystery of her melancholy eyes, which seemed always to speak so much and yet to say so little that men could understand.

One of these men at Magdalena's kitchen table—the legs of it were hewn from cedar beams, it would have upheld an elephant—was a familiar figure in that smoky room. Borrromeo Cambon, this was, a man who could beat out on his anvil any tool or instrument of metal that the need of man required, let it be a fishhook or hoe, copper cauldron or griddle-iron, scythe or sword. Borrromeo was a man of great stature and strength, a man whose broad hands were the endowment of generations of men grown mighty in the wrestle with stubborn metals. His black beard was short and curly, his face red-brown, like a tile.

The other man taking refreshment from Magdalena's bounty wore a soldier's garb; a beardless lean and weathered man. His sword-belt and brass-bound pistols hung on his chair-post close to his hand, as if he had compromised between the exactions of hospitality and the demands of duty, not going very far in either direction. This soldier appeared worn from many years afield; his brindled hair was shaggy, rough and long, but there was a merry light in his quick grey eyes, a smile that came easily to his close-fitting lips. The hardships and sacrifices of the wilderness, long association with austere and exacting men, had not caused him to

forget that even a good soldier may laugh now and then and be better for such indulgence.

Sergeant Miguel Olivera had arrived only that evening at San Fernando, riding in at the head of ten troopers, brought to reënforce the command of Captain del Valle, officer in charge of the king's dignity within the jurisdiction of the Pueblo de Los Angeles. There was a business in the bosque, as Magdalena said, calling these soldiers down from Monterey, a business that these two men were discussing as they made their supper from the great loaf and the red haunch of sheep.

"You'll never catch him," said Borrromeo Cambon, rolling his big head with an air of confidence that was almost defiance in the soldier's face. "Sebastian Alvitre is not a man to be approached while he lies asleep in the canyon."

"Who knows?" said Sergeant Olivera, indifferent, it seemed. He cut himself more meat from the reddest portion of the joint. "Who knows?" said he again, after a little while.

"I know that gold is scarce on the road since Sebastianito came riding here from Baja California with his wild black devils," Borrromeo said. "No more than two days ago he came down like an eagle upon a lamb and carried off no man knows how many thousand dollars from two fathers who were traveling from Capistrano to San Gabriel. It was a thing to make a man laugh, the four soldiers who were along with the fathers to protect them. It is said they flew away like sparrows."

"Then the king must lift the ancient law and permit the priests to carry arms," the sergeant said, unmoved by the jeer at the valor of his kind.

"Or send women to guard them," the blacksmith suggested.

"When you have been in California as long as I have," Sergeant Olivera reproved him, pausing with knife upended in one hand on this side of his plate, fork clasped in like manner on the other, "you will be kinder in your judgment of all men, including soldiers. It is a hard way, comrade; a man has to be deeper than the crown of a hat to know it all."

"Eight years ago I came to this mission," said Borrromeo, resenting the implication of unseasoned judgment, "marching from Baja California in the track that Brother Padre Serra himself made across the wilderness when he came to found the king's missions in this land for the reclamation of the gentiles' souls. Yes."

"It is a distinction to come in the footsteps of Father Junipero," Sergeant Olivera declared, nodding seriously. "You are honored to follow in the path of that sanctified man."

"I don't know that I'm honored more than old Padre Serra," Borrromeo contended, bristling like a boar from his manner of drawing the skin of his forehead down toward his eyes, throwing his short-clipped stiff hair erect on his crown. "He was the king's priest; I am the king's blacksmith."

"That is well said, blacksmith," Sergeant Oli-

vera nodded, "every man for his own calling. But people will have their own opinions, for all of that."

"What is a soldier's opinion of any man? A soldier is a slave!"

"It is a question," Sergeant Olivera returned. "But there is no question about artisans who come to Alta California to teach these savage neophytes their craft. They are men from the prisons, given parole on condition; they are thieves."

"Some of them may be thieves, little soldier, but I am no thief!" Borromeo's voice was a rumble in his chest, a cloud seeming to sweep a darker shadow over his fire-reddened face. "No, I will not permit any man to call me thief. I killed a man in Sinaloa, and I am ready to kill another one!"

"I implore your pardon, friend killer," Sergeant Olivera said, with sarcasm that was softened by a humorous kindling in his eyes. "It is a much greater distinction. But I am not ready to be killed my first night in San Fernando; there are several things that I want to live on a little while to see."

"You will not live to catch Sebastian Alvitre, anyhow, if God gives you two hundred years."

"Maybe not, Vulcan."

"No names, no names!" Borromeo leaned over the table to warn against such liberty, his great arms spread to reach and clasp the table's edges, a hand on either side.

"I make you a compliment," the soldier laughed, not disturbed by the blacksmith's savage squaring

off as for a leap the length of the board. "What, man! have you never heard of Vulcan? He was the god of ancient blacksmiths, as well as blacksmith of the ancient gods; all of your tribe came from him, he was the father of them all. He was lame in a leg, he went with a hobble."

"Devil take him! he was no father of mine if he was lame, I say. All of my people came into the world sound, no matter if some of them left it in pieces. No, you will never live to catch Sebastianito."

"What does it matter, as long as I live to see the first wine run from the only press in Alta California? I hear they are to trample out the first grapes tomorrow. After that, let me die."

Magdalena smiled, and turned quickly to her roast as if to snatch away from the soldier's eyes the delight they seemed to have discovered that moment in her face. Borromeo Cambon also smiled, his thick beard spreading back from the crease of his wide lips.

"What you or I, or any other man, gets out of that vintage he will pay for," he said. "These lean-shanked priests are not loose-handed men, comrade; they are the kind to make money grow on the top of a rock."

"There is much dependent on them," the soldier said, considerately, "all these poor devils of Indians, ignorant animals who would starve if turned loose to make their way without a hand over them now."

“ They are no good, they are not worth the meat they eat, ” the blacksmith declared with strong contempt. “ As for salt, they do not eat any. Comrade, they are not worth a curse. They have been long enough under the fathers’ teaching to forget the way of making a living in the woods, but not long enough to know how to get it out of the ground like civilized men. ”

“ That is why the priests have to watch the dollars, Vulcan. Well, when they get to making wine and brandy the money will come easier. ”

“ I have made them a still, ” the blacksmith nodded his head in solemn confirmation of his word, “ of two hundred gallons depth. There will be brandy enough as soon as the wine is ripe. ”

“ I can see it isn’t going to be such a melancholy life for a soldier to be stationed at this mission, ” the sergeant said, his eyes following Magdalena as she bent to baste the roast.

“ There is but one Magdalena, ” the blacksmith complained, “ and a man might as well expect favors from Our Señora by the side of the altar. ”

“ I am sure you speak a true word, ” the soldier returned. If Magdalena heard she did not turn up an eye. She pushed the dripping-pan under the roast and dipped up the rich liquid, in which pepper pods swam, and the cloves of garlic, and laved the brown savory meat.

“ As for these Indian women, they are animals. The fathers say they are Christians, but consider a man married to a woman who eats bugs! ”

"Cheer up, then comrade," the soldier encouraged him. "What? Haven't you heard the news?"

"News?" the blacksmith rolled his eyes, turning the whites of them like an ox straining at the yoke, ill-favored at the thought of being chaffed. "What neophyte has run away to get brandy from the soldiers at Buena Ventura? What rancher is complaining now against the mission sheep? Friend soldier, such news as this is all that tickles a man's ears in San Fernando."

"I would be the last one to laugh at a lonely man sick for the smile of a Christian woman. Haven't you heard the word our governor sent to the viceroy at the capital?"

"The walls of San Fernando are thick," said Magdalena, her wistful eyes on the soldier's face.

"The governor is a wise man in his day, according to my opinions," Sergeant Olivera said, "his clerk is a man from my own street in the capital, a man I know well. I had this from his clerk, but it is no state secret, it is a thing for everybody to know."

The soldier shifted his chair from the table-end, his meal finished, the scabbard of his long sabre scraping the tiles. Magdalena was quick with a blazing splinter for his cigarette; he rose to receive it from her, bending low in his acknowledgment of the favor, hand upon his breast.

"Well, it takes you a devil of a while to get it out of your mouth!" the impatient blacksmith grumbled. "What was it this famous governor

said to the viceroy, which your so-good friend peeped into and read, my brave soldier? Come now; give it to us."

Sergeant Olivera looked at Magdalena and smiled. He offered cigarettes to the complaining man, who spurned them with repellent hand.

"Cigarettes?" said Borromeo. "No, I don't favor the little things. There's only a mouthful of smoke in one of them for a man, and they burn his beard besides. If you've got a long cigar about you, let me have it. Very well; my pipe is better, anyhow. And the governor wrote to the viceroy on a matter, heh?"

"In effect, it was this: Padres with Indian neophytes gathered around their missions are all very well, but padres and Indians never will develop the glorious possibilities of Alta California. It will take, said the wise governor in his letter to the viceroy, at least a hundred years to bring the Indians up to a state of even crude civilization."

"Four hundred!" Borromeo declared. "There is not one man in five hundred of them with sense enough inside his head to learn how to make a shoe for a mule."

"I think the governor was nearer the truth, for I have seen many Indians of the second and third generation under the padres who are skilled in the crafts of hand."

"It is the young ones," the blacksmith agreed, nodding his head slowly; "the old ones can mix

mud for adobes, and that is all. So the governor said?"

"The man who has the love of land in his heart, the man who makes a home, and spreads green fields and vineyards around him, he is the man to build a colony to the king's glory. There are such men in California, the governor wrote, good soldiers, valiant men, faithful servants of the king, many of them retired from age and wounds, but not too stiff to plant a vineyard, not too old to be the fathers of families. But to have a family, even a soldier must first have a wife. Send me, then, the governor requested of the viceroy, a ship-load of women, to be wives to my soldiers in Alta California."

"What a fool!" said Magdalena.

"And his blacksmiths, his masons, his tilers—let them go to the devil! said the governor."

"No, I think there was a general provision, with soldiers first, certainly soldiers first. When the ship comes, I am sure you will get your lady, Mr. Blacksmith, along with the rest of us."

"What a fool!" said Magdalena again. "As if any women would leave Mexico to come to this wild country only to marry men!"

"But you are here," the sergeant said, "and it appears you are married to a man, one to be envied by all men, by the garment of Our Señor!"

"It is another thing," Magdalena returned, bending her head, pleased with the vehement compliment.

“ I was married before I came ; I was not sent like a hen to the market. ”

“ And the ship ? ” Borrromeo inquired eagerly ; “ you spoke of a ship. Is it on the way ? ”

“ It is expected at San Pedro bay within a week. ”

“ If it brings one lady, only one, Mr. Soldier, she is for the blacksmith of San Fernando. Let any man step between us, and I will crack his head with my hammer as I would crack an egg. ”

“ You are a valiant man, ” said Sergeant Olivera, lifting a shoulder in a strangely expressive little shrug, not so complimentary as Borrromeo might have wished.

“ I killed a man in Sinaloa for stealing my wife, Mr. Soldier ; that is the kind of a man I am. Well, I killed the woman too, if anybody wants to consider that worth thinking about. I cut their necks like rabbits and left them where I found them. That is why I am here. Ask Magdalena ; she can tell you what kind of a man I am. ”

“ Even the testimony of the beautiful is not required to give character to the brave, ” Sergeant Olivera said. He did not turn his eyes from the red coals under Magdalena’s grate, which he seemed to contemplate with visionary gaze, as if he saw the ship of which he had spoken there, the lady of his longing on its deck. The contempt that underlay the suavity of his words vain, boastful Borrromeo seemed too dull to catch or understand.

“ Remember your last penance, Borrromeo, ” Magdalena cautioned him. Her eyes were gentle

with him as she turned to where he sat, his rough bare arms folded across his breast.

"But if there is one woman on that ship, she is mine," Borrromeo stolidly persisted.

"What does a soldier want with a wife at his heels, following him from mission to mission?" Magdalena inquired, turning to Sergeant Olivera. "That is no life for a woman, at least for a woman fit to be the wife to a gentleman like you, Sergeant Olivera."

"I shall retire from the service in another year, if God spares me that long, doña. Then a ranch with a stream of living water through it, a herd, a flock of sheep. That would be paradise for a man, I think, doña, if he had a woman to hold his head when he is weary."

"What a man!" said Magdalena.

"It's safer to have a woman here than in Mexico," Borrromeo reflected, "there are not so many men to put poison in her ears while her husband is at work at his anvil. Give me a chance with another one, I say, and I'll keep her till her teeth fall out."

"Devils!" said Sergeant Olivera, dodging, striking with his hand as at an insect that annoyed him. "What is it dripping down on a man in your kitchen, Doña Magdalena? Surely the rains have not begun in September?"

"It is the fathers' ham," the blacksmith enlightened him, laughing to see the spreading grease-spot on the soldier's sleeve. "This time of the year they

drip like an olla of cold water hung in the door."

Sergeant Olivera looked overhead. Hams and bacon hung thick on the joists fifteen feet above him, dim in the smoke and shadows.

"There's many a sweet morsel there, heh, soldier?" Borrromeo licked his lip, his hunger moved by the piquant thought, full as he was of mutton, turning his broad face up to see, his curling short beard crisp as charcoal. More Jove than Vulcan he appeared in the candle's light.

"It would take a long arm to reach them, anyhow," the sergeant laughed. "Well, I have fared heartily at your table, Doña Magdalena," Sergeant Olivera rose, preparing to depart, laying hand on his sword-belt. "I do not envy the fathers their hams."

"It is nothing," said Magdalena, throwing out her hospitable hands.

"Tomorrow I shall not fare so well, doña; I shall eat a soldier's supper in the company of soldiers; there will be ashes on my bread."

"You would be welcome every day to this table, Sergeant Olivera. The house is yours, and all that is in it."

"And the fathers' hams, and the fathers' wine casks in the cellar—all yours, soldier; help yourself." Borrromeo laughed, rolling back in his chair as the thought enlarged in him, smiting the table with his big sledge fist until the platters jumped. "And your bed, doña — of course that is his, also, at least half——"

"Silence, fool!" Magdalena commanded, more a Gipsy now than before as she scowled at the blacksmith with eyes drawn small, her forehead wrinkled in an angry threat.

"'Take the sergeant to the kitchen, Borrromeo, and sit with him at the table,' Geronimo said to me. I leave my olla of beans with the wild onions from the hills, I come to guard the honor of the mayordomo's house, and what does the doña offer me? 'All is yours,' she tells the soldier, leaving the blacksmith with his finger in his mouth."

Borrromeo roared again, throwing his head back, his mouth stretched so wide that one of the hams must have gone down his great gullet if it had broken its rawhide thong and dropped. Sergeant Olivera looked at him with dry humor wrinkling about his eyes, his nimble fingers drawing his sword-belt snug around his spare soldierly body.

"Vulcan, your wit is heavier than your hand," he said. "Will you come with me? Doña, I kiss——"

"Ha! here is little Geronimo," the blacksmith said.

Geronimo Lozano, mayordomo of the mission estate, overseer of nine hundred neophytes, as the Indian converts to Christianity were called by the priests, stepped into the light of the kitchen door as if the blacksmith's word had commanded him up from the night. He paused a moment in the door, hand lifted in grave and courteous salute to the guests of his fireside.

The mayordomo wore a hat with high peaked crown and broad, pliant brim, a short jacket with wide collar, dark velvet pantaloons, tight fitting as his own skin, and boots which struck him at the knees. There was a glinting of white metal at the heels of his boots, a click of spurs when he stepped over the threshold upon the tiled kitchen floor. Geronimo Lozano was a tall man, taller even than Sergeant Olivera, and lean and sinewy as the ascetic priests themselves, bearded after the fashion of that time among those who made pretensions to consequence or filled stations of authority. One remembered his nose, high and thin, and his eyebrows, short tufts of thick blackness which set obliquely toward his nose. He wore flaring gauntlets which reached to his elbows.

“Sergeant Olivera, a thousand pardons for this late appearance,” the mayordomo begged. “There was a business that held me. No, you must not go before emptying a goblet or two. A soldier should never go to battle unshrived nor to bed without wine.”

“It’s a good maxim,” said the soldier. He stood with hand on his chair, his long sword at his side, his brass-lined pistols shining in their scabbards, his plumed hat in his hand.

“And a blacksmith, a blacksmith can go to the devil without even his apron to his legs!” Borromeo said, with great feeling of resentment.

The mayordomo clapped him genially on the shoulder, laughing at his surly complaint. Magda-

lena was bending over the roast that she had basted and browned with such exquisite care, lifting it to a platter with a great two-tined fork that had been beaten out by Borrromeo's cunning hand.

"There will be a sup for you, Borrromeo, old dog," Geronimo declared. He stripped the thong of a whip from his wrist, and reached to hang it on a crude, hand-hammered nail driven into the door-frame almost the height of his head from the floor. The whip was made of rawhide strips, finely cut, closely braided. It was pliant as from much use and careful oiling; its long lash touched the floor as it swung from the nail.

"Yes, there was a business of a young man who stole a horse and tried to run away," the mayordomo said. He smiled, ran his hand down the lissom whip, rolling the lash of it, damp as if from dragging over grass wet with dew, between his fingers.

"So?" said Sergeant Olivera, looking at him with keen questioning.

"He had an ambition to make a bandit of himself, to join Sebastian Alvitre, but he is wiser now," the mayordomo said.

CHAPTER II

THE BARBARIAN

BORRROMEO was not the man to refuse a cut from the fresh roast when the mayordomo and Magdalena sat down to supper, although Sergeant Olivera could not be tempted to exceed the limit of decorum and comfort. Geronimo brought a pitcher of wine from the cellar; there was laughter at the kitchen table, in which the rumble of great Borromeo's mirth bore the basso profundo like a boisterous wind.

"Savage!" said Geronimo, cutting again a thick portion of mutton ribs, which he tossed to the blacksmith's plate with his immense fork as if serving a dog. He was diverted by the blacksmith's appetite, which he encouraged both in goblet and in plate.

"If I could eat like one of these Indians I might be called a brave man at the platter," Borromeo said. "Beside even an old Indian woman with a poor appetite I am nothing but a child."

"That is almost true," Geronimo admitted, turning to the soldier with a smile. "Have you had experience in feeding Indians, Sergeant Olivera?"

"That is a singular duty I have been spared," the soldier replied. "From what I have seen of them,

and that is not a little after twelve years in this country, vultures are nice creatures, abstemious animals, compared to these neophytes that our padres conserve with such solicitous hands."

"That is true, there is no filling them. Here at San Fernando we have nine hundred of them, old and young, who gobble up between them twenty beeves a day. This is on top of the corn, and the wheat bread they are beginning to relish with fearful appetite. I tell you, Sergeant Olivera, I have known a group of Indians to devour twenty-five pounds of beef to the head in one day. Here at a fiesta not long ago, sixty of them put three beeves into their paunches in a single night."

"There is a pleasure in life when a man can eat like that!" Borromeo sighed.

Sergeant Olivera shook his head, expressive of depreciation of such inhuman voracity, but his thought appeared to be on something else. He sat in abstraction beside the table, his half-empty goblet at his hand, his eyes on the open door in the manner of a man whose thoughts had drawn him away. Magdalena watched him with growing approval in her eyes. He appeared to be an abstemious man.

"So, he would have joined Alvitre?" said the sergeant presently, nodding his head gravely, speaking in a manner to himself as if his thought had slipped its leash and gone wandering.

Geronimo started, lifting his head. One would have thought somebody had called him unseason-

ably; there was a look of questioning perplexity in his face.

“He speaks of Cristóbal,” Magdalena said, in voice deferential and low.

“Oh, Cristóbal!” The mayordomo laughed, relieved of his perplexity.

“I am curious about him,” Sergeant Olivera confessed, turning to face his host. “That is a strange notion for an Indian, a strange and civilized notion, to ride highwayman up and down the land.”

“He is one of the young ones,” the mayordomo explained, “one who is able to read. I always have contended with the fathers that it is wrong to teach savages to read, Christian or pagan. Nothing good can come of it but insubordination against authority, wild and wicked thoughts of liberty such as this young man has. Well, when one of them such as this Cristóbal cuts a padre’s throat, then they will be convinced of their own error. A little learning in the head of one of these fellows is equal to giving him a gun.”

“What sort is this Cristóbal? You will forgive my curiosity, since I may have to deal with him, or others like him, who may chance to step out from the bounds of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction.”

“Surely it is your right to know, as one who holds the king’s law in his hands,” the mayordomo returned. “Cristóbal is a young scoundrel who has been flogged all his life, first by the fathers for his impious defiance, later by me for insubordination in the fields. Now he breaks out like a wild colt

from the corral and comes to this end. I considered hanging him. I would have done it if Father Ignacio had been a minute later. It is an admirable thing the way that man hears and knows all that goes forward on this estate; you will come to be astonished at his cunning, Sergeant Olivera. If ever a man could hear the grass grow, Father Ignacio is that man."

"It is a strange story," said the soldier, reflectively. "I did not know that an Indian would have the nobility of mind to contrive a thing like that, for you will admit, Don Geronimo, that the sentiment of liberty is noble, let the man who carries it be as humble as a worm."

"Rebellion against authority is another thing," Geronimo contended, sharp in his correction. His face grew stern, the color of his gaiety drained out of it, as if the speech of the soldier had displeased him almost to the point of resentment and open anger.

"True," the soldier nodded, "there must be no flouting of authority. Still, it is a strange case."

"Perhaps he has not always been understood," Magdalena said softly. "I know there is no water he would not cross for one he likes."

"I will not have the thief defended by one of my own house!" said Don Geronimo, his anger flashing suddenly. "It is enough, woman!"

Borromeo's heavy head had fallen to his arm, flung carelessly upon the table among the bones of the feast, his senses cloyed in the satisfaction of

meat and wine. Now he raised his face, startled from his sleep by the mayordomo's sharp words, making a foolish grimace with long-drawn lip to stretch his sleepy eyes open.

"Woman?" he repeated, turning his head as if seeking to lay a challenge. "If there is one woman, she is for the blacksmith of San Fernando, by the sacred wood!"

Sergeant Olivera laughed, but with such a sound of good nature in it that no man could take offense.

"You have had a dream, friend Borromeo," he said.

"Dream? No, it is no dream, soldier. Don Geronimo, is it a dream, I ask you, that a ship is coming with a hundred good women on it for wives to the men of this cursed, lonely country?"

"I have not heard of any such thing," the mayordomo returned.

"Then the soldier was having his joke with me," Borromeo sighed, turning to his goblet for solace.

"What is it you have been telling him?" Don Geronimo demanded, with ill favor in his handsome, unsympathetic face.

"Surely you have heard of the governor's request to the viceroy, Don Geronimo?"

"This seems to be a matter on which I lack information," Don Geronimo replied crabbedly.

Sergeant Olivera went over his tale again, Borromeo wide awake now, such pleasure in his forge-burned face as if the simple repetition of the story

had magic in it like a witch's wind that hastened the desired ship upon its way.

"It is a matter of common report, there is no secret in it," Sergeant Olivera said. "I am already under orders to march to San Pedro bay and wait the arrival of the ship. Surely you have heard that a ship is almost due?"

"I know there is a ship coming with supplies for the missions, the president of the missions has informed me of this. There are ingots of iron on board for us, your holiday for lack of something to hammer, Borrromeo, will soon be at its end. But as for the women, I cannot believe that the secular governor would be so simple as to ask the viceroy to send them here, even fool that I grant the man to be. Women! what sort of women would come on such an expedition as this?"

"It is a question," said Sergeant Olivera, meditatively.

"What kind have come to the Pueblo Los Angeles? Black women, coyote women, greasy and ignorant sows such as no man of decency would have. We are better off without that kind of women."

"Not all of them," Olivera denied; "I was through the pueblo as much as three years ago, and saw many families happily on the way to prosperity there, with their little vineyards and flocks around them."

"Men and women alike, all of them in the pueblo are swine," Don Geronimo protested in high con-

tempt. "This land belongs to the fathers, who came into a wilderness full of dumb savages and brought it to both spiritual and material fruitfulness. The secular government looks on this prosperity with jealous eyes, and thinks of colonies. But where is it to establish these colonies? There must be water for the orchards and herds, and that is to be found only in rivers. Every river has its mission, there are no rivers unoccupied. What would the government do? Rob the missions of water and starve them? Certainly, there is not room for any more pastoral and agricultural enterprises in this country; already this miserable pueblo below us is complaining that we have shut the water of the river from them behind our dam. Well, let them complain. It is our water; we had it first."

"The Pueblo de Los Angeles complains, then, that you cut off the water?"

"They have threatened to break down our dam," Don Geronimo said, resentful of their necessity. "Well, our herds must drink."

"How many cattle run on your ranges, Don Geronimo? if a soldier may ask."

"Not more than forty thousand, while San Gabriel has a hundred thousand, I am told. Our sheep are but a mouthful, eight or nine thousand. You can see that we are poor, Sergeant Olivera, and if the pueblo continues to increase we shall be poorer, our little river divided to give it water."

"And there is the stubble of grain in the big field behind the adobe wall," the sergeant said.

“That comes to maturity with the rains, it calls for no water,” the mayordomo explained.

“There must have been a great amount of wheat, thousands of quintales, in that field,” the soldier speculated.

“We had eleven thousand quintales above our needs this harvest,” the mayordomo proudly confessed. “We sold it to the north, where their yield was poor. But it is only a mouthful when a man thinks of it, a very little, indeed.”

“It appears to me,” said the soldier, still in his subdued, speculative way, “that so many horned cattle, so many sheep, so much grain that God brings to ripeness with the rains of heaven, would bring prosperity and happiness to a great many people. It is only a soldier’s thought.”

“The country bears all the weight of population it can carry,” the mayordomo declared, with heat that seemed unreasonable, considering the friendliness of the discussion. “We want no colonists in Alta California, we want no——”

“Geronimo! there is a stranger in the door,” Magdalena said, her hand on her husband’s arm.

Don Geronimo turned quickly to the broad door that swung open to the night. A man stood just beyond the threshold, timid, hesitant, it seemed, as some creature from the mountains that pauses a moment in the camp fire light. He was a tall man, as barbarous a figure as any in the mission kitchen had beheld in many a year. His pantaloons were of deerhide with the hair on, save where it had been

rubbed off by wear; his coat, tattered and in shreds, was evidently part of a military uniform, the two brass buttons which remained on it bright in the candle beam. His boots of raw deerhide, hair outward, came to his knees; his cap, cut from the skin of a mountain lion, was crude and ill-fitting, large on his head as an oriental turban. It came down low on his forehead; an eagle feather was stuck into a slit with an attempt at the jaunty and debonnaire altogether ludicrous.

For all but the pale blue of the faded coat, the man appeared all hair. His beard was a golden flare on his brown cheeks, rippled like water that runs in shallows over a sunlit bar; his hair, of a strange fairness in the eyes of those who beheld him in amazement, fell to his shoulders in curls. He carried a gun with graceful lightness, the muzzle downward, the stock under his arm.

Borromeo Cambon leaned forward, hands on his thighs, mouth open, swallowing the wonder of this unaccountable stranger; Magdalena, still with hand clutching her husband's arm fearfully, stared with big eyes, her cheeks of a cold hue, her breath a gasp in her parted lips; Sergeant Olivera put his hand to his chin, where fingers and thumb stroked as if they felt for a beard, no emotion apparent in him but that of speculation on the reason for such a wild figure that seemed to have sprung out of the night. Don Geronimo rose, deliberately as became a dignified man at his own table, and went forward to speak to the man in the door.

The stranger, seeing a woman before him, removed his hairy head cover, hat or cap or whatever it might be, revealing his long hair in tangled ringlets over his ears.

“Look!” said Magdalena, touching the soldier’s arm; “his hair is bright as an angel’s. There is no harm in him.”

“Who knows?” said Sergeant Olivera, still feeling his chin like a man who, trammelled in meditation, puts his finger in his beard.

“What is this?” Don Geronimo inquired, standing well within the door, hand lifted a little as if to guard a sudden assault. “Who are you? What do you want?”

The stranger replied, with courtesy and gentleness, as was apparent to all, but in a tongue that none of them could understand.

“What savage!” said Borromeo. “If he prays, God can’t understand such a tongue.”

“He makes a sign that he is hungry,” said Magdalena, compassion in her soft voice. “Bring him in, Geronimo; there is no harm in his face.”

“He is carrying a rifle; it is forbidden,” said Don Geronimo. “But how to make such a wild animal understand?”

“Ha! he understands Spanish after all,” said Borromeo. “See? he is giving Don Geronimo his gun. How admirable! what a little man with hair on him this one is!”

“He is as gentle as a dove,” said Magdalena, rising to place a chair for the stranger at the great

oak table, where the savory roast was cooling, the iron fork standing in it like a harpoon in the back of a whale.

“What giant!” Borromeo said, with a sound of wonderment out of his pursed lips, like a man blowing to cool his soup. “He is nearly as big as I am, he is a man to lock arms with the blacksmith of San Fernando for a fall in the sand!”

Don Geronimo stood the rifle against the door-facing where his whip hung, far out of the stranger's reach, conveying by his act that the weapon was not to be returned immediately, at least. This did not appear to concern the hairy traveler, who stood looking about him with respectful, but keen, interest in the kitchen and all it contained, which evidently was as strange to him as he was to his surroundings.

“He has found the fathers' hams already,” Borromeo whispered, loud as a wind in corn, his hand beside his mouth to make a secret of it.

“I regret, sir,” said Don Geronimo, coming around the table from placing the rifle beyond its owner's reach, “that you haven't the Castilian speech on your tongue, but that is not the favor of Providence to all men. Sit, and eat; after that we shall see.”

Don Geronimo, like all of his blood, was almost as interpretative with gesture as with word. The stranger readily understood the invitation, spread so broadly with sweep of the hand, with slight inclination of the supple, slender body. He bowed,

not ungracefully, and seated himself in the offered chair.

Magdalena placed the trencher of meat before him; the others watched him curiously, as if they expected him to pick it up like an Indian and set his teeth into it with a growl. Strangely, the man's interest was not in the meat, but the broken great loaf of bread that lay on the bare board of the table near Magdalena's place. He reached for the loaf, which he held a moment before his eyes as a man lifts a relic which brings him recollections of a happier day, then put it down almost reverently, clasped his hands on the table edge and bowed his head.

"He thanks God for bread!" Borrromeo whispered. "So, he must be a Christian, and not a gentile out of the wilderness."

"His eyes are blue, blue as the little flowers on the hills in April," Magdalena said.

"There is no strength in a man with light eyes," Borrromeo declared.

"He probably is German; only the Germans have hair the color of fool's gold," Don Geronimo said.

"It is his fast day," Borrromeo said, in his great gusty whisper. "See, he eats nothing but bread."

"What is your opinion of him, Sergeant Olivera?" Don Geronimo inquired.

"I think he is a Russian; that nation has country to the north of Alta California, I am told."

"Now he cuts meat, he feeds himself like a gentleman," Magdalena spoke with a certain triumph as if she had assumed the defense of the strange

man against the prejudices and perils that awaited him in that peaceful place, and must bring forward and magnify each small circumstance of his good behavior.

“ But he drinks no wine, ” Borrromeo accused with severity. “ He is nothing but a woman with a beard. ”

“ They may not have wine in his country, it is likely that he doesn't know what it is, ” Magdalena contended. “ See—I will show him that it is to drink. ”

She took the goblet that stood brimming at the stranger's hand just as she had filled it for him, lifted it with a smile, sipped, and offered it to him. He received it from her with his face aglow in the smile that moved his beard, bowed over it as if he stooped to kiss her hand, lifted it high, and drained it in one stiff swig.

“ Ha-a-a! ” Borrromeo let his breath go in a sigh of admiration; “ after all, he drinks like a Christian and a man! ”

“ He is not such a barbarian, he salutes with his goblet like any gentleman, ” Don Geronimo said. He sat across from the stranger, Magdalena at his side, Sergeant Olivera at the table-end, Borrromeo at the other. The stranger smiled in friendly encouragement, as he might have smiled on children who had drawn near him timidly, one foot lifted to dash away at the first alarm.

“ Not once has he lifted meat with his fingers, ” Magdalena said.

“Look at him! he eats salt!” Borromeo declared in excited wonder. “What admirable barbarian!”

“What is to be done with him?” Sergeant Olivera inquired.

“That is a question for Father Ignacio,” Don Geronimo replied. “Well, my brave bear, if you have finished your supper, attend me.”

The stranger was pushing back from the table, his face glowing in the satisfaction of repletion. He rose, spread his hands as if he surrendered all the gratitude of his breast for their hospitality, and bowed to the little company in turn.

“Attend me, then,” Don Geronimo repeated, taking him by the arm to pilot him into the presence of Father Ignacio. “Sergeant Olivera, do me the favor to march behind, and see that your pistols are loaded.”

“It is a shame!” Magdalena protested. “There is no wickedness in the man; his heart is as soft as a peach.”

CHAPTER III

JUAN MOLINERO

CAPTAIN DEL VALLE, commander of the military forces in the jurisdiction of Pueblo de Los Angeles, whose headquarters was at the Mission San Fernando Rey de España, sat alone at table with Padre Ignacio in the lofty dining-hall that night. There had been other company at an earlier table, some of whom had taken the road again, others being that moment seated on the benches which ran along the wall outside under the long colonnade of arches, where they smoked and passed the news of the king's road that linked mission with mission from San Diego to Monterey.

Padre Ignacio was a man who came late to the table at evening, for he carried a multitude of cares. The office of host usually was filled by his younger assistant, Padre Mateo, who liked the chatter of drovers and traders, and such as were becoming more common on the roads of Alta California every day, such as every ship from Mexico added numbers to. Padre Ignacio was made sad by this invasion which had been increasing so rapidly through the past ten years. There was a forecast in it that disturbed him, a thing that had given him many a sleepless hour and set him pacing the length of his

vast chamber overhead. These men were as the dust that came ahead of the rising storm of change that Padre Ignacio knew in his heart soon would sweep the old order away in Alta California. But to a man who was younger, who had come after the trails were worn broad, the last adobe long since laid in the last mission walls, the last tile fixed, it did not signify so much. A younger man could bear it better, having no memories to be wrenched away.

Padre Ignacio had come down from his chamber only a little while before, to join in meat with Captain del Valle. The padre's room, spacious as the quarters of a king, and bare as if its occupants had deserted it and carried everything of value away, extended across the width of the mission building in the east end. It was floored with tiles, in which the feet of Padre Ignacio and those who had gone before him had worn little channels, or paths through the hard surface down to the softer core, which appeared tracings of duller red on the red-brown of the fire-baked adobe.

From door to altar, from altar to window, from window to the low, hard, austere couch, these little markings of sandaled feet were traced; and down the length of the room in its very center, the broadest and deepest line. Here Padre Ignacio wore down his troubles, spent his meditations, worked out the welfare of the hundreds, wild men and women but a little while before, who were gathered there under his hand.

A mighty cedar beam, the mark of the broadax in

its squared sides, bridged the room across its width, not quite the height of Padre Ignacio's head from the floor. A man must remember this beam, as he must have in mind forever and unceasingly the obstacles of life, and not dash without a thought for his chamber door in the dark. He must have it in mind when he paced, hands at his back, head bowed in somber meditation, like a penance which he could not for a moment forego. It was an obstacle in the current of serenity which a man forgot at his peril.

Now, as Padre Ignacio sat at supper with Captain del Valle, there was a red welt across his forehead, as if some one had given him a blow. Captain del Valle said nothing, although his eyes made inquiry with curious insistence. Padre Ignacio wet a napkin in wine and held it to the flaming excoriation.

"I forgot the beam that crosses my chamber," he said, contritely as if he had been discovered in some humiliating case. "I should have remembered, but a thing happened this evening that caused me great perturbation, and I inflict my own punishment, as a man must suffer always for his remissions."

Padre Ignacio smiled, dabbing the wet napkin to his hurt. A spare, tall man, almost frail, he seemed, in spite of the amplitude of his long brown gown of coarse serge which magnified his form. His face was long and narrow, and he was brown as sun and wind could turn him, even to the tonsure of his

crown which time had broadened so that a razor was no longer called for there.

" I heard that Don Geronimo had been putting the scorpion on somebody's back," Captain del Valle said.

" Yes, it was a youth called Cristóbal, a quick-minded lad who is not understood by Geronimo, I fear. The poor fellow, in some sort of wild resentment, got on a horse and tried to run away, to join this fellow Alvitre, Geronimo says, but I think there is only fancy in such a charge. Geronimo grows too severe; I must ask our president to put a restriction on him. "

Captain del Valle looked up sharply, as if he had heard a discord in the rendition of a maestro. He was a short and puffy man, grown fat from idleness and much feeding at this mission post and that; a man of middle age, whose brown hair was cut close to his well-shaped head, whose pointed brown beard was penciled with streaks of silver-grey. It was his habit to fill his cheeks with breath in any period of astonishment, expectation, small crisis or small climax of his rather inconsequential life, which gave him the appearance of a squirrel carrying acorns.

He knew that Padre Ignacio referred to the president of the missions when he spoke of having a restriction put on the mayordomo of San Fernando. Captain del Valle was a man who had run counter to ecclesiastical authority in California dur-

ing his day; there was no love in him for the president of the missions.

“Is Padre Tápis expected, then?” he asked.

“He will come on his periodical inspection in a few days, unless delayed in the south. What is this?” Padre Ignacio rose as Don Geronimo appeared at the door which led through the butler’s pantry into the kitchen.

Captain del Valle, his back in that direction, squirmed in his chair to see. “What is this parade, Geronimo?”

“It is this savage from no man knows where,” Don Geronimo replied. “He appeared at the door a little while ago as if he had dropped from the clouds, carrying a rifle under his arm. I have brought him for your disposal.”

Padre Ignacio went forward, brows drawn in his sharp scrutiny of the crudely garbed stranger, severe, unfriendly to behold.

“Where do you come from?” Padre Ignacio asked.

The stranger leaned forward in his eagerness to grasp the meaning of the words, a keen look of intelligent concentration in his eyes. He shook his head slowly, disappointment coming over him like a shadow.

“He doesn’t understand Castilian,” Don Geronimo explained.

Padre Ignacio was not much of a linguist, outside the Indian dialects and the Latin he had used so long that it had become more as a natural endow-

ment than an accomplishment. He tried the stranger in the Indian tongues of the several tribes spread up and down the California coast, winning only a deepening of the look of perplexity; tried him with medieval Latin, only to see a baffled look come into the man's eyes, and an expression of intense confusion rise in his face that seemed to cloud his intelligence like a smoke.

"We'll get nowhere with him at this," Padre Ignacio said. "What languages do you know, Captain del Valle?"

"Only Portuguese besides my own, father."

"If he understood one he would catch something of the other; that will not help us any. See how the poor creature looks from face to face, gentle giant that he seems to be, as if seeking even some modulation of expression that he can interpret. Let us give him the countenance of friends, at least."

"We have fed him, he has been kindly received," Don Geronimo said.

"You have done well, Geronimo. Let us have Father Mateo at him; he is master of many modern tongues."

Padre Ignacio went to the door to summon his coadjutor from his gossip with the travelers, and the enjoyment of his pipe, also, it must be confessed, for Padre Mateo was a man who wisely plucked as many of life's comforts, which he found blossoming along his way, as he could carry. He came quickly at his superior's summons, followed by several of the guests for the night, who had glimpsed

the stranger's remarkable presence through the open door.

"Behold this wanderer from God knows where, Brother Mateo. See if you can get anything out of him with the modern tongues; I can do nothing with him."

"What is this, now?" said Padre Mateo, clapping the stranger heartily on the shoulder, smiling assuringly. "You look like a German; let us try you in that voice. Can you speak German, friend?" he inquired in that tongue.

The stranger's face beamed at the sound; the light of a smile leaped in his eyes.

"Nein, nacht, nicht," he stammered; "Ich was—Ich bin—American—United Stateser."

"Oh, American. Then English is your tongue," said Padre Mateo, with the greatest ease of transition, addressing him in the idiom that he understood.

The stranger was so pleased to hear intelligible sounds issue again from a human mouth that he almost leaped. He grasped Padre Mateo's hand, unawed by the priest's strange dress, strange to him, no doubt, as his own barbarous covering of hairy skins was to them.

"Padero, you don't know how glad I am to meet somebody that can talk God's own language!" he said.

"What does he say?" Padre Ignacio inquired.

Padre Mateo translated the words, at which varying expressions of disgust, disdain, astonishment

and even mirth, passed over the faces of those who stood around to hear. But it was only on the face of Padre Ignacio that the smile was to be seen.

“So much for the vanity of the Spaniard, who says his tongue is the only one fit to address the Almighty in,” he said. “Take him aside where he will be at ease, Brother Mateo; give him tobacco, if he wants it, and draw his story from him. When I have finished my supper I will hear the account. Well,” looking the stranger over again with gentle humor in his brown dry face, “you are a big bird to fly so far from home.”

Don Geronimo and Sergeant Olivera attended the stranger and Padre Mateo to the bench on the arched portico beside the door. Padre Ignacio had finished his supper long since, and was sitting with his goblet of sour wine before him, enfolded in meditation, the stranger probably far out of his thought, when Padre Mateo and his charge returned.

“It is a strange tale that he tells,” Padre Mateo said, a coldness, a doubt, a withdrawing as of suspicion, in his manner. He bore himself like a man who wanted to believe what he had heard, yet feared the judgment of others in the light of its improbability.

Padre Mateo stood by with thumb hooked in the cord that gathered his rough gown about his middle, a florid man of good stature, with sturdy, well-borne shoulders, and good-natured, rather rustic face. He seemed hesitant over his beginning. The

stranger stood close by the padre's side, alert to all that was going forward; between them and the door, as if making a background for the drama then shaping, the travelers who were guests of the mission, Don Geronimo, Sergeant Olivera and Captain del Valle were grouped, none of them wiser for what had passed between the American and his interpreter than Padre Ignacio himself.

"If it is a strange tale, it fits the man," said Padre Ignacio. "Proceed, Brother Mateo."

"This stranger, then, says that he comes from a land called Kentucky, a place I have heard of, Padre Ignacio, and I think it may be true as he says. This Kentucky lies on the eastern shore of the Mississippi; it is a province of the new American republic founded by Washington—you will remember, Padre Ignacio, that a ship from the United States of America put into the bay of Monterey some years ago, but none of its men was permitted to land."

"I remember the ship, with its strange flag," Padre Ignacio said.

"This man tells a thing that is almost incredible, quite incredible, I believe, in the absence of verification. He says that Napoleon of France has sold to the president of the United States the territory of Louisiana. It is a thing that casts a doubt on his integrity."

"How long ago does he say this took place?"

"As much as three years, Padre Ignacio."

"It may be true; we have no right to doubt him. The wars that engage Spain have kept our ships

from the seas, we have had no news these five years from Europe here in California. But what has the sale of Louisiana to do with this man's presence here?"

"He says that the president of his country sent out an expedition to explore the new territory, through and beyond the Stony Mountains to the Pacific, Oregon already being part of the new republic's domain, as you know. This man was one of the party of surveyors or explorers, attached to the expedition as hunter. The party reached the Pacific, he declares, crossing the snowy mountains and passing in boats down the great Oregon river, which he declares has been named the Columbia. Midway of the mountains, on the return home, this man was lost in a snow storm which continued many days. His wanderings led him into a maze of mountain and desert, so far from his comrades that he gave up all hope of finding them. He made a course to the south, hoping to find Sante Fé, in Spanish territory, in which place he might meet hunters, or a caravan of French traders with whom he could return to the Mississippi.

"But no; he was too far to the west. Nothing remained to him in that misadventure, he declares, but to point his way like a mariner at sea, over desert and mountain toward California. A ship, he believed, might come some day to a port of that land and carry him to his own country. So he breaks out of his exile in mountain and wild waterless desert, and comes in the night like a moth led by a

candle, to the open kitchen door of this mission, and here he stands, let his tale be true or false."

"How long ago does he say it was since he lost his comrades in the storm?" Padre Ignacio inquired.

"He says it was in April."

"And it is now September," Padre Ignacio said, looking with strange mingling of compassion and admiration upon the man who had borne such adventures in an unpeopled land. "Ulysses wandered longer, but he did not go so far. It is a strange tale, as you have said, Brother Mateo, but not incredible. Geronimo, see that he is well lodged. Give him suitable clothing; have the barber attend to his hair."

"Padre Ignacio, your pardon, but a word," Captain del Valle stepped forward quickly, still red about the eyes from the extraordinary puffing of his cheeks which he had practiced during Padre Mateo's recital of the stranger's story. "This is a matter for the civil authorities, a thing of the highest importance. I request that this man be delivered to me, to be held for the order of his excellency, the governor."

"It is a strange rudeness, Captain del Valle, to interfere with my hospitality. Upon what grounds do you justify this demand?"

"Padre Ignacio," Captain del Valle's voice was grave and severe, his manner suddenly that of the stern and haughty soldier who knows no greater law than that of his immediate duty, "the story this man tells of the purchase of Louisiana Territory by

the yankee republic is true; we have known of it many months. The country of the yankee republic now touches the dominion of Spain; it is but a step from the purchase of Louisiana by some shrewd trick of this nation of sharp traders, to the seizure of the Spanish dominion of New Mexico, California. The military authorities have been warned; we have been watching. This man is a spy. I demand his surrender in the king's name!"

"It is folly," Padre Ignacio returned, leveling the captain's argument and demand to nothing with an impatient sweep of the hand.

"He stands condemned by his own act in entering California," Captain del Valle protested, his heat rising, his face losing its color in the seriousness of his purpose. "The edict of King Carlos and the cortes never has been revoked. California is closed to foreigners; to enter it is death."

"That applies only to those who come in the spirit of conquest, or to trade; not to a poor wanderer such as this. Peace, Captain del Valle! This man is under ecclesiastical jurisdiction; the hospitality of this place shall not be abused."

"You overstep your bounds, Padre Ignacio," the soldier contended, not new in this controversy between military and ecclesiastical authority in Alta California, a thing of growing bitterness. "You are not greater than king and cortes. But very well; tonight I grant the sanctuary you have given this innocent barbarian, as you seem to believe him. But let him set foot in the king's road——"

“Peace!” commanded Padre Ignacio, sternly, lifting an interdicting hand. “Take him, Geronimo, as I have directed, and attend to his comfort. But stay; what is your name?”

“He says it is John Miller,” Padre Mateo answered, after repeating the question. “In Castilian, Juan Molinero.”

“Juan Molinero,” Padre Ignacio repeated, strangely, as if he found a marvel in it. “What a propitious name!”

CHAPTER IV

SAN FERNANDO REY DE ESPAÑA

“**W**HAT a strange man you are, John Miller,” said Padre Mateo looking at him in unmasked admiration as they walked together at the border of a field of maize, where the hurrying clear water of an irrigation ditch murmured over boulders with which its bottom and sides had been paved with infinite labor and pains.

“Yes; the barber turned a basket over my head and cut around the edges. I couldn’t make him understand that I wanted it cut close to my head, or maybe he thought the shock of losing so much hair all at once would be too great.”

“He could not understand why anybody but a soldier or a priest would want his hair and beard shorn away at all,” Padre Mateo laughed. “It is the fashion among the *gente fina*, that is to say the best people, to wear the hair long, and the beard in such fashion as you saw on Captain del Valle’s chin. But you, my friend, you look this morning as if you had risen from a sickness, with your bare face all white where the beard covered it, and brown as the leather of my sandal above. See how the neophytes stare at you. They doubtless think you are some

new species of two colors, such as they have not seen before."

"You can't blame 'em for starin', I must look like a skinned eel in this outfit."

Padre Mateo put out his hand, halting the stranger in his hasty stride, while he fell back a step to look him over with humorously critical eye.

"The trousers are a trifle close-fitting," said he, "and the jacket is somewhat too short, both of body and sleeves. But the hat is excellent, the sash is faultless, and the boots are a marvel of elegance. Taken as a whole, for a wardrobe assembled out of the odds and ends about the place, it is quite remarkable."

"Yes, I'll bet I'd scare a blind horse," Miller grumbled, keenly ashamed of his strange garb, anxious to get along to the river dam, toward which they were headed, and out of sight of the Indians busy irrigating the almost ripe corn.

"You are a man transformed today," said Padre Mateo, proceeding slowly, in no hurry whatever to be on his way. "You would have been better for a beard, brought to an arrowhead point, and for some of your golden ringlets, at least long enough to strike you mid-neck. Such a hat as you have with its high peak and broad brim, makes your clean face look like a pea."

"It's the fashion in my country to wear the face smooth, Padero."

"Padre, padre," the priest corrected him, patiently, evidently not for the first time. "Stop where

you are, Juan Molinero, and stand until you have it right. Now, say it after me, slowly: Padre Mateo; Padre Mateo."

Padre Mateo beat out the simple syllables with his finger as if he directed a tune; John Miller, henceforward to be Juan Molinero in California, stood by with long lean legs spraddled, repeating the two words until he had both sound and inflection as smooth on his tongue as oil.

"Now, that will do very well," Padre Mateo commended him. "Your tongue is not stubborn, you will acquire the speech readily. It is necessary, it is very necessary, that you begin at once. You are a man of some learning, I think, Juan; you have been in school?"

"Back in Virginia, padre, I had some schooling. I could have gone to college if I'd stayed there, and made something out of myself, maybe a lawyer, like every second man in Virginia. But I went venturin' off to Kentucky with a band of boys like myself, and the woods swallowed me. A man soon loses all he ever got out of books when he's amongst wild Indians and wild animals in the woods, Padre Mateo."

"That is so, Juan; even here that is so. The refinements leave a man, unless he spends the night with his books like Padre Ignacio. There is one whom no wilderness can erase, no solitude obscure. And what age have you now, Juan?"

"Thirty-three."

"That is a good age, that is a man's age, it was

the age of Our Señor. You will grow as big as an oak here in California—if you keep within the bounds of the mission, and out of Captain del Valle's hands."

"I thought that little toad of a soldier had his eye on me last night. What have I done? What's wrong?"

"You have come to California, Juan Molinero," Padre Mateo gravely replied. "That is enough. The king of Spain always has been jealous of California; he is keeping it for Spaniards, alone. There is a law that closes this land to all other men, and the penalty on the head of a foreigner who enters here is death."

"The devil you say!" John Miller stopped, staring in amazement at hearing such a barbarous edict. "What's the reason you don't hand me over, then? If that's the law, how does it come that I'm safe in one place and not in another?"

"There is one law for the civil authorities, another for the missions," the priest returned. "You have heard of ecclesiastical law?"

"Yes, I've heard of it."

"And of sanctuary, Juan Molinero?"

"Sanctuary, yes. But that was a long time ago; they don't have laws that a man's safe from when he dodges into a church in these days."

"That is still the law here, Juan Molinero. You are under ecclesiastical protection; you have found sanctuary here with us at this mission. But if you put foot in the king's road before our door—then,

there is Captain del Valle and the king's edict. It is very simple."

"That's a strange fix for a man to be in," said Miller. He walked on with head bent, plainly downcast and troubled by his peculiar peril. "And I've got to stay here, right here on this farm, till ages know when? is that it?"

"If you leave your sanctuary, it is very plain that Captain del Valle will carry you before the governor, who is a stern man, a man without mercy. He will apply the law without a doubt, my poor Juan Molinero; he will stand you against the first wall and shoot you through the heart."

"That's kind of a snap judgment to take on a stranger," Juan Molinero mused as he curbed his long stride to conform to the priest's leisurely gait. He appeared more interested in the peculiar phase of the situation than concerned over his own peril, turning the matter in his mind, viewing it for its unusual aspects as a student of jurisprudence might have done.

"It seems an inhospitable decree, indeed," the priest admitted, "but you can see that it is necessary to protect a land so isolated as California from the feet of adventurous men, such as Englishmen, who grasp and claim in their wicked greed all lands that their ships touch. The decree was designed for the protection of the missions, in the first place. The king wanted the great work of redeeming these gentiles to go forward without molestation or

curious onlooking from strangers. It was, it is, the work of holy church alone. ”

“ But it’s holy church, as you call it, that’s taken me under its wing. How’s that? ”

“ That is another matter, Juan Molinero, ” Padre Mateo said, haughty and distant, as if he had withdrawn into the secret places where holy church kept its reasons for its commissions and omissions hidden away from the eyes of men. “ But this I will have you know: Padre Ignacio gave you sanctuary before he heard your name. ”

“ My name? ” said Juan Molinero, his wonder widening into amazement. “ My name don’t carry any weight away out here in California. What’s my name got to do with any act of friendship any man does me here? ”

“ Padre Ignacio believes you were directed here by the hand of God, Juan; let your deeds prove you worthy his belief. The moment he heard your name pronounced he declared that providence had sent you. We have wanted a miller sorely here at San Fernando, and there were no more in the prisons of Mexico. ”

“ But I’m a miller in name, only, Padre Mateo. As I have told you, I was a planter in Virginia, and later in Kentucky, growing tobacco. That, and hunting game in the woods, and defending my life against wild Indians, is all I know. ”

“ It does not matter, Juan, ” Padre Mateo declared, easy and confident in his way as a man who saw the certainty of a thing desired; “ you shall

do it, you shall build his water-mill. His faith in you, his great hope, will be your inspiration. Yonder is the dam, and there is the sluice that is at once for the mill-wheel and the mother ditch of our irrigation system. The poor mill! it has been a sad failure, Juan; the grist is splashed and ruined by the wheel. It is a thing we have not been able to overcome."

"No wonder!" said Juan, smiling as he looked at the clumsy arrangement. "You've got your hopper right against your wheel—how on earth did you ever expect to keep the grist dry?"

"See?" said the Padre Mateo, jubilant, beaming in satisfaction. "Already you prove that Padre Ignacio was not mistaken. If you know nothing of mills, how do you know this? Ah, Juan Molinero, you are the man! He shall have the mill of his heart at last."

"It's plain you've got to move the buhrstones off a distance, and house them against the weather," said Juan, curiously studying the detail of the crude mill. "A long shaft is what you want, padre, connecting the wheel and the buhrs by a little trick called a bevel gear. It's as simple as a clock."

"Hear him!" Padre Mateo applauded, speaking as if to an audience apart. "Juan Molinero is the physician who puts his hand on the ailment of our poor crippled mill; Juan Molinero is the artificer who shall set it turning out a golden stream of flour. Padre Ignacio never had faith in a man to be deceived."

“There’s water enough,” said Juan, measuring with calculative eye the lake that filled the deep river-bed and flooded to the flanking hillocks; “you picked a good site for your dam.”

“It will be a blessing when you get the mill turning, Juan. As it is, all our flour and meal of the maize are ground by hand-turned stones, with a sweep that the Indians put shoulders to and tramp a dizzy circle hour after hour. They are discontented at such labor; too often the lash of good Geronimo cuts their backs when they lag. When the water is set working for us, it will be a pleasure to feed the mill and carry away the warm meal from its mouth. Your work here will be a blessing, Juan; you shall hear them sing when they carry in the corn.”

“So that Geronimo feller whips ‘em, heh? That’s what the long whip that I saw hanging by the door is for, what?”

“They are children, wilful and defiant children, very often, Juan. You will understand when you come to know them. Now, do you think it is possible that one wheel can be made to turn two sets of stones, and produce a greater amount of grist?”

“Yes, it looks to me like that wheel’s plenty big enough to turn two buhrs. But one will be plenty, I think, going all the time; it would turn out all you could use.”

“There is a great demand in the growing pueblo, from the ranchers who are settled around us, even from the other missions. We could sell our sur-

plus flour at good advantage, adding greatly to the revenues of the mission. You can see what a business we have here, Juan Molinero; from this elevation you can sweep our valley by a shift of the eye."

Juan Molinero had been shifting his eye, requiring no prompting to that purpose. His long experience in surroundings where lapse of care and vigilance for a moment might cost his life had trained him to acquaint himself with what lay about him, leaving no mysteries unexplored that the eye could pierce. He stood on the dam, a tall, a lean and hardy man, viewing what lay before him with wonder and admiration which grew as the details of the vast enterprise were gathered.

Padre Mateo, a little distance away, and lower by some feet in the station that he occupied, having spared himself the trouble to mount the dam to survey a scene sufficiently well known, looked up at Juan Molinero with eyes made narrow, watching for the effect their great possessions would show upon this man.

Not so clumsy, nor of such stolid strength as he appeared in his dress of hairy skins, was this Juan today, thought Padre Mateo. An admirable man, of balance like a fine rifle, thought this padre, who knew the use of a gun very well, indeed, although arms were prohibited men of his holy calling by the express decree of the king; a man of vast endurance, plain in the length of his muscular limbs, the breadth of his shoulders. Not the burly, deep-

ched, slow crushing strength of Borromeo, the blacksmith. This man was thin of shoulders and chest compared to Borromeo. His was strength in its refinement, strength that had the keenness of a quick mind to direct it, a leaping, bounding, swift strength that would strike and spring like a cougar away from a retaliating blow.

Strange thoughts for a priest, perhaps; unusual conclusions to register in his active mind upon his weighing of this stranger from a far-off, barbarous land. But it is not unlikely that Padre Mateo was pretty much of a business man, and a man who knew the world and the creatures that move in its ways, as many of the mission fathers were. There were other matters, also, besides spiritual, to occupy the thoughts of the mission padres in those changing days.

Juan Molinero stood looking abroad upon the mission and the mission lands, its enclosure of long, grey adobe walls, raised in prodigious labor by the hands of savage man, directed thus into the arts of peace and prosperity by the patience, the rigor, the force if necessary, of these indomitable men. The site of the dam impounding the waters of the little river was a mile or more northward of the mission buildings, close against the hills; the rise to it was considerable, affording a clear survey to one who stood upon it overlooking the mission property in the Valley of the Oaks. How marvelous, thought Juan Molinero, this work that had been accomplished here.

The great mission building, which fronted upon the king's road, *El Camino Real* of California history and romance, lay farthest away from the point where Juan Molinero, in his Spanish garb and name, stood looking down upon the scene. This building of adobe, or sun-dried bricks, was more than two hundred feet in length, rising two lofty stories, with a breadth of fifty feet. Its walls at the foundations were eight feet thick, the arches of its few and small windows seemed embrasures in a fortress. The grey adobe walls were coated with white stucco, harmonious contrast against the surrounding greenery of vineyards and fields. The roof was of tiles, soft in their dull red, a mellow dash of color to delight the appreciative eye.

A long arcade, perhaps five hundred feet in length, ran from the northeast corner of the main building to connect with the church which stood on the bank of the little river. This passage was open to the west, where the familiar arches of monastic architecture looped in graceful diversion with the general severity and simplicity of the design. Along the east side of this long passage between mission house and church, several small buildings stood. These were of uniform size and design, and were the homes of the mission's various attachés, such as the mayordomo, the artisans who raised new buildings and kept all in repair, as well as the officers and soldiers stationed there to guard against a possible outbreak of the neophytes and assist in enforcing the discipline necessary to their control.

All these buildings were plastered with stucco that gleamed marble white in the sun, all roofed with the uniform red, soft-tinted tiles. It was a finished enterprise, to the last detail of convenience for that day, and fashioned and molded in the marvelous faith and perseverance of its builders out of the very earth on which it stood. Even a fountain was tossing a sparkling jet high among the greenery in the quadrangle that cornered between mission building and the padres' walk under the shady arcade.

The village where the neophytes lived was near the church, and close beside it the burying ground where they found rest when their struggles with civilization were at end. Many white crosses in this little field witnessed that death was a heavy toll-taker even in that scene of serenity and peace.

These Indian cabins were built of sun-dried bricks, roofed with straw thatch, arranged in neat order, mainly, with a few scattering ones as if of dissenters spreading about the edges. Poor as they appeared by contrast with the white magnificence of the mission buildings, they were luxurious to a people who had roamed almost unsheltered for centuries. It is doubtful whether the earth contained human beings of meaner accomplishments and intelligence than the California Indians were when the Spanish padres came. The never-ending marvel of it is that the priests accomplished so much with them in so short a flight of time.

But to all of this, certainly, John Miller, or Juan

Molinero as he must be called henceforward, was a stranger. He was so filled with admiration for the vast work that spread before him, revealed so unexpectedly in a land he had thought to find almost untouched by civilization, that the best he could do was stand there on the dam and gaze, and draw his breath in deep gusts of wonderment.

The fields were lively with bright colors where the Indians were at work, some with hoes among cabbage and turnips and potatoes, some with spades mending the embankments of ditches where the life-giving water sparkled as it ran. Some were threshing grain by throwing it under the feet of numerous cattle yoked up four abreast and driven at a trot around a circular corral. Near them others were rendering tallow, so Padre Mateo said, in vats built of bricks and lined with plaster. In a vineyard enclosed by a high adobe wall, women and children were heaping ox-drawn carts with grapes.

“There is none of the corruption of idleness here,” Padre Mateo said, pride and satisfaction in his voice.

“It’s a beautiful place! There’s room for a thousand farms in this valley—ten thousand, I expect,” Juan Molinero replied.

“Not at this time,” Padre Mateo denied. “We want no more encroachment on the mission lands. They are hemming us already, they are beginning to grumble that the mission cattle and sheep are eating up the grass. No, we do not want any more farms or towns, Juan. That is a mistake of the

government, which pays adventurous men a bonus and gives every one of them a gun and a leather shield to stop the Indian's arrows, inciting them to come to California and make settlements. It is a sad mistake."

"Of course, I don't know anything about the situation," Juan Molinero said, speaking slowly, as if his astonishing discovery had left him few words.

Padre Mateo clambered up the steep embankment, his brown gown lifted to disencumber his feet, discovering bare legs and sandals beneath. He stood beside the tall wayfarer, and stretched his hand out over the valley.

"It is a fair scene," he said, his pride in it well justified; "I doubt if the earth can show a fairer. But there are men who would overturn it all, Juan, snatch these lands that we have improved from rough wild places from us, turn all our poor Indians away to shift for themselves, and bring a deluge of sorrow where there is now contentment and prosperity."

"You don't tell me?" Juan exclaimed, quickly interested in this revelation. "What is it? Politics?"

"You are quick, Juan Molinero," Padre Mateo approved, but with grave face, slow-nodding head; "you are a man who can see through a wall. Yes, it is a matter of politics. They are beginning to talk secularization of the mission properties in California, of turning them over to the state, so the work of our hands may become the profit of design-

ing scoundrels who do not work, except in the crooked ways of evil.”

“It’s the same way everywhere, I guess, padre. There are some people that can’t stand the sight of other folks’ prosperity.”

“Well, they have a long way to go before they turn us out, your mill will see a great deal of wheat go into its hopper before that day. Let us go now; you will want tools and material to begin your work. Besides, Juan, there is a sight to be seen this morning. This is the day our wine press begins its happy service—they are gathering the grapes for it now.”

CHAPTER V

THE WINE PRESS

AN ox-drawn cart was coming into the courtyard behind the imposing administration building as Juan and Padre Mateo approached. This was a solid-wheeled cart, clumsy, heavy, at which the span of oxen strained with tongues thrust out in the agony of their labor, bound horn and horn as they were by the primitive, cruel Spanish yoke that had not been improved in the slightest particular in two thousand years. Baskets of purple grapes, big as wild plums, they appeared to Juan Molinero, were piled high in the cart, behind which there walked a young Indian, a tall and graceful youth, who carried his head so high that he seemed unconscious of his feet among the broken tile, brick and sunken cobblestones with which the court was paved.

Juan Molinero's attention was fixed on the Indian following this juicy load, a figure that expressed so much of suppressed defiance and revolt in its erect carriage, its detached bearing from the enforced task, however pleasant it might seem. The young man's face was gaunt and severe, sealed and impressed with the stamp of silent repression. It

was the first Indian countenance marked with the quickness of intellectual nobility that Juan had met among the hundreds which he had viewed that morning.

The driver of the oxen, another Indian little older than the one who came behind, brought the load of grapes to a stand near a broad arched door in the main building, unsparing of his sharpened goad. This instrument was a peeled sapling, as thick at the butt as a man's wrist, six or seven feet long. An iron spike was inset in its smaller end, and wound about with a rawhide thong. Three-quarters of a century later, the drovers of the plains which lay in the bounds of this new Louisiana territory which the stranger at San Fernando mission had crossed, used the same kind of goad to prod up the cattle which had fallen from fatigue and thirst to the car floor, as the slow train held onward to a distant market.

"Come this way, Juan; you shall see our noble wine press," Padre Mateo beckoned, one foot within the door, the arch of which was six feet thick above his head.

"What a way to yoke oxen!" said Juan in high contempt of the crude and barbarous method that made the creatures' labor a long-drawn agony. He lingered in the court, pity in his face for the suffering brutes, on whose withers streams of blood were black-streaked in the dust, where the unsparing driver had urged and directed them as he had been taught.

“Do you know a better way?” Padre Mateo inquired, with just a little slighting of contempt, perhaps, in his own tone. It was as if the old rose up in bridling hauteur to defend the unnumbered cruelties which ignorance had established and usage had fastened, blighting curses on man and beast, through the slow centuries in the land that was his own.

“A better way!” Juan derided. “Why, you couldn’t think of a worse way. Who ever would imagine oxen yoked by the horns, the yoke tied to the horns with ropes? They could pull about as much with their tails!”

“And there is another way, then, Juan Molinero?” Padre Mateo’s resentment at this criticism of time-established usage was falling; he was a shrewd man, a servant of an institution that had grown great on its ability to see, its readiness to employ, the cunning and the wisdom of shrewd men.

“The yoke ought to set back on the shoulders, with a bow under the necks,” Juan replied. “Haven’t you ever seen a yoke like that? Why, they’re used in every Christian country under the sun, have been since Adam made the first one, I guess.”

“That is another thing you shall show us, then, if there is any advantage in it, Juan.”

“Advantage? Why, I tell you, Padre Mateo, one span of oxen can draw as much as three span hitched this way. No wonder your fields look so

scratched and poorly-plowed! You can't expect beasts to more than pull the hat off of your head hitched up by the horns that way."

"Then you shall show us the better way, Juan Molinero. Truly, God directed you to teach us many things. I am ashamed to show you the wine press now, that was the pride of our hearts yesterday. Perhaps you will say we are savages when you see it. But come."

Padre Ignacio himself was there, and the mayordomo, Don Geronimo, just inside the broad arched door. A broad stairway of thin bricks—the padres followed the Spanish custom, making their bricks thin and broad—led down to the wine press, which stood several feet below the ground level. At the press itself this stairway narrowed to half its upper breadth to continue into the cellar, now to become the padres' wine vault, which underlay the eastern end of the administration building.

The wine press would have passed undiscovered by Juan Molinero if he had been left to find it for himself. It was nothing more than a big bowl, made of bricks, plastered with cement, built into a corner of the passage, or area-way, into which the arched door opened. It was about as high as a man's head, six or seven feet square, tapering toward the bottom. A ledge was fashioned around the interior walls to hold a framework, or strainer, laced with strips of rawhide, a space of a foot or so between it and the bottom of the press to admit the free passage of the compressed juice, the pulp re-

maining on the sieve, which could be lifted out as required.

At the base of the wine press, on the side facing the door, just at the bottom of the steps, a deep basin, something like a modern bathtub, stood filled with water for washing the feet of those who were to have the joyous honor of trampling the grapes on the springy rawhide sieve. These favored ones were waiting, feet bare, garments above the knees, six youths and six maidens, but not in any mood of great hilarity, or even subdued pleasure, that Juan could see. It was work to them, and strange work, which they approached with timid reluctance in spite of Padre Ignacio's assurance and the not so kind glances of Don Geronimo.

A line of young men, baskets of grapes on their heads, marched in and emptied their loads into the wine press; Padre Ignacio gave the word, the girls with washed feet clambered nimbly up the sides and began trampling out the wine. At first they stepped shyly on the cool rich grapes, promising little for Padre Ignacio's hopes. Presently the juice began to bubble pleasantly between their toes, bringing little exclamations of wonder, little starting smiles of pleasure. Absorbed in the new aspects of this task, moved to nimbler prancing by the reward of gushing juice, which broke in sharp little jets now and then, spraying faces and bare arms, the girls began to chatter and laugh.

"It is the same as in the days of old," Padre

Mateo said. "Even these poor daughters of savages shout with joy as they tread out the wine."

Padre Ignacio knew there would be no scarcity of eager feet for his wine press now.

The chief ceremony, so Padre Mateo said, was to be the drawing off of the first juice from the press. Padre Ignacio himself was to do this; no other hand was worthy the distinction of that long-awaited day. At the very bottom of the wine press, in the gloom at the foot of the cellar stairs, a half cask stood under the spiggot, which was itself made of a small cedar log with the heart hollowed out, the end closed with a plug. Padre Ignacio now descended to drain off the first juice trampled out in a wine press in California.

Magdalena came from her kitchen, which opened through a narrow door into this cellar way, to see this ceremony; the young men who carried in the grapes stood with empty baskets; the girls in the wine press, their dark faces spattered with stains, leaned along the edge, looking down on Padre Ignacio's fringe of snow-white hair as he went, gown gathered between his knees, to remove the plug. Borromeo Cambon, the blacksmith, was in the door.

They gasped in pleasurable exclamation when the thick stream of dark juice poured into the deep tub. Padre Ignacio let it run until the tub was full; the juice was running strong when he replaced the plug.

"It is a fruitful year; the grape skins are stored with wine. We shall have plenty at last," he said.

“There are dry throats waiting for it,” said Borromeo, as he turned from the door to go back to his forge.

“Geronimo, there is a messenger from the harbor of San Pedro, asking to see Padre Ignacio,” Magdalena announced.

“What is this?” Father Ignacio asked, overhearing Magdalena as he came up the stair.

“He has letters for you, which he refused to put in my hand,” she said.

“Don Geronimo, have the kindness to conduct him to my office,” Padre Ignacio requested, hurrying away.

Padre Ignacio returned in a little while, letters in his hand, trouble furrowing his brow. He beckoned Padre Mateo; Juan Molinero saw them stand talking in the white sunlight of the court a little outside the door.

“Here is a business!” said Father Ignacio, gesticulating with the unfolded letters. “The ship has been in the harbor these two days.”

“So far ahead of the time we expected it? Does it bring any news from Spain?”

“Not that I know, Brother Mateo, but it brings a woman who begs sanctuary in the mission San Fernando!”

“A woman?” Padre Mateo’s eyes grew wide. “It is incredible! Is it one of these adventuring strumpets the viceroy has been solicited to send here to marry his off-cast soldiers?”

“No, not of that kind. It is the daughter of José

Sinova, he who had the grant to the south of us from the king for his services in the wars. José was on his way here, with all his goods, his daughter and his wife. Both of the parents died of the black vomit, which struck the ship and took many lives. Now this girl, left alone, appeals to me as one whom her father knew, to stand in a father's place, and the captain, shorn of his crew, asks men to sail his ship to Monterey."

"And she would come to San Fernando?" said Padre Mateo, full of astonishment. "Why doesn't she stay on the ship and return with it to Mexico?"

"Here is her letter," said Father Ignacio, helpless in the demand of this unprecedented business.

"So, there is nothing behind her," said Padre Mateo, having read the letter twice. "Her heart and her hope have been fixed on California; she longs to remain—perhaps there is some useful thing to which she can apply her hand—and there is the captain, who urges marriage and is not a man to be borne, and—here we have Magdalena, who could take her mother's place."

"What? You would counsel bringing her here? No, it is impossible!"

"Somebody is needed to teach the girls needlework," Padre Mateo argued. "Magdalena has no time to instruct them in any more of the domestic arts."

"Magdalena is a jewel of inestimable value, teaching them breadmaking and the dressing of meats for the table with the patience of an angel. What

we should do without Magdalena I do not know.”

“This may be another Magdalena, for all we know, Padre Ignacio. Her plea is piteous, it would be hard to turn her away.”

“Give me the letter again—let me consider.” Padre Ignacio, a man who could not refuse a plea, worthy or unworthy let the subject be, as Padre Mateo well knew, stood with head bent over the letter, feet wide apart in his spacious gown, a gathering of concentrated thought on his brow.

“Besides, it will be a difficult thing to bring her here,” he said, “with this brigand Alvitre in the bosque by the road. There must be considerable gold in her possession; José Sinova was a man of the first.”

“Del Valle could send half a dozen soldiers.”

“There is not a soldier left at San Fernando today; we would be at the mercy of Alvitre if he came riding up in a dust with his villains at his shoulder-blade.” There was a note of bitterness, of resentment for an affront, in Padre Ignacio’s voice that drew a glance from his coadjutor so sudden, so sharp, that it seemed to flash like a plowshare in the sun.

“Gone?” said Padre Mateo.

“On one pretext or another,” Padre Ignacio replied, spreading his hands to illustrate complete dispersion. “Del Valle has set out for Monterey to make report to the governor he says: Sergeant Olivera and certain others are thought to be in pursuit of Alvitre, but with how much honesty in their

design no man knows, and the remainder have been sent to the pueblo at the request of the comisionado there. And you know what Comisionado Felix is."

"A man with red eyes and a disease," said Padre Mateo, succinct in his designation as he was quick in his decision.

"So, what is the peril of a young and comely woman sitting in a cart on a chest of gold?" Padre Ignacio asked it with a grimness of word and feature that seemed to be definite conclusion of the comely young woman's case.

"There will not be much heart in the soldiers' hunt for Alvitre, unpaid as they are, as they have been those two years," Padre Mateo said, turning that phase of it speculatively. "Yet, there might be a way."

"The only way I see is to let her stay on the ship and go to Monterey," Padre Ignacio said.

Padre Mateo turned, hands at his back, to walk a little way apart, chin up, eyes drawn small, in the attitude of a man whose determination leaps all obstacles. He turned back again.

"Del Valle sent his men away out of pique because he could not have his way with the stranger," he said.

"There is no doubt, Brother Mateo."

"Well, let them go. There is a man at hand who is equal to a company of soldiers."

"Such a man at hand?" incredibly, in kindly depreciation of the extravagant declaration.

“Juan Molinero himself,” Padre Mateo said, beaming in the discovery of his thought.

“You have advanced well with him, to learn so much, Brother Mateo.”

“He has fought the savage Indians in the forests of Kentucky, where one Indian is equal to twenty of our poor simpletons. He is a man who has dared much and suffered much, even the menace of death bound to the fiery stake. In a few words he told me of his escape, crediting it to his peculiar providence, which may be, when all is reduced, even the same providence as our own.”

“But poor Juan would find Spanish soldiers far different from the naked savages of Kentucky, and let him be sufficient, even so, to the task in hand, he dare not quit the bounds of the mission lands. I suspect that Del Valle has men posted in waiting to seize him.”

“Give him two pistols,” said Padre Mateo, building his plan as if no breath had disturbed it, “and the beautiful long rifle that he carried when he came, and I would trust him to deliver both maiden and gold safely beneath this roof. And there is Cristóbal—see him how he stands with admiration in his eyes, looking up into Juan Molinero’s face. Ha! there is a friendship already beginning there—see how our tall Juan smiles.”

“See him, he gives his hand to the lad, and seems to make himself understood, although there are no words between them,” Padre Ignacio marveled. “Yet there is a way of understanding when man

meets man that needs no words; I have marked that many times. Poor Cristóbal! I would have spared him today, but Geronimo declares he must work, in spite of the stripes on his back that made his shirt bloody. Discipline will fall without a firm hand to uphold it, our brave Geronimo declares."

"Cruelty is another thing," said Padre Mateo, "Ah! here is Geronimo! Unlucky chance!"

Don Geronimo came from the kitchen, stooping to pass the low connecting door. He stood a moment at sight of the Indian, Cristóbal, idling at his task, to step forward with admirable grace and lightness of foot, a sharp word on his tongue, the lash of his ready whip between his fingers, the thong of it about his wrist.

Cristóbal, his back ribbed and cut from the flogging of last night, did not leap away to follow the cart to the vineyard as Don Geronimo expected him to do at the first word. He fell back a step at Don Geronimo's unexpected appearance, where he stood with head up, his face set and immobile, as if he scorned to save himself the lash at the expense of his dignity in the eyes of his new friend. Don Geronimo's eyes twitched at the corners, a smile that seemed the snarl of anticipation moved his beard, baring his small white teeth. So he stood, slowly drawing the long lash of his whip between finger and thumb of his left hand, his right grasping the butt, like a fencer poising to bend his blade before throwing himself on guard.

Juan Molinero made a corner of the little triangle

formed by the three figures in this quickly assembled scene. He stood about equidistant from Don Geronimo and the Indian, Don Geronimo on his left hand. Don Geronimo seemed to be measuring the length of his whip across his chest between his outstretched arms, as a tailor measures cloth, making his dramatic pause of preparation long in his own enjoyment of it, as well as for the effect of the terror of suspense in the hearts of his assembled vassals who waited the fall of the first whistling blow. The lash was now at tip between his finger and thumb, the pliant black whip at full stretch in his outstretched arms. Don Geronimo lifted himself to tiptoe to whirl the whip, dexterous from long practice in its use.

Juan Molinero stepped in front of the mayordomo as he balanced for the blow, the gleam of his teeth widening in his beard.

"No!" said Juan Molinero, his hand lifted in stern prohibition, his body a barrier before the intended object of this inexorable arm. Don Geronimo's face grew white as the plastered wall; he let himself slowly down to his heels, the thongs of his lead-weighted whip-butt slipped from his slender wrist. Padre Ignacio came with quick stride between them, pushing them apart with outspread arms.

"He does not understand, Don Geronimo," he said. "He shall be taught that he must not interfere in your discipline."

"Very well," said Don Geronimo, his voice un-

shaken, although his hand trembled in his thwarted passion as he looped the long whip in his hand. "Let it be made very plain."

"Absolve poor Cristóbal his fault this morning, if he has been at fault, indeed, Don Geronimo. I will relieve you of him for a day or two; there is a work I have for him to do."

"Take him, then, Padre Ignacio," Don Geronimo yielded. He turned with what might have passed well for indifference in other eyes, and stepped lightly out to the court, where his saddled horse stood waiting in the sun.

"It is an unfortunate beginning," said Padre Ignacio, sadly; "there is murder in Don Geronimo's heart."

CHAPTER VI

PADRE AND FRAY

PADRE MATEO rode his mule in a fashion that seemed to mark him for a belligerent man. He held his legs as stiff as posts in the stirrups, flaring them outward from the animal's sides, braced as if he sat ready to ride headlong in a charge at the first alarm, his brown gown pulled high from his shanks, which were marred by scratches from cactus and brier thorn, new and old.

All day he had ridden that wide-spread way, jaunty in spirit and ready in word, good companion for the road as ever sat in saddle at a comrade's elbow. There was no fatigue in him, hardened by his twenty years in California, where he had tramped in sandals more than once the long trail between San Diego and Monterey. But varied as his experiences had been in that land, this expedition which centered around a lady was something so strange and extraordinary in the way of duty that he found himself checking his outflying thoughts now and then to ask himself if fancy had not tricked him, and imagination contrived it all.

Padre Mateo was not displeased with his part in that outgoing expedition to the harbor of San Pedro, for even a monk may have his desire for

adventure as naturally and lawfully as other men. There is no doubt that he smiled quite frequently in the shadow of his broad hat as he rode at his companion's side.

This other was a man garbed in all essentials like Pedro Mateo himself, in the brown gown of the Franciscan brotherhood, the flat-crowned black hat with broad brim, the severe cord of hemp about his waist. Only this one wore long stockings with his sandals, as the upraised gown revealed. A cloak carelessly thrown over the horn of his saddle fell down the mule's withers almost to the rider's toes.

A mule-drawn cart, its wheels almost the height of a man, came behind the two monkly travelers. It was covered with a weathered canvas, which rested not on bows, but upright pieces supporting horizontal braces, making the top square instead of round, after the fashion since the first covered cart rumbled down the long white slopes of Spain. The driver was an Indian of middle age, falling about in the second generation of the padres' era in California. In front of them, scouting the way, Cristóbal rode, mounted on a young horse thin-legged and fleet, his lariat coiled at his saddle-horn, his bow and arrows, the only weapons the neophytes were permitted, ready to his hand.

It was a winding way across a broad valley that the travelers followed, where the dark green of liveoak and the brighter leaf of sycamore stood high above the grey tone of the general landscape. Shrubs grew so near the broken road through the

thickets in places that passing cart-hubs had marked them with black grease; again all growth but grass, which was dry now, and sere, fell away from open meadows where cattle grazed on the withered provender. Since leaving the pass through the hills, which they had crossed from San Fernando into this valley, they had not passed any habitation of civilized man, their road lying several miles westward of the Pueblo de Los Angeles. It was evening; the sun was in the tree-tops.

“Well, my good friend, how does the friar’s gown feel to you by this time?” Padre Mateo inquired. He tilted his head back to look up into his comrade’s face, his mule being two hands lower than the extraordinarily large animal which bore his friend.

“Not much of an outfit for hot weather, especially when a man’s got these confounded tight Spanish breeches on under it,” Juan Molinero replied. “I tell you, Padre Mateo, if we meet any trouble on the road I think I’ll skin out of this long brown sack. I like to have my legs free in a fight.”

“No, no, Juan; no, no!” Padre Mateo said, shaking his head solemnly, greatly disturbed by the proposal. “Do as I have cautioned you if we meet soldiers, either on the road or at the Rancho Dominguez, where we shall arrive presently and spend the night. Bend your head a little, as a man in his thoughts, Juan, and pass them by without a word. If it becomes necessary to make explanations of your silence, I will do the talking, my boy. You

are a brother of the order, simply *fray*, not *padre*, as many Franciscans are; you come from a foreign land, you have no Spanish. I will guarantee that nobody who saw you yesterday, not even sharp old Sergeant Olivera himself, would recognize you to-day. This gown, your lean, ascetic face, your long jaw like the jaw of a man who has fasted —”

“Fasted I have, Padre Mateo. Did I tell you that for six days in the desert northeast of your mountains I had no meat, and only such water as I could suck out of that prickly plant with leaves like beavers’ tails?”

“You did not tell me, Juan. But you have earned the right to wear the gown of a monk, at least in the cause of the distressed. But remember—silence if we meet soldiers. It will only complicate your situation in this country if you fight them, and unluckily kill one of them, Juan.”

“Yes, that would be an unlucky go for me,” Juan said, as grave as if the vows of the Franciscans bound him, in truth. “I’d take to the woods and run my chances rather than lift my hand against a soldier, or any officer of the law, in this or any other land.”

Padre Mateo nodded, considering it silently a little way.

“Yes; just so,” he said. “But we must be wise, as well as cautious, and then you shall have nothing to avoid when you meet the soldiers, if such a bad chance must come to us. I never could put myself on the same footing with Padre Ignacio

again if you should not return to San Fernando with me; it was harder than converting an Indian medicine man to get his consent to this masquerade. But without it you could not have ventured on the road with me. It would have been foolish to leave the mission in your own skin."

"Well, if I look as foolish as I feel, the soldiers will see through me like a spyglass."

"No soldier in the world but would take you for a friar," Padre Mateo declared.

"I'd feel suspicious if I was to meet that raw-boned sergeant, Oliver, is it you call him?"

"Not even Olivera would know you," Padre Mateo insisted, his confidence profound. "Last night you were hairy as a bear; today you are clean as a fish out of the sea. Since I shaped up your hair according to the contour of your head, as a true friar's hair should be, I would see you walk with confidence within a foot of Sergeant Olivera's nose."

"Well, I hope we don't meet him; he's a feller with a mighty shrewd eye."

Day seemed to plunge its torch into the sea, the light gave way so quickly to dusk when the sun disappeared behind the low, grass-covered hills. They rode on through the twilight, Cristóbal growing dim before them. The incense of burning cedar carried faintly to them on the little wind that came rustling like a doe through the chaparral.

"I smell Fabio Dominguez' hearth-fire," Padre Mateo said. "There is the comfort of home-

coming in it, a sweet assurance that is as placid as an evening bell. ”

“ Where on earth did you learn English, Padre Mateo? ” Juan inquired, his wonder widening every time the priest spoke. “ You know it a ‘tarnal sight better than I do, or ever will. ”

“ I learned it in Quebec, Canada, my little son, where I was carried by my parents when a little lad. Although French is more common there, the vigor of your roaring English always made my heart jump to hear. But I am neither English nor French, but a Spaniard of the bone. My father was a sea trader, who came to anchor in Quebec for its business advantages. And so it comes. ”

“ I beg you to pardon my curiosity; I didn’t mean to pry into your life. ”

“ It is a book for any man to read, ” Padre Mateo said, so simply ingenuous that no man of honor could have doubted his smallest word.

“ You remember it remarkably for all the years you’ve been where no man’s got an English word in his mouth. That’s all I can say for you. ”

“ There are many Franciscan brothers who speak English; from time to time one of them has come my way these twenty years past. The last was a friar who made a survey extending our irrigating system; he remained at San Fernando almost two years. I kept his tongue going long hours. A good plan is to talk to your own ear when you are alone, but you will not have need of that in the practice of Spanish, a matter which you must begin at once.

That is Padre Ignacio's wish; he desires to be able to speak with you mouth to mouth."

"I guess I can pick it up, I'm handy with Indian talk."

"Spanish is not to be picked up like a savage jargon of the woods," Padre Mateo corrected him, almost severely, for he was touched in the spot where a Spaniard's skin is tenderest. "You shall learn it from the *abecedario*, as you would say the spelling-book, so you may hold speech with gentlemen without shame to yourself or your teachers. When we return, Juan Molinero, prepare yourself for this greatest pleasure that can come in the life of any man."

"I'll be proud to learn it, if I can twist my tongue around them little sliding-off sounds."

"You have a softness in your speech, as if southern winds had mellowed the harshness of your English throat. It is a strange thing, Juan, that the sweet-singing birds come from the lands of the south, where the speech of man is gentle and musical on the ear. Crows, with their harsh impertinence, are most commonly found in climes where the speech of man is also rough like a cough coming out of the breast. It is a thing to ponder. But as I have said, I like a roaring language which a man must open the mouth to let out of him, like rocks thrown from a volcano. So; we are approaching Pablo Dominguez' door."

"How far is it to the harbor?"

"Ten miles or so—too far to continue on tonight,

if that is your thought, Juan. In the morning we will take the road early, returning here for the night. The day after, with fortune that is due the valiant, we shall nestle the young bird safely in the walls of San Fernando."

The Dominguez house stood back some distance from the road, on a pleasant smooth hill where pine trees grew, making a fair setting for the low brown house. A high adobe wall enclosed the grounds to fend off the cattle which roamed hill and plain in thousands. At the double gate of solid planks, which Cristóbal had opened, Padre Mateo halted, slewed in his saddle and looked hard at Juan Molinero a little while without a word.

"Juan," he said at last, his voice serious and low, "I am afraid I have allowed a romantic, adventurous desire to bring you into peril. I fear the soldiers have been sent from the mission in the design of luring you out; it came to me only as we turned in to come to the gate. Captain del Valle is a man with an ambitious heart, jealous of his authority. Turn about then, Juan, and go back to the mission. The night will shelter you."

Juan Molinero laughed, and rode through the gate.

"But it must be considered," Padre Mateo insisted, pushing after him, drumming his mule's sides with his heels. "I am too quick to jump into something while the heat is on me; that has been a lifelong fault. Now I come on this expedition when prudence and wisdom should have been

heeded, bringing you to defend us against the brigands of the bosque. Captain del Valle has opened his hand, and the bird has stepped into it, woe is mine!"

"I was as keen as a hound on a frosty morning to go, Padre Mateo. Say no more."

"Something cold has come into my heart; I am afraid," Padre Mateo said.

They rode on to the dooryard, where Dominguez met them, offering the hospitality of his house. Dominguez, in the prime of his vigor, was a dark stocky man, full of words as a sack is full of wheat, for company did not come frequently to his door. Dominguez' house was not on the mission trail leading from San Diego to the north. On this harbor road there was little travel by persons of consequence, except when a ship came to San Pedro bay as now, which was perhaps not more than once a month. At other times the road was used by vaqueros riding to and from the pueblo, fishermen who came from the sea to trade their catch in the pueblo and the missions, and now and then a rancher who rode in to exchange news with his neighbor.

Dominguez held a grant from the king, as all the men of consequence who settled in California in those days were similarly favored. His house was a notable one, on account of the cedar beams which ribbed its ceilings having been brought from Mexico by ship. A woman servant was lighting many candles in the room where the Dominguez table was spread for the evening meal.

The rancher was astonished at sight of the tall friar, disappointed, too, that he had no understanding of Spanish, a fault that made him little better than a dumb man at the table so far as Dominguez' communication with him applied. Still there was a pleasure in having the stranger from a far country—Padre Mateo said he was an Englishman—bend his high head to enter the door of that house. Dominguez said so in as many words, and Mrs. Dominguez affirmed it with a smile that was full of broad white teeth. There was a young Dominguez of twenty or thereabout, and a daughter a year or two younger. These all sat at the long table with the two travelers, the young ones silent with that unembarrassed deference which graces the youth of well-bred Spanish and Mexican families.

Dominguez would have the whole story of their going and their object, nothing of which was kept from him but the identity of the masquerading friar. It was the best piece of news that had come in at the rancher's door in many a day; even young Dominguez listened with a sharpness that seemed to lift him out of his immature character, a flush deepening on his brown cheeks when his father turned to him in gaiety and said:

“Here is a wife coming for you at last, Guillermo!”

At which the young lady bent her head to hide a smile, and the mischievous banter of her bright brown eyes.

“You shall have Guillermo to go with you, Padre

Mateo, if you desire," Dominguez offered. "It is a bad business to travel these roads where every bush hides a thief, with a young lady and her treasure, and only an Indian boy with bow and arrows to stand in defense. It has been shown too often that these bandits have little respect for a priest's gown on the road in these days of affliction."

"It is too true," Padre Mateo agreed, "But I think we shall pass without harm. If we feel the need of another arm as we return, then we shall enlist Guillermo, as you suggest."

"The soldiers passed here this afternoon, I think there is little danger," Mrs. Dominguez said, not a willing party to her husband's fine plan of placing the young lady from Mexico under obligation for her son's defense. From the soft looks with which she caressed him it was certain the mother would meet at jealous point any attempt to beguile him from her house for a year or two yet, at least.

"The soldiers could have swept this band of robbers out of the country long ago if they had so much breath for pursuit of them as they have for drinking a man's wine," Dominguez criticized, not troubling to soften his contempt and resentment. "In the past month, Padre Mateo, this Sebastian Alvitre has stolen at least twenty of my sheep, which he devours without taking the trouble to go very far away from the roadside. If the soldiers wanted him badly they could track him almost any night by the smell of tallow dripping in the fire."

"You will have heard that he robbed two priests

from San Juan Capistrano not a week ago?" Padre Mateo inquired.

"May the spoil of it wither his arm!" Dominguez cursed the outlaw, his own hand lifted in solemn denunciation.

"We speak of the bandit, Sebastian Alvitre," Padre Mateo explained, turning to his companion, who attended to his meal in the thoughtful silence of a man who might have much on his heart.

"What sort of man is he?" Juan inquired, lifting his blue eyes from his plate.

"He asks what sort of man this Alvitre is, and I cannot answer him," Padre Mateo said, looking up the table where his host filled the substantial oak armchair in complacent dignity.

"For that matter, neither can I," Dominguez returned. "I have been told that he is of a vile countenance, black as a scorched loaf, but I never have seen him. Let us hope that our meeting with him, one and all of us, is far away."

"And the soldiers went this way today?" Padre Mateo inquired. "Can you tell me, doña, whether they went toward the harbor?"

"They went in that direction," Mrs. Dominguez replied, nodding her sleek black head until the long ear-pendants swung like pendulums against her neck.

"The soldiers are at the harbor," Padre Mateo said, addressing Juan, trouble clouding his hearty face. "Now, Juan when supper is over you will take the road on a fresh mule that I will procure

for you, and dawn will see you safely in San Fernando. It will be a load removed from my conscience and my heart. ”

Juan was vexed by Padre Mateo's insistence that he make himself safe at the expense of his loyalty to a friend and duty to the expedition that he felt to be as much his own personal affair as that of any other man concerned. A flood of color, as of the rush of a hot retort, came into his face, deepening the fiery coating sun and wind had given the newly shaved portion of it that day. He turned his head slowly and fixed his steady eyes on Padre Mateo's own.

“ We settled that business, once and for all, out there at the gate, ” he said. “ When the time comes for me to turn my back to soldiers, or anybody else, I don't want to be told; I just want to sneak off with my shoulders up to my ears, like a man that's whipped his wife. I'd feel that way. Now, Padre Mateo, say no more. ”

Padre Mateo held his eyes up under the severe rebuke from his companion of the road, although his face was ruddier for the slow, pointed words than the good food and unstinted wine of Rancher Dominguez' table warranted. A moment of silence, eye fixed on eye, as each man probed deep into the well of the other's honesty and courage. Padre Mateo laughed, and slapped his friend's brown gown until the dust of the road rose under his hearty hand.

It was a strange business between monks, Domin-

guez thought, watching the by-play with round eyes. He never before had seen any expression of the small sympathies of life common to other men between these severe brown-cassocked friars who went marching up and down the long white roads with rawhide sandals on their undaunted feet.

“Who sounds on the door?” Dominguez asked, starting at the rude note that broke the placidity of his hour.

“Shall I inquire, father?” the young man asked, pushing back to rise.

“Again!” said Dominguez, resentful of this rude hand that beat so loudly on his stout oak door. “No; I will go; permit me.”

The dining-hall lay at one side of the broad entrance-way, into which it opened through a wide-spanned arch. Dominguez stood for a moment under this arch, grasping the velvet curtain, bending a little, straining in doubtful pose, as if he questioned the honesty of a man who came at such an hour. In a moment his hand was heard on the chain of the door.

The traveler inquired the direction and the distance to the Pueblo de Los Angeles; Dominguez replying politely as he was asked.

“Can I buy refreshment here?” the traveler inquired.

“No,” said Dominguez, his caution struck down by the challenge to his hospitality. “Enter; this is not a tavern.”

The stranger was brief with his thanks; he stood

waiting while Dominguez fastened the chain. Dominguez parted the curtains, the stranger stepped into the light. Juan Molinero and Padre Mateo were seated at the side of the table, their faces toward the arched door, giving them a close view of the stranger as he set foot within the room.

The traveler was a man of medium stature, heavy in the shoulders with ungraceful strength, like a laborer; a swart man, with rough-modeled features, his face overgrown with the stubble of a thick black beard. His nose, very short and small, had an up-turned end, as if nature had pushed him aside with impatient thumb after finding him unsatisfactory when finished. He was a pig-eyed, peon type of man, his black mustaches small and bristling, a leering sneer in his countenance as of one who resented his position in human affairs while lacking either the merit to justify advancement at other hands, or the ability to contrive it with his own.

For a traveler who had no more to defend than this man apparently carried about him, the stranger was well armed. In addition to a sabre which almost touched the floor as he stood, he carried four pistols, two on each side, in holsters attached to the broad belt buckled around his middle over the soiled yellow sash with green stripes, which hung in frayed tassels to his thigh. There was dust on his peaked sombrero, which he kept with ill-mannered boorishness on his head, dust on his embroidered short jacket, and in the creases at the knees of his tight-fitting buff velvet pantaloons, cut

so broad at the bottoms as to almost hide his feet, strapped beneath his insteps and fastened with silver buckles. He evidently had been in the saddle a long time.

"You are late on the road," said Dominguez.

"It is a habit with me," the other replied.

"Will you sit at the table, gentleman?" Dominguez put his obligation as host above the affront this coarse fellow offered himself, his family and his guests. He placed a chair beside Juan Molinero, inviting with graceful cordiality the visitor to sit to his refreshment.

"A man doesn't sit down to the business I have come for, Dominguez," the stranger replied. He snatched a pistol, with the quick movement of a man aroused to sudden passion, and presented it at Dominguez' breast. "Steady, Dominguez! One little movement and you are with the dead. So, you have not met Sebastian Alvitre? Have a good look at him, then, so you can tell the next slip-foot priest that comes to your door the color of his eyes."

Dominguez stood with shoulders squared, head erect, a little paler for the menace of the pistol, but in dignity greater than his fear.

"Alvitre, you are a coward, then, as well as a thief, to enter a man's house on this false pretense," Dominguez said.

"That will be enough, little man!" Alvitre warned, his scowl black in the threat of death. "No, sit in the chair, your hands on the table, boy,"

he ordered young Dominguez, who was half-risen in some design of his own courageous young heart.

Padre Mateo commanded the young man down with frantic hand, for he could see, as plainly as if the price stood printed on Alvitre's face, the cheap valuation he set on a human life.

"What is this?" Juan Molinero asked, hands on the table-edge as if to rise.

"It is the thief of whom we spoke but a little while ago," Padre Mateo whispered. "God save us now!"

"When you speak nothing good of a man, shut your window, Dominguez, and see that your shutters are closed so tight one little word cannot pass," the outlaw said, making a meaning gesture with his shoulder toward the open casement. "A man might ride on if he heard a kind word fly out, but what is to be expected of priests who make slaves of helpless Indians, and fat farmers who get gifts from the king? So I sound on your door, Dominguez; I step into your house to take from you a thousand dollars. Your wife will bring it to me, while you stand here ready to be killed if one little hair raises on your head."

"I haven't so much money, not a tenth of it," Dominguez said.

"That is a lie!" Alvitre charged. "You have sold hides and tallow lately. There is money in your chest."

"A little, only a very little," Dominguez pro-

tested, whether in truth or in desperate subterfuge perhaps only himself knew.

“In such case I will take the young lady away with me, the young dove that sits yonder. She will do instead of money, if it will please you better, Dominguez.”

Young Dominguez leaped to his feet at the threat, laying hold of his heavy chair to strike the outlaw down. A second more and he would have worked his brave intention, but Alvitre, quicker than the youth, drew another pistol with his left hand. Grinning with a coyote snarl he aimed not at young Dominguez, but at the mother of the family, who sat only a little more than the length of his arm from where he stood.

Alvitre stood across the table from Juan Molinero, who sat in his place, hands on the edge of the board, the sleeves of his brown gown wide as grain sacks on his arms. On the outlaw's right hand, two feet or so beyond the pistol pointed at his breast, Dominguez stood; on his left, the son of the family had crouched down in his chair at the double command of outlaw and priest, where he sat alert and determined, palpitating in his wrath which burned in his cheeks and eyes. And there stood the obscene Alvitre, his arms in a manner outspread to aim his pistols at the hostages whom he had chosen to enforce his will upon that house.

So Juan Molinero sat, hands on the cloth, this scene fixed in his perception like the figures in a carving. There Dominguez stood, pale, watchful,

ready to put his life down in vain effort to protect his own; at the foot of the table, his wife, terror in her distended eyes; near her hand the daughter of the family, a flame of resentment for this treacherous invasion, this insolent demand; and young Dominguez, straining like a poised panther, ready to leap to his own destruction in the fierce anger of his courageous heart. All this Juan Molinero saw, down to the detail of the lightest breath. Padre Mateo put out a vain hand to stay him as he rose from his place, and leaped full into the outlaw's arms.

They had the sight of that brown-clad man, whom all but one in that company thought to be a friar, his arms spread as if to embrace Alvitre, the moment before pistol-shots roared and the smoke of the discharge made confusion of the struggle. Alvitre was lying insensible on the floor at the next sight; bits of plaster were falling from the ceiling between the brown cedar beams where the bullets had struck. Juan Molinero was unbuckling sword and pistols from the outlaw's body, one substantial foot in broad sandal set on the prostrate form to guard against a sudden revival.

Dominguez shouted to the others to put out the lights, thinking at once of Alvitre's men, fearing their fire through the window. The candles on the table were blown out in a breath; mother and daughter sprang to puff out the others which stood on the sideboard across the room.

“Leave one candle burning till we bind him fast

for the soldiers!" Padre Mateo called, his voice strong and loud.

"He will be held, never doubt," Dominguez panted, his knees on Alvitre's shoulders where he lay face to the floor.

Juan Molinero fastened the outlaw's pistol belt around him, and took the sabre in his hand.

"I'll see to the others," he said to Padre Mateo.

"God speed you, my son!" Padre Mateo replied. "Here," jerking off the hemp rope that was his girdle, holding it out to Dominguez, "this will hold him—bind him well."

Dominguez made a quick loop of the stout rope around Alvitre's arm, leaned over, reaching for the other one. Juan Molinero was at the door; the sharp clink of the heavy chain was in their ears. And Sebastian Alvitre, fox that had scorned and beaten the traps of many men, leaped to his feet, flinging those who clung to him aside as a man in the harvest flings sheaves of wheat. A spring, and he was on the low sill of the open window; a leap through the unfastened shutter, and he was gone in the dark.

Dominguez shouted; the last candle was blown out. They stood waiting; silent, expectant. Juan Molinero returned after a little while, to find them scarcely breathing in the dark house, where Dominguez had drawn them out of the range of windows behind his thick adobe walls.

"He was alone," Juan reported; "all I got was his horse. He slipped past me in the bushes."

Dominguez made a light, and exclaimed in amazement, and lifted his candle high.

“What is this?” he asked, turning in astonishment to Padre Mateo. “A monk went out, a cavalier returns! God save us! what is this?”

There Juan Molinero stood, in his short jacket and tight pantaloons which his long gown had hidden, Sebastian Alvitre’s pistols strapped around him, the robber’s sabre at his side. Close at his heels the young Indian, Cristóbal, was standing, a gleam of white teeth in his dark face, the long brown gown across his arm.

“I stripped it off, Padre Mateo, so I’d be free in case of a fight,” said Juan.

CHAPTER VII

NOT FOR GUILLERMO

DOMINGUEZ had waited at his gate since Padre Mateo and his party left his house early in the morning, his pistols in his belt, his gun on his shoulder. It had been his expectant fear that Alvitre, the brigand, would return as soon as Padre Mateo and his valiant companion took the road, to revenge the humiliation he had suffered in that house.

The rancher had watched this bright-haired stranger ride away on Sebastian Alvitre's famous horse, his brown monk's gown tied to the cantle of his saddle. No amount of argument, protestation or entreaty on Padre Mateo's part had been enough to induce him to envelop his limbs in the disguise again. Dominguez did not understand the words of his reply to Padre Mateo, but his bearing and his manner seemed easily interpreted. In effect, the disguise would appear a coward's subterfuge, something that men might say was put on because he feared to meet Alvitre by day.

It was very true, thought Dominguez. He was generous and hearty in his acknowledgment of service to the stranger, but there was something bigger than a little doubt in him that this long-strid-

ing man could have leaped and grappled the outlaw without getting a bullet in his eye if he had not been shrouded in a monk's disguise. Sebastian Alvitre did not expect to meet violence in that quarter; he had not looked for a monk to leap on him like a cougar and strip him at once of his dignity and his arms. Although it was a fortunate leap for that house, and all within it, Dominguez owned without reservation, it was almost certain to result in reprisals and acts of vindictive revenge which might not leave a rafter over his head.

Now this stranger with the barbarous speech on his tongue that only Padre Mateo, of all men, could understand, was riding boldly on Alvitre's horse, Alvitre's sword and pistols at his hand, and other pistols at his saddle-horn, to say nothing of the strange long rifle in the cart. Ten men might fall in the fiery rain this man could set loose from his hands without reloading a single pistol. Well, he would need all his pistols, and more, Dominguez thought with grave foreshadowing of disaster in his breast, when Alvitre and his men leaped out of the bosque and laid hold of the reins.

It was now midafternoon; the travelers had not come in sight on their return from the harbor, although they had been gone long enough, and time to spare. Dominguez feared that Alvitre already had taken his revenge.

Dominguez knew the story of John Miller, although he did not attempt to remember a name of such alien sound; Padre Mateo had told him, with-

out reservation, how this strange wanderer was himself an outlaw from the very fact of his presence in California. The priest had relied on the rancher's sense of justice and gratitude to keep the stranger's identity to himself if Sergeant Olivera and his men should chance that way. Dominguez respected a man who moved boldly with a peril over his head; it was his profound hope that Juan Molinero should reach the safety of the mission without mischance.

Dominguez was considering sending his wife and daughter to the mission along with Padre Mateo's cavalcade, where they would be safe from the vengeance of Alvitre, which was certain to center particularly on that house. Alvitre would not rest until he had adjusted his account of humiliation and disgrace in his followers' eyes by some notoriously cruel and outrageous deed against the Dominguez family. It was a time when men of consequence, such as Dominguez, stood alone on their defense against such as Alvitre, the military force being small, the civil government weak and indifferent, full of dissensions and jealousies. A rancher in those early times gathered his own forces about him, like a baron in his fastness, and stood or fell as he might.

Twenty men could have been summoned to stand at arms in defense of the Dominguez mansion, as it was called, but that would have left the cattle on the range unprotected. It was a very good measure of the mettle in the early Californians that Domin-

guez considered himself sufficient for all comers, give him his pistols and his gun.

Alvitre, the bandit, was notable in his brief day for his escape from a Mexican prison, his long ride to California on the very horse that Juan Molinero had captured, and his contempt for both church and state. He would rob a priest as readily as he would a rancher, but the poor he let pass, a provision of his code which had won him great respect and many friends, as similar exemptions have won for other bandits, before and since, among those whom it does not pay to rob.

This Alvitre had his lair in the Pueblo de Los Angeles, in that year of 1806 but a poor collection of refugees, banished ones, retired and broken-down soldiers, and such as had been induced by the government bounty offered to settlers in the California pueblos, to take up life there. The town was an unattractive and shiftless place, built around the plaza, an irrigation ditch leading water through it from the little river that ran near by. There were a few small mercantile establishments, many *cantinas*, or retail liquor stores, and goats and pigs, and crumbling adobe bricks, under the feet at every turn.

Here Alvitre and his four or five attendants came to spend the proceeds of their excursions upon the king's highway; here they were safe, for every hut was a refuge, and the *comisionado*, an ex-sergeant, was not notable as a disciplinarian in civil life, no matter what he had been in military.

All these things Dominguez had for his consid-

eration as he stood at his gate between his eight-foot-high adobe walls. He had little hope, little confidence, that this new man, Sergeant Olivera, would do more than those who had gone before him the past year at the mission. Up to this time Alvitre had not preyed on the ranches, except to take such sheep and cattle as he wanted for food, collecting his tribute from the many travelers who passed up and down between the north and south. It appeared now that his methods were changing. The time had come to put this Alvitre down. Well, they had come within a breath of doing it. If that stranger had not gone to the door and left them alone with the wily scoundrel! But it was done; Alvitre was waiting his hour.

Padre Mateo's company arrived when the sun was resting its rim on the tiles of Dominguez' house. The young woman on whose account this expedition had been made, alighted from the covered cart when it came to a stand under the pine-trees near the door.

Dominguez was disappointed in her at first sight because he found her lacking in the voluptuousness of figure, the sprightly vivaciousness of face, such as he accounted beauty in a woman. True, she came down out of the cart with a spring in her step, and no fear of breaking her leg when she landed. Dominguez liked her for that. She was nimble and slim and fair, even fair of hair like an Andalusian, with brown eyes of a softness that fine chamois skin is to the hand. Dominguez liked her very well for

that. She was thin, according to Dominguez' thought of what a woman should be, almost as flat of the bosom—not quite, certainly, to be sure—as Guillermo himself, and she was twenty-five if she was a day. For this Dominguez did not like her at all.

“She will not do for Guillermo,” he said to his wife as the guest entered the door, speaking with great politeness behind his hand, regretful that the exigency demanded the warning. “It must not be encouraged.”

Dominguez expressed his disappointment in her to Padre Mateo as they sat smoking in the patio after supper.

“I had hoped she would do for Guillermo, but it is not to be considered,” he sighed. “She would be a grandmother by the time he was thirty.”

“Nothing is so far from her thought as a husband,” Padre Mateo replied. “Her first confidence to me was that she wanted to become a nun. But that, of course, cannot be. There are no convents, no nuns, in California. Poor Gertrudis! I think she will have to marry somebody, in the end.”

“Doña Magdalena will be a mother to her at the mission, and Don Geronimo a second father,” Dominguez said. “She is going to a life as serene as if she had become the bride of Our Señor, indeed, but what use a poor pale thing like that will be to you there I cannot imagine. She looks as if she lived on the whites of eggs.”

“There is great endurance, and great souls, very

often, in bodies that seem too frail to stop the sun. Remember Padre Serra, and his three hundred leagues with a sore on his leg that would have crippled an ordinary man."

"It is true," Dominguez nodded, his eyes speculative, pipe in hand. "Your tall Englishman from the yankee country—he is watching the road?"

"He is watching, with the hope in his blue eyes that Alvitre will come for his horse."

"And you did not meet the soldiers at the harbor? It is a strange thing. They must have gone to the pueblo. I tell you, Sebastian Alvitre has nothing to fear from them."

"They cannot plead the excuse that he outrides them now."

"What do you intend to do with his horse, Padre Mateo?"

"It belongs to Juan Molinero."

"Alvitre valued it equal with his life, it is said. The fellow will go desperate ways to get it back again, no doubt, even to a raid on your corrals at night. It might be better to shoot the beast, good animal that it is, and leave it beside the road where Alvitre, or somebody who will carry the news to him, will see it."

"There is a friendship growing already between the creature and our Juan," Padre Mateo said, pride and affection in his voice.

"But the man is a gentile, he may turn bandit

himself, now that he has a notable horse," Dominguez argued.

"It is an ungenerous thought, unworthily expressed, Dominguez," the priest chided him. "Where would your tranquillity, your honor, have been tonight but for him? You forget too soon."

"No, I have not forgotten," Dominguez protested, not in the least abashed by the correction. "But I am a cautious man, padre; a business man. It is not wise to harbor stray dogs; too often they kill sheep. I am only considering that here this Juan of yours is, a man who has lived among savages, a stranger to our religion, our customs. In a little while he will grow uneasy shut in the bounds of the mission; he will step out, with no disguise to cover him, no friendly padre at his side. Such a man is not to be taken easily. When the soldiers challenge him, he will kill them, and then—to the bosque. So it will be, Padre Mateo."

"I would follow such a man, then," said young Guillermo, gratitude big in his breast.

"What folly!" his father corrected him.

"He sees deeper than you, Dominguez," Padre Mateo said kindly. "It is his meaning that Juan Molinero would not strike any man down without warrant, nor take the road in any enterprise that was not just and honorable. He means that a man could follow him in honor wherever he might lead. Youth has a quick heart and a quick eye. The world is often poorer because we pass its judgments lightly, with a laugh."

“ I only spoke as reason leads a man to believe, ” Dominguez said, humbled a little by the priest’s rebuke. “ It might turn out that way, it might not, but as a man of business who has felt the edges of the world, I say it is a mistake to give him the horse. ”

“ I prefer a mule for the road, it goes fast enough for me and has more spring in the step. Padre Ignacio would as soon think of mounting an elephant as a horse, and Don Geronimo has horses of his own. So, there is nobody at San Fernando who needs a horse so much as Juan. ”

“ It is to be considered that the villainous Alvitre rode the horse to my door; that it was my gold he demanded, my daughter he insulted by his gross affront. As a matter of indemnity for an indignity suffered, I believe the horse should come to me. ”

“ So, that is it, Dominguez? ” Padre Mateo laughed. “ The goose shows its head from beneath your coat at last. Well, it is done, the horse is given to Juan Molinero, and he will be a brave man, indeed, who takes it from him. The indemnity must be collected from Sebastian Alvitre, my good friend, I fear. ”

“ It is another thing, ” said Dominguez, closing his mouth on the subject, a sternness fixing in his countenance which did not forecast peace in Sebastian Alvitre’s ways.

Guillermo rose. His mother was in the door, daughter and guest dimly white behind her. The three came into the patio, where palms grew along the wall, and flowers which the hands of Doña Ana

had brought to perfection of bloom. The scent of lemon and jasmine blossoms blent in the slow night wind, the benediction of placid domesticity.

“The land is sweet after the wild and bitter sea,” said Gertrudis Sinova, standing to breathe such perfumes as chemist never blended, her arms lifted a little, her hands outspread. “There is security here; there is peace.”

“If no prowling bandit comes,” said Doña Ana, her voice low in dreadful caution.

“Little fear tonight, doña,” Padre Mateo assured her, so calm and contented himself that his confidence spread round him like a light.

“They have been telling me of the wild robber who came last night,” Gertrudis said. “It is a strange adventure to come to one’s own door. I did not think there were such men in California.”

“Put your fears away, then,” Dominguez counseled, “and sit here near the wall. The heat of the day is in the adobe still, it will cheer you against the wind of our north country, which is not so soft as the night-winds in the land you left behind you, my dear.”

“I seem to remember only storm and distress,” the young woman sighed.

“It is past; here peace begins,” Padre Mateo said.

“Where is the tall American with the shining hair?” she asked.

“He is standing sentinel, in the hope, I truly be-

lieve, that Sebastian Alvitre, the bandit, will come again tonight," Padre Mateo answered.

"In the hope?" Gertrudis repeated, incredible that she had understood.

"He is dissatisfied with the fiasco we made of it when he left Alvitre in our hands for a moment," Padre Mateo replied, a little laugh at his own disgrace in his words. "Yes, if Alvitre shows his head tonight it will be a long time before he runs away again."

She would have from Padre Mateo's tongue the story of Juan Molinero, of his coming to the kitchen door at San Fernando in the night, clothed in the skins of wild beasts, bearded like a patriarch, his long hair on his shoulders. She exclaimed in resentful wonder to hear that his life was forfeit under the king's decree which closed California to foreign feet; she protested like a defender of the oppressed when told of Captain del Valle's demand for his surrender on the charge that he was a spy.

"What romance! what a figure for romantic adventure! He is like Alvarado of the Noche Triste, another gallant gentleman with golden hair."

Her ardent sympathy, expressed in voice tuneless on the ear as the scented breeze was pleasant to breathe, was sweet in the ears of Padre Mateo. As for Guillermo, his father's disappointment in this young woman was not his own. Guillermo's thoughts were with his desires, and they were not in the patio that night. There was another, perhaps thought unworthy for a son of a family, with slow

lids over long-slitted eyes; a soldier's daughter in the pueblo, whose smile through her barred window had made his heart faint with ecstasy, his knees weak in the sickness of a so sweet malady.

"It is secure, it is safe, knowing that the American gentleman is on guard this night," said Gertrudis, so softly that the words must have been meant for her own heart alone.

"Ah!" said Padre Mateo to himself, nodding his wise head in the dark, "the judgment of youth is quick and sure, world without end."

"But if the soldiers take him, then he must die!" she said, her words quick, sharp, as if the man's peril had been revealed to her without the splendor of romance only that moment.

"That is the fear that walks with me," Padre Mateo confessed. "I led him into the danger, but I urged him to return while he could have done so in safety. He scorned the thought."

"Certainly; I would—anybody who had looked him in the eyes would—have known he wouldn't go back. And tomorrow!" her fear leaping into her words, quickening them, giving them a panting anxiety; "if the soldiers meet us tomorrow!"

"Then Juan Molinero will find a way," Padre Mateo said, as confident as he was that his own feet were on the ground.

CHAPTER VIII

A BULLET IN THE WALL

PADRE MATEO had them on the road while the morning was still wan. A grey fog made day delinquent; it trickled in a cold sweat from every roadside shrub; it marked the ridge of wheel-tracks in the dust with little tracings of moisture, and drew its magic circle with delicate touch around each footprint of creature that had passed the dusty highway the day before.

“It is a good morning for my lima beans,” Dominguez said when he parted with them at the gate, “but I would wait for the sun before taking the road. That rascal Alvitre could stand behind a bush and never be seen till you were on top of him.”

The chance was as great by sun as in fog, Padre Mateo replied, and rode forth in confidence, Cristóbal in the lead, his quick ears strained for an unfriendly sound, as ready now to shoot an arrow through Sebastian Alvitre as any other thief. Alvitre was in the dust; a new hero stood in the young Indian's eyes. There was a big hope in his heart that morning to do some brave deed in the presence of the mighty man who had held Sebastian Alvitre

as helpless as a little child and taken away his pistols and his sword.

Padre Mateo and Juan Molinero rode behind the cart in which Gertrudis Sinova sat on a pile of blankets, her possessions about her. Which of her boxes, if any, contained the gold she was believed to have inherited, Juan did not know. Against the advice of Padre Mateo she had tucked the canvas cover of the cart aside, to give her a view of the new land that was to be her home, she said.

Juan thought she appeared very frail and oppressed by sorrow, her face as white as a summer cloud under the dark scarf drawn over her head, her large cloak making her shapeless as she swayed in the jolting cart. Her gentle eyes, too sad to seem eager, watched the narrow winding road now ahead, now through the opening at the cart's end, wonderingly, expectantly, with a great loneliness that struck his heart like a pain. Sometimes when her eyes met his, where the compassion of friendliness had nothing to hide, she smiled.

Gertrudis understood that perils might await them on their journey to the mission, although strife and outlawed men seemed out of keeping with the serenity of that gentle land. Here were no rocky crags, no down-pouring torrents, no shadowed forests, no insidious greenery of swamp and brake. A clean and friendly land it seemed, where one might advance with his fears behind him. She waited eagerly what the breaking of the fog would reveal.

There is a wind that comes down from the desert places of southern California in the autumn of the year, sweeping over mountain and hill, bearing its mysterious way out to sea. It is a searing wind, that seems to pierce the eyeballs, to strike to the core of the brain, yet a beguiling wind, rustling the curtains of memory, not lifting them to reveal the thing that charges it with such a yearning that starts the sutures of the heart. It is of things that were, and are not; of the beginning, which has left but a rudimentary recollection; of old dreams and old songs, and long wanderings. It comes at sunrise, when fog lies over the land like a cool hand upon a pulsing wound, working a transformation in a breath. Clouds are consumed by it, fog vanishes in its fiery contact, not blown away, but eaten as if this wind were a dragon which sucked it through flaming nostrils.

Such a wind began blowing this morning before the travelers had been more than two hours on their way. It seemed that the sun was almost instantly revealed in a hazy sky, wool-fragments of fog melting away in its untempered glare. Far ahead Gertrudis could see the hills which made the nearer wall of the valley in which the Mission San Fernando lay. Low-lying they seemed, at that distance, shreds of fog-cloud resting over them, the desert haze carried by the growing wind making them dim and far away.

A sullenness had come into the day, changing the kindly aspect of the country which had been so allur-

ing and inviting to her from the ship, from her closer acquaintance with it in the short journey the day before. It seemed to have withdrawn its friendly welcome, to be sulking behind barriers of mystery and alien traits. The broad valley which they were journeying through was a monochrome of gray, as if every green leaf had taken a sickness, every stem an ashen leprosy, such was the effect of the atom-fine dust the desert wind bore, impalpable, mysterious, working its magic on the light of day.

As the morning advanced the temper of the sun became more ardent, a languorous, drowsy heat such as comes but a few days in the year to the seacoast country. The animals in Padre Mateo's cavalcade marched listlessly, with heads hanging, the sweat dried on their flanks by the desert blast as quickly as it oozed, their feet chugging with stocky indifference in the white dust of the road.

Quite different from their journey of the day before between the harbor and the Dominguez ranch, when the wind was from the sea, crisp as cabbage leaves, as Padre Mateo said, the sky so blue and serene that one longed to taste the breath of it, and plunge like a dolphin through its untainted depths. Then Padre Mateo had ridden without a fear, beguiled by the innocent face of the day, perhaps, into belief in a security that was no greater than that of today, his mule-bell tinkling with a comfortable pastoral sound among the bosque as they passed.

Now Padre Mateo's mule-bell was stuffed with

leaves, dumb on its neckstrap as any common metal that never had known the vibration of a clapper or the thrilling of sweet sounds. Padre Mateo himself was oppressed by forty fears. His sandalled feet did not flare out so gallantly from his mule's sides, his shoulders drooped under the burden of the sun. He turned his eyes this way and that, in constant watching, thinking to see Sebastian Alvitre spring from the bushes, red-eyed from a long vigil by the roadside.

In that way Padre Mateo traveled with his fear, Juan Molinero on the bandit's horse beside him. There was no assurance in pistols, nor the rifle in the cart where Juan could lean and reach it. A man with twenty bullets in him could not stand to a defense of the helpless. But if it came to the point where he must do it, Padre Mateo was determined that he would show the bandit crew that, although prohibited by the king's commands from bearing arms of his own, he was under no interdiction that bound his hands from applying the weapons of another man to the defense of a helpless one in his care. There was comfort in this simmering down of his perturbation; Padre Mateo calculated the effectiveness of a barricade of the boxes in the cart.

"Tula," said he, giving her the affectionate diminutive of her name, "can you fire a pistol?"

"As well as almost any man," she replied, but with sidelong look at Juan, as if she made her exception there.

"Then I am going to ask Juan to give you one

of his, or perhaps two. No man can use six pistols, no matter if he's quick as powder. If this fellow Alvitre should happen to appear—although I do not look for him at all, my dear, the road is quite safe—it would be well to be able to show him his place.”

Juan was pleased with the suggestion. He selected one of the pistols brought from the mission, a new pattern of weapon with four revolving barrels.

“These pistols of yours, Padre Mateo, are better than Alvitre's,” Juan said. “For a man of his name, he's away behind the times.”

Padre Mateo kicked his mule close to the tail of the cart and put the pistol in Gertrudis' hand.

“God forbid that you ever need it!” he said. “But there is a proverb which says that the wise man does first what the fool does last. It is well to be prepared. No, my boy,” speaking to Juan, ranging beside him again, more comfortable in his mind, “it is not such an easy thing to get good weapons in this country. Alvitre, I have no doubt, is nearly as badly crippled today as if you had cut off one of his hands. Guns and pistols are not as common here as they are in your country, although it will come to that in time. A man takes what he can get. These with the four barrels were made in Massachusetts, as you will see by looking at the stock. One of them equals Alvitre's four, and would shoot twice as far, I expect, although I know nothing about such matters, indeed.”

There was a knowing look in Padre Mateo's grey

eyes as he made this profession of ignorance, which Juan answered with a smile. It was worth knowing a man like Padre Mateo, thought Juan. He was as sound as a new barrel, wholesome and hearty, and unselfish as a true priest, a true man and a true friend should be.

Whether Sebastian Alvitre was indeed crippled for the want of pistols, or whether his humiliation had so debased him in the eyes of his followers that they were afraid to engage in any further enterprises under his lead, Padre Mateo, of course, did not know. But he was relieved to reach the pass in the hills at noonday without sight of the outlaw. Beside a spring near the summit of the pass they halted for refreshment under the wide-spreading oaks. Gertrudis came down out of the cart, pistol in her sash, to spread the lunch that Doña Ana had packed in a big basket for them, scorning the rough fare that Padre Mateo had brought to feed this well-bred lady from the capital.

San Fernando mission lay against the farther hills, directly across the wide valley which the travelers entered from the pass called Cahuenga, as it is known even to this day. The road seemed more secure from the pass onward to the mission, many travelers being abroad. They were now traversing the King's Road, the highway binding mission to mission from south to north, which touched the mean village of Los Angeles, and many similar small places outside the ecclesiastical jurisdiction along the way.

“It is folly to feel safe on a well-traveled road through a country where bandits levy their taxes,” Padre Mateo said, “but it is common to us all. Reason shows us that a bandit does not stand beside a road where nobody passes. The faster they come, the sooner his day’s work is over, and he is back to his pleasures at the inn.”

“I suppose it’s because there’s comfort in numbers, Padre Mateo, even if there isn’t much help,” Juan responded.

“You have not relaxed your watch, I see, my good Juan, although I may doze at times, especially when I hear the bells of some honest freighter plodding on to meet us with his burros. If I go too far, jog me with your foot, Juan. This sun is hotter here; it is always so in our valley.”

There were no toll-gatherers by the road that day. The travelers came in peace to San Fernando when the sun was low, and the burning wind from the desert was falling to intermittent gusts. Here the king’s highway divided the mission estate, the buildings lying to the right of it, a broad field enclosed by a high adobe wall on the left. In the center of this field two palm trees stood, aliens in that land, set there by the fathers who founded the mission, the little plants carried from Mexico with tender care.

Juan Molinero was to remember long that day’s journey and that home-coming. To the end of his life a whiff of dust rising from the road, a glimpse of a tiled roof through the greenery of boughs,

brought back to him in a rush the recollection of that day: Gertrudis in the cart, her cloak and scarf aside, her fair hair lifting in the wind, and now and then her smile of confidence, the only language between them that they could understand.

The thirsty mules quickened their listless pace, scenting the water of the fountain across the road from the mission's white arcade, a great brimming basin built of bricks, placed there for the refreshment of passing beasts. Gertrudis stood on her knees, looking over the driver's shoulder to see what waited her in the land that had cost her so much bereavement and sorrow to reach.

Before the mission the road was broad and white, trampled to its very edges by feet of men and beasts. The Indian neophytes were coming home from the fields, their day's work done, streaming across this wide white road with hoes and scythes, spades and rakes, and all the small tools of their occupation on their shoulders. Some of them waved their hands in greeting to Cristóbal as he approached the fountain, riding a few rods ahead of the cart. A little way beyond this procession of oncoming laborers the road bent sharply around the corner of the high adobe wall that closed the padres' garden, where there were orange trees and figs, and roses beside paths that were cool and pleasant when the sun was low.

The mules drawing the cart stretched their necks with sudden yielding to their thirst, and swerved wilfully toward the fountain, defying the driver,

who sawed with all his might on the bits, carrying the young lady across the road from the spot where Padre Ignacio stood under the white arches to welcome her. The Indian laborers paused a moment in their homeward march to laugh at the driver's helpless anger against the mules, which he relieved a little now by lashing their dusty backs with his whip as they stood with muzzles buried to the nostrils, greedily sucking the cool water of the fountain.

"It will do," said Padre Mateo, seeing that it must do. "Drive across when they have enough. No, Gertrudis, do not get down—there is dust enough here to swallow you. One moment now."

"Here is the pistol," she said, offering it at large, it seemed, standing with it in her hand.

Padre Mateo waved Juan forward to receive it back from her, which he did with a surge of color to his face, his hat in his hand. He put the pistol in the saddle holster that carried its mate, flinging over them the brown gown that he had worn yesterday.

"Thank God for the peaceful conclusion of this day," said Padre Mateo. "Juan, keep a close eye on that horse to see that Alvitre doesn't steal him from you. The rascal will go to no end of trouble to get him back again, you may——"

"Quick, Juan, quick! soldiers!"

It was Cristóbal, shouting at a pitch of excitement that cracked his voice and made it squeal like a girl's. He stood at the fountain, pointing.

Troopers were rounding the turn in the road at the corner of the garden wall.

The neophytes cleared out of the way, some dropping their tools in their haste to give free passage to the men whose contempt and cruelty made them a daily scourge. Padre Mateo kicked his mule with frantic drumming on its ribs, reining it in front of the soldiers who came sweeping down the road like a boisterous wind, their dust heavy behind them.

“ Ride! I will stand between!” he shouted to Juan.

Juan turned his horse to face the troopers, as if he had a thought of riding through their line, but no intention of showing them his back in flight ahead of them. The reins lay loose across the saddle-horn; his hands were under the brown gown where the four-barreled pistols hung. Padre Ignacio had started down from the arcade when the soldiers closed around, Captain del Valle within the circle, sabre in his hand. The officer made an imperious gesture which seemed to sweep Juan from his horse.

“ Down! you are a prisoner in the king’s name!”

“ So, this is the trick you play? worse than liar!” Padre Mateo scorned the soldier. “ You hide beyond the wall——”

“ It is enough!” Captain del Valle said. “ Down!” he commanded again, lunging with his sword to make his meaning plain, the point of it not an inch from Juan Molinero’s breast. A mo-

ment, and the iron seemed to melt in Captain del Valle's arm. The sword-point wavered, sunk down; the blood fled out of the captain's face. Juan Molinero was levelling the four-barreled pistols at the captain's head.

"Tell him to order his men to retire," Juan requested Padre Mateo.

"There must be no violence! In the name of Our Señor I forbid him to fire! Stop him, Brother Mateo." Padre Ignacio came hurriedly among the horses as he spoke, his sandalled feet noiseless in the dust.

Juan said nothing, nor hesitated a moment, when Padre Mateo translated his superior's command. He restored the pistols to the holster instantly, and sat defenseless in the face of eight soldiers and their captain, his hand on his thighs.

"Now," said Padre Ignacio, greatly relieved and pleased, "permit him to pass, Captain del Valle."

"He is the king's prisoner, and no longer at my disposal," Captain del Valle ungraciously returned.

"Have you no more gratitude, no greater magnanimity, for the man who gives you your life?" Padre Ignacio sternly demanded.

Captain del Valle had exchanged sword for pistol, which he presented at Juan's breast. The soldiers had followed their captain's lead; Juan was the center of their concentrated aim. His obedience had cost him his hope.

"Tell him to dismount," the captain ordered Padre Mateo. Juan obeyed, confident that the

authoritative voice, the commanding presence, of Padre Ignacio would be at once his defense and deliverance.

“Bind him,” Captain del Valle commanded, designating two soldiers for that duty.

Padre Ignacio stepped to Juan’s side, lifting an interdicting hand.

“Let no man touch him on pain of denial of the holy communion,” he said.

Captain del Valle threw himself from the saddle as the soldiers drew back, quaking between the fear of the awful punishment threatened by the priest and the wrath of their officer.

“You cannot stand between the law and this spy,” the captain said roughly, approaching as if he would fling the priest aside. “He has been at the harbor spying out a way for ten thousand of these new Americans to enter this land. You do not know, here behind your thick walls, what is going on in the world, Padre Ignacio. This man must be taken to Monterey for trial. Priest or layman will stand in the way of it at his peril. It is enough!”

“If you were an honest man you would not bend to this poor trick,” Padre Mateo said, pushing his mule forward between Captain del Valle and Padre Ignacio, crowding the beast with such impertinence into the little space that its dusty neck rubbed the soldier’s coat. “You could have come on the open road to arrest this inoffensive stranger, you knew where he would pass. But no; you must

do it here, at the very door of the mission, to defy and humiliate Padre Ignacio, to work your mean spite against him in this manner, worm of a soldier that you are!"

"Bind him!" Captain del Valle commanded his men, a threat of terrible discipline in his scowl.

"Let me plead for him, brave captain," Gertrudis appealed, standing pale and wistful in the cart's end.

"It cannot be, miss, or madam," Captain del Valle replied. His pistol was pointed at Juan Molinero's heart; the soldiers, trembling, white and cold with fear, came forward with ropes to bind the prisoner's hands.

"There is no harm in him, he is gentle in word and thought," Gertrudis pleaded, "and only two nights past he grappled an armed outlaw with his bare hands when he threatened the lives of a citizen and his family. See — that is the outlaw's horse; his pistols are here, in this gallant gentleman's belt."

"It is nothing to me, lady," Captain del Valle said.

"But you—he spared you——"

"Ha! God save her! She falls!" Padre Ignacio cried, leaping in vain endeavor to assist Gertrudis who, in her earnestness seeming to forget where she stood, had stepped from the cart-end and fallen to the ground.

She lay as if insensible, her cheek in the dust,

her hair spread around, one hand thrown out as if to break her fall.

“Lift her, my son — she lies as one dead!” Padre Ignacio said, interpreting his meaning by speaking gestures.

Juan, disregarding Captain del Valle’s menacing pistol, bent and lifted her in his arms.

“Into the cart with her, leave her so!” Captain del Valle ordered.

Gertrudis opened her eyes with appealing look into Juan Molinero’s face.

“My knee — it is terrible, the agony!” she moaned. “Carry me within quickly, quickly!”

Juan understood only the appeal of her eyes, the suffering expression of her white face against his arm, but he knew that Captain del Valle had ordered her thrown into the cart like a sheep. That was no place for a suffering woman when the mission door stood wide.

“Across the road with you now, John Miller!” Padre Mateo shouted, kicking his mule in front of Captain del Valle as if the soldier were a bush, the pistol in his hand of no more importance than a thorn.

There was a trampling of feet, a dismounting in haste of soldiers at the captain’s command, confusion and blinding dust. Padre Mateo, his feet flaring wide in the stirrups, shifted his mule in a clever dance to block Captain del Valle’s aim, and Juan Molinero pushed the doubtful soldiers out of

his way and set off with his burden across the road toward the mission door.

“Halt!” Captain del Valle shouted. “Fire! shoot him down!”

Padre Ignacio stood before the hesitant soldiers, his arms spread wide as if to gather the charges of their half-raised muskets to his own breast. Captain del Valle, desperately furious, laid hold of Padre Mateo’s bridle reins, wrenching the capering mule to a sudden stand. He levelled his pistol across the animal’s back, at Padre Mateo’s cante, and fired as the wrathful priest laid him a lusty blow across the mouth with the back of his open hand.

“You would kill a woman, beast!” Padre Mateo cried.

Padre Mateo’s blow sent the pistol-ball high over Juan Molinero’s head. For many years after that day the Indians pointed to a dark spot in the white plaster covering the mission’s adobe walls, close by a little barred window that let the south sun into Padre Ignacio’s chamber. Before Captain del Valle could draw another pistol, Juan had leaped up the three steps leading to the arcade and crossed to the open door.

Magdalena, waiting within to welcome the guest who was to become her special care, who had seen Juan’s arrest and deliverance, was amazed when Gertrudis leaped out of Juan’s arms as they crossed the threshold, as nimbly as if she never had been

touched by as much as a falling leaf in her life. In a moment she was running back the way that Juan had carried her, to meet Padre Ignacio, who stood in amazement in the middle of the dusty road. There the girl flung herself on her knees before the priest, who spread his hands over her bowed head in the benediction that she sought.

“It is a miracle!” said Padre Mateo. He leaned back in his saddle and laughed until his brown gown shook.

“It is a trick that you shall pay for, by the holy wood!” Captain del Valle swore. There was blood on his beard as he looked up into the priest’s face, his eyes luminous with the hate that inflamed him. He drew his hand across his mouth, and held it out with its stain for Padre Mateo to see, sternly, as if he laid before him proof of an offense so deep that only blood itself could balance it.

Magdalena stood in the door, a barring arm stretched before Juan, who seemed to protest that honor demanded of him to return to the soldiers from whom he had escaped by the artful pretense of this admirable girl. Magdalena understood that one word *honor*, for the sound of it in the Castilian tongue is similar. She placed her palm against Juan’s breast and pushed him away from the door, as she might have repelled an insistent child.

“No, no!” she said, sternly. “Honor goes to honor, Juan Molinero. Remain where you are.”

Padre Mateo sat a moment in his saddle, his head

bent, his mirth gone out of his hearty face. He looked then at Captain del Vallé, whose swollen lips twitched his beard.

“ Captain del Valle, I did not strike you; I struck only your unworthy passion. Thank me; I saved you, perhaps, from the curse of innocent blood. It is folly to carry the thought of vengeance against a priest who has neither property to be taken away nor ambitions to be denied. ”

Padre Mateo rode away in dignity and left the soldier with that. Captain del Valle mounted his horse and turned toward the north, this time with no pretense in his going to report to the governor in the capital city of Monterey.

CHAPTER IX

INCREDIBLE NEWS

DON GERONIMO sat at supper with Sergeant Olivera in the mission kitchen, as on another night more than two months before. The long whip was hanging in its place beside the door, the hams and bacon were dim in the slow-moving smoke among the dark beams. Magdalena sat opposite her thin-visaged, bearded husband, proud of his handsome carriage, his erect shoulders, his commanding eye. Truly, if Don Geronimo had not been born *caballero* he had made one of himself, and that of the first.

Magdalena was as neat and comely as it was her customary habit to be, a yellow kerchief with scarlet crescents binding back her fine dark hair. Her youthful, plump arms were bare to the elbows; in unconscious grace she leaned them on the cloth, her slender brown hands clasped restfully.

Sergeant Olivera was the same as yesterday, as ten years before, as he would be ten years after. A sun-cured man, brown and grey, enduring as oak, tireless as an eagle. His sabre and pistols hung on the post of his chair, his soft grey hat, its broad brim turned up on one side and fastened against

the low crown with a leather cockade, lay on a corner of the table near his hand.

“It is incredible news you bring, Sergeant Olivera,” Don Geronimo said, his grizzly thick eyebrows lifted until they arched high in his lofty forehead. “Sebastian Alvitre given full pardon by the governor, and to become an honest tavern-keeper in the pueblo! It passes the belief of a credulous man.”

“How honest a tavern-keeper is another thing, but a tavern-keeper in all sobriety. As to the governor’s motives, Don Geronimo, you will pardon my silence.”

“Certainly, Sergeant Olivera. A soldier’s tongue must wear a bridle. As for myself, I can see nothing in the whole business but the beginning of some new rascality.”

“We shall see,” said the sergeant, his leathery face as secret as a closed purse.

“Well, you have been a long time away, you missed the wine-making after all. Are the grapes of San Diego de Acalá abundant this year?”

“Small and dry. And the brandy-still? does it work, Don Geronimo?”

“Like magic. We have eight barrels already distilled, and shall make more — perhaps twenty in all. That will not be a poor beginning.”

“Alvitre will be a customer,” the soldier said, looking shrewdly at the mayordomo, humor in his eyes.

“ And pay for it with gold stolen from the padres on the king’s highway, ” Don Geronimo nodded, the humor of such a situation quite beyond him. “ Let the scoundrel come here, and I will flog him back to the pueblo like a dog. ”

“ Here is Borrromeo, ” said Magdalena, her face toward the door.

Borrromeo Cambon appeared out of the night, pausing a moment in the door to make a ceremonial bow to Magdalena, who laughed and applauded the effect with clapping hands. Borrromeo was arrayed as for an occasion, with gilt-braided green jacket and buff pantaloons so tight on his big thighs that the skin itself must have been crowded. These were buckled under his insteps, making it appear a question, and a disconcerting one, how the blacksmith was to sit down.

“ Well, soldier! ” Borrromeo hailed in booming voice, coming in with a swagger to his broad shoulders, putting out a hand in greeting. “ Where have you been since I drank the last cup with you at this table more than eight weeks ago? ”

“ I have been in the south, ” the sergeant replied, rising to meet the hearty fellow on equal terms. “ What is this? You are dressed like a lover, there is perfume on your beard. ”

Borrromeo’s dark face grew darker for a slow mounting of blood. He lifted his shoulders, raised his eyebrows, rocked his head.

“ A man is not old at thirty-seven, ” he said.

“I remember; there was one lady on the ship. Did you get her, according to your oath, Borrromeo?”

“A man is not an old man at thirty-seven, as I have said.” Borrromeo looked about him, a challenge in his bearing to any man who might have the courage to question the pertinacity of his emphasized repetition.

“Nobody denies it, Borrromeo,” Don Geronimo said. “Sit; there is wine in the pitcher.”

“And where is the barbarian?” Sergeant Olivera inquired. “Has he put on his hairy skins and gone back to his kind?”

“He is sitting by a candle, a book under his nose, spelling out large words which he will try to pronounce to me tomorrow,” Borrromeo laughed. “He is a savage no longer, my brave soldier.”

“No? It is a miracle,” the soldier said, amusement, depreciation, in his words.

“He has been baptized,” Magdalena told him, speaking with reverence.

“Like an Indian caught out of the woods,” Sergeant Olivera smiled. “Do not trust him; it may be only a pretense.”

“It is to be seen,” said Don Geronimo, very grave, shaking his head as if in pity of the priests’ credulity.

Magdalena said nothing. She reached for the pitcher and filled her husband’s glass.

“Now, I will tell you, gentlemen,” said Borro-

meo, puffing after a tremendous swig at the earthen mug that held his quart of sour claret, "I believe he is as true a man and as worthy a Christian as ever put beans in his mouth. That much I will say for Juan Molinero, who has worked by my side in the forge many a good day."

Magdalena turned a look upon the blacksmith that would have given a coward courage. Perhaps for the peace of her hearth she held her own words under her tongue.

"You were not here," Borrromeo addressed himself to the sergeant, "the day he escaped from Captain del Valle. You do not know the story of that day?"

"It wasn't through his own valor or shrewdness that he got away, I have been told," Sergeant Olivera replied.

"The way was opened by another, that is true, and if I had been there I would have stood ten soldiers on their heads to help him," Borrromeo declared. "You would not speak lightly of his courage or his honor if you knew him, little soldier. Have you been told that he wanted to go back and deliver himself into Captain del Valle's hands that day? thinking that honor bound him because he got away by the comical trick of that smart girl. Well, that is the truth of it, as Magdalena here can tell you. How many soldiers would have been troubled by a call of honor with a wall eight feet thick between them and their enemy?"

“That is another thing,” Sergeant Olivera said testily, frowning into his cup.

“There is not much honor among soldiers,” Borrromeo said, with dispassionate, simple earnestness. “I have seen them lasso Indian women in the camps of those who are still gentiles, and drag them to their tents.”

“There are ruffians in every company, not excepting this,” Sergeant Olivera returned, very little concerned by the blacksmith’s opinion, not in the least disturbed.

“Where there is one soldier there is always a ruffian,” Borrromeo growled.

“Your wit improves, Vulcan,” Sergeant Olivera said, smiling with easy good-nature. “You must have been at the brandy barrels.”

Borrromeo made a grimace that involved all his facial apparatus, unmistakable in its intent of denial and, more than denial, confession of defeat in all his hopes for this extracted fire of the grape.

“It is not to be permitted, Padre Ignacio says. The guests in the front of the house may sip it like hungry bees, Don Geronimo, perhaps, will fill his bottle now and then, but the poor devils that built the still to cook it in and the barrels to hold it, they must be happy to breathe even the smell.”

“Remember your penance, Borrromeo,” Magdalena prompted him, gently.

“Doña, I do not forget,” Borrromeo replied, his

broad simple face suddenly grave, his booming voice subdued.

“You are a good man, Borrromeo,” she praised him; “you are becoming a better man every day.”

“What of the mill, Don Geronimo, that this stranger was to build for Padre Ignacio? Does it go?” Sergeant Olivera made the inquiry in light derisiveness, as a man speaks of another’s ridiculous simplicity to the one who has borne the affliction of it, certain that he has pitched his tune to a sympathetic ear.

“It goes,” Don Geronimo replied without enthusiasm, grudgingly, as the flatness of his voice betrayed. “There is a devilish ingenuity in the hand of that man. What calamities his innovations shall bring to this mission I shrink to contemplate.”

“Calamities?” Sergeant Olivera repeated the word curiously, as a man turns, with a puzzled face, a thing that he does not understand.

“Saving labor to these Indians is not wise,” Don Geronimo answered gloomily. “They see the water doing their work in one thing; presently they will demand that the water do it in all things. No, the millstones with the sweep were better than this arrangement; I do not care if the stranger’s mill grinds ten times as much.”

“And it goes?” said Sergeant Olivera, keenly curious, leaning a little in his eagerness to learn more.

“I will tell you how Don Juan and I made the

machinery that turns this mill with such marvelous ease," Borrromeo interrupted, assuming an undertaking which Don Geronimo willingly yielded to his forward tongue. "With your permission, Don Geronimo," he amended, seeing the corner of Magdalena's eye.

"Speak until you are empty, Borrromeo," Don Geronimo granted.

"I am listening," Sergeant Olivera said.

"Then it was this way we accomplished it, against the belief of all men but Padre Ignacio," Borrromeo began. He stretched his legs under the table, and leaned back at elegant ease, one arm hooked over the chair-post, one free to emphasize and illustrate his points. "In the beginning, Don Juan came to me to inquire if I had a furnace for melting iron. He was not surprised when I showed him the little melting-pot that I had made of clay, for running metal to cast many little things which save me long hammering at the anvil. He saw at once that I was a craftsman who knew metal from the very ore. That made it simple for him; half the work was already done.

"Then this Don Juan shapes a model of parts out of wood, his cog-wheels and his stems. We pack dry sand around them, and withdraw them with care, leaving the impression, the form. But when I pour in the metal, there is a disturbance, for the sand is not just so dry. So, this first casting is not good. Again, and again, many times we try,

until at last it comes perfect from the mold. A bevel gear, as Don Juan calls it. Those are the English words for it: *bevel gear*. It is strange about this English, a very simple and easy language to speak. The word *no* means the very same thing that it does in Castilian."

"Simpleton!" said Magdalena laughing until her cheeks were red.

"A bevel gear," Sergeant Olivera repeated, thoughtfully. "But it is nothing new in mechanics, Don Geronimo?"

"Not at all; but new to the simple padres, applied for the first time in California. We have two buhrstones turned by the contrivance; I grant that it is a labor-saving machine, which is all this American yankee thinks of — saving human energy, the most plentiful and the cheapest thing in the world."

"That is not all that Don Juan has accomplished," Borrromeo said with pride. "He has shown us how oxen are yoked in America, with the yoke resting on the necks close against the shoulders, in place of being tied to the horns, as we do it, as it has been done in Spain for ten thousand years."

"Oh, not so long, Borrromeo," Magdalena asserted. "The world has not been created as long as that."

"Well, as long as it has been made, then," Borrromeo insisted.

"I do not see the advantage of the method,"

Sergeant Olivera said, considering it for its merits with an unprejudiced mind. "It may be more comfortable for the beasts, if any man is such a fool as to devise arrangements for that."

"Put yourself in the place of an ox," Borromeo proposed in entire seriousness, "and imagine me in the place of another, yoked to you horn by horn. There is a diabolical fly with a green head on my ribs; another, maybe its wife, on yours. I fling my head to knock off the beast that is sucking my blood; you do the same. Then where do we go, my friends? for the way one head goes, that way the other must go. So we suffer from these animals that eat us alive while head pulls against head and our eyes roll white as onions."

"It is for the flies that this humane Don Juan has devised the beautiful yoke, then?" Sergeant Olivera mocked.

"An ox is like a man, take him as you will," said Borromeo. "Give him comfort and he works with spirit. And that is one thing. Another thing is that one span of oxen will draw a load as heavy as three span yoked in the old way. And that is something else, heh?"

"It is something to consider," Sergeant Olivera admitted, honestly interested in what he had heard.

"And Don Juan has made a plow that throws a furrow like a wave, a great wide plow with one turning-side to it, not like the iron-shod beam that has been used in Spain for eight——"

“Hundred,” Magdalena prompted.

“Too long, even at that,” Borrromeo complained. “We knew no better until Don Juan proved what his plow could do. It will increase the yield of our fields, it will throw the diabolical worms that eat the roots of our plants up to perish in the sun.”

“I must see this plow,” Sergeant Olivera said.

“I am making another one now, after the pattern of the first; I shall make many more. You are welcome to come to the forge tomorrow and learn the ways of progressive men, so that when you have the ranch you spoke of at our first meeting, you will know where to come for an implement.”

“Just so,” the soldier said, nodding seriously.

“Yes, Don Juan is a marvelous man, he is like a brother to me,” Borrromeo declared. “He knows the name of every tool in the forge, he can talk enough Castilian already for daily use, more than many of these neophytes who have had it beaten into them for twenty years.”

“That is no marvel of intelligence,” Don Geronimo said, cold in the heat of all this praise, which Sergeant Olivera knew very well was distasteful to him as a bitter pill. “Castilian is the natural language of man; it is the speech that God put into Adam’s mouth at the beginning.”

“Does he sit at this table?” the soldier inquired.

“No. Padre Ignacio has him at table, with Padre Mateo and the guests,” Don Geronimo replied.

“It is like a family; he is the same as a son to Padre Ignacio,” Magdalena said.

“This is interesting,” Sergeant Olivera assured them, rising to take his leave. “With your permission, Doña Magdalena, Don Geronimo, I shall go to my repose. Tomorrow I leave you again, to return to the mission no more, except only as a friend to see his friends.”

“What is this?” Don Geronimo asked, his face turning pale.

“My captain has returned from Monterey with orders to establish the military forces in the Pueblo de Los Angeles, withdrawing the troopers from this mission and the Mission San Gabriel.”

Don Geronimo bent his head, and stood a little while in silence, as a man stands to collect himself when he has heard heavy news.

“It is the beginning of the end,” he said. “The pueblos will be built at the sacrifice of the missions. That is the mistaken policy of the viceroy, urged on by politicians who wait to pick our bones.”

Don Geronimo went with the soldier to the door, where he stood looking into the night. Magdalena knew by the turn of his head that he was facing toward the village where the Indians lived. What thoughts, what fears, were crowding into his mind that moment she could not know, but a terrible cloud of menace and unrestrained passion rose in her own vision, making her eyes big as if she looked on unspeakable things. There was hatred and smolder-

ing vengeance laid up against Don Geronimo in the brown huts of the clustered village, where many a back was sore that night from the bite of the long black whip that hung beside the door.

CHAPTER X

SEBASTIAN ALVITRE AGAIN

JUAN MOLINERO, for one, was glad to see the soldiers quit San Fernando, where eight of them, under command of a corporal, had been stationed since the day he returned to his sanctuary from the trip to the harbor. They were an insolent crew, fattening on the bounty of the padres, to whom they returned little service and less thanks. The Indians could be managed easier without this menace of cruel oppression forever in their eyes, according to Juan's belief. Even Padre Ignacio said the time and the necessity for a military guard at the missions was past.

Padre Mateo had told Juan a thing about these military men that did not lift them an inch in the American's respect. Spain, recently engaged in a turmoil of wars, its ships driven from the seas by the French, had lost contact with its American colonies. No Spanish ships had come to California in five years past; the viceroy of Mexico had ceased sending money to pay the soldiers in the presidios and missions of Alta California. The New Spain was becoming a stranger to the old; bold talk of separation, bold plots of uprisings to form a nation

apart, were carried forward in the light of day.

The governor of California had appealed to the missions for gold to pay the soldiers, many of whom, stationed at the presidios, were in hardship, their wives and children in necessitous want. This appeal, out of gratitude for past protection and assistance, was gladly met. It was so generously and promptly met, in truth, that the governor and the military men were surprised. They had found the key to the treasure-boxes of the missions, upon which they had fixed their covetous eyes so long.

From the first respectful, doubtful appeal it was only a step to another, this time with growing boldness in the security of their situation. It became, in modern expression, a graft, this preying on the mission treasure. Little of the gold thus easily secured reached the soldiers in the ranks. The governor, the officers, the favored citizens of influence in the settlements around the missions, profited in easy security by the gold drawn from the padres' generosity on the plea that the soldiers had protected them in the days of their weakness and should now be remembered in the hour of their own distress. The unworthy ones smiled, and put the gold in their own pockets, growing rich on the generosity of gratitude, as many other grafters have done in this moral world, before and since.

It had been a tremendous drain on the missions' treasury, the requirements of the beneficiaries growing as their respect gave way to insolence,

their supplication to unfeigned demand. The missions could not carry the load without falling soon into a state of exhaustion. A halt was called; the golden stream was suddenly and inexorably checked. This happened about the time of Juan Molinero's arrival at San Fernando. The withdrawal of the soldiers from the mission now was part of a plan of coercion to open the golden arteries again.

Padre Mateo talked of this as he stood with Juan Molinero in the mill the morning after Sergeant Olivera's visit to the kitchen. They had seen the soldiers ride away to the Pueblo de Los Angeles a little while before, each man with a pack-mule carrying his goods and possessions, accumulated here in this profitable lodgment which they were in no keen zest to leave.

Inside the shed that housed the simple machinery of the mill there was the pleasant smell of flint on flint as the millstones spun, warm streams of flour pouring into the bins in bountiful cascades. The miller was an old Mexican whose hair was almost as white as the flour, one who had come a young man to the mission of San Diego de Acalá, and had followed Padre Serra, founder of the missions, into the north. The marvel of this admirable mill was over him like the effect of a miracle. In the most prolific year of all the many years that he had fed the hoppers of mills driven by Indians tramping a wearisome circle at the end of a sweep, he had

not ground as much wheat as he had turned into flour these past two months. It was beyond him, this ingenuity of the man from a strange land. As he laved his hand in the stream of flour, guarding its temperature as carefully as a physician the heat of his patient, the gratitude for such bountiful outpouring was calm in his heart like a benediction.

Cristóbal had been advanced from the drudgery of the fields under Don Geronimo's lash to the station of assistant to the miller. His duty was to attend to the hoppers, and to tally off the number of bags ground daily. Padre Ignacio had withdrawn the mill from Don Geronimo's superintendence, placing it entirely in Juan's hands. Diplomatically, nicely as the priest had made this new arrangement, it had not been accomplished without umbrage on Don Geronimo's part. That gentleman's feather-edged dignity was as difficult to avoid trampling on as a cat's tail.

"So they are gone," said Padre Mateo, looking from the door of the mill toward the lumpy-backed low mountain that marked from a distance the point where the pass led into the valley of San Gabriel and the Pueblo de Los Angeles. "I, for one, have neither fears for the future nor tears for the present. The air seems sweeter to me this morning for having those gaming, drinking, dishonest fellows out of it. Let us hope that the road will be a long one that brings the next soldier here."

"I'll be able to cross the road, at any rate, with-

out needing a young lady to scheme some plan to get me back," said Juan. "I've been wanting to see that big field with the two palms in it for a long time."

"You have been patient under the restrictions that have set bounds for your restless feet, my son," Padre Mateo commended him. "But when you come and go, always remember Captain del Valle, and another one."

"Don Geronimo would like to see him catch me, well enough," Juan said. "Well, I'll give him a clear field one of these days, I think, Padre Mateo. Now the soldiers will not be here to spy on me every step I take, I can cut a bee-line for the mountains one of these nights."

"It is the way of an honest man to think of home with a tender yearning," Padre Mateo said gently, "but it would give me a pang like losing a brother to see you go. Is there nothing here, no promise, no vision of future times, to hold you, my Juan?"

"The Indians tell me there's a way to the south," said Juan, evading the question, "that's easy to travel in winter when the rains come. It strikes the country of the Yumas, on the Colorado."

"It is the mission trail, an old road, well known. There was a mission once among the Yumas, until they rose in their wickedness and destroyed it, and all within. That is a bad country, Juan; you couldn't pass the Yumas."

“ I’ll risk it, when the rains begin, ” Juan returned. “ What can a man do, or ever hope to do, in a country that condemns him to death for blundering into it? ”

“ Padre Ignacio has taken the matter up with our college of San Fernando, in Mexico. An appeal will be made to the viceroy for exemption in your case. When it comes, you may pass from one end of California to the other, the equal of any man. ”

“ They’ll find a way to deny you, Padre Mateo. There’s a jealousy of our people held by the Mexicans on account of our late expansion of territory west of the Mississippi, unwarranted as we know it to be. You may be certain that Captain del Valle has given me a bad name at headquarters. No, Padre Mateo, I’m convinced that if I’m to save my neck I’ve got to risk the dangers that lie between here and Kentucky. They’re bound to get me in time, if I stay here — I can’t live on your charity forever — while I have a strong chance of escaping the Yumas, and the tribes east of them, if I’m watchful as I go along. ”

“ It is not a question of bounty on our part, Juan, but one of the deepest gratitude for benefits conferred. You have helped us forward fifty years. What you might do, for us, for yourself, by remaining in California and becoming a citizen, is inspiring to contemplate. ”

“ Don Geronimo sneers at me for embracing your religion, Padre Mateo. What —— ”

“ Sneers? Don Geronimo sneers at you for embracing the holy faith? ”

“ It was a matter of expedience, rather than honest conviction, I heard him say to Sergeant Olivera. He didn't know I understood. ”

“ He is dishonest in his heart when he utters such words! ” Padre Mateo declared. “ Let me hear him repeat it, and I'll scorch him in a way he'll remember! ”

“ So what would he say, and other men like him of the snake-cold blood, if I changed my citizenship? I never could live among them, Padre Mateo, for I'll bear no man's scorn. ”

“ It is proclaimed in the way your body stands, in the high courage of your face, my son. When you stood between Don Geronimo and poor Cristóbal that morning the grapes were put in the press, I never beheld more dignity in a man, or more commanding power. And there is a day coming when we shall need you here, Juan, to stand between others of us who may not strike in our own defense, and the greedy ones who are making their sacks ready now to strip us and carry away all we own. ”

“ Yes, they're working to throw all the mission property over to the state; it's an infection that seems to have gone up and down California like a plague of smallpox. I've sat at the table with travelers the past month who passed words of their plotting from mouth to mouth, traitors to the hos-

pitality they enjoyed. I've felt like pitching them out into the road more than once."

"I have seen it grow," Padre Mateo sighed, "fed on the false postulation that the missions are holding these forty thousand Indians in slavery. Our work is accomplished, they argue; the Indians have been redeemed from the state of heathens and lodged safely in the bosom of mother church. We should now lift our hands and let the full-fledged brood fly away, and to what, Juan Molinero? To debauchery, debasement, slavery of the bitterest, indeed. That is the desire of these men who have vast land-grants from the crown: Indian labor to turn their furrows, guard their herds, make them rich. It would be the same here as it was in the islands of the Spanish Main of old. Our poor simpletons would become slaves, indeed."

"It looks to me like they've got a pretty easy time of it," Juan declared. "I don't see any hardships in the lives of these Indians at San Fernando, granted that the lazy ones do get a little strap-oil now and then. Eight or nine hours a day——"

"Seven, Juan. None of these Indians labors more than seven hours a day. Three hours we apportion for devotional exercises, as you know, making ten hours in all that we require their duty to us and to God. In return we give them, in simply material comforts, good lodgment, good beds for their repose; good garments to clothe their nakedness, abundance of food such as they never knew in their

former state, and could not provide for themselves if they were given their so-called freedom today. We give them the sanctity of marriage, we insure them repose in holy earth when life departs; and above all this, we have brought them into the inestimable heritage of eternal happiness beyond the grave."

"Padre Ignacio is coming, bringing some buyers for flour," Juan announced, breaking abruptly the thread of their not-too-happy discourse.

"So!" Padre Mateo made his eyes small, looking against the sun to see. "We'll soon have more customers than flour at the rate they've been coming. The fame of your mill has gone far."

Padre Ignacio was advancing along the dusty road beside the mother-ditch that carried the water to the fields, bareheaded, as he commonly went about, striding in long steps like a soldier. Three men followed him, coming a little way behind, talking among themselves, apparently discussing the flow of water in the irrigation ditch, to which they turned now and then with gesticulating hands.

"I doubt if these men are customers, Juan," Padre Mateo said, watching them narrowly, the broad brim of his flat hat pulled low to shade his eyes. "I see Vincente Felix, comisionado of Los Angeles, in the lead. He is not a man to buy flour."

"Isn't there another one you recognize?" Juan asked, a curious expression in his frank blue eyes.

"No-o-o," Padre Mateo deliberated, "I can't

say — yet there seems to be something familiar in the figure of another, the second, something in his bulky shoulders — what is it? do you know him, Juan? ”

“ Not that I know him, Padre, but we have met. If I am not greatly mistaken, it is Sebastian Alvitre. ”

“ So it is! late brigand, now a citizen of parts, but a rascal in any guise. It is no good wind that blows such geese as these to our water. ”

Padre Ignacio halted a little way from the door of the mill, waiting for the lagging trio to overtake him. They came up to him red and sweating, short-winded and puffing, for it was a hot morning and they were men of weight.

“ Good father, you can outwalk a horse! ” Comisionado Felix declared.

“ I come like a tortoise behind you! ” the third man of the party laughed, wiping his mottled face with an immense silk handkerchief of infernal hues.

Sebastian Alvitre made no comment. He had come up short, like a man running against a wall in the dark, on seeing Padre Mateo and Juan beside the door. He threw up his head, his face betraying his surprise as plainly as an exclamation, and shifted a foot as if to fall back into a posture of defense. There was neither shame nor fear in the man, whatever his other emotions on coming face to face with the one who had stripped him of his weapons in the house of Fabio Dominguez, and

thus set him on the road to reformation. He turned to look over the vineyards and fields which he had just traversed, standing as if transported by the beauty of the scene, making an excellent pretense of it for a man so blunt.

“Brother Mateo, Comisionado Felix, of the pueblo, you know,” Father Ignacio said, indicating that person with graceful turning of the hand. “This is Manuel Roja, citizen of the town, and this is Mr. Alvitre, who lately established himself in an inn on the plaza there.”

“Whom I have met, under circumstances not so tranquil as the present,” Padre Mateo said, giving Alvitre a bold, accusing look.

“I do not recall the pleasure,” the rascal protested, all interest, alert, deferential; carrying it off with the assurance that only an unconscionable rogue can assume.

“You will remember the monk who laid you on the floor of Fabio Dominguez’ house some weeks ago,” Padre Mateo prompted him, severe as a judge. “It was not I, but this one. You remember his eyes?”

“Your humor embarrasses a man, good padre,” Alvitre returned, looking indeed as if he spoke the truth. His companions, who knew very well that his pretense could not deceive anybody, made out to be so interested in the mill, the dam, and the water that rushed down the flume under the wheel,

that they did not even hear this by-play between the former bandit and the priest.

“And my girdle, a good hempen rope it was, of two yards’ length — what did you do with that?” Padre Mateo pressed.

“Some scoundrel masquerading, as many low fellows did in my unfortunate past,” Alvitre protested. “If you ever encountered a man in Dominguez’ house who said he was Sebastian Alvitre, that man was an outrageous liar!”

“I have no doubt of it,” Padre Mateo assured him, heartily sincere.

“Comisionado Felix has led this delegation from the pueblo to investigate our mill, Brother Mateo,” Padre Ignacio explained.

“You consider building one?” Padre Mateo inquired, turning to the comisionado.

The comisionado was a man who seemed enlarged to a disgusting puffiness by the virus of some festering complaint, evident in the pustules and pits which marred his face. His eyelids were red-rimmed, his beardless lips purple from the congestion of much wine. He spread his hands, drew his mouth in grimace expressive of complete disclaimer, at Padre Mateo’s question.

“Far from it,” he replied. “As it is we have scarcely enough water to drink, and keep our cattle and goats alive, to say nothing at all of our trees and little gardens of beans, which perish where they stand.”

“They claim that we are taking the water out of the river, robbing them to propel our millstones,” Padre Ignacio explained, with the patience of a just man, however ill-founded he knew the charge to be.

“It requires more water to drive two stones than one,” said the little fat fellow called Roja, whose sharp eyes had been exploring the interior of the mill.

“That is true,” Padre Ignacio replied, “and it is also true, as I told you before, that the water goes back into the river. You can see where the flume goes down, branching off there to the right.”

“There is a gate, also, to shut it off,” Alvitre said.

“The river-bed drinks it, the sand is so dry,” Comisionado Felix complained. He shook his head gravely, as if to say he found things worse than he had expected.

“Very little comes over the spillway, it is only a dribble that a donkey could almost drink,” said Roja.

“The mill is not always going, only seven hours a day,” Padre Mateo explained. “We close the gate at the head of the millrace at night; you get all the water that runs in the river then.”

“A great deal of water is required to irrigate these fields and vineyards, these trees, these gardens,” Alvitre said, spreading his hand to include all. “And there is much water shut behind this dam; it would take the little river weeks to fill it at

this time of the year. Consider our sufferings, then, in the pueblo. If this goes on, our beasts must die."

"Water is a thing which cannot be denied men who were Christian-born, for the benefit of lazy Indians who make a pretense of Christianity for the sake of their bellies, my good padres," Comisionado Felix said. "I was a soldier in this country many years; I have helped drive these savages to the baptismal font even here at San Fernando, and I say there is no justice in taking from men who were created in God's image to give to such as they."

Felix spoke with great earnestness, evidently sincere in his belief that the rights of the pueblo were being denied in favor of these beings whom he contemned, and placed among the inferiors of creation.

"There are two fountains wasting water constantly," Alvitre charged with severity, speaking to Padre Mateo as if he would humble him for what had gone before. "Must Indians have fountains to put their dusty toes in? Enough water is wasted in these two fountains every day to make many little gardens green."

"How many people are there in the pueblo now?" Padre Ignacio inquired, turning suddenly to Felix.

"More than five hundred, padre. They arrive on every ship."

"There is water enough in the river where the road crosses it to enter the pass, to supply three times that many people, and all their gardens, all

their flocks and animals of every kind," Padre Ignacio maintained. "I crossed there only two days ago; there is water over the fetlocks of a horse."

"Four or five inches of it there, yes, in a little stream two yards wide," said Roja. "But it is miles away from the pueblo yet, the sand drinks it as it goes, and no more comes in along the way."

"The rains are six weeks off," Alvitre complained.

"It is not only the present, but the future," the comisionado argued.

"Would you have us tear out the dam, then?" Padre Mateo demanded, in tones of defiance.

"It is God's water," Roja contended. "No more for priests to divert away to the use of Indians than for citizens and their children."

"Peace!" Padre Ignacio commanded sternly, the wide sleeve of his gown running down his brown sinewy arm as he lifted his hand. "There is water enough. Return to the pueblo and let it be understood there will be no change made in the economy of this mission. If necessary, the pueblo can be established in another place, where there is water for all future needs. This work shall not be abandoned, our fields and vineyards left to shrivel in the sun, for the convenience or comfort of any who came to this land after us and established themselves in our shadow. Go back to the pueblo and tell them this."

"You talk of moving the pueblo as one speaks of

lifting a box," Comisionado Felix said resentfully. "Well, Padre Ignacio, I have known you a long, long time, and I knew Padre Lasuen, who built this mission, before you, and I tell you that I never heard more unreasonable, more unwise words come out of the mouth of a priest. The day of your oppression in this place is nearly over, but the pueblo will be there when the walls of this mission are dust. Come, my friends; let us go."

The three at the mill door watched the visitors from the pueblo away, Padre Ignacio so indignant that he had no thought of attending them back to their horses at the mission door.

"So the admirable Comisionado Felix lays bare in a word the core of their complaint against us," Padre Mateo said. "Did you understand that mode of speech, Juan?"

"Only a word here and there."

"The base animal, calling us oppressors in a land that is incontestibly our own!" Padre Ignacio spoke with passionate indignation, his thin brown face reddening in the first gust of anger Juan ever had seen rise in him.

"That is the complaint of the trespasser everywhere," Padre Mateo said, "of the covetous who come to profit out of the labors of industrious men. We dominate this country, but no man can charge with justice that we oppress. We have made it; we shall hold it."

“If God wills, if God wills,” Padre Ignacio said gently, his flush of anger gone.

“This is the core of their indictment, this charge of oppression,” Padre Mateo went on; “they are making their argument for the confiscation of our property on that plea. Consider our poor Indians in the hands of such villains as that gallant three!”

“It may come, but we shall not live to see it, Brother Mateo,” Padre Ignacio said. “The government is not so weak as to listen to such wretches.”

“What will they do about the water?” Juan inquired, surprised that they should pass so lightly the nearer question of first importance for the speculative discussion of a political agitation that might never come to a head.

“They will do as they have done; clean out their ditch, perhaps, and let a little more into it from the river, the lazy rascals!” Padre Mateo replied.

“They loiter like the first pair leaving Eden,” Padre Ignacio said, looking after the three men in displeasure. “Attend them, Juan; see them outside and on their way.”

Juan followed quickly, glad for the order that gave him this detail, little honor as there was in attending Comisionado Felix and his friends. He had been wondering whether Alvitre would turn thief again if he chanced to see the horse that had carried him in many a foray on the highroad, dozing in the corral. But there was another thought

that caused him to quicken his steps far more eagerly than concern for the horse: the thought of Tula Sinova, her fair head bent over a square of snowy linen, her delicate fingers drawing out long threads, working a design of airy, exquisite beauty, while her little charges drove clumsy needles in the lesson of the day.

That was not a sight for the lewd eyes of a Comisionado Felix to behold; not a picture, framed by the broad, low door, for Sebastian Alvitre to lick his lips over like a wolf outside the lambs' corral. Tula would be in the big room adjoining the dining-hall with her class of young women and girls at that hour, fresh as a bramble-rose on the trellis by the fountain, her eyes bent down upon her work, sitting near the door that opened into the court. These men from the dusty pueblo must not profane her with their eyes.

CHAPTER XI

THE FIELD OF TWO PALMS

JUAN did not overtake the men from Los Angeles. They appeared to have no relish for his company; the moment they saw him following, his long legs quickly discounting the advantage of their start, they hastened on as if walking for a prize. Juan arrived in time to see Magdalena returning from the public entrance, which she had barred behind them as if she distrusted their return.

“What rascals! That Vincente Felix looks like he would steal sheep, and his companions are not much better.” Magdalena wiped her hands on her apron, as if she had touched something unclean, putting her thoughts into simple words that Juan could understand.

“One of them has stolen more than sheep, Doña Magdalena,” he told her.

“The one with mustaches like pin-feathers on a goose; that would be the man, Don Juan.”

“Sebastian Alvitre, the robber of the road. You have good judgment of men’s faces, doña.”

“Alvitre! Now, I let him go without hearing him speak, notable brigand that he is!” Magdalena hastened to the door, as if to repair her over-

sight for an opportunity of picking up a cheap souvenir, as it might be said, which she could have boasted of in future times.

There was nothing in the road but the dust of the visitors' going, and an ox-cart coming from the field with white onions that looked like a load of snow.

"Brigand no more, as you have heard," Juan laughed, diverted by the ingenuous woman's outspoken disappointment. "You can stop at his tavern the first time you go to the pueblo, and hear him talk by the hour."

Magdalena gave him a look of reproof, drawing her finely traced brows in a frown.

"As if I would put my foot into a robber's den, Don Juan! Alvitre in his tavern will rob twenty men where he used to rob one on the road."

"Yes, I think a traveler would be about as safe with him in one place as another."

"You learn our speech fast, Don Juan; already it spins from your tongue like a thread from the wheel."

"It is a good place for learning many things, this mission San Fernando. Would to God, Doña Magdalena, I could stay here forever."

"You would not leave us? No, there is no ship goes to your country."

"I must leave soon, doña; across the land, the way I came."

"The poor Indians would weep to see you go,

Juan, and Cristóbal — Cristóbal could not be held in iron. ”

“ There would not be a river of tears, the walls of San Fernando would stand, ” Juan laughed, but uneasily, with a poor pretense.

Doña Magdalena studied him in silence a moment, tender sympathy in her soft dark eyes.

“ A man like you should have a wife, and little-ones around his knee, ” she said. “ What injustice in laws which condemn a kind stranger, and let Sebastian Alvitre walk free! ”

“ But it is that way, doña. A man does not want to be shot for being nothing worse than a stranger. ”

“ I heard Padre Ignacio tell Don Geronimo that he had sent to the capital to get a paper for you, something that will make you a free man, Juan. Stay at the mission until it comes, then you can find a wife without looking far, and make a home. There was a grant of land to Don José Sinova, father of our little Tula, which now comes to her. She has gold in a box, too, plenty of it. When the day comes, and you have your paper, Juan, Padre Ignacio will give her to you for the asking. ”

“ Doña Magdalena, she wouldn't have me for the taking, or at any price, no matter how cheap, ” said Juan, seeming to despise himself, his words were so pointed with disdain.

“ That's what a man always thinks when he adores a woman, ” Magdalena returned, superior by

reason of her inner knowledge. "Go now, little Juan, about your business and let me do mine. But look in at the door as you pass, and speak to her. If your eyes are in the right place, you will see a color rush up her throat and spread in her face like measles. It will be nothing worse than her heart trying to jump out where you can see it, great simpleton that you are, Don Juan."

Gertrudis Sinova, affectionately called Tula by her equals at the mission, sat where she could see the fountain through the open door. Near by stood a long table on which patterns of garments cut of cheerful blue and white cotton cloth were orderly spread. Along the sides of the table, ranged on benches, the sewing class was at work, advanced students guiding the hands of beginners, a happy chatter filling the immense room, spacious enough to have seated a class of four times the number.

As it was, there were fifty or more girls under Tula's gentle hand, from seven to twenty years of age, eager to learn the one art of civilization that seemed to have a great allurements for them, and in which they displayed astonishing aptitude. Two windows, small for the great depth of room, fended by strong hand-beaten bars, were set the height of a man in the thick adobe wall. These, with the wide open door, gave light for the labors that were going forward there. It was sufficient in those long, cloudless white days of summer and autumn, although the farther corners of the apartment were in gloom.

The mission padres were sparing of their windows, probably owing to the scarcity of glass, perhaps due to some more remote reason of their own. Their interiors were gloomily melancholy, out of keeping with their airy arches and white-plastered outer walls. The Mission San Fernando was an over-built establishment; it never had developed up to the plans made for it by Padre Lasuen, its founder. The western end of the long building, impressive in dimensions even in comparison with the great structures of the modern city which has grown out of the old pueblo where Comisionado Felix strutted his brief day, was at this time used for the storage of grain, and other products of the fields. At an early period the women neophytes had been locked there at night to keep them from temptation: later the king's soldiers had been quartered in the vast apartment where Tula Sinova held her sewing classes; the marks of their heavy boots were in the soft red tiling of the floor.

This bright autumn morning, when the scarred hills seemed to have drawn so near that one could have called greeting to the shepherds in the little green canyons with their flocks, the old barracks room was as cheerful as sunlight and youth could make it, and there is no illumination in all the devices of men that can reach so far into the heart as these. Juan Molinero felt the gushing of a great happiness, when he stood looking in at the open door.

Tula Sinova was all in white, like an evening

primrose. There was a little spray of fragrant jasmine blossoms in her rippling hair above her ear. Her head was bent slightly over the work upon which her hands lay idle; one sandalled foot was thrust out a little, as if it started toward the open door to follow her dreams away. She was pensive, and seemed oppressed; there was a shadow in her cheek as of a face that sorrow had held between its hands.

Juan had stopped a little way beyond the door, his feet quiet on the dusty earth that bordered the tile-paved path. He knew that Doña Magdalena was watching him, and laughing at his timid heart. Gertrudis seemed to feel his shadow in the path, as one feels a cloud before closed eyes. He removed his low-crowned hat as she turned her face, greeting him with a smile.

It might have been a Castilian gentleman from the very shadow of the Alhambra whom she beheld standing between her and the fountain, the sun glinting in his bright hair, striking in little metallic gleams as she had seen it glint and glisten in the sands of Santa Monica, wet in the racing seas. The tailor of San Fernando had done credit to his craft and justice to the frame of his customer. Padre Mateo had seen to that. Denied the pleasure of fine raiment himself, the honest padre had no small enjoyment in the example of elegance and grace that this adopted son of the mission presented.

Juan's limbs carried the garments of a strange race with gentlemanly ease that was equaled only by

the facility with which he acquired the speech to harmonize with them. He stood before Tula in a fine suit of silver-gray velvet, lacings of gold on his short jacket, tassellings of gold on the green sash. His own skin was not tighter on his thighs than his pantaloons, cut with flaring bottoms which almost covered his boots and strapped under the instep, in the fashion that was best suited to men who lived more than half their time in the saddle. A little trickling-down of hair from the temple made a narrow band of beard, which was cut square-ended midway of his cheek, in the true Castilian way. He was a supple, sinewy, brown and comely man.

Tula laid aside the linen that she had held in her lap, and came to the door, a thimble on her finger, scissors hanging like a crucifix on a black braid about her neck.

“You would look in at my class, Don Juan?” said she.

How could Doña Magdalena ever think of so gross a comparison for the delicate tint that ran, like a shadow over a fair land, from throat to cheeks as she spoke. Measles! scorned Juan. It was the impalpable pigment of sunset above the hills; the elusive beauty of the sweetest bloom.

“I will include the class,” said he, but he could not have sworn, on the word of a true man, that Tula was keeping a class that day. There was Tula in the door. A man’s vision fused upon her radiance; it faltered like a dying beam at the window of her eyes.

“ Will you enter, Don Juan, and see the class at work? ”

“ I am only passing, Miss Gertrudis, there is a new liberty for my feet today. You have heard that the soldiers are gone? ”

“ I saw them ride away at sunrise, thank God! ”

“ So I can cross the road now, without fear of the dogs, ” he laughed, shifting his feet like a bashful swain, his eyes now on the path, now on her face, now on the hills, varying as the seed of an alamo blown on its feathery wings.

“ Be watchful, Don Juan! How can you go with a laugh when there is so much peril? They may be waiting for you to appear, as before. ”

“ No, there is no pretense this time; they are gone. ”

“ Doña Magdalena says it is a plot to humble the padres. They believe the Indians will rise. ”

“ Never against the padres. ”

“ Against the soldiers themselves, or perhaps against the authority of Don Geronimo? ”

“ Who knows? ” Juan returned her the Spanish answer, making an exposition of entire neutrality of mind with his outspread hands, facile as he was in that mode of expression from long use of sign language among savage neighbors and foes in the forests of Kentucky.

“ But why will you cross the road this morning, Don Juan? Captain del Valle is a man who will not accept defeat; he may be waiting around the wall. ”

"I want to see the field of the two palms, where the melons grow," said Juan. "Captain del Valle is in the pueblo, but I believe with you that he is waiting his day."

"Then you must not go out of the mission bounds, Don Juan."

"The mission is only a few miles square, Miss Tula; just a little place for a man who has roamed a continent."

"Your heart is eager to be away, Don Juan. Home is dearer than friends in a distant place."

Juan turned his head to see if Doña Magdalena had gone into her kitchen. She was standing where he had left her, watchful duenna that she was, for all her bantering.

"I will pass on," he said, turning his hat in his hands.

"Until the next meeting, Don Juan," she returned, gravely courteous as if that time stood far away.

"They say the rains will come in six weeks," said Juan, as if a messenger had come with the news that morning, and politeness constrained him to repeat it. But he did not advance a foot upon his way.

"We must close the door and light candles in the daytime, then," Tula sighed. "I would keep these bright days."

"There is no thunder here, I have been told."

"That will be a blessing to a coward such as I. When thunder crashes, I shrivel like a snail."

v.

Magdalena was standing with hands on her hips, in posture of impatience, rather severe and wholly imperious to behold, although Juan was certain that she was smiling, as an indulgent mother smiles when her small son strains and struggles to reach a fruit far over his head.

“I will pass on, Miss Tula,” said Juan. But not convincingly; more in a way that seemed to plead for a detaining word.

“Until the next sight, Don Juan,” she murmured, filling her breast with a quick breath that escaped again at once, a sigh. Tula was fingering the scissors on the tape; she looked up, her eyes hesitant, timid, yet governed by a curiosity that was not to be denied.

Juan was trapped; he felt hot blood in his face as he turned his glance away, withdrawing it like a hand caught pilfering. Padre Ignacio was returning from the mill; there was a sound of the cargo of onions being unloaded from the cart.

“There is a pomegranate tree in the field of two palms, and I never have seen such a tree,” said Juan, sighing as if pomegranate trees bore fruit of misery. He shifted from foot to foot; his gaze was on the brick-red tiles of the garden walk, his flat hat was crumpled in his hand.

“It is a sour fruit,” she said; “when it bursts in the sun it is red like garnets.”

What a sad thing to bear fruit that burst red in the sun! What a misfortune for the melancholy pomegranate tree! What a tremendous sigh!

“Now, I am going,” said Juan. He put his hat on his head; he moved his foot in the path.

“Go with God, Don Juan,” said she, low, like a benediction. And after that word he could not stay.

There were wonders to be seen in the field of the two palms, where the grey adobe wall ran in line as true as transit could draw it. First of all, there was the wonder of the wall itself, not less than eight feet thick at the bottom, where it stood on a foundation of round stones brought from the river bed, tapering to three feet at the top. It was nine or ten feet high, and enclosed at least two hundred acres. Juan stood at the gate admitting to this fruitful enclosure, struck with astonishment by the evidence of so much labor so unwisely spent.

It seemed as if the padres had expected the mastodons and camels to rise up out of the bismuth pits which held their bones in the valley crossed by the harbor road. Padre Mateo had pointed out the melancholy place where wild creatures of a past age had walked into this viscous lake. The people of the Pueblo de Los Angeles used the material now to make their roofs waterproof. They found the bones of these ancient monsters, immense past belief, sound as the day they had mired and wallowed down to their miserable end. It seemed, indeed, as if the padres had expected these prodigious beasts to come again to the valleys of California and invade their fields.

Hundreds of hands had toiled through many

months to raise that wall, brick upon brick of sun-dried adobe bound with a mortar of mud; savage hearts must have rebelled at the enforced task, which must have appeared unreasonable even in their slow and groping minds; savage hearts must have been broken, savage pride fallen crushed to rise no more, driven by lash and bayonet to this labor of lifting a rampart strong enough to stop an army, against no greater enemy than domestic cattle and murmuring flocks of sheep.

Juan looked at this very Chinese wall of a fence in amazement. It was the first evidence of waste and extravagance he had seen in the building and economy of San Fernando. What a needless expenditure of human force had gone into that wall! What an unfeeling disregard for men driven to labor to this fatuous end! A wall half as high, with a foundation a fourth as broad, would have turned the wildest animal in the mission herds, and there were no others ranging that country that would have any desire to break into a field.

Borromeo had repeated to him Don Geronimo's saying that there was nothing in the world so plentiful and so cheap as human labor, which Juan's devices were all designed to conserve. It required the illustration of this thick broad wall to give him the true valuation of the mayordomo's argument, an unquestionable interpretation of his social and economic ethics. Untempered cruelty was the foundation of that belief, insatiable greed its distorted genius. The padres were blind to its monstrous

barbarity in their zeal of building to the glory of Christ.

Many Indians, young and old, were at work in the big field where the two palms grew, some of them harvesting the onions, of which there were several acres, picturesque groups of them, their long hair about their ears, loading sheaves of grain upon carts. Others with hoes and spades were letting the water from the ditches in among the little fields of turnips, cabbages, beets and green things, the luxuriance of which proved the strength of the soil.

Close by the gate there grew a field of maize, green and flourishing this late November day as Juan ever had seen it in midsummer in his own clime. Young Indians were gathering the green ears, with a great amount of laughter and happy calling to each other from the jungle of tall stalks. An ox-cart was being heaped with the ears to be taken to the Indian village. That amount would make only one meal, and a scanty one as measured by the neophytes' desire for this delectable food.

Padre Ignacio had told Juan how the Indians had come to value maize after a patient and slow persuasion to induce them to accept it. Like all cultivated vegetables and grains, maize was strange to the California Indians when the padres brought it there. These Indians knew nothing about agriculture in their primitive state; they were roaming, homeless animals; their sustenance was gathered from the bounty of nature, the bitter acorns of the encina, or live oak, forming the principal item of

their food. Juan remembered this as he stood viewing the fields abundant in the ripe and ripening crops. The Indians had advanced marvelously in two generations under the padres' hands.

There was a pleasant smell rising from the ground where the water spread between rows of growing cabbages and beets, as if it breathed the incense of its humble thanks for this blessing. With deft strokes of hoe and spade the Indians led little streams, which went crawling hungrily, eager in the way of water, whether it rushes in beneficence or roars in destruction. It left a little beading of foam on the ditch sides as it sank, the plants, growing on little ridges, leaning almost imperceptibly at the touch of it, as if they relaxed from the strain of waiting, famished in the ardent sun.

The greater part of the field within the strong adobe wall had been sown to grain, the stubble of which was still standing almost knee-high to a man, proof of the prodigious leavening that land contained. Juan calculated that the ripe grain must have been as high as the heads of the reapers who went to gather it with their primitive sickles and bind it into little sheaves no thicker than a man's thigh.

These sheaves were being carted to a circular enclosure over against that part of the wall nearest the mission buildings, whence there rose a confusion of dust and voices. Cattle were being driven around and around inside this fenced circle; Juan knew it was the threshing floor, where the grain was

being trampled from the husk under the feet of oxen. He was filled with a compelling curiosity to witness this operation.

This threshing pen was about fifty feet in diameter. In the center of it sheaves of untrampled grain were thrown, from which point they were distributed under the oxen's feet as required. Two teams of oxen yoked four abreast, were being driven around the circle, prodded out of their ordinarily leisurely gait by young men who trotted beside them with goads. The cattle were dripping sweat, their tongues were lolling, apparently at the utter bound of endurance. Dust rose thick from the dry straw, and from the uncovered ground where the grain was beaten out under the tortured creatures' feet.

The Indians, not far enough advanced yet to feel compassion for a suffering beast, seemed altogether unconscious of their cruelty. Here, as elsewhere when they worked without the direct superintendence of Don Geronimo, there was singing and laughter and merry light words among the young men who had been born and bred under the mission régime. Only the older men, the true neophytes, or converts from the state of heathen, were silent as they moved slowly, apathetically, perhaps unwillingly, about their appointed tasks.

These men, some of them shrivelled of skin and grey, seemed dulled by a heavy melancholy. Maybe they were thinking of the days before the padres came, when they were unrestrained and free. In those times it was the custom, at this season of the

year when the rains were approaching, to set the grass afire to drive the rabbits out. There was more pleasure in standing along the line of fire and whacking rabbits with a club, than toiling here to beat out this grain of the padres, superior as it was to acorns when boiled in a kettle with the cracked bones of sheep.

In this time of year the acorns were ripe. There was far more pleasure, indeed, in lying aside under a tree, watching the women beat them between stones and put them to soak in water to withdraw the evil that made the bowels knot and gripe, than to be carrying sheaves of wheat on one's shoulders, or tossing the grain in the wind to clean it of chaff and dirt. Perhaps they had thoughts such as these, the old men who went silently, with sad faces, at this labor which they never came to love.

Juan watched the threshing with a feeling over him that he had been shifted from the present into the far past. It might have been that he stood at the edge of the field where Boaz bent with his sickle, and Ruth came with timid feet far behind him, gleaning the scattered ears of grain. For surely this was not the method of modern men.

Here, on one hand, lay the grain already threshed, whether yesterday or today he did not know. It was heaped on the bare ground, filled with chaff and dirt which certain old men labored with indifferent success to remove by tossing the grain in the wind for the lighter particles to blow away. Close beside this heap of grain the trampled, broken straw

was thrown, carelessness, uncleanliness, disorder, over the whole that made the thought of bread repellent.

As Juan looked on this clumsy, ineffective operation the thought of the pomegranate tree went out of his mind, and of its fruit that burst in the sun and is like the red of the garnet stone. He lifted a handful of straw, finding it filled with fragments of unthreshed heads; he stirred it with his foot, to see whole grains, broken grains, fall in a shower. At least a tenth of the grain appeared to be wasted in this ancient, ignorant method of threshing. In its twenty centuries of history, Spain had not thought of a better way.

For months this threshing had been in progress at the mission, Juan knew; it must continue two or three weeks longer, calculating from the amount of grain still in the shock in that field, which was the largest and the last. Juan turned back to the mission, leaving all that he had not seen of the field of the two palms to another day. The sharp cries of the young men who drove the weary oxen in their staggering round, followed him over the high adobe wall.

CHAPTER XII

DON GERONIMO'S WRATH

“**W**ELL, Juan Molinero, you have not shown me a new invention,” said Padre Ignacio. “I have heard of such an instrument, used for the purpose you propose to put this to, I believe, but principally as an ancient weapon of war. Flail, is it, in the English tongue? In Castilian it is *flagelo*, plainly meaning an instrument for the infliction of punishment. I am afraid, my gentle Juan, that your contrivance will be looked upon in that light by the poor Indians, who would much rather have the cattle to do this work of threshing than bend their backs and do it themselves.”

Juan did not understand all this, for Padre Ignacio sometimes forgot to use simple words and speak slowly, yet he received enough to know that his proposal to introduce the flail for threshing grain in the mission fields was not welcomed very warmly. This fact did not cool his earnest determination to prove the superiority of the flail over any method then known to man for separating grain from the husk.

Juan had gone straightway from the threshing floor, if the fenced circle trampled by the oxen could be so called, to the carpenter shop, where he found

wood of toughness and grain suitable for the swingle and shaft of a flail. The two parts of the simple instrument he connected with a rawhide thong. Now he was on his way, the flail in his hand, Padre Ignacio at his side, to give a demonstration of the flail in the field where the threshers were at work, there being no grain in the sheaf elsewhere on the mission estates.

Cristóbal accompanied them, carrying a thick canvas to spread for a threshing floor. Juan explained that results would not be as satisfactory under these conditions as on a firm barn floor of planks, but he hoped to convince Padre Ignacio of the superior economy in this mode.

“No, it is not a new thing, Padre Ignacio,” Juan admitted. “The German and English people have used the flail for threshing ever since they grew grain. But they are people who do not shun hard work when it will bring them better bread.”

“Ah, we are indolent people, we Castilians, except in the conquest of worlds,” Padre Ignacio returned. Gentle and just as he was, he could not suppress the pride and irony that leveled all men’s achievements to dust in comparison with the race from which he sprung.

Work in the threshing pen was suspended while Juan illustrated the use of the implement he had made. In that day the use of the flail was a part of every American farmer’s craft; Juan had been notable with it as a stripling, when he once took the championship away from a whiskered giant famous

over three counties for his fourteen hundred weight of grain a day. The Indians pressed in silent interest to watch him, while the chaff flew in a cloud beneath his dextrous strokes.

In a little while Juan had threshed half a hundred weight of grain. He scooped a double handful and lifted it to Padre Ignacio's inspection, letting it rain down between his fingers and winnow in the wind. Padre Ignacio said nothing. He bent and ran his hand through the little heap of clean whole grain, sifting it through his fingers as if not ready to accept the evidence until he had satisfied himself there was no trick about it.

Juan scooped his hand full of the grain from the threshing floor where the oxen had trampled, and offered it in comparison.

"It is cleaner, there are not so many broken kernels," Padre Ignacio admitted. "But see how you sweat, Juan. It is a labor to thresh grain with your machine."

Juan could see in the faces of the Indians the same thought, the same objection. This was not like the mill, there was nothing marvelous in beating out grain with a jointed stick. He had not come to them with a labor-saving implement, but a man-consuming device, as the oldest and the dullest Indian alike could see.

"How much is threshed in one of these trampling-pens in a day?" Juan asked.

Padre Ignacio repeated the question to the Indian foreman.

“Who knows?” the man replied, “I keep the young men at work, I see that the oxen are changed when one falls. Maybe the men who measure the wheat can tell.”

Here was a divided, a vague, opinion. One thought it might be a hundred quintales, another scoffed this, putting his estimate at fifty.

“Call it seventy-five quintales, although I don’t believe it can be done,” said Juan. “It must be winnowed, it must be run through sieves, even the little stones must be picked out of it by hand, before it can go to the mill. Look at this wheat I have threshed, Padre Ignacio; clean enough as it is to go into the hopper, except for this chaff, which a breath will blow away.”

“I fear the method is too slow, although superior in other respects, I will admit. At the end of harvest, Juan, we have nine or ten of these threshing-places going every day; we make short work of it. But with this little stick — who can tell?”

“An ordinary man can thresh six or seven quintales in a day, Padre Ignacio. Put fifty at work —”

“Don Geronimo!” Cristóbal warned, touching Juan’s arm.

Don Geronimo had approached unseen until that moment by any of the interested spectators. With his arrival there was a general scurrying back to their duty among the Indians, who cringed as they ran in expectation of the bite of Don Geronimo’s whip. The mayordomo reined up at the edge of

the spread canvas, his face dark with displeasure.

"What is this diversion? Why are these men standing idle?" he demanded of Padre Ignacio.

"The day is long enough, Don Geronimo; we can spare them a few minutes from their tasks," Padre Ignacio replied, his manner gently corrective, gently resentful of the harsh challenge of authority in that place.

"Yes, if you priests were left to conduct the business of this mission everybody soon would starve," Don Geronimo declared, scornfully as a man ever spoke.

"It is well we have a zealous guardian of our fields, Don Geronimo," Padre Ignacio confessed, contrite as if he was the aggressor, indeed. He looked up at the mayordomo, a smile illuminating his sad old weathered face.

Juan felt a great tenderness for this gentle old man, a strong desire to stand in his defense against the arrogant overriding and assumption of authority by Don Geronimo. He understood fully that the mayordomo held his appointment from the president of all the missions, but it was also true that all authority at San Fernando was in Padre Ignacio's hands. A word from him should have been sufficient to put Don Geronimo in his place, but more and more Juan was aware of the mayordomo's trespass on this authority, his open and contemptuous stealing of the good-hearted old padre's power.

It seemed that the aggressiveness had burned out

of Padre Ignacio in all the years he had been tramping the long road between San Diego and Monterey before coming to his rest at San Fernando, where the little river came down out of the hills. There was only gentleness left in his breast, and the missions were not built by gentleness, nor regard for the labors and sufferings of impressed savages, while it was plain that Padre Ignacio put this first in all his thoughts of men. He stood there, the slant sun of evening on his face, one bony brown hand closed on the wheat he had taken from Juan's threshing, the other lifted in what seemed an appeal, rather than a command, for peace. The sleeve of his coarse rough gown had fallen to the bend of his arm, which was sinewy and brown from his labor among his beloved vines.

"Juan has been giving us an exemplification of a tool, an ancient weapon applied by the men of many nations to the arts of peace. You see, Don Geronimo, the grain he has beaten out with a few deft strokes — he was not half an hour about it, I am certain. The advantages of this mode are apparent to me; I see more and more in favor of it as I reflect and consider."

"We can have no more of this change and innovation at San Fernando," Don Geronimo said. "This meddling with the old, time-established order is demoralizing; it advances nothing but discontent and laziness."

"It cannot be said of the flail, then, Don Geronimo, that it would encourage a lazy disposition in

any man," Padre Ignacio returned, in smiling good humor. "Look at Juan, see how the sweat pours out of him from threshing this little heap of wheat. A man would earn his salt at a day's work with the flail, you may be certain."

"I cannot permit this interference in my fields, this distraction among my workmen," Don Geronimo said sharply.

"Don Geronimo!" Padre Ignacio chided.

Juan was standing by, his jacket thrown aside, his shirt wet on his muscular back, the flail in his hand. He was far more resentful of Don Geronimo's insolent declaration of authority than Padre Ignacio, whom the mayordomo made so bold as to push aside as a man of no consequence in the affairs and administration of the Mission San Fernando.

"Let this spy of a despicable, upstart nation keep to the mill in future. I tell you, Padre Ignacio, I will have no more of his interference and silly contrivances."

"It will be enough, Don Geronimo," Padre Ignacio said sternly, the gentleness of his face yielding to an expression of dignified command. "Where this son of San Fernando chooses to walk within our limits, there he shall walk without the interference of any man."

"A weak prejudice for him, growing in your heart for his supposed services to you, blinds your eyes to his true guise." Don Geronimo charged. He leaned toward Padre Ignacio as he spoke, his

face flushed with the rising of his anger, little thinking that Juan had the intelligence to understand nearly all that he said.

“He has done us great service, Don Geronimo; simple gratitude is but poor payment for what he has given us.”

“Padre Ignacio, I tell you the man is a spy, sent here by his government to learn how the soil is cultivated, how we make raisins, dry our figs, how the seasons come and go, and all the secrets necessary to the ten thousand of his kind that stand ready to flock here and overrun us like locusts.”

“That is a lie in the mouth of a liar!” Juan stepped forward to hurl the charge into Don Geronimo’s face like a stone.

Don Geronimo lifted himself in his stirrups, face distorted by the sweep of his sudden passion. Padre Ignacio anticipated his intention, and leaped with incredible swiftness under the fiercely flung lash. The scornful, hate-driven blow of the mayordomo’s whip fell sharply across the priest’s shoulders, only the lash of it stinging Juan’s arm.

So the gentle old man stood between them, his arms spread to keep them apart. Cristóbal, hurt deeper than Padre Ignacio by the indignity of the blow, cried out sharply and sprang forward, as if to tear Don Geronimo from his horse. Juan Molinero swung his flail, unheeding of the priest’s clutching, frantic hand upon his arm, and struck Don Geronimo from the saddle with a sweeping, terrible blow.

Cristóbal's shout of triumph rang over the dusty field, where the workmen flung down their tools as if liberty had come to them with that swift blow, and came running to witness the overthrow of the tyrant who had driven them with pitiless hand.

Don Geronimo's horse sprang away as its master fell, the stirrups flinging high as it galloped to the gate. Don Geronimo lay on his back, his black whip on its thong about his wrist, its long lash trailing across his breast. Blood ran into his beard from a great gash that opened from cheek-bone to forehead across his temple. Dust was grey on his face; beneath it a pallor that seemed the bloodless seal of death.

Padre Ignacio was on his knees beside the mayordomo, one hand on his heart, one on his lips, searching out the spark of life. Juan came and stood over the prostrate man, neither contrition nor anger in his honest brown face, but rather the look of a man who is satisfied with his day's work, and would not mend it if it lay within his power. He stooped and lifted Don Geronimo's hand, his finger seeking the beat of the artery under the thong that held the whip.

"He is not dead, by a long shot, Padre Ignacio," he said.

"Thank God!" Padre Ignacio breathed in relief. "Bring a cart, Cristóbal — that one just emptied of sheaves." He turned to Juan, his face sadder than Juan had ever seen it, yet something inexorably hard and accusing in his eyes.

“ Juan Molinero, you have done a terrible deed! ”
he said.

“ It was for the blow you took, Padre Ignacio. ”

“ I would have borne it, Juan, in forgiveness. ”

“ He can't strike a white man with his whip!
he's no lord of creation. ”

“ You have struck down authority before the eyes of those who must bend and subjugate themselves to it. No man can see the evil fruit of this woeful stroke, let Don Geronimo live or die. I took the blow that was intended for you, Juan, from Don Geronimo's hand, but I cannot assume the consequences that your vengeful anger must bring upon your head. ”

“ My back is broad, Padre Ignacio; I can carry it. ”

The cattle were standing again in the threshing-pen, the pitchforks, sieves and measures were dropped, while the Indians crowded to look at Don Geronimo, blood mingling with the dust on his beard. There was excitement in the faces of even the most stolid; eagerness gleamed in all their eyes. They pressed round the spot where Don Geronimo lay, their bare feet noiseless in the dust of the trodden field, short, ejaculatory words passing under their breath from man to man. Cristóbal came with the cart; they parted to let him pass.

“ Gently with him! ” Padre Ignacio cautioned, for there was neither gentleness nor pity in the hands that clutched Don Geronimo to lift him into the cart. “ Here, put this unlucky instrument of

yours in the cart with him, Juan; I will take charge of it henceforward. I fear it will be many a long day before we quit the old method of threshing our grain at the Mission San Fernando. Forward, Cristóbal; hasten with him to his door."

Cristóbal took up the goad, a gleam of pleasure in his quick eyes, a look of triumph in his dark handsome face. He threw his head back, shaking his long hair from his brow, whistled to the oxen, his goad poised to strike. The mellow, vibrant note of a bell sounded over the fields, three measured strokes. All heads bent, all hands fluttered over breasts, all lips moved in the brief words of a prayer.

"Forward, then," said Padre Ignacio, as the bell began again, quick and joyous in its tolling, the evening signal calling the laborers home from the fields.

In that way Don Geronimo went home with his bleeding face, his feet at the cart's end like the feet of a dead man going to his grave. And so the neophytes followed him, their bare heads lifted in the sense of a new freedom. The sound of the evening bell went rolling over the fields, now dimming as the wind bent it seaward, now welling as there came a lull. There was a purple on the hills like the mist of wine.

CHAPTER XIII

A BROKEN FIESTA

AFTER vespers the Indians were merry that evening over their green corn and beef, Don Geronimo's abasement the motive of their delight. Each family group gathered around the big vessel which held their supper filled from the common kettles, in the back yards of the cabins — for the padres began early to instill the patio usage, the Spanish love of seclusion, in their wards — talked of the noble deed Juan Molinero had done. They raised him in their praise as they humiliated Don Geronimo. And now Don Geronimo was dead, they said. Don Juan was to be mayordomo. They should have justice; they should feel the cut of the cruel black whip no more.

There was little serious thought, then or at any time, of rising against the beneficent authority of the padres, although trouble makers who expected to profit out of the Indians' exploitation had been at work several years among the younger men. It was not against the padres that the resentment of the neophytes rose, but against the machinery which the padres employed.

There never were more than two priests at one time stationed at a single mission; spiritual super-

vision was the work with which they were most earnestly employed. Soldiers always had been at the various missions, or stationed within easy call, to enforce the discipline of those who directed the labors in the fields. The Indians were not willing toilers in the upbuilding of these vast mud palaces, these high-walled, stolid, frowning, gloomy churches, yet never since the remote days of the beginning at San Diego de Acalá, when they killed two of the pioneer padres, had they lifted their hands against the priests.

There was beginning to be much talk of liberty among the young men, it is true, words put into their mouths by crafty rascals who would have changed the Indians' pastoral security under mission rule to the debauched state of wage slavery which they finally accomplished, to the wreckage and almost extinction of this simple people within a generation. Tonight this talk of liberty was bolder and more outspoken than ever before. The young men gathered in the trampled little streets, talking of working as freemen among the ranchers, gaining money and horses, flocks, herds, homes of their own, instead of bending their labors to the padres' comfort and enrichment with no promise of future change.

Let the old ones, and the timid ones, remain at the mission, they said. Now that Don Geronimo was down, it was time for the young ones to go. Against this urging there were far-seeing ones who revealed the white men's purpose in alienating them

from the padres' lands. Cristóbal was one of them, fiery as he was at heart, resentful of the cruelty and imposition of his condition. For a few strong ones who could withstand the temptation of the white men's brandy, liberty would be desirable, he said. But for such as understood liberty as a state where a man was free to own a horse, ride where he liked and drink brandy when he had earned the money to buy it, the mission, even under Don Geronimo, was a better place.

But Don Geronimo was dead, the others replied; they had seen him lying in the cart, his knees stiff, blood on his beard. A worse man might come in his place. No, said the old men, Don Juan of the mill was to be mayordomo now; they had seen an understanding pass between him and Padre Ignacio. Don Juan was gentle and just; there would be no weighing of meat when he came to be mayordomo, but every man should have as much as he desired.

Excitement grew on them as they gathered before their doors in the white moonlight and talked. There seemed to be a new freedom in every movement, in every breath, now that Don Geronimo was down. The feeling that the task-master watched and listened, the restraint of his cold presence over every fiesta, every marriage, every occasion when men should laugh and fling the feet free of the thought of toil; all this restraint was dissolved, broken like bonds of glass by Don Juan's courageous blow. Laughter rose lightly on the night wind. The young men brought their fiddles and

guitars; in the little square where the tall cross lifted the pale figure of Our Señor, they danced with the girls, the old ones sitting by with nods and smiles and low words, in the comfortable relaxation that comes after long watching, and hardship, and pain.

Padre Ignacio at that hour was pacing in troubled meditation the length of his vast empty room where the great hewn cedar beam crossed from east to west. The light of his candle was dim among the rafters, peaked high over his head; the shadow of the cross-beam threw half the chamber in gloom.

Padre Ignacio marched up and down the room, his sandals scuffing in a little soft sound of attrition on the dim red tiling of the floor. His hands were at his back, his head was bent. Between the north window, looking out on the Indian village beyond the church, and the cedar beam his course lay. At the beam he turned toward the east window, his shoulder close against the wood, brown as his own skin; at the east window he turned again to the north, following the triangle marked in the tiling by his tramping through many years.

Close by the north window his little table, with his few precious books upon it, stood, convenient for the light of tired eyes. This was a low window, where one must bend the back to see the hills. It was crossed by iron bars beaten at the mission forge. Under the east window, on the farthest side of the cedar beam, Padre Ignacio's narrow bed was placed. This couch, a rawhide stretched on a crude frame, stood where the first gleam of dawn

would strike the sleeper's face, calling him to the endless duties of the day. Near it was a small altar, and a chair with rawhide seat. A similar chair stood beside the table with the books and inkstand. The room, spacious enough to contain a king's furnishings, held nothing more. There was not even a peg holding Padre Ignacio's extra gown. It was a question, indeed, if he commanded so much luxury.

The sound of the music and happy voices mounted in through the open window and broke upon Padre Ignacio's meditations. At first he heard with nothing more than a subconscious realization, as one is aware of the insect chorus of a summer night. Then it welled until it became insistent, clamorous on the ear for attention. Padre Ignacio paused in his tramping to lean at the window and listen.

"This is strange!" he muttered, hearing laughter rise unrestrained as the music ceased. "They are dancing, when it is neither a fiesta nor the eve of a fiesta, without permission asked or given."

Padre Ignacio was deeply troubled and disturbed by this loud evidence of independent thought and action in his neophytes. It was the first time in his mission experience of thirty years and more that such a demonstration had occurred. It was the young ones, he reflected with sorrow, the grandsons of the savages who had come at the first tolling of the bells to subject themselves to the padres' God. Reverence was dying out of them, he feared;

this world revolution of liberty which had shaken America and France, had blown to the mission Indians like the seed of some evil disease. Liberty was admirable for those who could enlarge their happiness and morality under it, Padre Ignacio confessed; liberty for the mission neophytes would lead only to relapse and destruction. It would be fire in an infant's hand.

These thoughts moved Padre Ignacio to go at once and remonstrate with his foolish children, censure them sternly and send them to bed, where they should have been that moment instead of laughing and capering in the moonlight, dissipating the strength needed for tomorrow's toil. All of this grew out of Don Geronimo's haughty disdain of Juan Molinero, and the sadly unfortunate blow with the flail. Poor Juan had struck in the flash of his foolish anger, not knowing that it was the penance of a priest to bear lashes for other men.

Juan was standing in the court, looking at the moon, disconsolate, Padre Ignacio thought, as a lonesome dog. The kitchen door was closed, the ready word of Doña Magdalena lacking to cheer the night. Save for Juan, the court was empty. The jet of the fountain sparkled in the strong moonlight; the scent of rose and lemon bloom was sweet.

"Come with me, Juan, and see the result of this day's work with your four-times-unlucky flail," Padre Ignacio said.

Juan was not troubled over that day's work with his flail to any uneasy length. His one regret was

that it might alienate the friendship of Doña Magdalena. For Don Geronimo he had no care, whether he lived or died.

Padre Ignacio said nothing more as they walked down the long arcade joining mission building and church. The broad trampled road to the Indian village crossed under this arcade a little way before coming to the church, at the point where the tallow cauldrons were, and the great underground vat for holding the grease rendered from the waste portions of butchered animals and those that died in the fields. The top of this tank extended above ground a few feet, like a sunken tower. It contained tons of tallow, waiting the ships from Spain that were so long in coming.

Padre Ignacio touched Juan's arm and stopped him in the shadow of a little adobe hut at the corner of the village plaza where the tall cross lifted a crude figure of a crucified man. The bleached grass and straw thatch of the crowded huts seemed frosted in the moonlight; the blocked shadows were as little squares of velvet spread before the doors. The plaza was not much larger than Padre Ignacio's room. It was packed with the village inhabitants, young and old. Those who were not taking their turn at dancing sat on the brick-hard ground, which was as clean of dust as Doña Magdalena's kitchen floor.

"You see how they mock discipline, Juan," Padre Ignacio stretched out his hand with the slow, revealing, accusing gesture of a man who unveils to

another the result of his wilfulness. "They have seen authority struck down; they are following the example set before their eyes."

"They seem to be having a good time," Juan said, still not struck by any contrite pang.

"It is not authorized, they did not ask permission to play fiesta this night," Padre Ignacio said, his voice, shocked, injured, the disappointment bitter for him to bear.

"Must they ask permission to laugh and sing?" Juan inquired, unable to see where anybody had room for injury in the innocent scene before their eyes.

"This is permitted only on days of fiesta, when it is proclaimed."

"It is a hard matter to be happy by proclamation, I am afraid. They get the good out of it when it's spontaneous, when they do it because they feel like dancing and singing. I know I wouldn't like for anybody to point a pistol at my head and tell me to sing, padre."

"The sad thing is this, Juan Molinero: the hand that was over them has been removed for the hour; they poach upon that authority like thieves. Perhaps tomorrow, when it comes time to go to the fields, they will stand with idle hands. That is the sad thing, to think they may fail us, now Don Geronimo is down."

"A man's loyalty cannot be won with a whip, Padre Ignacio."

"I have been gentle with them always, even

sparing the children when it seemed even the credo was beyond their grasp. I have given them grace by patience where others have used the stick. But what is it to profit me now?"

"There is Cristóbal with his guitar; speak to him and see."

"Ah, Cristóbal is a good lad, a loving boy. But there are not many like Cristóbal. Yes, they will disperse at my command, Juan; I have no fear of that. But with what reservations for tomorrow? That is like lead on my breast. They have seen authority——"

"They're going to see it again, then. Look there!"

Don Geronimo stepped into the moonlight of the little plaza, his broad hat pulled low over the white bandage that circled his head and came down to his eyes. Pistols were in his belt; his black whip was on his wrist.

"Don Geronimo! He heard the revelry, he rose from his bed of pain."

Juan had a thought of warning Cristóbal, whose back, he knew, the black whip would single out for its vicious assault. Padre Ignacio restrained him as he stepped out into the moonlight to shout Cristóbal's name.

There was no need to warn Cristóbal, whose quick eyes were the first to see the mayordomo, and to realize with a falling heart that the celebration of his passing was premature. A surprised cry, low like a moan of pain, followed Cristóbal's word of

warning as the people rose and cleared out of the plaza like leaves before a wind.

Don Geronimo's whip burned like a branding-iron wherever it fell, and it was as quick as a serpent in his supple hand. Child and man, mother and babe, it lashed alike in its indiscriminate fury. Don Geronimo's voice rose strong over the screams of women and children as they fled before his arm.

"Who has declared a fiesta?" he demanded. "Who has told you to sing and dance? Now, sing with pain, dance with agony, you dogs!"

Don Geronimo rushed from side to side of the plaza, his leaping whip never falling short. Women encumbered by clinging children, old men whose feet were slow, suffered for the merry-makers who sped away at the first alarm. Juan was furious at the sight of this atrocious punishment where a word would have served as well. But Padre Ignacio had firm grip of his wrist; he remained in the shadow, writhing in pain at the sound of the screams of women and the sobs of children who felt the fiery touch of Don Geronimo's lash.

"Let us return; I shall not be needed here," Padre Ignacio said.

Juan attended him, the confusion of the village, the running feet, the lamentations of the flogged, sadly disturbing the placid night. He could not feel that Padre Ignacio was not needed there, where authority had come again to dissipate the rejoicing of innocence, and tyranny to stamp under relentless feet the springing fires of manhood and liberty.

So, Don Geronimo was not down; sad revelation to those who had stolen a little breath of liberty that night.

“I did not expect such a quick recovery,” Padre Ignacio said, comforted and vastly relieved, “although life came back to him within half an hour. Come with me to my chamber, Juan. There is something on my heart that I must say to you this night.”

CHAPTER XIV

DECREE OF BANISHMENT

JUAN followed Padre Ignacio up the narrow stairs and through an unfinished part of the great building, where only the light of the priest's open chamber door guided them through a hot close darkness that one could feel on the face. There were finished chambers on only one side of the building in this part, used for lodging guests; the other side was a vast emptiness, the long rafters of round cedar trunks bare overhead. Juan was obliged to do obeisance to save his head a thump on the low lintel of the padre's door.

Padre Ignacio brought the chair from beside his bed and placed it for Juan at the table-end over against the north window. There they seated themselves, the thick tallow candle standing between them throwing off a smell of cracklings, such as the Indians feasted on after the fat had been pressed out of them in the vats.

"It is plain then, Juan, that this unfortunate engagement between you and Don Geronimo brings affairs to a crisis," Padre Ignacio said. "I tremble to think of the consequence of another meeting."

"Let him go about his own business and I'll at-

tend to mine," Juan proposed, not disturbed by the padre's uneasiness for the future.

"Don Geronimo is not a man to accept a blow without retaliation. He is a hot, a vengeful man."

"I wouldn't expect him to let it pass."

"What can end this feud, then, but the death of one or both of you? Unless, certainly, you make peace with Don Geronimo as a Christian should."

"If he'll come and offer it, Padre Ignacio, I'll not turn my back."

"Don Geronimo is not the aggressor, my son. You were the first at fault, Juan, the morning you stood between Don Geronimo and Cristóbal at the wine press. You were ignorant of conditions here, certainly, and that mitigates your fault, in my eyes, but not so with Don Geronimo. It was a defiance of his authority before the eyes of the meanest; it threw Don Geronimo in contempt."

"He was about to do a contemptible thing."

"After the insubordination you have witnessed tonight, you should know better than to condemn Don Geronimo for his inflexible hand, my son. You have seen how license springs from the striking down of authority, how the spirit of anarchy sweeps like a fire among the unrestrained."

"I have seen a coward lashing harmless women and children with a whip! and that is all I have seen tonight that was wrong, Padre Ignacio."

"We are spending words for nothing, Juan. There are two courses open to you for insuring the placidity of San Fernando: the first is to go humbly

and contritely to Don Geronimo this night, and crave his pardon for the passionate weakness that drove you to strike him with your unlucky flail. ”

Juan shook his head, his lips set firmly, his countenance severe.

“The other course is that you leave San Fernando within three days. I pronounce this sentence with a heavy heart. Grateful as I am, dearly as I have come to love you for your candor, your honor, your truth, I must set your face to the perils of the long journey back to your own country, unless your wisdom prompts you to accept the simpler, the truly Christian way. ”

Padre Ignacio looked at Juan appealingly, his brown hand put out as if to invite to the simplicity of this course. Juan did not see the inviting hand, nor the pathetic, tender appeal of Padre Ignacio's eyes. He was staring at the window, his eyes fixed as if he saw the long road stretching through many dangers, that led to his home and kind. He shook his head again, unmoved.

“I can't go and bend my neck to Don Geronimo, ” he said.

Padre Ignacio regarded him in silence, the eager appeal dying out of his face. He saw that Juan would accept any penance rather than the single one that would bend down his pride. He was a man who confessed no superior.

“You can understand the justness of my decision, Juan? ” he seemed to beseech.

“Don Geronimo struck the first blow; let him come to me,” Juan replied.

“It cannot be,” Padre Ignacio sighed, despairing of making him understand.

“Then there’s nothing for me but to leave.”

Padre Ignacio did not speak. He sat with head bent, overwhelmed by a cataract of thought. One sandalled foot was set beyond the shadow of the table, a sturdy, dusty foot that seemed as if it had come to rest but then from tramping the long white trails of that summer-land.

“Will you permit me to take the horse that fell into my hands from Alvitre?” Juan inquired.

“But I will be happier to know that you are alive, filling the useful destiny that God has planned for you, than dead here by Don Geronimo’s hand,” Padre Ignacio said, his head still bent, his voice low. “The horse?” looking up suddenly, as if the words had only penetrated his ear that moment. “Take him, Juan. I wish I could give you riches to load his back. But you will prosper without that. Only tell me, Juan, that you will hang a bell in a little church some day in your own country in memory of your old friend who wished you well, but could do so little for your happiness.”

“You have saved my life, Padre Ignacio.” Juan touched the brown hand that lay on the table near him with firm pressure, assurance of his sincere gratefulness.

“By my cruel edict I save it again, for you will

pass through the dangers of the journey and come to your home at last. ”

“ And I will hang three bells in a church, each one of them not less than a hundred pounds weight. I shall name them in my heart for the three that I love best in San Fernando; when I hear them, I shall think it is your voices, calling to me from California, from San Fernando by the hills. ”

Padre Ignacio's fingers clasped his young friend's hand, pressing it tenderly. His face was bright with a smile, but tears stood in his eyes, to tremble a moment in the candle light and course down upon his worn brown gown.

“ Duty calls for many sacrifices along our way, ” he said. “ If I could send Don Geronimo away I would keep you here, but that is impossible, there is no other man who could stand in Don Geronimo's place. He knows our fields and herds as no other man; his loss would be a calamity. ”

“ I believe he is a zealous and conscientious man, although I question his methods. No, I am not one, at least, who could fill his place. ”

“ He understands cattle, the breeding, the increase, and agriculture. Only vines and olives he does not understand, but they are safe with me. If I could keep you, Juan, and teach you the care of a vineyard, until the exemption I have asked for you arrives — but that is indefinite; it will be months, perhaps years. It may not be granted at all. Perils encompass you wherever you are in California; there is no refuge for you here. More than that,

you must be disciplined before our neophytes, they must be shown that no man can strike down authority and continue on his way. His deed must overwhelm him, as they must see this assault upon Don Geronimo banish you from friends, and dearer than friends. So, make ready, Juan. The third day from this must not see you in San Fernando."

"I am ready. When everything is quiet tonight I'll leave you, Padre Ignacio. You can direct me to the pass that leads to the mission road across the sands?"

"It is by way of San Gabriel. No, not tonight, Juan — there is no pressure to force you away tonight. Tomorrow I will give you a map, and letters to those at San Gabriel, who will assist you on your way. Now I go to Don Geronimo, to tell him of your banishment. He shall have no cause to say you have gone unpunished, and seek adjustment with his own hand. Tomorrow, Juan; tomorrow."

Juan accompanied Padre Ignacio to the court, where they stood a moment in silence before the broad door, now shut and barred, through which the Indians were carrying grapes to the wine press on Juan's first morning in San Fernando. Padre Ignacio laid his hand on the young man's shoulder, in a touch of gentle absolution for whatever fault was his.

"I will set a truce between you and Don Geronimo, I will require it of him on the cross," Padre Ignacio said. "If you want to remain until the day after tomorrow, or to the last hour, Juan?"

“ I think it will be better to go soon, since I must go. ”

“ Until tomorrow, then. It is pleasant on a moonlight night beside the fountain, Juan. ”

Juan was not a stranger to the delights of the fountain on a moonlit night, or even a night without moon. He had sat on the bench near the trellis where the roses clambered in perpetual bloom many an evening with Padre Mateo, smoking their pipes in perfect understanding. Borrromeo, the blacksmith, often had joined them; frequently Juan and Borrromeo had occupied the bench alone, when there were guests who had news of interest to the padres of San Fernando. Tonight the bench was empty. Padre Mateo was taking his pipe on the arched portico before the public door, with guests from the south who were passing the night; Borrromeo was singing in his little house, where his shadow crossed the window when he moved about, busy at some congenial service for himself.

It was a sad thing for Juan, this banishment from San Fernando, where he had come an uncouth stranger but a little while ago. Its quaintness had become as familiar as his own face, its medieval atmosphere, its baronial government, had come to be accepted as truly fitting to the old-world somnolence of that sunny land. The charm of it had won him from his recollections, the peace of it had quelled his yearnings for home, until the past had become very dim and far away, its renewal not any more desired.

He had hoped that the stern law of that land otherwise so genial and inviting would be set aside in his case, an answer to Padre Ignacio's generous appeal. With such immunity he could have taken land on the river, somewhere in the broad and fecund valley between San Fernando and the Pueblo de Los Angeles, and established a prosperous ranch, free alike from the harassments of winter and the hazards of drouth. But, as Padre Ignacio had said, such exception might not be granted, the paper might never come. In such event, the mission soon would grow a small place for one whose feet never before had acknowledged bounds. So he had thought. But tonight, with the sentence of banishment upon him, he would have been glad to accept the restrictions which had bound him during his stay for the balance of his days. For there was that to be left behind at San Fernando which all the world beyond could not supply.

That was not Borrromeo's footstep on the tiled garden path, nor Padre Mateo's step. It might be Doña Magdalena, coming to her kitchen to see that all was well. But she had passed the kitchen door; she was coming toward the fountain, perhaps cooling her brow after Don Geronimo's foray into the plaza. It would be a trying experience to meet Doña Magdalena, and hear her reproaches, yet there was no way to escape. For Doña Magdalena's sake he was sorry for the blow he had given Don Geronimo with the flail. He bowed his head in his hand, waiting for her to speak.

“ Will you assist me, Don Juan? Padre Ignacio sent me for roses to refresh the breakfast table. ”

Then if Doña Magdalena's voice was so gentle, so friendly and so sweet, she might speak on by the hour, even to chide and condemn. Tula, white as a white rose she had come to gather, stood beside the fountain, a basket in her hand.

“ How many do you require? ” Juan asked, taking the little bright shears out of her hand, the same, indeed, that she had worn that morning hung about her neck like a crucifix.

“ Wait, Don Juan—the braid! ”

She took it from round her neck and tossed it playfully over his head.

“ I have caught you now, Don Juan! ” she laughed. “ You are my apprentice to the shears. ”

“ Bind me to the trade, ” he supplicated; “ make it a long apprenticeship. ”

“ They should be sheep shears then, ” said she. “ But why would you have the apprenticeship long, Don Juan? ”

“ How many roses do you require? ” he asked, his hand on the bramble that grew thicker than a strong man's arm.

“ As many as the basket will hold, Don Juan. ”

Juan stood on the bench to reach the choice blossoms high on the trellis, Gertrudis holding the basket, the moonlight on her lifted face. The shadow in her cheek was deeper here than by the light of day; it seemed as if many hopes had departed out of her life, and few had come to abide.

Yet there was no sense of oppression in her manner, only a gentle patience as of one chastened and made sweet by pain. Her hair was fairer for the moonlight, fair as northern tresses, her heritage from some Gothic adventurer who set foot upon the Iberian plains so long ago.

“We have enough now, Don Juan, the basket will not hold another one.”

“Here is one too many, then, and the best of them all. I was reserving it; you can put it in your hair.”

“In the morning it will open,” she said, holding it against her cheek. “When I see a rosebud burst, I think it is like a soul that goes to God.”

Juan took the basket from her and placed it on the bench, while she wove the rose stem in her hair above her ear, where the jasmine blossom had held the place of honor as she sat that morning with her class, when Juan Molinero found it as difficult to pass her door as if his own feet had been enmeshed in that soft entanglement.

“Now, I will run with the roses, Don Juan,” she said, reaching out her hand.

He gave the basket to her, keeping hold of it still as if it stood, with its white burden, a covenant between them.

“Roses seem sweeter at night,” she said, her head bent over them, her hand passive on the basket, no pressure in it to relieve him, nor any hurry in her feet to run away.

“ Has Padre Ignacio told you of my banishment, Gertrudis? ”

“ Banishment? ” She lifted her face quickly, in a panic of surprise.

“ For the peace of San Fernando. You know what has happened? ”

“ May you always strike hard for those you love, Don Juan. ” She laid her free hand on his where it clasped the slender handle of the little basket, her seal of approval of the deed for which he stood under sentence of banishment. “ But I did not know that you must go; I thought Padre Ignacio had arranged a truce. I heard him speak of a truce to Don Geronimo. ”

“ Only covering the time I make my preparations to depart. Tomorrow Padre Ignacio will give me letters to certain people on the way, and a map of the road I am to go. ”

“ But the soldiers, Don Juan? ”

“ There will be no soldiers the way I am going, Tula; not even men of any kind for a long and weary way across the southern desert. Very likely I'll leave in the night, besides. They'd find it hard to follow me. ”

“ It will seem that so much will go with you away from San Fernando, Don Juan, ” she said pathetically, “ so much of the life and energy of the place, so much that is needed here for the happiness of all. ”

“ I wish I could think it so, ” he said, his voice low and grave.

“It will seem that hope will leave with you on your long, long journey to your homeland, Don Juan.”

“I wish I might hope that it would be so, Gertrudis.”

“You will go to those whom you love better, but to none that can wish you better than those you leave behind.”

“I shall leave more behind me than I shall ever find again. If I had the freedom of this country outside the mission, Tula, Tula, I would not go, Tula. If the dispensation asked for me by Padre Ignacio were certain to be granted, I would hide in the mountains until it came.”

“But it might be granted,” she spoke eagerly, her handclasp tightening. “Then I could send you word, I could send Cristóbal. Or I would go, Don Juan; I would go to the world’s end to carry such good news to you.”

He covered her hand with his broad palm, and so they stood, their four hands on the little basket, their fealty pledged in roses, their understanding blessed in bloom.

“And I would wait till the world’s end for you to come,” he told her, as earnestly as if he vowed. “But it is too uncertain, Tula; Padre Ignacio says it may take months, even years. I believe he has no hope that it ever will come at all.”

“Then you will go away, Dan Juan, into the desert, as one goes away into the night, never to be seen again.”

“ Paper or no paper, I will come back, Gertrudis, if you will wait for me at San Fernando. Give me a year, and we will fill a basket of roses for our wedding day. ”

“ A year, or ten years, Juan. I will be waiting here, if San Fernando stands. ”

“ I am not a poor man in my own country, Gertrudis, and more than I own I can command. It will be a simple thing for me, if I ever reach the Mississippi, to go to Boston and sail with a ship for California. There is trade waiting anybody that will brave the barbarous laws of this country and sail a ship here freighted with the things that are needed, to be exchanged for the hides there is no market for in Mexico. ”

“ It might be a hazardous undertaking, but you, but you, my brave, strong Juan, you do not know peril where another falls. ”

“ The coast is unguarded, Tula; there isn't a ship in these waters that could turn back a Boston brig. We could lie off San Pedro — I looked it over the day we went for you—and run to sea if anything threatened from land. But I believe the authorities would wink at the law to get a cargo of yankee goods. Give me a year, then, Tula, and I will return. ”

“ As long as San Fernando stands. ”

“ Your trust will carry me through. It may be for the best, after all, that I must go. ”

“ There was a forecast in your heart of this go-

ing when you stood here this morning in the sun. You will remember, Juan? ”

“ But you were wrong when you said that home was dearer than friends in San Fernando. Poor Padre Ignacio! For the peace of the mission he banishes me, but he weeps to see me go. ”

“ I have been a long time after the roses, Juan, ” she said, gently freeing her hands. “ Padre Ignacio will wonder why I am so slow. ”

“ There is no mystery, ” Juan answered, smiling; “ he has been sitting on the bench by the wine press for the past ten minutes, waiting for us to come. ”

“ Ah, what a heart! ” said she.

CHAPTER XV

THE HOUR OF BETROTHAL

“**H**E would have married her, but the wisdom of Padre Ignacio stood in the way,” said Magdalena. “It is a perilous journey, Padre Ignacio said, that Juan is setting his feet upon. He may not return. It is better to be a maid than a widow. I heard him say the words.”

“I’d rather be a rich widow than a poor maid, even pretty as God ever fashioned on his anvil,” Borromeo declared.

“So they have gone to the church to plight their betrothal before the altar. That is next to a wedding; that will hold them true until they meet again, if ever that day shall come.”

“I don’t know,” Borromeo demurred; “a woman is a fly, she will go buzzing after the next lump of sugar she smells. It will take more than plain promises on bent knees to hold a woman to her word.”

“A woman will hold steadier than a man, who is ready to run off after the first pretty ankle he sees under a woman’s riding gown.”

“Maybe more, doña, when she slides to the ground; maybe a leg, heh? They say the English and American ladies ride like monkeys; Juan will

have his temptation presented many a time before he sees the pretty eyes of our little Tula again. But no woman will wait a year for a man if another comes by her window. My poor little Juan should have married her, Padre Ignacio would have yielded to argument, especially from a man of experience like me. And I would have stood up like a lawyer to talk for Juan——”

“Like a fool, you’d better say !” said Magdalena in scorn. “What do you know about women, or how true they can be to a man who is worthy?”

Borromeo struck the cold iron upon his anvil a ringing blow, his brows knotted in displeasure.

“Why do you stop to gossip with a fool then, doña? Go along, then, and put your words like cotton in the ears of that great saint Don Geronimo, and don’t stand in the light of a poor fool that never did more than cut a false woman’s throat for her perfidy.”

“Maybe you will cut mine, Borromeo?” she mocked him, stretching out her chin, drawing the delicate dark skin tight on her round, soft throat. She laughed in his eyes, merry as the music of a holy day.

Borromeo was taking a horseshoe from the fire with his tongs. He plunged the glowing iron toward her, causing her to leap back nimbly, her laugh cut by a breathless exclamation.

“Go along, now, one of your kind,” said he.

Magdalena stood in the door of the forge, her hand against the side, the sun on the bright ker-

chief about her head, twinkling on the great gold rings in her ears.

“Just as if I didn't know your fraud as well as I can see the bottom of an empty bucket,” she said. “Borromeo, you never killed anybody, you never killed anything; your heart is too soft.”

“So, I was condemned to prison for doing good!” he sneered, but badly, making a poor effect.

“For stealing, that is all; stealing money out of a man's pockets, the prank of a foolish boy. I have heard it. You were drunk at the time.”

“Now!” said Borromeo, beating the horseshoe furiously, his face dark-red as the cooling iron. “What slanders you heap on a man, Doña Magdalena, with your bold tongue. Say, then, that I was put under a penance for stepping on a dog's tail!”

“You were put under a penance for fighting the soldiers in barracks when all of you were drunk on brandy brought from Santa Barbara, you simple great ox. Go on, live in the reputation of a dangerous man with blood on his fingers — I'll not betray your innocence, Borromeo.”

Borromeo dropped his hammer, reached with a little spring and drew his smutty fingers across her cheek, leaving four streaks of black. She looked at him in humorous reproach, the simple fellow's heart as well known to her as the secrets of a divided apple, her fingers ruefully trailing where his had swept, as if to feel the grime.

“Rascal!” she said, laughing again in his eyes.

Borrromeo threw back his head and roared, shaking with laughter until the horseshoe rattled in the jaws of the tongs, his mouth wide enough to hide a spade.

"I have put you under my seal," he said, tears of mirth on his beard. He wiped his eyes on the crook of his wrist, with a comical grimace.

"I'll not betray you, Borrromeo," she promised, rubbing with her apron at the streaks of grime. "Is it all off, pig?"

"It will do; you are black, anyway, by nature you are black, Doña Magdalena. It will not be seen. How is Don Geronimo's split head mending? You must have care of fever that may strike to the brain."

"Don Geronimo rode last night to the pueblo. There was the rumor of a ship."

"So? He is not in his bed, then. He is a rash man to go riding through the heat with a cracked head."

"It is nothing to Don Geronimo!" Magdalena was displeased by Borrromeo's familiar discussion of Don Geronimo's wound. She turned away coldly, as if to go.

"They are sealing their promises before the altar, heh?" Borrromeo stooped for his hammer, after thrusting the cooling horseshoe back into the fire. He stood a little while with hand on the bellows, his head bent as if in reflection.

"I suppose it is done," she returned. "There

is Padre Ignacio at the church door. They are remaining behind for prayers."

"I am not the man to cross the path of a friend," Borrromeo said, blowing hard at his bellows, his face turned to the fire, "but if Juan does not come back when his year is past, then I'll marry Tula myself. A man is not an old man at thirty——"

"Soldiers!" said Doña Magdalena, startled, alarmed. "What is this?"

"Soldiers?" Borrromeo repeated, going to the door, wiping his hands on his leather apron as he went. "I thought we were done with those scoundrels. Olivera rides ahead, and here is little Captain del Valle, coming galloping as if he had stopped to pick up a purse. Juan! by the holy wood, they have come for Juan!"

"Impossible! Why this day than any——"

"He has been betrayed! News of his banishment has been carried to the pueblo by some vengeful traitor. Del Valle would not risk taking him on the road, but comes here to do it in safety."

"If you mean Don Geronimo——"

"By the holy wood, I do mean Don Geronimo!"

"Then you lie!"

Sharply as Magdalena flung the insulting charge, it was no more than a pellet against Borrromeo's indignant wrath. He pushed her out of his door without a word and went running after the troopers, who were riding in a clatter of shod hooves along the paved arcade to the church door where Padre Ignacio stood. Magdalena saw that the

blacksmith carried a long iron bar in his prodigious hand.

Magdalena stood near the smithy door, looking after the soldiers with sinking heart. She held Juan in blame for the blow he had given Don Geronimo, but not in unforgiving bitterness. There was mitigation in the deed, she was just enough to understand and admit, but it had been a wicked thing to strike authority down in the eyes of the subjugated and mean. It was better for Juan to go from San Fernando, Padre Ignacio's decree was wise and just; but it was a sorrowful misfortune for him to fall into the soldiers' hands. Don Geronimo could not have betrayed him; she could not believe it so.

It was not more than an hour before vespers; the shadow of building and tree fell long across the court; the shadow of the church reached far over the mean huts of the Indians which lay snuggling along the other side of the separating adobe wall; Borromeo's shadow was a huge, long-striding thing as he ran after the troopers, the terrible iron bar in his hand. In a few hours more night would have fallen; Juan would have ridden in safety out of the mission gate.

Padre Ignacio stood at the vestry door, just as he had emerged from the church but a few moments before, astonished by this rude invasion, this barbarous charge against the very walls of the sacred building in whose protecting shadow he waited. At the corner of the church the headlong advance halted suddenly at Captain del Valle's command.

There the little force divided, four troopers going with Sergeant Olivera to the front door, four continuing with Captain del Valle to confront Padre Ignacio where he stood, his indignation, his great bewilderment, upon him.

“What is the meaning of this wild riding into these sacred precincts, Captain del Valle?” Padre Ignacio demanded, his voice trembling in resentment of the outrage.

“I have come to demand the body of Juan Molinero, so called, who has entered California in defiance of the king’s edict, and who stands charged with murderous assault on the person of Don Geronimo Lozano, mayordomo of San Fernando.”

“You shall not touch him, for all your grandiloquent charges. Juan Molinero is under discipline of the church for such misdemeanor as he is guilty of; his punishment is extreme. Turn again, Captain del Valle, and be careful that you ride in the cart track, not across the pavement of our arcade.”

“This temporizing cannot stand in the way of justice, Padre Ignacio. Juan Molinero must be surrendered into my hands.”

“Call your ruffians from the door of this sacred house, or you shall suffer for this sacrilege!”

“I am not to be denied. Threats, my good padre, cannot bar me here.”

“Juan Molinero is in sanctuary; he is at his prayers within.”

“Then we shall drag him out, with irons on his arms. Inside, Olivera!”

Borromeo rushed past Padre Ignacio and into the church.

“To the altar, Juan! to the altar! the soldiers are upon you!” the blacksmith shouted, his great voice roaring in the empty church, coming back in shattered echoes from the choir loft and stately gables.

Padre Ignacio hastened after Borromeo; two troopers dismounted at the captain’s command and entered through the vestry door.

There was neither bench nor pew, nor cushion to kneel upon at prayer, in the spacious interior of San Fernando church. The white plastered walls, the soft red tiles of the floor, clean as devoted care could make them, lent an atmosphere of purity and sanctity to the place. Its very emptiness seemed to accentuate its consecration to holy purposes, to lofty meditation, to heaven-aspiring prayer.

The boots of Sergeant Olivera and his men — two at his back, two keeping the door — were loud on the tiles before Borromeo’s warning was hurled among the beams. Juan and Gertrudis were standing before the altar, his hands clasping hers as when he had reached to lift her. She shrank against him in terror of the soldiers, their defiance of that sanctuary, the sudden violence in their peaceful hour.

“Stand!” Sergeant Olivera commanded, advancing with drawn sabre.

“The soldiers!” said Gertrudis weakly, clinging in stifling fright to Juan’s supporting hands. “Leave me, Juan — fly!”

Even with an eagle's wings he could not have escaped them, if it had been in his heart to go and leave her there, stricken and white at the altar steps. Soldiers were at the inner vestry door close behind Padre Ignacio, who lifted his hands to stay the sacrilegious advance of those who had entered from the front.

"Put up your weapon, Sergeant Olivera! outside with your men!" the priest commanded.

Sergeant Olivera lifted his saber in salute, but did not pause a moment in his advance. He was within a few yards of the spot where Juan and Gertrudis stood. Padre Ignacio came down hastily and stood before the altar, spreading out his arms.

"Let no man touch him on pain of being denied the holy sacrament!" he cried shocked to the heart by the thing that was being done.

Sergeant Olivera stopped, his head bent for a moment as if he faltered before the interdiction and its dread penalty. Then he lifted his eyes, his face white as if the blood of his heart had been drained away.

"A soldier must obey his commander first, padre, and afterwards make his peace with God," he said. "Juan Molinero, you are the king's prisoner. Stand forth!"

"Now!" Borromeo roared, rushing forward, his iron bar lifted high, "if any man touches him I'll burst his head!"

Borromeo was in easy swing of Sergeant Olivera, who paused and drew back before such a terrible

weapon in the hands of that bristling giant. In his pause, in his moment of open guard, Juan sprang and caught Olivera's sword-arm, wringing the weapon from his hand.

Sergeant Olivera leaped back, drawing his pistol, a sharp command on his tongue. The two soldiers leveled their pieces, and Padre Ignacio, his breast heaving, his face tense, his eyes wide in the horror of the growing outrage, rushed between Juan and the threatening guns.

"Peace!" he commanded. "This place must not be profaned with blood. Juan, go with them in peace."

Juan stood a breath, looking at the sword in his hand. He tossed it from him then, with gesture that acknowledged its utter uselessness, as a man throws down a broken tool which has failed him in the moment of his greatest need.

"The irons!" Sergeant Olivera commanded.

"Not here!" Padre Ignacio interposed, stretching his arm to stop the soldier who sprang forward eagerly, the heavy gyves in his hand. "I will guarantee his peaceful and nonresistant passage to the outside. Beyond that, it must be as God wills. That way," to Juan, indicating the vestry door.

Padre Ignacio went beside Juan, the soldiers pressing behind. At the inner door of the vestry, opening close beside the altar, Juan looked back. Gertrudis was on her knees before the altar, her hands clasped to her face, her head bowed in the agony of her supplication. A bright sunbeam,

streaming through a tall window, reached near her feet, like a path of golden promise that ended suddenly there, such as the path that had led them to their plighted word, to plunge them into this sudden abyss of despair.

This unexpected development in the midst of what Juan had felt to be his security, his happiest hour; this dragging him from the sanctuary in open defiance of his right under the law, as he knew very well, was portentous of the gravest imaginable things. It was such a shocking blow that it stunned him, leaving him groping for the opening that would show him a gleam of assurance, very much as he might have groped for the door if he had been stricken blind as he stood before the altar.

Outside the vestry door Captain del Valle sat on his horse, his sword-hilt and trappings glittering in the sun. The brim of his broad hat was fastened up with a rosette of gilt cord; the dust of his quick ride from the pueblo, a matter of twenty-five miles, was heavy on his coat. One soldier was on the ground, holding his companions' horses, one in the saddle near the captain. Four came with Sergeant Olivera conveying the prisoner, and two remained at the front of the church.

Borromeo came last out of the church, and stood with his back against the wall, his iron bar taken from him by Padre Ignacio, turning his eyes with a glowering and savage mien.

"Here is this man, whom you have torn from his lawful refuge," Padre Ignacio said, halting with

his hand on Juan's shoulder before Captain del Valle. "I have brought him out to prevent the pollution of this sacred place by blood. The most awful penalty that holy church can pronounce rests on the heads of these guilty men who have torn this refugee from the altar. Turn, Captain del Valle, and ride away with these outlaws who have profaned God's house at your command."

"The irons!" said Captain del Valle.

"This is the protest of holy church against your tyranny, Captain del Valle. I shall not surrender this man to your irons."

"You can protest away, then, my good padre," Captain del Valle said, insolently defiant. "We have what we came for. The irons!"

Two soldiers yielded their pieces to their comrades and laid hold of Juan, to bring his arms behind him to receive the irons. Poor old Padre Ignacio, shocked almost to speechlessness by this barbarous defiance of sacred authority, interposed once more.

"On pain of excommunication ——"

"Peace, old man!" Captain del Valle rudely checked him. "There are no terrors ——"

A hiss, like a quick-swung blade cleaving the air; a sharp blow, as a man striking himself with open hand upon the chest. Captain del Valle rose in his stirrups, rigid in a moment of mortal agony, plucking vainly at an arrow that had driven through his breast. Sergeant Olivera sprang to his side, easing him as he fell.

There was a confusion of shouts, of shots at random; a leaping of soldiers to locate the unseen assassin. Juan Molinero flung to the ground the two men who held his arms, sprang into Captain del Valle's saddle and galloped away.

CHAPTER XVI

FLIGHT AND RETURN

JUAN'S first thought was to fly to the hills directly behind the mission, a distance of two miles or more away. When he reached the corner of the church, the hasty shots of the unsteady soldiers singing over his head, he found that road blocked by the two men left by Sergeant Olivera at the front door. Behind him Sergeant Olivera was mounting and calling his men to the pursuit. Juan did not know whether soldiers had been left to watch the mission gate; it was a hazardous chance, but he had no time to linger and debate it. The sound of the pursuing soldiers was loud in the road behind him as he bent low and pressed hard for that one possible exit to the open road.

At that moment he saw Cristóbal running, swift as a hare, on an angling course through a little vineyard between the tallow vat and the buildings that flanked the arcade, easily keeping abreast of Juan's galloping horse, shaping his way as if to intercept him presently. Juan knew whose arrow had struck Captain del Valle down in his impious tyranny. He believed now that Cristóbal expected to leap up behind him and share the slender chance of escape. To further this quickly caught plan of

the young Indian, as he interpreted it, Juan drew his horse under the arcade and rode in close to the fronts of the little adobe houses along the way. That moment he saw Padre Mateo at the corner of the main building, where the cart track rounded it to pass the gate. Padre Mateo was beckoning him on, frantically, the sleeve of his gown flapping as he waved his arm.

Just here, when Juan expected Cristóbal to run out between the houses, Cristóbal came galloping on horseback, yelling in the exultant triumph of his wild young soul. He was riding Juan's horse, the fleet black animal taken from Sebastian Alvitre, which he had saddled and stationed at that strategic point, his plan worked out in the quick comprehension of his agile mind. Sergeant Olivera was not four rods behind them when they swept around the corner of the great mission building and saw the unguarded gate.

Unguarded but for Padre Mateo. There that honest, rustic-faced priest stood, one leaf of the ponderous oaken gate closed, the other half-swung, ready to clamp to its fellow the second they were through. Juan saw Padre Mateo's benediction in his eyes as he rode past him, leaning low over the pommel of the saddle, Sergeant Olivera's pistol balls flying so near he seemed to feel their wind.

When Sergeant Olivera came to the gate he was obliged to pull up hard, and set his horse back in the dust to save himself being pitched over the barred gate. There was an adobe wall ten feet

high around the mission grounds at this point; it ran to the corner of the main building on one hand, far along the field-edge on the other. Sergeant Olivera and his soldiers could not ride over it; there was no way around.

They told the story long years afterwards, how Padre Mateo held the gate that day until Juan and Cristóbal were safe in the bosque in the mountain canyons; how he threaded his arm through the iron brackets that held the great oak bar, telling the soldiers that they must dismember him to open the gate and ride after his oppressed children. Sergeant Olivera, being a reasonable man, turned and rode back to the church, and led his men through the little burying-ground at the farther side of it, and took the roundabout way to the king's road again, where the trail of Juan Molinero and Cristóbal was by that time cold in the dust.

Juan Molinero, in the meantime, found himself in the mountains behind the mission, where it did not require much of the craft that he was master of to conceal himself from such clumsy trailers as these soldiers who went about their business with no more than half a heart, at the best. He was mounted on a good horse, provided with a good saddle, and two pistols in the holster at the saddle-horn. There was nothing more. He had no hat, no cloak, no food. He was dressed like a Spanish gentleman, in black silk jacket and buff trousers, and ruffled shirt open at his neck. His red sash was fringed and tasseled with gold thread. It was fit for nothing

but to catch in harsh and thorny shrubs and hang up evidence that he had passed that way.

Cristóbal was no better provided, aside from his bow and arrows, which were his assurance of sustenance, as Juan would have felt assured with his rifle and ammunition within his reach. But Cristóbal was in a joyous mood. He had won his freedom from the cruelties of Don Geronimo at last.

Cristóbal related with pride how he had grasped the soldiers' intention when he saw them ride to the church, and how he had determined that moment to get Juan away safely out of their hands. As the first step in his swift preparations to that end he had caught Juan's horse up out of the corral and saddled it, concealing it close by Borrromeo's house. Then he had crept up within easy shot of the soldiers, hiding among the clumped grapevines, and had shot Captain del Valle for two very good reasons. The first of these was that he bore him an unquenchable hatred for his debauchery of young Indian women: the second to create a commotion which he knew Juan would take advantage of to escape, exactly as it had come about.

The young man was fully aware that he could not return to his people at the mission, nor remain anywhere within reach of the military in California. There was no refuge for him in Mexico, except perhaps in distant Santa Fé, and there he might stop no longer than his description would be in reaching the military authorities.

"So, I am going to your country, Juan," he an-

nounced; "I am going away with you and be a man."

Juan agreed that it was the only course open to him to escape punishment, which would be as severe in one case as the other, let Captain del Valle be alive or dead.

"He is dead," Cristóbal declared. "Would I miss a man's heart at fifty yards, Juan?"

Juan knew very well that Cristóbal would not miss a mark so fairly presented. Captain del Valle was dead, and in that fact his own peril in California was doubly magnified. No dispensation from the viceroy could exempt him from the charge of complicity in that deed, although he was innocent in intent. He would not have lifted a hand against a soldier in Padre Ignacio's presence.

The two refugees rested in a wooded canyon where night was already deepening, although the peaks of the blasted hills were grey yet in the failing day. Cristóbal searched until he found some pieces of hard wood, to be used in the primitive method of making fire, which he tied to his saddle with great satisfaction, saying they would have no fear of means to cook their meat now. For him, the necessities and comforts of a journey, let it be never so long, were provided.

Juan was of a different mind. He had no reason, certainly, to hold the soldiers in such fear as Cristóbal, never having felt their oppression and cruelty as the Indians who had suffered under them. Their vigilance, and the valor and shrewd-

ness of Sergeant Olivera especially, was not to be lightly held, in any case, yet Juan was confident that he could return to the mission for certain imperative reasons which urged him, and depart again undiscovered.

For one thing, he wanted his rifle. Without it on such a journey as lay ahead of him he would feel as hopeless as a man thrust out upon the sea without a plank to sustain him. And there was Gertrudis; she must be comforted and assured. Finally, and not of least importance, there was the map of the old mission trail, with the distance from water to water, and all other essentials of the road, which Padre Ignacio had prepared for him. With this to guide him, he would feel far more confident of reaching the Mississippi, and his plantation in the clearing of the Kentucky forest.

Cristóbal discounted the need of these things, actuated more by his fear that Juan would be taken by the soldiers if he should attempt to return to the mission than by the great confidence in his bow and arrow that he professed.

“I can find water in the desert, an Indian can smell water three leagues, Juan,” he said. “We can hide at the water and kill deer with my arrows. The old men say there are big oxen on the other side of the desert, with long hair. The bulls have whiskers on their chins, one of them is big enough to feed twenty men.”

“That is true, Cristóbal, but a white man must have a hat to keep the sun from his head in the

desert. A white man's head is not as thick as an Indian's; he falls dead from the sun if he has no hat."

"Oh well, we'll make a hat for you like the one you had when you came to San Fernando," Cristóbal said, overcoming that objection readily. "I'll kill a deer in the morning, we can have you a hat in an hour."

Juan agreed to this proposal, saying that it would be a good thing to prepare for the journey and be ready to go onward in case the soldiers should prevent his return to the mission. Cristóbal, seeing that his intention to return was firmly fixed, touched Juan's shoulder gently, and turned his dark face to peer at him earnestly through the dusk.

"I know why you want to go back, my brother," he said. "It is to kill Don Geronimo. That is very good; a man must strike his enemy, and Don Geronimo is the one who betrayed you to the soldiers. They would not have known you were going if Don Geronimo had not gone to the pueblo and told them."

"That must be true, Cristóbal. But I am not going to kill Don Geronimo."

"Padre Ignacio would say that is fine, to hear you talk like that," said Cristóbal, plainly incredulous, "but a man can't love his enemy. I have tried that, Juan; it does not go very well. I used to pray for Don Geronimo when he cut me with his whip, and what good did it do? Don Geronimo only hit

me harder the next time, as if God had told him what I had done, and made a fool of me. ”

“ I’m not going to kill him, I tell you Cristóbal; I’m not going to lift my hand against Don Geronimo again. ”

Cristóbal was silent a long time. After a while he laid his hand on Juan’s shoulder again, firmly, the pressure of understanding in his touch.

“ You will let him live because of Doña Magdalena, ” he said. “ A man could almost love his enemy when he has a wife like Doña Magdalena. She is a gentle lady. ”

“ I have heard her speak kindly of you, Cristóbal. ”

“ But nobody but you, Juan, and Padre Ignacio, ever stood between me and a blow. Will you go to San Fernando tonight? ”

“ Not tonight, Cristóbal; the soldiers might be expecting me to come back tonight. In the morning we will go farther back among the mountains, and tomorrow night I will return. ”

Whether Sergeant Olivera had failed to pick up their trail after they left the dusty highway, or whether he had abandoned the pursuit in the early conviction of its utter fatuity, Juan had no choice of conclusion. No soldier had come in sight from the high look-out they kept the next day. At evening Juan was ready for his return to the mission.

Cristóbal was to remain at that place in the mountains for three days, unless forced to flee onward from the soldiers, waiting Juan’s return. At the

end of three days, if Juan failed to come back, he was to proceed on his long and lonely seeking after a refuge in an alien land.

Juan gave the young Indian the names of people in Kentucky who would assist him; the little English that Cristóbal had learned would further his progress once he reached the country where Spanish would be no longer understood. Juan gave Cristóbal the cavalry horse, and one of Captain del Valle's pistols, with half the ammunition.

At twilight Juan rode down the canyon beside the little stream of crystal, turbulent water on his hazardous return to San Fernando, to repair the omissions of his hasty flight.

CHAPTER XVII

GERONIMO'S BAD HOUR

“**I**T gladdens my heart to see your face again, my Juan, but I would have been better pleased if you had not returned. You have come to look upon insubordination and rebellion, such a state of affairs as never disgraced San Fernando before, and which may pass with what pain and sorrow to us all God alone can tell.”

Padre Ignacio spoke in deep sadness, his lean brown face seamed with shadows in the candle light. It was then long past the hour of retirement at San Fernando; Juan had been guided to Padre Ignacio's room by the light of his north window as he rode cautiously down past the dam, keeping his horse to the furrowed ground. No soldier had challenged his entry to the mission close; the unbarred door had admitted him. He had gone at once to Padre Ignacio's door, his Indian shoes noiseless on the floor tiles.

Juan looked sharply at Padre Ignacio when he made this startling declaration of the disorder at San Fernando. There was no evidence of insubordination and rebellion in the quiet night; as he passed the Indians' huts Juan had noted their silence, glad that all seemed to be asleep, disturbed

in the fear that they might set up a babble on hearing him pass, and make it necessary for him to ride again for his life.

“It is the quiescence of a covered fire,” Padre Ignacio said, reading Juan’s doubtful thoughts. “Our poor Indians have thrown off all authority, except alone their spiritual allegiance. This morning they refused to go to the fields, standing under Don Geronimo’s lashes sullenly. The cattle and sheep are straying tonight in the hills and vegas without herdsmen or shepherds; the fields are thirsty; the threshed grain lies unwinnowed on the ground.”

“I am amazed!” said Juan, truly so. “Has there been any violence?”

“No. Brother Mateo and I have succeeded in holding them; they seem like children, indeed, so gentle, so obedient, in our hands. Only they refuse, stubbornly, with such a determination that it is almost valiant, poor little fools! to work in the fields under Don Geronimo. They say he was to blame for your betrayal to the soldiers, and your flight from San Fernando. They mourn you as a friend lost to them. I do not know how the belief took hold of them, where it started or how it spread, this thing that you were to be mayordomo in place of Don Geronimo.”

“Poor devils!” said Juan, his heart strained with pity for their vain hope.

“We must call on the soldiers again, I fear,” Padre Ignacio sighed, “and force them to the fields

with bayonets, as at the beginning. They will not yield to persuasion; they mutter and stand in groups, demanding that we send for you and Cristóbal. They have made a hero of the lad."

"It is a place no man can deny him," Juan declared warmly, quick in the defense of his friend.

"I must ask you, then, my son, to repair your necessities and depart again as quickly as you can. You can see how your presence here will only inflame them to further defiance of discipline. As it is already, I have found it expedient to prohibit Don Geronimo's appearance among them. He is determined to go to the pueblo for the soldiers in the morning if they persist in their rebellious stand."

"That will be a most unwise thing to do, Padre Ignacio. You admit they are obedient and gentle in your hands; why not try kindness instead of the lash and bayonets? Send Don Geronimo away from San Fernando, and your troubles will melt like a morning fog."

"We believe, from past experience, that it would be a bad piece of business to yield to them in the slightest point. If they find that rebellion against the hardships — as they believe them, groundlessly — of their material life will result in their alleviation, they will begin to employ the same means to escape the obligations of their spiritual life. A relapse to savagery would be the result; all our labors here among them would be defeated and brought down to nothing."

“It may be so,” said Juan, but with doubting reservation.

“The map I prepared for you is here, and your rifle is here. I will help you collect other things necessary, to hasten your departure. You must be well on your way to the mountains again before dawn, but it will be wise to avoid San Gabriel; the soldiers may be there watching for you. Cristóbal will be able to find the pass.”

“Yes, Cristóbal is familiar with the way. But Gertrudis — if I might be permitted a last word with her, to give her assurance —”

“It will be better as it stands,” Padre Ignacio interposed hastily, coldly, Juan thought. “She has been asleep long, or if not, in retirement for the night; it would be impossible to see her now. I will give her every assurance of your safety, I will inform her of your return and departure, well provided against the necessities of your journey home. If God wills it, Juan, you shall come back some day.”

“She’ll think it strange that I came and went without seeing her,” Juan seemed to protest.

“It is past midnight now — too late for lovers to be alone,” Padre Ignacio said, smiling a little through his cloud of gloom. He touched Juan’s shoulder affectionately, turning him a little to look into his face. “She has been brave, she exulted in your escape,” he said. “To see her now, only to leave again, would be more cruel than kind. One parting is only half as hard as two.”

"You are right, as you are always right, my kind, my gentle friend."

"Not always, Juan. I may be mistaken in my rigorous treatment of these poor Indians, your words of a moment ago turned me to thinking it might be so."

"Your wisdom and love of justice will prompt you," Juan assured him eagerly. "Only, if possible to do it, send Don Geronimo away. There are no soldiers here now, not even a guard?"

"Not one remains, Juan. They carried Captain del Valle's body away to the pueblo for burial, I would not permit him to lie in consecrated ground after his defiance of the church. Whether they will come at Don Geronimo's appeal is another thing."

"As God directs it," said Juan. "I will leave these clothes behind me, Father Ignacio, to be put on again some happier day, if that day ever comes. If I do not return, give them to some wayfarer with the blessing of the man who will need them no more."

"You will find your room as you left it; as you leave it tonight, Juan, so I shall keep it until you come again. Get into your stout clothes, then, my son, and make ready for the road with haste."

"Somebody is coming," Juan said. He rose, anxiously, leaning while he hearkened to the slight whisper of soft-shod feet coming cautiously through the dark under the rafters.

"Brother Mateo," said Padre Ignacio. "It is a

time of unrest. Hold the candle to light him, Juan."

"Doña Magdalena!" Juan spoke her name in soft surprise as he opened the door, the candle in his hand.

"I saw by your window that you were not asleep, Padre Ignacio," Doña Magdalena said. Her great dark eyes sparkled like the eyes of a wild creature in the light; her face seemed hollow and gaunt, with shadows in her cheeks. She looked as if she had come from a troubled vigil, her unbound hair in slight disorder, a few strands of it sweeping her face. She stood in the embarrassment of unexpected discovery, having paused indecisively a moment at the door, its sudden opening revealing her in the troubled state between appeal and flight.

"What is it that brings you from your bed at this hour, my daughter?" Padre Ignacio inquired of her gently.

"Don Geronimo," she said, and paused, lifting her great eyes. She moistened her lips, as if they burned, fright, and something more than fright, a horrible questioning, it seemed to Juan, in her face as she looked at him.

"Has his wound broken, is he sick?" Padre Ignacio asked.

"He heard a commotion among the horses in the corral, it must have been two hours ago," she said. "He went out. He has not come back!"

"He is overdoing himself, I warned him," Padre Ignacio said, out of patience with the mayordomo.

"He has fallen in the ditch, very likely. Come, Juan, let us find him."

"I have looked for him everywhere," Magdalena panted, putting out her hands in gesture of helplessness, of expressive emptiness. "I would not have come to you, only I saw the light."

"Then he has taken a horse to ride out among the cattle," Padre Ignacio assured her, untroubled by her failure to find Don Geronimo. "He is not a man to be looked after like a little child, doña; return to your bed, we shall see what he is about."

They left Magdalena at her door, while they continued on to the corral where the vaqueros commonly kept their horses at night. This was on the river-bank, built in such manner that the beasts could go down to the stream to drink. It was an enclosure between high adobe walls; its openings barred by peeled saplings, smooth-polished from years of use.

"She looked at you as if she believed you had eaten him," Padre Ignacio said, rather sad than indignant to see such suspicion in Magdalena's face. "That is another result of your hasty blow, my son."

"What is this? The horses are all turned out, Padre."

The bars were thrown down in the disorder of haste, the corral was empty.

"Where are a woman's eyes, that she couldn't see this?" Padre Ignacio wondered. "But why the fellow has turned them out at midnight, and

apparently followed them to the pastures, is more than I can understand. ”

“ The saddles are gone from the top of the wall, ” said Juan. “ The horses have not gone away without riders. ”

“ What is this? ” said Padre Ignacio, alarmed. “ Oh well, ” calmed by his own reasoning again at once, “ it only means that the vaqueros have listened to reason and gone with Don Geronimo to gather up the scattered cattle. That is well; there is no further need for investigation, Juan. ”

“ Who is that? ” Juan challenged, seeing a shadowy figure close against the wall. He ran forward; an old Indian stepped out into the moonlight, lifting his hand in sign of peace.

“ Padre Ignacio, a word! ” he whispered, beckoning to the priest.

Padre Ignacio turned from a short exchange of words with the Indian, who at once disappeared around the corner of the corral wall.

“ He says the young men put a rope around Don Geronimo, ” said Padre Ignacio, in slow, fatalistic, heartless words; “ he says they have carried him away to the hills. ”

“ It is a bad hour for Don Geronimo, ” said Juan.

They turned and stood looking toward the hills, rough, jagged as peaks of mountains that stood with their roots sunk into the plain, rising to the dignity of mountains, in fact, as they ranged northward in forbidding expanse. The moonlight was white on

scarred cliff and crumbling ledge; shadows lay penciled in bold strokes along sharp escarpments; great slides of broken granite spread fanwise on the steep slopes, grey and dark-mottled where sage and harsh laurel had taken a melancholy hold.

"I must follow them, I must stay this awful tragedy!" Padre Ignacio said.

"Nothing can be done until daybreak, Padre. I can pick up the trail at the first light of day, and follow it quickly. Before then we could only stumble and grope."

"I must go at once, there will be something to tell me the way. Your horse — fetch him, I will go at once."

"There are many canyons," Juan pointed to the hills, where the dark gashes of the canyons opened down to the plain. "And see — who is to follow them, who is to know which way they went over this trampled ground? I have had much experience in these things, Padre. I tell you earnestly you will waste time and strength by starting now."

"They will go to San Feliciano Canyon, where the horses stray," Padre Ignacio said, decisively. "I will follow."

"I'll go with you, then. That horse the outlaw owned is a wild creature, and hard to manage at times. I saw your mule in the pasture by the mill-dam as I passed — he will be safer and more sure. Shall I bring him?"

"Hasten with him, then, Juan."

Juan returned with Padre Ignacio's mule to find

the priest in grave contention with his coadjutor over the question of which of them should go on the hazardous business of rescuing Don Geronimo. Padre Mateo argued for the advantage of his years, for his secondary position, which threw the arduous tasks upon him as a matter of right, to all of which Padre Ignacio was deaf.

“It will matter very little what happens to me, Padre Ignacio,” Juan heard Padre Mateo say as he came up with the mule, “but everything in San Fernando rests on you. If you should fall ——”

“Dismiss the thought! These poor misguided lads would not touch me with violent hand.”

“Remember San Diego de Acalá!”

“That was long ago, Brother Mateo.”

“But it is the same passion, the same blood.”

“Now, Juan, is the girdle tight? That is well.” Padre Ignacio put his foot in the stirrup, and laid hold of the saddle-horn to mount, stood so, ready to lift himself to his seat, and turned to Juan. “Go and finish your preparations for departure,” he commanded, severely, it seemed to Juan, almost unfriendly and cold.

“But I am going with you,” Juan insisted. “It was understood.”

“Only by yourself, my son. It is generous of you young men to put your hands to my relief, but another cannot serve in my place in this. Brother Mateo, I charge you to see that Juan does not remain at San Fernando above half an hour from this moment.”

He lifted himself to the saddle and rode away, the mule's unshod feet pluffing softly in the deep dust.

"He blames me for this outbreak," Juan said, hurt, sad, to have the old man go with no more kindness in his last word, "when Don Geronimo brought it on his own head."

"His judgment is not to be questioned," Padre Mateo censured him, with sharper word than Juan ever had heard from his lips.

Padre Mateo was waiting beside the door when Juan came down from his room under the eaves, determined, Juan thought, to see that he did not overstay his time. Juan had not been more than fifteen minutes gathering his few necessities; he believed that Padre Mateo had not stirred from his place beside the door.

Juan had his long rifle, and one four-barreled revolving pistol that Padre Ignacio had given him; a generous supply of food, with a few pieces of extra clothing, in a bag to be carried at the cantle of his saddle. He had changed his fine clothes for the rougher garb that he was accustomed to wear at his work in the mill and shops; for convenience in carrying, rather than from the present need of it, he had fastened a long cloak about his shoulders. And so he appeared before Padre Mateo, freighted, bulky with his bag of supplies, his heavy long rifle in his hand.

The moon stood half way down the western sky, not a mote, it seemed, in the clear night between it

and the Valley of Oaks where its effulgence made the Mission San Fernando bright. Juan stepped from the edge of shadow along the northern wall of the long white building, into this bath of light, a very figure of a pilgrim, indeed. The short-cropped little strip of beard on each cheek, dropping down from the temples, gave his face a serious cast which the shadow of his broad hat enhanced. There was a broad gay band on his low-crowned hat, the one gleam of lightness in his severe accoutrements. His long grey cloak was sombre as a cloud.

Padre Mateo lifted his hands; Juan sank to his knee to receive his benediction. When he rose, Padre Mateo embraced him, the words usually so ready on his tongue suppressed by his deeper emotions now. He pressed his face a moment to Juan's shoulder, turned him gently to face away from the mission, and dismissed him without a word.

Juan's horse stood close by, asleep on its feet, head drooping, relaxed in the confidence and security of home. At the corner of the church, before making the turn that would cut the great main building from his sight, Juan looked back. Padre Mateo stood where he had left him, even from that distance rugged and strong against the white wall at his back.

Doña Magdalena had gone into her house at Padre Ignacio's bidding; Juan knew a prayer was going out from her lips for the welfare of Don Geronimo. He wondered if any but Padre Mateo's prayer went ahead of him to ease the perils of his way, and for a moment his heart was bitter toward

Padre Ignacio, who had denied him the solace of a word with Gertrudis. He thought for a moment of riding back through the vineyard, and approaching Don Geronimo's house from the rear, in the hope that Gertrudis might be at her window. This rebellious thought quieted in a little while, giving place to one of humbler gratitude for the generosity of that gentle old man. One parting, after all, was only half as hard as two.

CHAPTER XVIII

A TRAIL BEGINS AND ENDS

A MILE beyond the milldam Juan left the trail that ran far back into the mountains to the grazing ground of San Feliciano Canyon, the road that Padre Ignacio had taken in his belief that Don Geronimo's captors had gone that way. Here Juan turned to the eastward, striking a direct course for the place where Cristóbal waited his return.

He stopped here a little while, turning in his saddle for a last look at the mission which, he felt in the sorrow of his banishment, he should see no more. He was close by the mountains now; a little while and the canyon would swallow him. With the last sight of San Fernando, since he was not to go by way of San Gabriel now, his eyes would not rest on the dwelling-place of civilized man again in more than two thousand miles.

Juan considered all this with melancholy spirit, more in the sad depression of a man leaving home than one setting his foot forward to it. He had blown like a seed on the wind into this serene valley, where he had taken deep root in the friendly soil. Warm hearts were there behind him; perhaps it was too much to expect of human fidelity to even hope that he might find all unchanged on his return.

That day was far away, so dim and indefinite, so hopeless and so vague, that it could not be fixed in the imagination.

He turned from San Fernando with a sigh, to take up his unwilling road. He knew then how Boabdil felt on leaving the white city of Granada, turning from his last sight of his ancestral roof from the distant heights, never to return again. The swallow might come back to the turrets, the dove to her nest in the lemon tree, but a defeated and broken king could feel no more the quickening joy of home-coming. Sorrow with hope is to be borne; the heart breaks in the void of despair. The lash of Don Geronimo was driving him away, as it had driven happiness and contentment from the lives of the poor neophytes of San Fernando.

Juan rode on, his thoughts behind him, with so little heart in his enterprise that he was careless of his bridle reins, and almost unseated when his horse shied and bounded with sudden start away from something among the bushes. Juan only glimpsed it, a dark small something lying close beside a clump of tall purple sage, but he knew from the animal's alarm that it was something that belonged to and had been handled lately by man. He turned back to investigate, to discover a black hat lying in the trampled trail of several horses which had passed that way only a little while before.

Plain as the tracks of the horses were in the loose earth, Juan had crossed the trail without marking them, absorbed as he had been in his own affairs.

Don Geronimo's peril had been put into the background of his thoughts. Here he read, as plainly as from a printed page, something that brought it to the front again with sudden rush. There was no mistaking Don Geronimo's hat with its broad band of silver cloth; there was not another like it at San Fernando. While Padre Ignacio pressed northward into the wooded canyon, Don Geronimo's captors were headed to the south, striking for the mountains called Santa Monica, on the farther side of the broad valley, which rose higher as they reached toward the sea.

Yet it might be that Padre Ignacio had seen this divergence from the expected, and had followed. Juan dismounted for a closer examination of the ground in the open places where the shadows of the bushes did not interfere. There was no mule-track to be found. If Padre Ignacio had come after the horsemen, the distinctive footprint of his animal would have been seen without trouble. It was but a little way back to the road which these vengeful young men had followed from the mission; Juan back-tracked them, bent on learning beyond any doubt that Padre Ignacio had gone on to the north. If mule-tracks anywhere between there and the beaten road these riders had left proved that Padre Ignacio had picked up the trail, then Juan would have no further duty in the matter, let his misgivings be what they might.

But there was no track of unshod mule in the hoof-torn soft earth. In the dusty main road,

white as a trickle of flour over the thirsty land, Juan found the mule's tracks. Padre Ignacio had ridden in haste; it was written there in the dust. Straight on to the north he had gone, unseeing in his fixed belief that those whom he sought continued on before him.

With this discovery, Juan dismounted. He hastily took his sack of provisions from the cantle of his saddle, wrapped his long grey cloak around it and placed it in the branches of a sturdy live-oak tree that stood beside the road. He debated with himself briefly on the question of his firearms, deciding that they must be left behind. Padre Ignacio had missed the object of his quest; he would ride far into the mountains before discovering his mistake. Juan had no doubt of his own duty in this situation; Don Geronimo's hat, dropped unseen by his captors, or carelessly passed as it flew off in his headlong ride, had appealed with tragic eloquence. Yet Don Geronimo's enemies were Juan's friends; he could not pursue them armed.

Two hours before dawn the morning fog blew in from the sea, muffling the moon like a lady's face behind her mantilla, dimming at first, speedily obscuring altogether, the light that had been Juan's guidance in following the vaqueros' trail. He groped along in the grey mistiness, leading his horse, bending low, sometimes feeling the ground for the tracks, only to lose the trail in a cluttered confusion of hoofprints where a herd of cattle had drifted across it. He waited there, impatient of the delay,

his back against the trunk of a tree, while the fog came rolling in, cloud on cloud, the slight breath that carried it damp upon his face.

Juan felt, when morning came as pale and uncertain as light through muddy water, that this delay had eaten up Don Geronimo's doubtful chance of ever returning to San Fernando alive. He did not care so much on Don Geronimo's account; considered from that corner of the situation he was not moved by any sharp twitchings of sympathy. When one thought of Padre Ignacio and Doña Magdalena, it was another thing. Don Geronimo was a cold and cruel man, yet singularly devoted to the cause of the padres, honest and loyal according to his severe accounting of discipline and service in the name of Our Señor. Considered from the appraisal of his worth as a true and faithful servant, harsh only as he believed it necessary, cruel only in the age-old oppression of master over slave, not singular in that respect to hundreds of men in Juan's own Virginia and Kentucky; considered in this light, Don Geronimo probably was worth saving for himself.

If he could deliver Don Geronimo from the vengeance of the young men and see him faced again safely toward San Fernando, he could turn to his own banishment with a lighter heart, knowing that the blessing of Padre Ignacio and Doña Magdalena would follow him, multiplied by a thousand gratu- tudes. There was no selfish thought in his breast of winning absolution, of quieting the feud between

him and Don Geronimo, or gaining a revocation of the edict which sent him forth like one disowned.

The trail led across the little river which came down from San Fernando, several miles below the mission. From that point it bore toward the pass leading across into the valley of San Gabriel, but a considerable distance to the eastward of the king's road which Juan had traversed with Padre Mateo on the journey to the harbor to fetch Gertudis Sinova. It was plain going here; the mayordomo's captors were carrying him toward a mountain that flanked the pass on the east.

This mountain rose out of the valley abruptly, without the gradation of preliminary hills, almost precipitous on the side which Juan was approaching. It was an ill-shaped eminence, its sides dark with the greenery of laurel and sage and chaparral, its summit divided into two knobs, standing perhaps half a mile apart. These topmost heights were rocky and bare, although almost daily refreshed by the fogs which swathed the valley at this time of the year, drenching tree and shrub with their distillations, keeping the northern slopes of the mountains green.

Juan drew rein as he came clear of the tall, wide-spreading oaks which grew in luxuriance close against the foot of this mountain, standing in a little open space from which he had a clear view of the forbidding dark mountain's double hump. The rising sun was routing the fog out of the valley; the shrubbery around him was dripping as from a

shower. The summit of the mountain was sharp against the clear sky, stalks of yucca, from which the bloom had long since withered, standing like spears out of the barrens and ledges from which they grew. On the summit of the eastern peak a horse was standing; Juan could see its head lifted above the shrubs which hemmed the little rocky islet of the top. It was unmistakably plain, although it must have been more than a mile away, in a straight line.

Juan could not see anything of the animal but the head and neck, lifted in the posture of sharp attention, as if the creature had caught an alarm, or stood watching the movement of something on the opposite slope. As the trail of those whom he sought led on into a canyon that promised to offer a way to the summit, Juan had no doubt that this horse was from San Fernando, and that the others, and their riders, with the unhappy Don Geronimo, were close by.

There was no road, no trace or mark of any way frequented by man, in the canyon through which Juan followed the track of those who bore Don Geronimo to the reckoning of his cruel years. Here the riders had been forced to scatter, each finding a way for himself through the close-grown thickets of chaparral. It was slow going; more than an hour of winding and forging through the rough tangle, where harsh branch and bramble laid hold of every fold and wrinkle in a man's garment and sought to hold him back, brought Juan only fairly

into the shadow of the mountain, the base of which the trail of those he followed was rounding, while it mounted always on an oblique course that was making for the top.

The sun was three hours high when Juan mounted out of the canyon and stood on the western shoulder of the mountain, in a meadow now yellow with the dry stalks of wild oats, which a few months ago was a green pasture. From this point he could not see the peak toward which he was directing his efforts, although he was confirmed in his conclusion that this knob, the highest point of the mountain, had been the vaqueros' objective. Their trail continued on, angling sharply up the mountain-side, appallingly steep here, and grown over with a tangle of low shrubs which seemed almost impenetrable.

A little below the level on which he stood, ahead of him a considerable distance, a brushwood fire was burning. Juan could not see the blaze, only the tall pillar of vaporous smoke, yellowish-white with a tint of green, such as the woodsman at once knows is fed by living vegetation. A slow and languid fire, Juan thought; doubtless in the clearing of some settler, who heaped it with green boughs. He went on, uneasy to be riding on that slope, steep as a house roof, where a stumble might send horse and man rolling down among the scraggled bushes, none of which seemed strong enough to offer much of a lodgment.

The horse that Sebastian Alvitre had ridden in

his outlawed days was well accustomed to that kind of work. He went about it with surprising security and quickness of foot, although the labor of it was heavy. Juan was nothing extraordinary as a rider, knowing little about easing or sparing his mount in such a pressure as this, yet his sympathies were keen and his heart tender, to such a degree, in fact, that he drew up and dismounted as the passage grew steeper, with the intention of hitching the horse to a shrub and going afoot the remainder of the way.

He was astonished at this point to notice the growth of the fire, which had spread from its place of beginning in the half hour that he had been toiling up the slope, to a long front which was girding the mountain. It was still too far away to give him much concern; it must eat its way through the green brush, tall and dense below him, thicker and greener a little way ahead. But it was making a tremendous smoke, and the outrunning spread of it was mystifying.

It might be that the Indians not attached to the mission—a tribe lived there in the vicinity of the pass, he knew—were setting the fire to drive out rabbits, according to their custom at that time of the year, as Padre Mateo had told him. It seemed an unlikely place for such a sport, yet it was certain that somebody was extending the fire line. There was little wind; the smoke rose high, so dense that the view of the distant San Gabriel valley was cut off. All the world visible to Juan was that grey-

green mountain-side between the fire and the top.

If the wind should rise, the blaze might run up the mountain to that point before he could explore the top and return, although it seemed unlikely that fire could find a foothold among the melancholy greenery of that slope. Again, he might need the horse to follow the trail, in case Don Geronimo's captors had crossed the summit and gone on. He did not believe this to be the case; they had struck for the mountain top with definite intention, perhaps associated with some tradition of sacrifice or vengeance, or celebration of victory such as they doubtless considered this to be over their persecutor, the mayordomo of San Fernando.

Leading the horse, Juan scrambled on, the beast lumbering after him in the peculiarly ungainly heaves and jumps by which a horse takes a steep. This was an uncomfortable proceeding at a man's heels, with only the length of the reins between. Juan pulled up after a little of it, considering what was to be done, blowing from the exertion, and the heat of the morning sun concentrated on the mountain-side.

And more than the heat of the sun. The fire had grown almost past belief in these few minutes. There was a pitchy blackness in the smoke close to the ground, and glimpses through it of fire that leaped like spume of breaking seas. The wind was beginning to stir, called up by the heat; it flattened the smoke against the mountain, and bent the points of flame down to catch the tops of those stolid,

harsh-leaved shrubs, the names of which Juan did not know, but the nature of which now became appallingly apparent. Each leaf, each somnolent, scraggly shrub, became a torch at the touch of fire. They were full of resinous substances, and strange oils, the perfume of their burning sweet as incense before the altar.

Juan looked anxiously toward the mountain top, not far away, but circled with a band of vigorous shrubs as though some ooze of water came out of the rocks to gladden their roots. The steepest part of it lay ahead of him. But it was evident that those whom he trailed had ridden up it; he could do no less.

The horse was uneasy; Juan felt it tremble as he put foot in the stirrup. Eager to be away out of the march of that panic-striking thing that crunched dry branches and roared in green boughs, the creature lunged and lurched up the steep. In a breath the smoke had become as thick as the morning fog, and hotter than the noontime sun of San Fernando. Still Juan was not anxious over his own situation. The top of the peak for which he was bound had appeared rocky and bare from a distance; the fire would fall at its edges; there he could wait until it had stripped the mountain and died out, as it must do quickly, urged on by the growing wind.

It had grown to be a gale of fire on the mountain-side before Juan reached the summit, the wind from it so hot that the skin puckered and drew, and the

eyeballs burned in dry sockets. All the surface moisture evaporated out of a man at the touch of that fiery hurricane, which whistled through the greasewood, sowing smoking twigs for the hasty harvest of flame.

Juan's great concern had come suddenly to center on himself. Grave peril had leaped up out of that lazy cloud of brushwood smoke, beside which Don Geronimo's was scarcely greater. Across the ridge of the mountain Juan believed he would be safe from this driving storm of fire, which he calculated would spend itself for want of fuel when it reached the top. Don Geronimo's captors would have fled to safety; there would be nobody on the mountain top for him to rescue but himself, and from the way things looked and felt at that moment, he would have quite enough to do to accomplish that.

The fire was more than half way up the mountain when Juan's horse scrambled up the last steep to the top. Looking back, Juan saw the forerunning surge of flame leaping from bush to bush, thicket to thicket, in a wild, avid, happy madness, a greedy delight of destruction, it seemed. Far below as the smoke broke for an instant and showed him the yellow-brown meadow of wild oats, he saw a man running with a brand of fire. It was only a glimpse, sharp, clear, distinct; the trailing torch dragging in the grass as the man ran, the quick-springing flame that followed.

There was no security on the summit at that

point. Here the long ridge of the mountain ran between the two humps, only a few yards in width, clothed over with a dense growth of sage and dwarfed laurel, the cedar-green of rank greasewood clumped here and there, every plume of it primed with its inflammable oils, waiting to vanish in a whistling roar at the first touch of flame. Juan pushed across the ridge, thinking to ride down out of that withering blast of fire, knowing that it could not run down this lee side as rapidly as it had pursued him upward on the slope at his back.

His hope was cut off by a drop almost perpendicular. Not a ledge, but a brush-grown steep, so tangled with interlacing growth that a stone scarcely could have rolled down, it appeared. Juan hastened on to the peak where he had seen the horse. The vaqueros would have gone at the first sight of fire; it was his hope that he might follow their trail to safety.

What had appeared a barren spot from the valley, here proved to be some sort of winter-growing plant that had matured and turned brown. It stood thick on the slope of the peak, kindling spread ready for the advancing fire. At the summit there was a small clear space, indeed, and here lay rocks red from the passing of old fires, which had streamed across them on such a wind as this. Here Juan paused a moment. The horse that he had seen must have been on this point; from here the trail that he must follow led away.

Juan could not discover any tracks from the

saddle, his eyes parched by the searing wind and smoke. He dismounted, sheltering himself in the lee of his horse. There they had passed; the hoof-prints were dim in the hard earth. On again, on foot, pressing close against his horse's side, almost strangled, his windpipe a streak of fire. Over the summit he plunged down into a jungle of greasewood, which grew there taller than he ever had seen it, at least twice the height of a man.

Here the hot blast of wind was broken by the thickets, the smoke was not so stifling and dense. Juan paused to breathe a moment, gasping, spent. He moistened his finger-tip in his mouth and rubbed his burning eyes, searching again for trace of the passage the others had made through the thicket.

A horse was standing almost within arm's length of him. It was tied to a stout mountain sumac by bridle reins, and lariat around its neck, hopelessly fastened in the track of the approaching fire. On the ground beside it lay the saddle it had worn, and the sheepskin that had been used for a pad; on its back there was bound another burden, as terrible to see as ever shocked the eyes of man.

CHAPTER XIX

DARKNESS NOT OF NIGHT

DON GERONIMO had been beaten hideously. He lay bound to the back of his horse, his face against its neck, as he evidently had been placed to receive the punishment that had been applied by unsparing hands. Yet not altogether unsparing, for Don Geronimo still lived, although he had not been spared in mercy, but in calculative cruelty, that he might be conscious of the end most dreaded by all living things.

It seemed that a thousand blows had fallen on his back, stripped naked to the waist. He was a pulp of purple, horribly gashed flesh. Blood from his wounds had drenched the horse's sides and stained the dry earth which had drunk it greedily. His castigators had calculated nicely the load of torture the human frame could bear. When Don Geronimo had fainted from the pain, Juan gathered from the evidence at hand, they had drenched his head with water to bring him back to life. His hair was still wet; he lay bound so tightly, hands clasping the horse's neck, feet drawn under its girth, that he could move nothing but his eyes, even if the strength for greater effort had endured for him to command.

Juan was so shaken by the disturbing sight that he stood for a moment inactive.

“Don Geronimo, Don Geronimo!” he said, his compassion so deep that it must have assured a man even on the threshold of death.

Don Geronimo could not move his head to see who it was that spoke in pity; he could only roll his eye, even that slight exertion seeming to rend his soul with pain. He did not speak; his great agony had not left him even a groan. Juan cut his bonds and lifted him from the horse, believing him on the verge of death. Don Geronimo lay limp in Juan’s arms, staring without sense or thought, it appeared, into his face. His throat constricted, his jaw sagged. Juan believed the door opened to let his soul step out into the mystery.

“I am a dead man, Juan,” Don Geronimo said, his voice a husky whisper. “Save yourself from the fire — go!”

“Can you ride, Don Geronimo?”

“I can only die,” Don Geronimo answered, bitter for his own weakness, it seemed. “The fire is near — ride, Juan, ride for your life! Mine is done.”

He sank to the ground, closing his eyes, the last of his strength consumed in these words. Juan threw the sheepskin on the horse, lifted Don Geronimo to it in the position he had lain before, and bound him there. The horse was restive; it braced its legs and tugged to break loose, snorting in fear of the fire.

The creature's sudden panic struck Juan's horse like a contagion. Until that moment it had stood where Juan had dropped the reins, confident in the wisdom of its master, unshaken in the menace of the fiery storm from which, left to its own resources, it would have fled. Juan sprang to secure it to a shrub; it reared as he reached for the dangling reins, snorted a blast of terror, dashed way in the brush. Juan ran after it, his reason dispersed almost as completely as the horse's by this sudden calamity. The roar of the fire drowned his voice; the horse was lost to sight in the swirl of driving smoke.

Don Geronimo appeared to be unconscious, lying nerveless as the dead with closed eyes and sagging head. Juan twisted the bridle reins around his hand and plunged off in the direction his own horse had gone, the frantic creature that carried Don Geronimo struggling to pass him and tear free. It required all his strength to hold the horse, which dashed through the thick brushwood dragging him after. A branch took his hat; he had neither time nor power to stop and recover it, but he was assured by the determination of the horse to go in that direction that a way to safety lay ahead.

This was a false hope, as proved in a moment when his own horse came running wildly back. Juan called to it, tried to throw himself in front of it and stop it. The mad creature swerved, and broke past him with a crash in the tangled brushwood, and was gone.

Juan turned to follow it, knowing that fire must have cut off its escape. He must go back along the ridge toward the western point, looking for an opening, let it be never so steep and the chance of passing it never so desperate, that would let them down the northern side of the mountain to the security of the valley. The barring brushwood limbs tore Don Geronimo's wounds. Whether he was conscious of this added torture Juan did not know, but he was assured by the flow of blood that Don Geronimo was still alive. He tore off his jacket and struggled with the crazy horse while he fastened it over Don Geronimo's bleeding back. On again, retracing the way he had come.

A blast of hot wind struck him as he left the shelter of the greasewood thicket, staggering him, setting him back momentarily blinded and gasping. It was a breaker of fire, a surge of stifling smoke streaked with flying points of flame. Close on his heels this outrunning wave of fire caught the greasewood jungle, leaping high, rolling a sudden burst of black smoke as from a broadside of cannon-shots.

Juan bent against the hurricane that swept the mountain top, struggling blindly on, the horse singularly passive beside him. Its panic seemed to have given way to a trembling paralysis of fear, in which it realized that a greater intelligence would guide it through the wild sowing of fire. Juan felt the skin of his face tighten, the hiss of fire as it crinkled his hair. The horse was singed. Don Geronimo's

beard was smoking as Juan pressed against him to break the fire from his face.

Across the top the fire was farther down the slope. Here the air was clearer, although little brands were setting the brown vegetation that not long ago had been a mass of yellow bloom. Now it was to bloom in a more ardent hue, and sing with a sharp piping as the red surge laid it low in a breath.

Juan's horse came galloping back from its frantic seeking to the westward, its hide singed bare in spots, its saddle leather smoking, the stirrups thrashing its sides in wild spurring on this desperate race.

The mad creature wheeled as it faced the turmoil of fire from the burning flowers, to rush to the northern slope, where it paused, its forelegs thrust out stiffly to check its plunge over the rim. Juan made another vain effort to catch the beast, which burst away at his approach. Back and forth in the short clear space of the mountain ridge the wild thing galloped, rushing in eager seeking to the north slope again. A moment it scrambled there, forefeet over the edge, then plunged out of sight.

Had it found a way down, a desperate, perilous way? Juan hurried to the spot to see. The horse was rolling down the steep, crashing through brushwood, dashing over sharp ledges, trailing a frightful way that living man could not follow. On again, the horse that carried Don Geronimo humping its back as if it faced a wintry storm, its nose close to the ground, shrinking as near Juan as it could press, companion indeed of his miserable situation.

Juan felt that this mangled ending his horse had made would be happy in comparison with the thing he faced, but it could be reserved as the final choice between the two. A little way beyond where his horse ended its torture in the desperate chance that failed, a canyon scarred the southern side of the mountain. The draft of this place was like a chimney, the roar of the fire in it equal to a cataract. Glimpses that he caught beyond that point gave Juan the hope that his way to life might be found on that side of the mountain, even in the face of the fire.

The horse hung back when they came to the head of the canyon, where a cloud of fiery smoke rushed across the mountain ridge as from a bellows. Juan stripped off his outer shirt, wrapped it around Don Geronimo's head and face, held his breath, crouched low and plunged into it, dragging the horse after him. This furnace blast was not more than twenty yards across, perhaps, but it was almost a sheet of flame. Only the tremendous draft, which shot the blaze high, gave them a passage with a scorched remnant of life.

The shirt around Don Geronimo's head was blazing when they burst through to the comparative clearness beyond the canyon; his beard crumbled under Juan's hand as he tore the cloth away. The sheepskin was burning, Don Geronimo's nether clothing, all that he wore, smoked in many spots. Juan crushed the fire out in his hands, blistering fingers and palms. His own raiment was picked

with a score of spreading fire-spots. He rolled on the ground to smother them, the bridle reins turned securely around his arm.

He staggered up, and on a little way, pausing to drag his hands over his face, in which there was a harsh feeling of incineration. His eyebrows and lashes were gone, the beard below his temples was only hard stumps; when he touched his hair it broke like glass and vanished. But he breathed again, he stood erect, and hope unfolded at his feet.

Here the side of the mountain was mangy and almost bare. Below him the burned patch of wild oats lay black; a weak line of fire was clambering up the slope, leaping on the wind from bush to bush, clump to clump. If he could pass the thicker fringe of bushes along the ridge before the fire had sprung that high, he could continue down without more risk. It was steep going, the horse, almost blinded by the last dash, stumbled insecurely after him. Whether Don Geronimo still lived, he did not know.

How viciously those unlikely shrubs blazed! What a torch sprung out of every drab grey sage! Juan met the line of fire where yucca stalks stood among stunted gray sage not much higher than his knees, sparse and sad and drouth-cursed, but more eager to burn, it seemed, for its very insignificance. The fire sprang from these sage-clumps into his face in vicious gusts, and the horse, unable to stand the charge, turned to lumber up the mountain.

Juan stopped the beast after a doubly perilous

struggle on the precarious slope, and stood bending over Don Geronimo, shielding him with his body from the fire. It was only a gust; in a moment it had stripped the leaves from the miserable shrubs and roared on like a little whirlwind on a summer day. They passed through this without much damage, and went on down among the black, smoking sticks of laurel and gnarled sage and grey-green clumps of spiked yucca, which looked little worse for the passing of the quick-leaping line of fire.

Juan found the spring in the pass called Cahuenga, where they had spread their dinner the day he rode as guard to Gertrudis Sinova. There he bathed Don Geronimo's wounds, grateful to find him breathing strongly, testimony of the strength of the indomitable race to which he belonged. Juan feared the mayordomo might die without surgical attention, such as Padre Ignacio could give him, if left there by the roadside long. He considered going on with him, cruel as it would be to Don Geronimo to bind him to the horse again, his excoriated back to the sun.

Juan himself was in poor case for traveling. Although he had closed his eyes against the fire in his long dash through it on the ridge, all but a little crevice to give himself a dim guidance, his blistered forehead and cheeks were puffing out of all human semblance, threatening soon to eclipse his sight entirely. A blind man and an unconscious man would be but a poor pair of traveling companions for the

fifteen miles or more between there and San Fernando.

This was the king's road, a highway much frequented. Perhaps the soldiers might pass that way, or some traveler who would hurry on to San Fernando and send help. The wisest thing was to wait at the spring, where the blessing of cold water was to be enjoyed by stretching out the arm.

Don Geronimo had not suffered from the fire as much as Juan. Aside from the shortening of his beard, his face bore little mark of the flames. Juan had spread the sheepskin and his scorched jacket for Don Geronimo's bed beside the spring. He dipped water in his hands and poured it over his bruised, galled back, entreating life by his gentle ministrations to remain in the citadel that had been so sorely battered.

Juan's labor was rewarded in a little while; Don Geronimo sighed, opened his eyes, tried to speak. Juan poured water on his lips, lifted him to lean against his shoulder while he offered water in his cupped hand. Don Geronimo drank thirstily, the draught seeming to restore his wasted blood.

"So I live," he said, his voice hoarse and low. "They would have burned me, they left me with a taunt to set the fire."

"Spare yourself, Don Geronimo," Juan cautioned. "I think I hear a cart; you will need your strength for the long ride home."

Fabio Dominguez, the rancher of the San Pedro road, was on his way to San Fernando that morn-

ing to buy flour. He had rested the night in the Pueblo de Los Angeles, and was making a merry clatter as he came up through the pass with four stout mules to his high-wheeled cart, singing a bit of song now and then, happy that Sebastian Alvitre had quit the road for a safer method of freebooting, leaving honest men to go their way untroubled.

Dominguez was not concerned with the burning mountain, that being a sight common enough in his experience. So long as the fire did not block his road he gave it little thought, but his eyes were like peeled eggs at the sight of the two battered, disfigured men beside the spring.

“What is this, in God’s name!” said Dominguez, standing on the footboard of his cart, his long whip looped in his hand.

“There is a gentleman here who has met a sad misfortune,” Juan explained. “If you will carry him to San Fernando, you will be rewarded.”

“I am on my way to San Fernando,” said Dominguez, coming down cautiously out of the cart, as if wary of some trick. “Who is he you want me to take, — God save me! what is the matter with his back?”

“It is I, Geronimo Lozano. You will lose nothing, Dominguez, in this.”

Dominguez came nearer, bending over Don Geronimo, still with the quick-set way about him of a creature ready to spring and run away. Weak as Don Geronimo’s voice was, Dominguez had heard it perfectly, yet he was not convinced.

“Don Geronimo? It is a strange thing,” he said.

“He has met a strange adventure, such as only Don Geronimo could pass through and live. Help me break some boughs to make a springy bed for him in the bottom of your cart. We will cover them with your sacks, there will be others to replace them at the mission.”

“And who are you?” Dominguez asked, his best foot set to spring back into the cart at the first false start.

“It is another thing,” Juan returned, coldly.

“Are you of the mission?”

“I am not of the mission.”

“Well, you are a thing to make a man forget his dinner!” Dominguez declared. “Have you come through the fire on the mountain?”

“We have. At San Fernando Don Geronimo will tell you what there is for your ears to hear. Assist me; let us be quick.”

While Don Geronimo's strength was little more than a shred when they lifted him to the cart and stretched him on the springy couch of boughs, he held himself braced on his elbow a moment, and took Juan's hand.

“Don Juan, you have suffered much for an unworthy man,” he said. “I pray for a happier day to requite you.”

“It is nothing,” said Juan. “Dominguez, will you lend me a jacket? I cannot promise to return

it, or to pay you for it soon. Don Geronimo will be my surety."

"I have but the one, and this cloak, with me," Dominguez said, very doubtfully. "A man hesitates ——"

"A meal sack, then," Juan said, impatiently.

"That is very well," Dominguez agreed, relieved by the easy bargain. "Here is a big one — now, a little minute and I will make you a shirt and a coat in one."

He cut a slit for the head to pass in the bottom, slits for the arms, and handed it to Juan with a laugh.

"I will not need surety for that," he said, "but when we get to San Fernando I will expect a good one in exchange."

"All will be well with you now, Don Geronimo," Juan assured him, bending over the mayordomo in his ridiculous smock. It was little wonder that Dominguez had not recognized him; it is a question whether Padre Ignacio himself would have done better at that moment.

"You will sit in the cart. Turn the horse loose to follow if it will," Don Geronimo said.

"I have lost my own horse; this one I shall need for the journey that lies ahead of me."

"You are not going with me to San Fernando?"

"It cannot be, Don Geronimo."

"Ah, I remember!" said Don Geronimo, his words a groan. "But that is the past; it is forgotten."

“That horse is only good for the wolves,” Dominguez announced, after looking the creature over. “He is blind, the eyes have been burned out of him. If you have far to go, my friend, I’d advise you to get another one. See!”

Dominguez struck at the horse, close before its eyes. It stood quite unconscious of the menace of his hand.

“It is true,” Juan admitted.

“Yes, and you are little better off,” Dominguez declared, a rough sort of pity in his manner. “Jump in now, little man, and I’ll land you in San Fernando in three hours.”

Juan was reluctant to go in the cart, but there was no other way. He feared that it would appear to those at San Fernando that he was making capital out of such service as he had given Don Geronimo in his hour of peril, a thing that bent down his spirit and humbled his soul to contemplate.

“The misfortune of my situation, Don Geronimo, forces me to do a thing that my manhood revolts against,” he said.

Dominguez heard this with amazement, turning on the seat of his cart to look at Juan, standing by the tail-board in such woeful plight that it would seem a blessing, rather than an indignity, to be offered a ride in a cart.

“Don Juan Mealsack, you are a strange animal,” he said. “In with you, now, and arrange the canvas to break the sun from Don Geronimo.”

“In God’s name, Dominguez, drive fast!” Don

Geronimo groaned, lying face downward on his bed of boughs.

Juan was concerned gravely over his own condition. His heavy undergarment had protected his arms and chest, but his neck and face seemed cooked, puffed in places with dropsical distensions, skinless and raw in others, a most miserable and tortuous plight. His hands were in no better case; his legs were scorched and blistered in spots where his pantaloons had burned through. These things he could have borne with no more than a passing concern, as indeed they were secondary to the injury his eyes had suffered. But the thought that he might lose his vision was a terrifying one which made his courage falter in a sweat of dreadful apprehension.

Don Geronimo did not know, Dominguez had not understood, that Juan had seen but dimly when he broke the leafy tips of branches from oak and sycamore for the mayordomo's bed; or that this obscuration grew with alarming rapidity, as an eclipse seems to rush to its climax. The inflammation was mounting in pulsating pangs that pierced his brain like exploring instruments in a cruel surgeon's hands. When they left the shadow of the oaks around the spring and entered the glaring sun on the white road, the canvas cover of Dominguez' cart seemed a poor shelter against the piercing rays.

Juan sat with hands pressed to his burning eyeballs, not even a tear left in the seared founts to mitigate the deep-striking agony. He had no spare

garment to wet in the spring and carry with him; his jacket, rough as it was, he had drenched at the last moment and spread over Don Geronimo's back. He could do no more than close his burned lids tightly, bow his head in the shade of Dominguez' canvas, hold back his groans and hope all was not lost of the most precious sense that comes from the mysterious Source.

Dominguez drove fast where the road would permit, and in the main it was smooth, the wheel-jolt cushioned by thick dust. If Don Geronimo's sufferings were increased by the motions of the cart, those who shared it with him were not enlightened by so much as a groan. Fast as they traveled, it was nearer four hours than three before they reached San Fernando. Juan heard the midday bell striking before they stopped at the gate.

"What is this?" said Dominguez, impatiently. "The gate is closed. A man would think the padres were afraid of an insurrection. So it is you, Padre Mateo that is warder today?"

"Drive in, Dominguez," Juan heard Padre Mateo direct.

"Here are the two most sorrowful men that I ever have seen in my days," said Dominguez, coming to the end of the cart the moment it stopped in the court. "You will need help, Padre Mateo, to get one of them to his bed."

"What is this?" Padre Mateo demanded, his head thrust in the cart-end.

"It is I, Geronimo Lozano, and the man who has

delivered me from death," Don Geronimo was quick to answer in voice surprisingly strong. Juan, hands pressed to his burning eyes, felt the movement as Don Geronimo struggled to lift his head.

"And who, in God's name is he?" Padre Mateo asked, shocked by the sight of so much misery as the two presented.

"It is Juan Molinero, God's blessing on his head!" Don Geronimo replied.

"Come down, Juan — come down," Padre Mateo said.

"Assist Don Geronimo, his need is greater than mine," Juan returned.

Padre Mateo called to some who stood in wondering silence near at hand, with directions for carrying Don Geronimo to his house. Doña Magdalena ran to meet them; Juan heard her sharp cry of piteous dismay.

"Now, Juan, let us see to you," Padre Mateo said, again at the tail of the cart. "Why, you shrink there like a man ashamed! Come down — here is my hand. See where Gertrudis is running to greet you, quick as the dawn."

"Padre Mateo," Juan said, uncovering his hideously distorted features. "I shall never look upon her face again. I am blind!"

CHAPTER XX

SO ENDS THIS DAY

PADRE MATEO heard this melancholy declaration with a sinking heart. He stood a moment looking with horror on the disfigurement of what had been but a few hours before a handsome, frank-faced man, to turn away quickly and almost run to stop Gertrudis in her eager coming.

“I have sent her away to wait a little while, Juan,” he said, returning presently. His voice was hushed, awed, as if he spoke to one dying, to whom the things of life were only trivialities. “You are no sight for a woman’s eye, your body half naked. She understands; she will wait.”

“I will go inside with you, then,” said Juan.

Padre Ignacio had not returned from his blind dash into the mountains; the care of the two suffering men rested in Padre Mateo’s hands alone, and he was uncertain in his mind which was the graver case and in the more pressing need of attention. Juan solved the doubt for him the moment Padre Mateo opened the door of the little room under the eaves which he never had expected to enter again.

“Leave me now, Padre Mateo, and attend to Don Geronimo,” he requested. “If you will send me a

pitcher of water and a cloth to lay over my eyes, I'll be very comfortable until my turn arrives."

"I have a doubt between you, Juan," Padre Mateo hesitated.

"My injuries are not mortal, nor in any danger of turning out half that bad," Juan replied, pushing Padre Mateo's shoulder gently to hasten him on his duty. "Don Geronimo's life is wasting in a hundred streams; the blood must be stopped, the poison checked in his wounds."

"Yes, it is a grave condition," Padre Mateo admitted, "a sight that wrings the heart. But I may be an hour, or longer, over Don Geronimo."

"Take the rest of the day if you need it. Put me out of your thoughts — only for the water and the cloth."

"A little longer does not matter so greatly with a burn," Padre Mateo said, yielding against his desire. For his sympathy lay with his affection, and there was not a warm spot in his heart for Don Geronimo.

Padre Ignacio returned before his coadjutor had completed his plastering and piecing of Don Geronimo's stripes. The sound of his voice in the door was as comforting to Juan as a mother's to a fevered child. New hope came with the gentle old man, tumultuous and eager in Juan's breast as a mewed flock that hears the hand of its liberator at the gate. Still he suffered an oppression of fear that his excuse for returning to San Fernando might not suf-

fice, or might be taken as a plea and a justification for a desired reward.

“ You see me here again, like a dog that can't be kicked from the door, ” Juan said, rising at the priest's kind word of greeting.

“ You had no choice, with your sufferings upon you, but to come back, my poor Juan, ” Padre Ignacio replied. “ I must open the shutters to have the light — can you bear it? ”

“ In a day or two I'll go on again, this time for good, ” Juan persisted in his effort to be understood. “ If I am not able to see my way, I only ask you to let one of your young men guide me to Cristóbal, who is waiting for me in the mountains. ”

Padre Ignacio turned from the little window set low in the north wall, placed his hand on Juan's shoulder and pressed him gently into his chair. “ You shall not leave San Fernando again, my son, unless the vengeance of the soldiers drive you away, ” Padre Ignacio said. He drew Juan's head back and pressed the swollen flesh from his eyes, saying nothing until he had completed the examination. “ Don Geronimo has told me all, ” he said, the weight of sufficiency in his tone.

“ I would not have followed them, but I found Don Geronimo's hat, and saw that you had missed the trail. ”

“ A deed of mercy needs no plea of justification in my ears. Do you feel the light? ”

“ It is like a spike driven into my eyes! ”

“ You must suffer like a hero, you must pay a hero’s price. ”

“ Shall I see again? ”

“ That is in God’s hands. ”

Juan’s hope fell away again, sinking as water vanishes in sand. Padre Ignacio was cutting away the mealsack shirt, touching his burns with exploring finger as they were revealed. He stretched Juan on his rawhide bed and washed his injuries, bringing him immeasurable relief. As he worked he talked, lightly, of his expedition into the mountains on a false trail.

“ Old as I am, I am not past learning, then, it is plain, ” he laughed. “ I rode away without reason, certain of my keen sense, forgetting to watch the roads for tracks that turned aside. It is fortunate I did not see them, for I never could have followed them in the night as you did. Even if I had found them, I could not have brought Don Geronimo through the fire. An old priest is a poor figure for an adventure. Is it not true, Juan? ”

“ On the other hand, if you had waited for daylight, as I advised, neither of us would have found Don Geronimo, ” said Juan.

“ There is a complexity in the direction of our lives that we would need to be more than men to understand. If we had gone this way, and not that; if we had said one thing, and not the other. It is always so in life. We do not swim; we drift in the current of our providential destiny. It lies in the hands of God. ”

Padre Ignacio applied soothing oils to Juan's burns, and cooling lotion to his eyes, working quickly, deft in his long years of practice in healing the physical as well as the spiritual afflictions of mankind.

"Now, I have wrapped you like a mummy," he said at last, "and here you must lie, in darkness of a dungeon until the inflammation subsides out of your eyes. Until that time, we shall not know."

"I suppose the military authorities will hold me to blame for the death of Captain del Valle. They will soon know that I have returned; they will come for me."

"Yes, Juan, your peril is far greater than ever before. Would to God you had gone on — yet I should not say so, I should not say so."

"And when they come?"

"They must wait; Sergeant Olivera is a reasonable man, he will not expect to take you away in this sorrowful condition. A guard will be posted, yet there are means of passing a guard. All depends, in the last moment, on your eyes."

"Is there a hope that I may see again?"

"There is always hope."

Yet little for Juan in the hollow platitude. He lay silent a little spell, wrapped like a mummy, in truth.

"Padre Ignacio, if they station a soldier at this door?"

"No, they shall not enter here."

"They entered the church."

“ In defiance of both civil and ecclesiastical law. Only with a warrant, properly signed by the civil governor himself, can soldiers enter upon church property and arrest a man. They had no such warrant; Sergeant Olivera would not go to such length himself, and he is now in command, as a matter of succession, there being no intermediary officers at the pueblo. It remains to be seen. ”

“ Yes, ” said Juan, heartlessly. “ Padre Ignacio? ”

“ My son. ”

“ There is Gertrudis; I cannot hold her to her promise now. I shall be hideous in my scars, I shall be — I shall be blind. Tell her I release her, and ask her to forget me. ”

Padre Ignacio did not reply at once. He was silent so long, indeed, that Juan read in it the sentence of eternal blackness, the confirmation of his deepest fear. When Padre Ignacio spoke, his voice was low, and distant, it seemed to Juan, as a voice heard at eventide from the hill.

“ In a few days, when the swelling of your face has fallen, she shall come with me and sit beside you, Juan, ” he said. “ Until then, permit your words to lodge with me unrepeated. ”

“ As you say, ” Juan yielded, holding his answer a long time. “ But spare her the sight of me, Padre Ignacio, until my face has gone back to as much of its original shape as it ever will bear again. It would be repellent to her; she never could forget. I beg you not to permit any of them, except Padre Mateo,

to come near me while I am in this repellent state. ”

“ Perhaps it would be better so. A sensitive mind retains the memory of such unhappy sights — I understand your argument, Juan. I shall assume the care of you myself, permitting nobody else to enter your chamber until you are restored to your familiar features. ”

“ Thank you, Padre Ignacio. I’m afraid I’ll never carry the same face again, burns draw and pucker so where they heal. ”

“ That is of tomorrow, which no man has yet seen. Now, I am going to shut you up in the dark like a bear in his winter hole, for one little spark of light will be agony to your eyes, as well as an agent of inflammation. Rest you easily as your sore condition will permit, and fasten your thoughts and your confidence on our dear Señor, whose sufferings for us cannot be measured by the utmost agony that man can bear. ”

Juan heard him moving softly about the room, placing his bandages and medicaments outside the door, making a subdued noise with sash and shutter at the window. He came back to Juan’s side to stand for a moment with hand lightly laid on his bandaged eyes, saying no audible word. Then he went away.

Juan lay a long time as Padre Ignacio left him, shut in his little room, listening to the sounds that came up from the court, so distinct that he knew the father had left the folding window open, drawing only the shutters. There was a dove among the

olive trees by the river, singing the few sad notes that sounded like the burden of a viol above the lesser instruments too far away to be heard; and the tinkle of sheep bells where the creatures came crowding in from the distant grazing-lands to drink.

Around the mission itself there was little activity. Dominguez had loaded his cart and gone away; Juan heard Borrromeo hammering intermittently at his anvil, and thought, now and then in the silence, he could catch the cool splash of the fountain where the white roses clambered over the trellis, out of reach of a maiden's hand.

It was best, indeed, that Gertrudis had not seen him in this frightful disfigurement, best that she should not see him now, wrapped and swaddled like a caterpillar in its self-spun cell. It was bitter to reflect on the future, which seemed to lie a dark pit at his feet. How he should cross it, how find his way, harassed him with sombre questioning. He felt himself at the beginning of unmitigated misery, the thread of his existence broken, a new, an appalling problem in his groping hands. The pain that centered in his eyes magnified the horror of his situation. Reason was racked until it shuddered in this conjoined suffering of body and mind.

Gertrudis might be there by the fountain, where the shade would be falling now, looking to his window, wondering how he fared; the soldiers might be at the mission gate, barring his way even to the blank, dark life beyond the mission walls. He was involved in a confusion of fevered speculations, con-

jectures, fancies; they eluded his reason, flying in blurring swirl that sickened him, oppressing him with such misery as falls on a man only when he stands in the very penumbra of death.

Gertrudis, Gertrudis! She was torn from him in the confusion of reeling fragments that his world had burst into; she was swept out of his reach forever, her face white as it floated by, white as foam on the outrunning tide, white as a rose on the trellis by the fountain.

Padre Ignacio returned, bringing a lull in this awful hurrying of his life's wreckage by his simple presence within the door. He spoke softly, his hand on Juan's wrist, on his bosom where the fire had not licked him raw with its avid tongue. Padre Ignacio gave him a bitter drink. There was a slackening in the sickening tide that swirled the broken bits of his life; there was a slowing to a pause. After a little the sweet tone of the vesper bell came to him, tremulous, restful, but faint as if it carried on the wind from distant places. There was a thought of the sun purple on the hills, and a surcease of the piercing agony; a sinking, as of one going down in the sea; and sleep.

CHAPTER XXI

BRANDY AND COFFEE

BORROMEIO CAMBON came to the kitchen at evening of that notable day in the history of San Fernando, to get a mouthful of the dainties which Magdalena had been all day preparing for the feast. It was not often in the life of a man of even such importance as the king's blacksmith that he came to share the provender of a governor. True, the governor was dining in the refectory with the padres, but the nearer to the source of luxury a man can seat himself, the greater his advantage. So Borrromeo, in his philosophy, consoled himself for a place and a platter at the kitchen table.

Doña Magdalena never had appeared so fair in Borrromeo's eyes, her dark cheeks glowing, her soft eyes bright, all dressed in white like a bride, the broad strings of her long white apron tied daintily at her slender waist. Even the kerchief that protected her hair from the smoke of broiling meats was white; it was bound smoothly across her forehead like the wimple of a nun.

"Doña Magdalena, you are beautiful tonight as a plume of white yucca on the side of the hill," he said.

“Then it is the white dress that you admire; I am just the same,” she returned, but pleased and smiling, for Borromeo was not a man to speak compliments or give flattery. The wonder of her attractiveness was in his round eyes. It was as if he had made a discovery.

“It is the honor of cooking for a governor that makes you glow like a little star in a white cloud, doña. A man might be jealous of a woman for that, seeing her so happy serving another fellow when she has had only growls for him to go with his soup out of the black pot.”

“It is a marvel, your knowledge of women,” she twitted him, yet too happy for the acrimony that she knew so well how to tip her ready tongue with, like the flint of an arrow, making the softest sounding words sometimes very hard and sharp when they were felt. “It is a pity you haven’t one of your own to make you wiser.”

“Maybe another ship will come some day, doña, bringing my chance. Who knows?”

“It would be better to take a ship away from this country, as Don Geronimo and I have decided to do. This is a sad land, it is full of hardships. Don Geronimo never will stand the same man that he was a few days ago. But I forget, I do not mean to laugh at you, Borromeo. You are not yet free to go.”

“Two cursed years yet to hold me here, like an Indian slave! Well, a man could be in worse hands than Padre Ignacio’s, and he might be where the

sun could not shine on him, or the light of a pretty lady's eyes. I am afraid, by my breath, that Don Geronimo will have reason to cut my throat if I am left alone with you very much — I may take you under my arm and carry you away. ”

“ What a terror you put in my heart ! ” Magdalena laughed, her big earrings twinkling in the candle-light when she threw her head back, gaily as a girl at a fiesta. “ Well, have you seen the governor, Borrromeo ? ”

“ No ; he did not come to the shop to pay his respects, and I am not going to stand on a leg like a chicken in the rain waiting for him to show his face around the corner. And so you are feeding him veal, heh ? Doña, it is as tender as the breast of a dove. ”

“ Borrromeo, San Fernando would be a disconsolate place without you, ” she said with great gentleness. “ I have a gill of brandy here, and there is coffee for you to put it in. So you see what fine things come when the governor rides down from Monterey to visit us here in the south. Padre Ignacio has been saving this choice berry in his chest for some such notable occasion as this. ”

“ It smells — doña it smells — what is it this coffee sets me thinking of with its smell ? Ah ! the market at Tepic on a Sunday morning, where I went one time with my father, long, long, ago. It is a queer thing, doña, how God has made a little place in everybody's head to put these recollections away, for dust to settle on them, it might be said, until some

word, or some piece of a tune, or some smell such as this coffee, brings them out again, as fresh as yesterday. Yes, yes; it is very strange."

Doña Magdalena's eyes were very tender as she placed her hand on Borrromeo's shoulder, pausing a moment in her flitting between grate and the trencher that she was heaping with meat to be carried by the Indian boys to the padres' table. She said nothing; only touched his shoulder as one gives an encouraging, commending caress to a child. Borrromeo bent over his plate, busy with his great hunger, a serene, a happy man.

"Do you know what the business of this fine governor is in the south?" Borrromeo lifted his face presently to inquire.

"He has come to investigate the many false charges that have been lodged against the missions," Magdalena replied.

"I thought Don Geronimo would have the reason of it," Borrromeo nodded. "So, they have carried their case to the governor? What is it they are crying about, our sheep?"

"The Angelenos say the padres of San Fernando are oppressors because they built a dam in the river years before the pueblo was established. That is one thing. Another cry of oppression rises from the ranchers, from Pico and the rest of them around us, but from Pico especially, who says the sheep have destroyed his grazing and he has no place left to pasture his cattle. The others join him in this—you have heard that complaint these two years."

“ True ; the ranchers have been here many times to see Padre Ignacio about it. Pico has a cloak with a green satin lining which he turns back over his shoulder. He looks like a parrot on a limb. What does Don Geronimo think the governor will do? ”

“ Don Geronimo is not well enough to be much interested, ” she replied, sadly.

“ But he is mending, doña? ”

“ Oh, marvellously. There never was such a physician as Padre Ignacio, although Padre Mateo is a good second. ”

An Indian lad came for the immense dish of meat, lifted it in both hands and ran out, carrying it before him as if he could endure the weight but a little while, and soon must place it or let it drop. He was lithe and quick, but short and undersized as most of his race, his black coarse hair cut squarely midway of his neck.

“ He pretends the dish is hot, playing for an excuse to put it down in the next room and cram his mouth full of meat, ” Borrromeo said.

“ There is enough, ” said Magdalena, undisturbed.

“ You will sit down and take your refreshment now, doña? ”

“ I will begin, Borrromeo; a woman who is cook to a man never knows when she will finish. You will excuse me when I jump up and quit you now and then without a word. ”

“ It is certain that I know a woman’s way in this, doña, if in no other, remembering my mother when she made corn cakes on the griddle for us in the

morning. Let me tell you, if that governor doesn't decide in our favor after filling his belly with this delicious food from your hands, I'm the man to wait by the side of the road and crack his head with a crowbar."

"There is no telling what the decision will be. I once heard Don Geronimo say — that time the soldiers were ordered away from the mission — that it was the beginning of the end. Perhaps the governor will give the mission lands away to the greedy ones who are sitting by waiting. It will be a sad day."

"A bitter day for these poor devils of Indians, who never will be able to find bugs and rabbits enough to keep them alive, they have increased in such numbers under the gentle padres' care."

"Don Geronimo says the ranchers will make slaves of the poor creatures, as was done in the Indies, in Mexico, in the days of the conquerors. Let us pray for wisdom in our governor, to help him to the right course."

"Padre Ignacio will make it clear. It is too bad our little Tula is not at table with us like a sweet white candle to light our faces."

"It is the last day of her novena for poor Juan," said Magdalena softly. "She is praying constantly."

"Nine days of prayer!" said Borromeo, full of marvellous admiration. "There are not many men worthy the great devotion, but Juan is one of the few. If I could transplant one of my eyes to his

head, as they say can be done with a crayfish, I'd give it with my blessing. "

" I would give him both of mine, and be happy in my blindness, " Magdalena said, the tears of gratitude which stood in them enhancing the endowment she would bestow with such unselfish heart.

" Well, it cannot be done, doña : poor Juan must remain a blind man to the end of his sad life. And he could strike a blow with a great hammer the equal of any man I ever saw. "

" And how much greater the strength and nobility of his heart! "

" Yes, it takes a man to hold his body between another one and the fire. And this is the ninth day since Dominguez brought them home. Nine days of unceasing prayer! It is tremendous! "

" Great blessings call for great sacrifices, untiring devotion, Borromeo. "

" Yes, it is reasonable that Our Señora cannot keep count of every man's trouble, there are so many men. She is a very busy lady, looking after the afflictions of all mankind. "

" True. But it is also certain that if her attention is called to some particular case by such great acts of devotion and continual appeal, she will intercede for that person if he is worthy. "

" Is Tula still determined to carry out the last great act of humility that she has set her heart on so solidly? "

" She is determined. "

" And that is tonight? "

“Tonight.”

“My prayers will go with her to sustain her in the anguish of her ordeal,” said Borromeo, in his simple piety. “I thought Padre Ignacio had stopped it. He was against it from the first word.”

“He has not consented, neither forbidden it. Gertrudis will not offend him; she will go about it quietly after the governor has retired and all is still. Padre Ignacio has only to keep out of the way, and you too, my good Borromeo. If her strength is equal to her faith she will carry it through, but she is so pale and worn by her vigils and grief that I am afraid.”

“As for me, I do not know. I never heard of such a thing. Maybe Our Señora will be pleased by such a sacrifice, but I say I do not know.”

“I have heard of it being done,” Magdalena said, her voice low and reverent. “It comes from the old times, when there were miracles. Who knows?”

“At least it can do no harm, only to herself,” said Borromeo, also reverent and hushed of voice as if he stood in a holy place. “Consider the pain of it, doña. I might undertake it for my own eyes, but for another’s ——”

“You would if that other one was more to you than eyes, than your whole body, — yes even your life and your very soul.”

“In that case there would be nothing left of a man, doña.”

“There is nothing left of a woman when she loves a man as Gertrudis does Juan. She can go

eagerly to this act of devotion that would make another flinch to think of it, and shudder and turn sick. ”

“ It can be accounted for that way, then. Would you do as much for Don Geronimo? ”

Doña Magdalena did not reply. She turned her face to look out of the open door, where the moon made it almost as bright as within. Borromeo lifted his eyes slyly, creeping up on her in a manner of espionage, it appeared, as if to study the secret of her fealty and learn how far she would venture on account of it, and so be able to weigh his findings against the protestation of her lips. No such protestation came from Doña Magdalena. Borromeo looked at the soft line of her throat, the poise of her handsome head, as she turned in that manner as from a triviality that deserved no more than silence.

“ Doña, you would do it. And you would do more, ” he said. “ A man might expect it of his mother, and if I had a wife so devoted, doña, I would preserve her in oil. ”

“ Like a herring, ” Magdalena laughed, but to relieve her own embarrassment rather than to discount his protestations.

“ Of course Juan does not know of this, ” he said.

“ How should he know? shut up like a bee. No, if he knew anything about it, that would be the end. It would not do. ”

“ Yes, Our Señora might think it was a plot, an arrangement between them, to bring his suffering to her notice. ” ✓

“ Borrromeo! what a thing to say! As if she were a woman, like me. ”

“ Very much like, very much like, indeed, ” Borrromeo declared, so sincere, so simple in his honest admiration there was no sacrilege in the comparison. Magdalena was not offended. She touched his big thick hand where it lay spread on the bare wood of the table.

“ I am only a woman, ” she said, humble and contrite in her manner and word.

“ Padre Ignacio has kept Juan close, ” said he. “ I wanted to go in today to see how he was mending, and give him a little cheer, but he sent me back. Of course he knows best, but it’s a lonesome business for a man to stay there in the dark. ”

“ I shall always remember his blue eyes, and the little smile that used to peep out of them. It is a pity! ”

“ The night he came, doña, do you remember how he looked? He was hairy as a heathen, and a heathen he was, in fact. When he sat eating, and you looked at him kindly, saying something in his favor, he lifted his glass to you. It was as much of a surprise as if I had heard a donkey speak. From the strange creature of that night he has become a Christian as good as any of us. ”

“ He is as sincere in the faith as Padre Ignacio himself. ”

“ Sergeant Olivera would give a leg to be in there at supper with them, hearing what is being said about his demand for our poor burned Juan. Has

the ban for profaning the church been lifted?"

"No. Communion is denied him, but he seems indifferent. He rode past the door yesterday, coming from the north along the king's road, smoking his cigar with defiance. Three of his thieving soldiers were with him, watching like dogs, as if they expected Juan to ride out of the gate again as he did that day with Cristóbal. I am tired of the sight of their dirty leather jackets. I hope I shall never see another one when I leave this unhappy land."

"I laugh when I think of the look in Sergeant Olivera's face when he came here demanding to put a guard over Juan. Padre Ignacio was as firm as a hill. He demanded a proper warrant, signed by the governor himself, and that, of course, Olivera didn't have, any more than Captain del Valle had the day he paid for his sacrilegious defiance."

"It is understood that Olivera sent to Monterey in special haste for such a paper."

"Well, the governor is here now; we shall see. Once I had a friendliness for that lean man Olivera, but if Padre Ignacio would give me permission I would drive him and his soldiers before me like bees the next time they come to San Fernando. Give me a bar of iron five feet long and I will account for any seven soldiers you can stand up against me. Little Cristóbal got away from them, smart as they are, anyhow."

"Padre Ignacio says he is far in the desert now, out of the reach of any man."

“God speed him, I say, and take him safely to the end of his journey.”

“It would appear more the duty of soldiers to be out searching the mountains for the nine villains who carried Don Geronimo away, than sneaking around here waiting for Juan to heal sufficiently to be taken out and shot,” Magdalena said.

“They will not be found,” Borrromeo declared. “They are away in the woods with the wild heathens who refuse to embrace the faith, the horses they rode have been eaten before this. And things are going poorly here, in spite of Padre Mateo’s strong hand. He is a priest, not a mayordomo, let him try it as he will. Don Geronimo was a hard one, too ready with his whip at all times, but it will be a good day for this mission when he is able to ride out again and put these lazy rascals about their business.”

“Don Geronimo will not serve as mayordomo again,” Magdalena said.

“Until a ship comes, surely?”

“No, not any more. Another must be found to fill his place.”

“That will be a long search, then, doña.”

Borrromeo poured brandy into the spoon of sugar that he held over his cup, sank it and lifted it, again and again, until the mixture was absorbed by the coffee. He sipped, the mellowness of contentment in his broad hairy face, his eyes dreamily on the beams dim through the smoke overhead.

“The padres’ hams have thinned amazingly, doña, since the night Juan came to the kitchen door with-

out a Christian word in his mouth to make himself understood. ”

“ A great many mouths with Christian words in them, and some with words that no Christian should hear, much less speak, have come to these doors since that night, Borrromeo. They have eaten the hams, sometimes as many as two in a single day. ”

“ It will be time to cure more when the rains come. Ah-h! this is a soothing drink, doña. There is nothing like a little brandy to make a man kind. ”

“ And nothing like a great deal to make him cruel, Borrromeo. ”

“ Without a doubt. But if our little Tula had a drop of this tonight — ”

“ I am reminded. ” Magdalena rose hurriedly, concern in her face. “ I must go to her and assist her to prepare for the ordeal she is to undertake for the one dearer to her heart than the blood that visits it. Borrromeo, I ask you to keep inside your door tonight — this piteous sight is not for the eyes of man. ”

Borrromeo drank the last drop of his brandy, rinsed the glass with coffee for the last clinging scent. He stood, turning his stiff mustaches up from his lip with the back of his immense hand.

“ I will keep inside my door, doña, ” he promised, “ and I will pray for strength to sustain her in the pain of her progression on this pilgrimage of love. And I tell you, doña, when a heavy man like me prays, that is a thing that counts. ”

“ They will sit at the table an hour yet, for trust

Padre Ignacio to know the best time of day to approach a man to get out of him what is desired. Even the governor has no brandy equal to this in his cellar, that is certain. Padre Ignacio told me it came from Barcelona, and has been fifty years in the wood."

"He will be so mellow he'll give our good padre the seal of his office if he wants it," Borrromeo said. "Didn't I tell you, doña, there was nothing like it to make a man kind?"

"Let us hope so, Borrromeo. They do not send back for more meat, it must be they are satisfied. If they want more, Diego can cut it; I am going to Gertrudis now. Go, then, Borrromeo, and I will shut the door."

"May you open it with a light heart tomorrow, doña."

"Thank you, Borrromeo."

Borrromeo stood outside the door a moment while Doña Magdalena swung it almost shut, leaving only her face in the opening.

"The moon has been dragging through the ocean again, the under part of it has melted away," he said.

"But it will grow again, as always," she returned.

"Like a lady's heart, doña."

"So it is said. Good night, Borrromeo."

"Doña, until the next sight."

CHAPTER XXII

THE SACRIFICE OF DEVOTION

NEXT to the trying-vats stood the carpenter's house, which was the last one in the row facing on the arcade; beyond the vats was the tallow-tank, sunk deep into the ground, its top showing like a sunken turret, as has been said. Then there came a corner of the vineyard which grew up to the church-side and spread away to the boundary of the Indian village, where it came against the adobe wall that stood between.

The vines of this vineyard were not trained on trellises, but grew in luxuriant clumps from the stumps of the grape, cut back year after year, in the old-world fashion which came to California with the padres. Since the day that Cristóbal had found covert among these vines to strike down Captain del Valle, they had dropped their leaves, save for a tenacious cluster here and there, in the quick way of yellowing and dropping that a grape leaf has, the world over. It is as if the vines, exhausted by the labor of bringing their juicy burden of fruit to maturity, lose all their sap in a day, unfeeling of the leaves no longer needed to shield the vinous globules from the sun.

As the wind moved through the vineyard this night the leaves took wing like flocks of migrating birds, sometimes rising to little heights above the stems that bore them, more frequently drifting in a shower of slow-floating, listless sails, to settle with soft sighing upon their crisp-dry companions with melancholy resignation to this thankless severance^a after a long and faithful service.

There was more than the whisper of falling grape leaves in the vineyard; more than the low piping of the wind among bare branches, soft as the lute-strings of the night. There was the sound of many feet in soft Indian shoes, and the sound of feet unshod; and the low murmur of voices held in awe, where the people came from the village, old and young, to wait for the passing of the beautiful white lady, and uphold her suffering body on the flood of their sympathetic prayers.

For Don Juan, friend of the oppressed, was blind, and this one was pleading with the Holy Virgin to give him back his sight. She would pass that way tonight, humbly walking on her bare knees from the door of Don Geronimo's house where she lived, to the altar of the church, hoping to gain through her suffering and humility the favor of Our Blessed Señora. Four of the little girls who learned their lessons and the use of the needle under her gentle hand, were to walk beside her, clothed all in white, carrying candles to light her agonizing way. There was no secret hiding her deed or its purpose; any person who had the heart to bear her suffering,

as the rough tiles cut her tender flesh, was free to come. So they came and waited for her to pass, in reverence, in tender sympathy.

That was to be the crowning of her long petition, the culmination of her sacrifice, for the good Don Juan. All hoped that Our Lady would bend low and see.

This low-whispering, sympathetic gathering extended along the open part of the arcade, where the moonlight fell through its airy, rhythmic arches, reproducing them in sharp outline of shadow on the pavement tiles. Well to the front the young women waited, many of them sitting on the pavement edge, their bright garments like gay blossoms along the way.

These were of the third generation since the Indians embraced the Christian faith. In all essentials except blood they were Spanish, and some of them, indeed, were even Spanish in blood, the children of soldiers and other exiles in California who had married Indian wives. Their common language was Spanish, their thoughts were Spanish, molded from infancy by the mission fathers. Two of these girls sat a little apart, close by the pedestal of an arch, as near to Don Geronimo's door as they could draw, as if some dearer bond of sympathy, some closer understanding, gave them the right to be the first to strew their prayers and sighs and heart-deep wishes like sweet flowers in Gertrudis Sinova's path.

“If I could do as much for poor Cristóbal!” sighed one.

“Doña Magdalena says he is safe, far away from San Fernando and the wicked soldiers,” her companion said, as if in reminder of something lately discussed.

“But he is not here, he never can return. Gertrudis has Don Juan, even blind, as I would have Cristóbal if I could, both blind and deaf. I’d only ask that he could still use his tongue to tell me he loved me.”

“I would want a man who could see my pretty ribbons, Inez. I think a blind man would be very tiresome in a little while.”

“It is sinful to say that, Maria. Do you believe Gertrudis thinks this of Don Juan?”

“But she would rather have him with eyes to see her pretty face.”

“Any girl would, of course. But between having a blind lover and a lover whose hand you never shall touch again — that is the thing, Maria. When I am old, I must sit in the sun beside the wall alone.”

“Maybe another one will come in Cristóbal’s place, perhaps a man from Don Juan’s country.”

“Why should they come here to be killed, as the soldiers want to kill Don Juan? But if one came, he could go back again; I wouldn’t look at him.”

“Maybe one from Mexico, then. Who knows?”

“It would not be Cristóbal, Maria. No, I am going to wait. When the cruel soldiers are gone from California, as everybody hopes to see them

driven out some happy day, Cristóbal will come home, if he does not die of a lonely heart in that distant land of strangers. ”

“ There is Padre Mateo, lighting the governor to his room — see — at the window there! Ah! he is closing the shutters, I got only a glimpse of his beard. ”

“ When he goes in the morning to see the mill that Don Juan made you’ll get a sight of him, for all the good it will do you. I wouldn’t walk the length of the church to see him. ”

“ If you would ask him, ” Maria spoke eagerly, animated by the sudden thought, “ he might give Cristóbal a pardon. Who knows? ”

“ He’d order the soldiers to flog me, ” Inez replied, bitter beyond her years under the burden of her sorrow. “ There is no pardon for an Indian who lifts his hand against the oppressor of his people. There is Doña Magdalena in her door to see if they are putting out their candles — she is looking at the governor’s window. Gertrudis does not want him to see her, she has no faith in his sympathy. ”

“ I hope my little sister will hold her candle straight, ” said Maria, projecting ahead for a little bit of something to worry over.

“ The flame will point to heaven, no matter what way it leans, ” Inez said.

“ There, Doña Magdalena goes in and shuts the door. She is a slow woman about some things — if she is much longer getting Gertrudis ready my little sister will go to sleep. How cold the pave-

ment is!" she shuddered, her little brown hand spread on the tiles.

"Not so very cold," Inez denied, trying it with her palm. "It wouldn't be any softer under her bare knees if it was warm."

"The ground is warmer, and softer," said Maria, whose troubles were few and light. "I think I'd walk in the cart-track if I were in dear Gertrudis' place."

"That would be a slight to Our Señora, Maria, trying to win her favor by the easiest way. If you were doing it for someone you held dear you would go over the stones."

"Yes, over sharp stones, or hot ones, or cold ones. I would go where lions waited to tear me, as they went in the days of the martyrs — or I think I'd do it, dear Inez. I never have loved anybody yet, I am not quite sure."

"She is coming!" Inez whispered.

The girls stood, drawing into the shadow with instinctive nicety of regard, to spare Gertrudis the bold evidence, at least, of the curious interest that drew them to the vineyard edge at that late hour.

Gertrudis came alone into Don Geronimo's door, from which no gleam of light fell from within the house. There were two steps from the threshold to the pavement; on the upper one of these Gertrudis paused, her hand on the door-jamb, a bare foot put out in seeming hesitant exploration, as one advances into untried water whose icy chill is feared.

The night was clear, it being that season of the

year when clouds have been so long absent from the skies as to be unreckoned in the affairs of men. The stars seemed drawn near to earth, spreading and contracting in their bright scintillation as if they panted at the barrier of space that held them back; Polaris was red close down upon the hills. Even a shred of moon is bright beyond the brightness of other moons in those serene autumn nights of California. This night the cold sphere seemed swollen with a passion of light. Gertrudis stood revealed in the shadow of Don Geronimo's wall.

She was dressed in white, like a bride. Her skirts, turned up above her knees as if she lifted them at a brookside, revealing her gleaming limbs, white as the sun-bleached linen of her spotless garb. She came with sudden resolution down the steps and stood on the pavement, assured by the silence around her, although she could see the Indians grouped along the arcade at the margin of the vineyard. There was something in their attitude of silent, sympathetic waiting that was like a sustaining hand.

Don Geronimo's house stood almost in the center of the arcade, there being something less than a hundred yards between his steps and the great door of the church. Ahead of Gertrudis the shadowy arcade stretched away broken by loops of moonlight; on one hand was the cart-track, white with dust; on the other, a little way ahead, the vineyard. In the courtyard behind her the water of the fountain could be heard plashing as it overflowed the rim of

its great mossy bowl, which stood like a goblet among water hyacinths and lilies.

The little candle-bearers appeared suddenly in the door, released with their blazing tapers from the room where Doña Magdalena had held them in readiness. Gertrudis dropped to her knees; the little girls ranged beside her, two a pace or two ahead, two a distance behind. They were dressed in white; their feet were bare. White ribbons were bound around their foreheads and smooth black hair.

Gertrudis remained a little while as she had knelt, her head bowed. Along the edge of the vineyard her humble friends were strewing the rose-leaves of their ardent prayers in the way her knees, bared to this act of devotional appeal, must pass.

A little sigh sounded, a faint, soft gasp, from the breasts of those dark, grave watchers when Gertrudis lifted her face, her head thrown back a little as if she looked into heaven, and began her painful march. Her fair hair was drawn back smoothly, every joyous ripple of it pressed down and bound by the white ribbon that circled her forehead. It was a broad ribbon, worn after the fashion of the Indian girls on fiesta days. In the center of it, just between Gertrudis' eyes, there was a silver star.

Doña Magdalena closed her door without a sound. She came and stood in the center of the arcade like a sentinel, seeming to say that none was to follow the slow little procession, no matter how hard sympathy might urge. Gertrudis passed on, clasped hands pressed to her breast in attitude of appeal, her

face white and holy, lifted as if to keep her eyes from calculation of what distance lay between her and the end of that painful journey.

“ She sees nothing of this earth ! ” Inez whispered as she passed.

“ She does not shrink, she puts her dear soft knees down as if they fell on cushions. But look ! every step — oh, every step ! ”

The tiles of the pavement were worn down by the stream of feet that ran over them unceasingly. But there were little bits of granite, set into them, sharp-angled and enduring ; pebbles of harder substance than the red-baked soil. These stood above the worn surfaces, as if they had been sown by the hands of a calculative torturer, to tear this suppliant's tender flesh. With each step the candles of the two little girls who came behind her revealed dark spots on the chafed red tiles.

They were kneeling along the edge of the vineyard as Gertrudis passed, except here and there one whose curiosity was stronger than his piety, who stood among the vines. The murmur of low-breathed prayers rose softly ; at least half the village was there, moved to compassion by this spectacle of sacrifice.

Gertrudis wavered only once in this tortuous march. She had passed more than half the distance when it seemed that the pain of her bleeding knees was more than she could bear. She stopped, swaying as if to fall. The two girls who walked ahead of her continued on, unaware of the break in the sup-

pliant's slow march. Wrung by an agony that could not remain voiceless, Gertrudis bowed her head and cried, a sharp sob breaking the struggling compression of her brave lips, pressed hard to hold it back.

There was such anguish in the cry, such piteous appeal, that it echoed from the hearts of those who heard it. The sound of this sympathetic weeping, bursting here and there into an uncontrollable sharp wail, frightened the candle-bearers until it seemed for a moment that they would run away screaming the terror that stared out of their wild little eyes. Gertrudis spoke softly to them, her own suffering submerged in the presence of their fear. The two leaders came back; the little procession moved on.

Doña Magdalena had arranged Gertrudis' dress in a way that it modestly covered her bared limbs when she knelt, and all but trailed over her feet. There were splashes of blood-stains on the white cloth now; on the tiles the dark spots grew broader, with a trail of trickling drops between. Gertrudis passed on resolutely, her face lifted again in the rapt fixity of her appeal. These who had the heart to look at her face as she passed the church corner and drew near the door, said it was beautifully serene. For in the measure of her suffering, founded on the profundity of her faith, she expected to be rewarded at her journey's end.

"The little ones are to stop at the door," said Maria. "The altar lights will guide her the rest of the way."

“They are turning back; it is done,” Inez whispered.

The two girls rose from their knees. The four little candle-bearers came running, the flames of their tapers streaming, flying from the church door as they might have fled from a tomb. Maria darted away to meet her sister and calm her voiceless fright. Doña Magdalena advanced and spoke gently to the people, who loved her for her merciful intercessions in the past.

“She is in the care of Our Blessed Señora,” Doña Magdalena said. “Go home now, good children, and leave her to her prayers.”

They went away through the moonlit vineyard, drawing together in little groups of families and friends to talk in low voice of the courageous sweet lady who had walked in the pangs of her own blood to carry her appeal for poor Don Juan to the very gates of heaven.

“If anybody thinks it is not such a great thing to do,” said an earnest old man whose face was wrinkled like a dried fig, “let him press his bare elbow with the weight of his body here.” He scuffed his sandalled foot on the hard ground, rough with particles of disintegrated granite from the crumbling ledges of the hills.

Doña Magdalena stood a moment at her door, looking toward the church. If a thought impelled her to go to Gertrudis’ side, her supreme faith that Our Señora would lift and sustain her seemed to make it almost a sacrilege. She went in, closing the

door upon that sorrowful way from which even the moonlight was withdrawing, as if in pity for the dark stains upon the rugged tiles.

In the church Gertrudis lay prostrate before the altar, where she had sunk down when pain dispersed her turmoiled senses. Faith and courage had sustained her to the last step of that dolorous journey. She lay like a white dove brought down by an arrow, her arms reached out in pathetic supplication, her fair hair against the knee-worn tiles. Her white dress glimmered in the pale altar lights, the dark blotches soothed down to shadows that could not offend the eye. Her simple sacrifice was done; the utmost exertion of her devoted heart was expended. O, Calles Dolorosas of this earth! how often there are trails of blood through them of sacrifice and mercy, converging always and forever upon the sanctified altar of love.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE ANGELENOS

PADRE IGNACIO was up later than usual that night. It was his established habit to retire early to refresh himself against the duties of the day, which began at dawn with his attendance before the altar at the early celebration of mass, and continued unbroken until the last word in the minute chronicle of the day was entered in his books.

This work tonight had been delayed on account of his sitting long at table with the governor; the gentle padre's candle-beam was bright in his north window long after Gertrudis finished her painful walk. Even after he had closed the record book, where all the doings of the mission were set down for the president's information, he sat involved in a web of speculations that kept the desire of sleep from his eyes.

In the chamber adjoining, Governor Jose Joaquin de Arrillaga lay asleep. It was the first time in his six years as governor of California that he had visited the south. Now he had come on the persistent complaint of the people of the Pueblo de Los Angeles and ranchers of consequence whose lands bordered those of the Mission San Fernando, to hear at first hand the pleas and defense.

Governor de Arrillaga was a friend of the missions; he understood fully their importance, the vast spiritual and industrial labors which they sustained to the glory of God and the welfare of man. Padre Ignacio was fully aware of this. Yet the priest was not animated by any great hope that the outcome of this controversy between the mission and the people, whom he looked upon as interlopers, would be decided as he would have it closed. The governor was a diplomatic man, genial, friendly; but so guarded of word that his mind seemed fallow ground, in which the seed of testimony must be sown and brought to fullness before he would deliver his opinion.

Well enough, quite within the practice of justice, Padre Ignacio admitted. Yet the cause of the missions was so evident that no man could deny the justice of it, except those politicians and schemers whose hands burned to lay hold of these vast enterprises and divide their treasures among themselves.

Not only the treasures of hemp lands, and wheat lands; orchards, vineyards, fair gardens; cattle and sheep numbered by the hundreds of thousands on the ranges of the missions between San Diego and Monterey; not only these, but the poor simple wards of the padres, the Indians redeemed by the faithful labors and marvellous patience, zeal and tender love of these men whose reward was not among the things of earth. These defenseless creatures, only a step removed from the most barbarous state that man ever descended into, the greedy ras-

cals who pressed closer day by day would tear away from the mission shelter and enslave.

Here lay the broad spread of cultivated lands, the impounded waters of rivers led into them to make them glad and green, developed by foresight and wisdom, and unremitting toil. It was so much easier for the adventurers to reach out and take what other hands had brought to this state of fruitfulness than to expend long years in building plantations out of the raw land; much easier, also, to sit and grow rich from the profit of an enslaved people's labor than to trim their own vineyards and hackle their own hemp.

It was charged, indeed, that the Indians were slaves under the padres, that they suffered abuses and cruelties, and punishments which revolted the hearts of the humanitarians who complained. That was one of the charges which the governor had come to investigate. True, Padre Ignacio owned in the honesty of his unequivocal mind, the Indians must be disciplined at times, as children of parents never so kind and generous must be held within bounds and administered corrections. There was no denying that these measures had been applied with little judgment at times; the present state of things at San Fernando was evidence of that. Yet this was far from the general rule. Even under the harsh authority of Don Geronimo the Indians had been happy at San Fernando. Padre Ignacio sighed. There had been disturbing days, there had been insubordination and rebellion. But it was

quiet again. What a serene breathing of peace there was over everything tonight.

The quietude of the night soothed him; the desire of sleep descended on him heavily. He drew the candle forward, leaning to puff the flame. There was no thought in his mind of Gertrudis and the sacrifice she had proposed to make in the simplicity of her deep faith; the sorrowful act of devotion had been carried through so quietly that no murmur of those who witnessed it had reached to his open window, and he had been so deeply occupied with the business which crowded his mind that he had not looked out upon the arcade, or the white gleaming church at its farther end until this moment.

"It is almost as light without as within," he said, his hand held for a moment between the candle and his eyes. "It is the hour of peace."

Padre Ignacio blew out his candle. The moon was shining in at his eastern window, the bars across its face in curious effect. Padre Ignacio sat looking at it in a calm reverie.

"Padre Ignacio! Padre Ignacio!"

The voice was beneath his north window, where the gleam of his candle had shone but a moment before. Sharp, clear, insistent in its clamor, its emphasis of alarm. Padre Ignacio sprang to his feet, to the window.

"Who calls?" he demanded, straining to see directly below him, whence the voice sounded.

"Padre Ignacio! The Angelenos — they are breaking down the dam!"

“Who calls?” Padre Ignacio demanded again, bristling with a cold thrill at the wild note of that shrill voice.

“The Angelenos — they are placing a blast of powder in the dam!”

Padre Ignacio heard the swift scuttle of soft-shod feet across the pavement of the court as the messenger who had shouted this disturbing news into his peaceful window ran in the direction of the blacksmith shop. The thickness of the wall at his window sill, the bars outside it, prevented Padre Ignacio seeing who this person was. The earnestness of the shouted warning, the tremulous eagerness of its wild note, seemed to echo yet in the great empty room. Padre Mateo was aroused; he was making a noise at his window.

“Who is bellowing there?” Padre Ignacio heard him demand, the huskiness of sleep in his throat.

“I will hasten to the dam,” Padre Ignacio said, putting his head a moment in at Padre Mateo’s door as he passed.

“I will be at your heels,” Padre Mateo returned, his head already in his gown.

Padre Ignacio did not wait. He ran toward the church, bristling with indignation against this sneaking trespass by the Angelenos, not doubting for a breath that the warning had been an honest one. The high, tremulous, anxious voice still sounded in his ears, like the pain of a thorn in the hand.

“I seemed to know that voice,” he muttered as

he ran, his long legs cutting the distance like a swallow's wings. "I seemed to know it, but it evades me like an echo." He hurried on, flitting from arch to arch like a swift bird.

He cut through the corner of the vineyard to the vestry door outside which Captain del Valle had fallen. In a moment he was out again, carrying with him the tall black cross borne at the head of processions. It was more than half as high as Padre Ignacio. A figure of Our Señor was carved upon its tree.

Governor de Arrillaga's sleep had been cut by the alarm beneath Padre Ignacio's window; his waking had been as sudden as a fall. Now he was moving about his chamber.

"What is this?" he called, his head thrust out of his door. "What alarm is this under my window, Padre Ignacio?"

"There is an assault on the dam by those rascals of the pueblo," Padre Mateo informed him, coming to his door a little way along the dark passage under the bare rafters. "Padre Ignacio has gone to stop them — I am going. Compose yourself until we return."

"Stay!" the governor commanded. "Guide me to the dam — in a moment I'll be with you — in a moment — where the devil is my sword!"

Padre Mateo, boiling as he was with rage against the skulking rascals who had come to work them this incalculable damage, had no choice but to curb his passion and his feet. He heard the governor

let his sword fall with a loud clatter on the tiles, and the muttered curses of the great man as he snatched the various pieces of his apparel. Padre Mateo made ready his candle to light the governor down the stairs.

For an elderly stout man, Governor de Arrillaga was quick about getting into his clothes. Although it seemed long to Padre Mateo's fuming impatience, it could not have been more than a minute or two until the governor appeared in his boots, his trousers pulled on with rather a stuffy appearance over his nightgown. He was carrying his sword in his hand.

"Now, my good padre, I'm with you," he said. "Lead away — let me get a sight of these precious citizens at their admirable work!"

Padre Ignacio arrived in breathless precipitation at the dam, having run all the way. He burst among the wreckers, who were so intent on their preliminary work of destruction that they had not seen him until he was within two rods of them, holding the cross before him with extended arms like a peace offering or a shield.

"Hold your work here, lawless men!" Padre Ignacio commanded. He pushed among them to the spot where two men, under the direction of no less important person than Comisionado Felix himself, were drilling a hole with a crowbar deep into the adobe-and-boulder dam.

There were not more than nine or ten men in the crowd; their horses were tied near the mill. The

moon was so bright that the features of every man there were laid plainly before Padre Ignacio's searching eyes, and he was not in the least surprised to see the other two members of the committee who had waited on him not long past in company with the comisionado: Sebastian Alvitre, late outlaw of the king's road, now innkeeper at the pueblo; and Manuel Roja, citizen, of no particular calling. The others were unknown to Padre Ignacio, but he made such note of their faces as to be able to identify every one of them when necessary.

The men who were drilling the hole dropped the bar and drew away from the cross as from a fire-brand, one of them stumbling blindly against the pail of water they had been pouring into the hole to soften the sun-dried bricks, upsetting it over Sebastian Alvitre's feet. Padre Ignacio saw that several holes had been started and abandoned, due to striking imbedded boulders. This one they had down four feet or more, already below the water line. The priest planted the cross in the mouth of this hole, pushing it down solidly, leaving it standing there in its sacred defiance.

"So I see you here, Vincente Felix," he said sternly, "a man sworn to uphold and enforce the law, setting your hand to this outrageous deed! Sebastian Alvitre, this is the manner in which you repay the mercy of those whose generosity saved your neck from the hangman's rope."

Alvitre had not moved an inch at Padre Ignacio's approach. He stood within arm's reach of the cross,

the shadow of his broad hat across his dark face.

"We have not come on a lawless expedition," Comisionado Felix denied. He came forward, Padre Ignacio and his cross between. The others had fallen back, leaving a broad clear space around the point of their interrupted operations.

"There, Padre Ignacio, there is our reason for coming," said Alvitre, pointing to the spillway. "See that little trickle of water that you spare us from the plenty you have stored up behind this dam. That is our reason for coming here tonight, after our prayers and petitions to you have failed."

"It wastes away before it comes to the pueblo, our gardens have withered, our cattle are dying, our women and children are suffering the pangs of thirst," Comisionado Felix declared. He set himself in dramatic attitude, arms thrown out as if he laid his purpose and its motives bare to all the earth.

"You have come like cowards and dishonest men to take what does not belong to you," Padre Ignacio replied.

"You wrong us, good padre," Alvitre boldly defended. "We have come only to take what is our right. Your oppressions cry out to God!"

"Miserable man! Away with you, now — all of you! Begone from here! If any man puts hand to the destruction of this work again, he ——"

"I have heard curses, and I have been cursed, padre; they don't hurt a man," Alvitre interrupted. "But I will tell you, Padre Ignacio, we are reasonable men. If you value your water so dearly, maybe

you are ready to pay us the damages we have suffered, and keep it where it is. The soldiers have not eaten up all of your gold."

"You discover the honesty of your purpose here, Alvitre," Padre Ignacio returned, contemptuous of this offer to compromise for a price.

"And there is a horse at this mission belonging to me," Alvitre pursued, unshaken, unabashed, bold as he ever was when he took away a man's money on the king's road. "I must include the horse in my terms of settlement. Bring us two thousand dollars in gold, good padre, and my horse, and you will see us ride away from here. With that money we can put down wells; we can endure till the rains come."

The others, some of whom were drawing off at the priest's half-spoken threat of the church's awful displeasure, Manuel Roja, the fat citizen among them, came crowding near again when Alvitre began this proposal of compromise. Comisionado Felix, little better than his second, caught at this offered adjustment with hungry zeal.

"Indemnity, that is all we ask, or it might be said with more truth, aid in finding water somewhere in the ground that we can't find in the river any longer, since the padres at San Fernando shut it up to their own selfish use," Felix said.

"It is plain that your purpose is robbery, if not of one thing, then another," Padre Ignacio replied, more sad than indignant to see such rascality stripped of all pretense. "Poor knaves! you do

not understand the enormity of the thing you propose. But you shall take neither water nor gold from San Fernando tonight. It is enough. Go now — away with you!”

“Roja, do you desert us?” Alvitre demanded, roughly challenging the citizen who was starting again toward his horse, followed by three or four.

“I have misunderstood your purpose, and I did not come to fight a priest,” Roja replied.

“Go your way, coward! there are enough without you. I am not afraid of a piece of wood, nor any man’s curse!” Alvitre snatched the cross, flung it aside and set his foot over the hole. “Bring the powder and fuse! Felix, watch that man!”

Padre Ignacio would bear watching, indeed. Fired by overmastering resentment of this ruffian’s contempt of the church’s authority, he sprang and picked up the cross. He swung it with all the passion of his heart, all the strength of his sinewy arms, and would have struck Alvitre down in a moment only for the interference of a tall bearded man who leaped and caught his arm from behind. The rascal laughed lightly, as if he had overpowered a defiant boy, twisted the cross out of Padre Ignacio’s hands and stood holding him by the wrists.

“Take yourself away from here in peace, padre, before I tie you with your girdle to yonder post and leave you to enjoy the spectacle of the blast that’s going to blow your dam to pieces in a minute or two,” Alvitre counseled.

“You shall blow me to pieces with it, then! I’ll not move a foot!”

Alvitre lifted his head from the work of pouring powder into the hole. He looked at Padre Ignacio a moment, his hat pushed back, the moonlight on his face. There was a gleam of his teeth between his parted lips.

“You poor old fool! I believe you’d do it!” he said. “Take him over behind the mill—see to it Felix—where he’ll be out of harm, and tie him securely. It will do him good to hear the water rush.”

“Come away, padre, come away,” Comisionado Felix requested, his voice in a degree respectful, his hand lightly on the priest’s shoulder. “We must have our water, you understand. You can see the river is dry, so dry. I tell you good padre, that it is no more than a mule can drink three miles below the dam.”

Alvitre had stepped into command of the expedition as naturally as if he had been appointed captain of it instead of Comisionado Felix. Whatever justice there might be behind their complaint of oppression in this matter of shutting off the river, their act was an unlawful one, outrageous as it was cowardly. All these phases of it fitted it peculiarly to Alvitre’s hand. He put down the bag of powder with a curse when he saw that Padre Ignacio moved neither at his command nor the comisionado’s entreaty.

“We’re not going to have a martyr here, old

man," he said rudely. "Now, march away before you set me on fire with a passion that jumps up in me quicker and hotter against a priest than any other man. You're not different from other people, you priests; you've got legs under that long gown. Let me see you march on them this moment!"

"Here is somebody coming!" said the man who held Padre Ignacio's arms.

"Nothing but another gown, and that serpent Geronimo Lozano," Alvitre said, contemptuous of their coming. "I'll make a martyr of him, with very great pleasure."

Padre Mateo and the governor were approaching along the dam from the direction of the mill, which stood not more than twenty or thirty yards away. Roja and those who were leaving with him, paused in the shadow of the mill to hear, perhaps, whether some new negotiations would begin, in the result of which they might return and share. Alvitre, indifferent to the arrival of this pair, was tamping down the blast with the smaller end of the bar.

Governor de Arrillaga came ahead, puffing from his run. He laid sudden hand on the man who was holding Padre Ignacio, and flung him aside, sending him sprawling down the bank.

"What do I behold?" he roared. "Citizens of the pueblo in this most despicable design!"

"Comisionado Felix, guardian of the law in the Pueblo de Los Angeles," said Padre Mateo, "and on your other hand, Governor de Arrillaga, one

Sebastian Alvitre, who places the powder to wreck our dam. Excellent gentlemen, both!"

"You have arrived in good time to learn the honest character of those who make the outcry of oppression against us, excellency," Padre Ignacio said. He spread his hands, rather ashamed of the sight before the governor's eyes, it seemed. "Yes, I would to God they had gone before you came to see them in their shame."

Comisionado Felix was speechless before the governor, turning his head in anxious calculation first toward his horse, then toward the chief executive at whose mercy he stood. What was passing in his mind was not worth the trouble of stopping to read, for it could have been only subterfuge and plans of excuse and evasion, or perhaps of treachery to those whom he had involved.

Sebastian Alvitre was more collected, for he had been confronted in his villainy many times in his life. He leaned on the bar, his eyes drawn to a scowling point.

"So, it is the governor, heh?" he said.

"Comisionado Felix, I will have my hour with you," the governor said, dismissing him with that. Felix started away, slinking and afraid. The man who had held Padre Ignacio, who was, in fact, nothing more than one of Alvitre's former companions of the road, had scrambled up the bank again. Two others and Alvitre, of the raiders, remained.

"You are Sebastian Alvitre, then?" said the governor, advancing a step, leaning to look sharply

at the fellow, "whom I pardoned at the petition of Captain del Valle, on assurance that you were an honest man at the bottom, and one who had rendered service to the state."

"It is I," Alvitre returned, insolent under the governor's severity where an honest man would have been ashamed.

"Your pardon is revoked. Stand! you are under arrest." The governor's sword flashed in the moonlight as he spoke. He presented it at Alvitre's breast. "And I tell you, villain, that you shall hang for this night's work!"

"I'll have something to hang for, then!" Alvitre said. He sprang back, snatched a pistol from his sash, the governor's sword-point pressing him. The cap flashed in the governor's face; Alvitre flung the pistol down with a curse, retreating nimbly before the governor's sword.

"Stand!" the governor commanded; "stand, or you're a dead man!"

Alvitre's foot struck the cross that he had contemptuously wrenched from the place where Padre Ignacio had planted it. He bent as swift as a swallow, laid hold of it, guarding himself against Governor de Arrillaga's lunges with desperate dexterity. A smashing blow sent the sword whirling down the embankment; Alvitre, a cry of rage in his throat, lifted the cross high to strike the governor dead.

A swishing sound, as of the wing of a waterfowl rushing in the panic of flight above the hunter's head; a noise of impact, sudden, sharp, as an apple

falling from the bough at night. Sebastian Alvitre caught his breath with a choking sharp gasp, flung out his hands and fell upon his face, the cross beneath his body,

“The Indians!”

The man who had held Padre Ignacio in his insolent strength gave this alarm, plunging down the embankment of the dam as he spoke. His companions followed. While the two priests and the governor bent over the fallen man, the raiders mounted and rode hard toward the hills.

“An arrow!” Padre Ignacio muttered.

“It was heaven-sent, it saved my life!” the governor said.

Padre Mateo was looking toward the willows which fringed the margin of the lake.

“There are two men yonder!” Governor de Arillaga said, pointing.

“Advance!” Padre Mateo cried, his voice trembling with emotion indescribable, a quick strange gladness that thrilled him to the marrow.

The two men were only a few yards distant; Padre Ignacio ran a little way to meet them, stopped, his hands lifted in astonishment.

“Juan Molinero! Cristóbal! Juan!” he said, amazement making his utterance weak.

Juan leaped forward like a man from his prison door, to fall on his knees at Padre Ignacio's feet. The wondering priest laid his hands in benediction on the young man's head, lifted him gently, saying

nothing; turned his face to the moonlight and looked anxiously into his eyes.

"You see!" he said.

"Thank God for his mercy!" Juan returned.

"It is a miracle!" Padre Mateo declared.

"It seems no less," said Juan, his voice hushed in the great flood of his thankfulness.

"When did this come to you, Juan? When were you restored?" Padre Ignacio inquired.

"I heard Cristóbal give the alarm——"

"Ah, Cristóbal; it was Cristóbal. I knew, and yet I did not know. And then?"

"I sprang from my bed, Padre Ignacio, forgetting for the moment that I was blind. You know it is the way of a man who has depended on his eyes to tell him things, to think of seeing first. I was alarmed at the thought of the dam, standing there in the dark. Cristóbal called you again; I rushed toward the window, I tore the bandage from my eyes, and I could see!"

"It is a miracle!" Padre Mateo whispered. "Juan Molinero, thank God for the devotion of a pure heart whose pleading and suffering brings back to you this inestimable treasure."

"Gertrudis! What has she done? Where is she? What—what——"

"Patience, patience, my son," Padre Ignacio calmed him, hand on his shoulder to stop him as he stood ready to bound away to seek her.

"She is safe," Padre Mateo said.

"Where is she?" Juan demanded, his voice and

manner so stern that Padre Mateo drew back a little as if in fear.

“ Before the altar. I saw her there as I passed the church door but a little while ago. Calm yourself —— ”

Juan did not wait to hear the pacific words. He leaped past them like a fugitive who fled for life; they could see him running swiftly along the white cart-track that led past the great church door.

CHAPTER XXIV

A ROCK IN THE DEEP

GERTRUDIS revived from the swoon of her suffering, chilled by the cold tiles of the floor. There was a struggle in her consciousness for a little while against the confusion of what seemed a departing dream, followed by a clearing, revealing with sudden remembrance all that had passed. Juan; she had perfected her appeal to heaven for Juan.

She thought of him with a welling tenderness which mounted in a sweep to an intensity that was almost a pain. Where was Juan? What if her poor sacrifice for him had failed! It was a terrifying thought. She would stand rebuked for her unworthiness; some offering more precious than her devotion, her prayers, the pain of her body and its blood, would be required, and she had no more to give.

It seemed that she had failed, indeed, or Juan would have come to comfort her, and lift her head to his bosom and caress away her fears. The thought troubled her; it lashed her with hot surge of anxiety that beat in her temples and burned in her cheeks, to fall again in a breath, like a sudden fire in a handful of grass, leaving her too cold to

warm a little hope. Shame had come to overwhelm her and confront her with the appalling insufficiency of the sacrifice which she had held so dear.

Otherwise Juan would have come.

There was no pain in her torn, bruised knees, but a numbness and a cold throbbing, a heaviness as of stone when she tried to lift herself and pray. She sank down again prostrate, her cheek to the rough tiles, hollowed before the altar by the feet of so many burdened ones who had come to kneel and pray. She stretched there, her arms reaching out in piteous appeal, too weak, too spent, too crushed and bruised and sorrowful in the shadow of the dark belief that she had failed, to murmur one more little prayer to cap the golden sheaves of the supplications she had sent before.

It was certain now that she had failed, or Juan would have come.

How long had she lain there? What was the hour? She was so weary, spent and cold! Tears that came on her cheeks were cold tears; warmth had gone out of the world with hope and faith. How could she struggle to her feet and go to Doña Magdalena's house, and to her bed under the window where the sun came in at morning? How could she ever return to face them all: Padre Ignacío — who had not shared her confidence in the sufficiency of this ordeal — Doña Magdalena, and poor Juan. She had been denied. Our Señora had not taken compassion; she had not bent down out of her place in heaven to hear.

Juan would have come if this had availed. Juan would have come.

It was a dream, she said; the great sacrifice had not been attempted, she was asleep in her bed, driven by the horrible distractions of a senseless dream. She struggled to defeat it, beating with resentful weakness to break its insane illusion, fighting to rise as one drowning fights to cleave the waters and plunge into the sun, if only to see the world again and confirm his unhappy fate. She fought the smothering specter with all her strength, yet without a twitch of a poor cold finger, a convulsion of a tear-wet lid.

She lay as nerveless as one dead, and sank, and sank, under the pressure of what she resented with her last gleam of thought as a dream.

Juan Molinero did not understand, when he came to her there prostrate in the dim lights of the altar, what this sacrifice for him had been. He saw the pitiful trail of blood across the tiles from the door, the dark stain on her bare feet. He was weak in the shaking of a terrible fear as he fell to his knees beside her, and touched her cheek in the agony of his life's greatest dread.

"Tula! Tula!" he pleaded, bending over her, his voice in her ear.

So it was she broke the trammeling meshes of the dream that was not a dream.

She felt him lift her, and was serene as if an angel had stooped out of heaven to bear her to paradise. Juan stood holding her in his arms, the light

of the altar candles on his face. She lifted her hand weakly, like the flutter of a wounded bird that struggles to take wing. He took her hand and guided it, understanding her desire. She touched his eyelids, and stroked his face with her numb cold fingers, wonder growing in her eyes. She smiled, and sighed, and drew close to him, this renascence of faith and thankfulness giving strength to her arms to clasp them about his neck, and cling as if she had plunged upward out of the waters to the glad sunlight of day, to find a rock in the midst of the deep.

CHAPTER XXV

PADRE MATEO'S FAITH

GOVERNOR DE ARRILLAGA had faced death before in his day, yet he never had been so shaken by the confrontation as tonight. This adventure had its aspect of commonality; there was no dignity in it. To be slain by a vile bandit with an outraged cross was no fitting end for a governor. It would have been said of him that he fell in a brawl, little more dignified, if not quite as ignoble, as a riot of dirty fellows in the street.

It was enough to cause a man to walk in the silence of reflection, turning over in his mind the somber thoughts that attended this happy deliverance. It was a subject for a philosopher, such as Governor de Arrillaga was in his way, this inscrutable caprice of chance, or fortune, or providence, in snatching a man one way or the other when he stood on the great divide between life and death. The governor had been silent in the contemplation of it as he walked back to the mission beside Padre Ignacio, Padre Mateo and Cristóbal going on ahead.

Juan was standing under the arcade before Don Geronimo's door, whither he had been banished by Doña Magdalena, who had only to whisper a word, indeed, in explanation of the delicate matter of Ger-

trudis' wounds, to send him flying into the night. Doña Magdalena had stood before him in awe, afraid to touch him, even to let her garment brush him. It would be a presumptuous sacrilege, she said, for one in sin to lay a hand on him, coming so lately from the holy touch of Our Señora which had restored his sight.

For Gertrudis, agent of this miraculous restoration, as Doña Magdalena declared it to be, the good woman had a reverent regard. There was the balm of healing in the very compassion of her touch. She assured Juan that Gertrudis would be well in the morning, to which confident declaration Gertrudis added the hopeful comfort of her smile. It was a wan, a weak, a weary smile, yet the placid expression of serenity, of humble gratitude. There was no triumph in it, no exultation in a reward struggled for and won.

Padre Mateo was almost equal to Doña Magdalena in his regard for Juan. When he came up with Cristóbal, leading Padre Ignacio and the governor by almost a quarter of a mile, Padre Mateo spoke to Juan in whispers. He inquired of Gertrudis, expressing thanks for the promise of her quick recovery. He suggested that they turn back to meet the governor, who had sent word ahead that he desired to inquire into the part borne by Juan and Cristóbal in the late tragedy.

"It will please him to have some deference shown," he said. "I hastened on to acquaint you with his desire, Juan, but it will be better if we go

and meet him. He is a just man, but he is a governor."

They met Padre Ignacio and the governor before the church. There, in the moonlight that fell white on the bare, hard-trampled ground in front of the door, Governor de Arrillaga stopped to hold his court of inquiry into the adventure of the night. His short, harsh hair was standing on end from the raking of his perplexed fingers during his silent walk at Padre Ignacio's side; his sash was slipped out of place around his rather well-filled body, his wide-topped boots flapped about his legs. The collar of his nightgown was open, his sword-belt hastily buckled, the end of it loose from the guard.

Yet the governor was a man of commanding figure and presence in spite of his disarray. He had sat in high offices for many years; his position in California was virtually that of a king.

"Governor de Arrillaga, this is Juan Molinero, of whom you have heard tonight in our conversation before this disturbing hour," Padre Ignacio said, presenting Juan as formally as if the governor had not seen him at the dam a few minutes past.

"The one who was blind?" said the governor.

"Who now sees through a miracle ——"

"And this is Cristóbal," Padre Ignacio broke his coadjutor's fervent declaration, his hand on the young Indian's shoulder. "You have heard of him tonight, also."

"So it is," said the governor; "it is very true. Now tell me," he demanded with sudden directness,

looking from one to the other of the two young men, "whose arrow was it that struck that villain down?"

Juan stepped forward. He was not an assuring figure, his appearance more in keeping with those who had come in violence than one who had intervened as a friend. The scars of his face were hidden by his thick-growing beard; his hair was in disorder on his forehead, he was dressed in the rough garb that he lately had worn in the shops and mill.

"Is this act to be regarded as a service to be commended, Governor de Arrillaga, or a crime to be condemned?" Juan asked.

"The arrow saved my life," the governor returned, his voice calm, his manner unmoved. "Does a man condemn such a service? Juan Molinero, I would reward the man whose hand despatched that arrow in the measure of his service to me, if it lay within my power. Let him speak without fear."

"It was Cristóbal, excellency."

"Excellency, it was Juan."

The two men spoke together, as if they had rehearsed the declaration many times, so readily do the words of generous abnegation spring from the lips of friends. Each of them stepped forward a little, as if in haste to lodge his information first in the governor's ears, hands put out in earnest appeal for credence of statements so impossibly at variance.

"What is this?" the governor demanded, looking curiously from one to the other.

"It will be easy to prove that it is Cristóbal's arrow — his mark is on it," said Juan.

"My arrow, but Juan aimed it," Cristóbal testified with equal earnestness. "Excellency, give him his life — your soldiers hunt him like a panther. You see now what a man he is!"

"I beg this reward for Cristóbal, whose true arrow never fails a friend," Juan entreated. "His life is forfeit for the death of Captain del Valle. Give it to him, I beg you, excellency, in payment for your own."

"I see how it is between you," the governor said, lifting his hand for silence when Padre Mateo would have spoken. "Each would have the reward go to the other one, with the true generosity of a friend. But suppose that I say, with this conflicting testimony before me, that it was neither Cristóbal nor Juan who shot the arrow that saved my life?"

"Our horses stand waiting, excellency; we will ride on our way," said Juan.

The governor took a little turn up and down the open space, fingers raking his upstanding hair, a man in deep perplexity, it was plain. Yet it was as evident, also, that he desired to resolve this matter in a just and equitable way.

"It is strange," he said, muttering as to himself, "that one who was blind, and another who was far distant, should meet in the moment of my peril and

do me a service which neither will own. A man would think it disgraceful to save a mere governor's life, the way you fellows put it off on each other. I don't know whether either one of you is deserving, I don't know whether to believe you or not. Still, somebody shot Alvitre; he is lying dead on the dam."

Governor de Arrillaga looked from Juan to Cristóbal, from Padre Mateo to Padre Ignacio, hand in his short harsh hair.

"It is unfortunate that I do not know anything about the integrity of either witness," he said, "or what credence to place in the word of either Cristóbal or Juan. Never mind, Padre Ignacio — I know what is in your generous heart. You cannot see wrong in any of your children. Permit me to sound this matter in my own way."

Padre Ignacio spread his hands in gesture of resignation. He whispered to Padre Mateo; they stood waiting the governor's decision while he paced back and forth across the trampled dooryard of the church.

"Then I shall interpret this mystery this way," the governor said, stopping abruptly before the two young men. "I shall say that both Juan and Cristóbal shot the arrow that saved my life, and both Juan and Cristóbal shall be rewarded as they individually deserve.

"Juan Molinero, your case has been laid before me tonight by your good padres; we have discussed it fully. I cannot see that you are guilty of any

crime. The old decree that sets the penalty of death upon foreigners who enter Alta California is oppressive and unjust; it cannot stand between friendly nations. Aside from your service to me this night you have shown yourself a courageous, a worthy and generous man. Your work here at San Fernando, also, has been of incalculable value, not alone to the mission, but to the public. You are free from all charges and harassments from this moment. You may remain in California, with all the privileges of a citizen, or depart to your own country, as you desire. So much, then, for you."

"I thank your excellency," said Juan, standing so very straight that it seemed his back never had owned a superior by bending before any man.

"Cristóbal, your case is more serious," the governor continued. "You are charged with killing the king's officer, Captain del Valle, of the military forces of Alta California. What is there you can say?"

"Only that I am happy I did not wound him, excellency."

"And why did you return to San Fernando, when you were thought to be far away?"

"I was far away, but my heart was here. I could not go on without knowing what had become of my friend."

"Permit me, Governor de Arrillaga," Padre Mateo requested, not to be silenced any longer.

"Many things have come to our ears concerning Captain del Valle since the day he fell, not least

among them absolute proof that he was an ally of Sebastian Alvitre, and shared his plunders of the road. This is conclusive."

"Complaints of the same tenor have reached me," the governor admitted. "You hasten me to my conclusion, Padre Mateo — what is it I would have said? No matter; the man was unworthy, he was an oppressor in his place. Yet that does not justify you, Cristóbal, in your awful deed. A man cannot be convicted without testimony, however, and I am told there were no witnesses to your crime, no eye that saw you direct the arrow against the king's soldier. A man cannot be compelled to testify against himself, I cannot accept your unsupported declaration that you are guilty of this crime. Therefore, you are absolved, you are fully pardoned, you are set free. Except — except such penance as Padre Ignacio shall set for you, which is a thing that I leave to him."

Here the governor, as if overwhelmed by his growing gratitude, the warmth of his nature melting the least clinging hardness of his words, rushed to Cristóbal and embraced him; dashed from Cristóbal to Juan, enfolding him in his arms, drawing the young man's hairy face against his own.

"I had no son until this night, now God has given me two!" he said.

Padre Ignacio and his coadjutor sat on the bench beside the broad door that opened to the wine press and the cellar. The moon had turned the middle

of the world, and was filling the courtyard with a light that was like soft music of harps and viols, falling even against the north wall of the white mission, touching the knees of the two priests where they sat. Governor de Arrillaga had gone to his bed; Cristóbal to the village. Juan was pacing like a sentry up and down the arcade before Don Geronimo's door.

"It was a marvel, but not a miracle, Brother Mateo," the elder priest said, as if approaching a conclusion of the discussion that had run between them for an hour or more.

"It is an elusive distinction, for me at least," Padre Mateo returned, shaking his head with the stubbornness of a man unconvinced.

"As I have told you," Padre Ignacio said kindly, patiently, "Juan was not blind, at least according to my belief from the first. His eyes were sensitive to light. I had intended to begin in a little while to introduce him gradually to the day, not certain, but hopeful, that he might see very well again in time. This recovery is beyond my expectation, far beyond, indeed."

"Then it remains a miracle, for all your logic, Padre Ignacio."

"Not so, Brother Mateo; there is no necessity for miracles since our faith is established among all men. Juan leaped up at Cristóbal's cry, shocked by the alarm in the peaceful night. All the force within him desired to see; every nerve bent its energy to the consummation of that desire. So, in a moment

his bodily forces accomplished what might have taken months in the ordinary course of healing. The clouds cleared from his eyes, in the same manner that the stress of great excitement, the shock of a sudden sorrow, has been known to strike men blind. It all resolves in a natural and explicable way."

Padre Mateo was silent a little while, yet the course of his thoughts could be traced by the slow, stubborn shaking of his head from time to time.

"Then Gertrudis must be told that all she suffered in anguish of spirit and body, all her pitiful petitioning through the long, sad hours, has been thrown away. It availed nothing; it was an empty sacrifice."

"Such devotion is not thrown away; it is not lost in heaven or earth," Padre Ignacio replied with infinite gentleness.

"You are a physician, and I am not," Padre Mato said; "you have an understanding of the science of optics, of which I am ignorant. But, my dear Padre Ignacio, science and logic, optics and physics and all aside, it is a miracle to them."

He stretched out his hand toward Don Geronimo's house, where Juan was pacing his tireless beat before the door.

"He cannot sleep, exalted as he is by the compassion that has melted his very heart. How is truth best served? By ruthless unveiling, or by tender reservations?"

"Poor child!" Padre Ignacio said; "she has

emptied the chalice of her heart for him. And the blessing of it is, he is worthy."

"Then who is to tell her," Padre Mateo asked, turning earnestly to his superior, "that she won nothing, that Cristóbal's shout beneath the window did it all? No, Padre Ignacio, it is still a miracle to me; let it remain a miracle to them."

Padre Ignacio did not reply at once. He sat reclined wearily, his white-fringed head against the plaster wall, his sandalled feet stretched out as if he slept. Presently he raised himself quickly, put his hand on Padre Mateo's where it lay on the bench beside him, in his caressing, assuring, comforting way.

"Yes, it is better so," he said.

CHAPTER XXVI

SUNSET AND EVENING BELL

“YOU’LL never be done laughing at me, Doña Magdalena, because I slept the night of the miracle. I tell you it was the coffee; it put me to sleep like opium. I shouldn’t have heard the devil, I tell you, doña, if he’d come hammering at my door that night.”

Borromeo Cambon was at his anvil, beating out the parts of one of those plows that turned a furrow like a wave, which Juan Molinero had shown him how to build. He did not take Doña Magdalena’s banter with his accustomed good humor, but scowled at her with his dark brows drawn, while he pumped his bellows until it roared like a wintry wind.

“You look as if you’d eat me like a shrimp, Borromeo,” she said, pretending to pout in an offended way. “I think it was the brandy instead of the coffee. You are not strong enough to take so much of it at once, poor little man!”

Borromeo slowly took his hand from the bellows shaft, like a deliberate oarsman who feels his craft touch shore, turned to Magdalena with such an expression of injury in his broad face that would have provoked laughter if she had not seen at a

glance that her raillery had hurt the simple blacksmith's heart.

"That was four weeks ago, doña; a long time for a joke to stick like a thorn in a man's hand and bite him every time he takes up a tool. It is true, as all the world knows by now, that I slept like an alligator the night the miracle came to Juan, and they killed Alvitre at the dam. But it was the design of providence that I slept, doña, for if I had roused at Cristóbal's cry and rushed to the dam with my iron bar, there would have been no need of an arrow to save the governor's life. Then where would Juan and Cristóbal have stood today? They would have been hunted men, with no governor's pardon making everything right as it does. Now, that is my last word of this jest, doña. Run away to wash the feet of your great lord, Don Geronimo, and trouble me with your cackle no more."

"I am sorry, Borrromeo," she said in sincere contrition, understanding very well that her jest had become a thorn.

"Very well, then. There is no reason in galling a man for a weakness because he's got a broad back. But it is enough; go and feed your hens."

"I am ashamed, Borrromeo. You are better than I am, and kinder, too. Forgive me; I will say no more."

"Oh well, if you speak that way it is nothing. It was not said, Doña Magdalena. Now, I must go on with my work."

He turned to the bellows again, which had wasted its last breath in a long sigh and stood as flat as a parson's purse. With short quick strokes at first, growing longer and harder as the leather filled and grew toad-like in its distension, Borromeo rekindled his failing fire. He did not glance at Magdalena, who stood close by his elbow, her bright kerchief binding her tidy hair, the firelight of the forge twinkling on her Gipsy earrings.

"Borromeo?" She touched the elbow of the hand that held the bellows shaft. Borromeo was bending over the fire, trimming it around the iron that lay glowing among the coals. He did not turn, nor lift his head, nor answer her by so much as a grunt.

"Borromeo?" softly, coaxingly. "What are you making, Borromeo?"

"It must be a piece of foolishness, when it is made by such a fool," he returned, not yet quite mollified.

"Who has made San Fernando famous for its ironwork, from mission to mission for hundreds of miles? Not a dunce, Borromeo; you know very well I esteem you next to Don Geronimo as the best man in the world."

"Maybe it is a ship, then, to carry me to Mexico," said he.

"You will not tell me; I have lost your confidence because of a silly little jest pushed so far it hurt. But you speak of a ship, Borromeo. There is a ship coming down from Monterey in a few days

that will carry Don Geronimo and me away. Perhaps your heart will be kinder toward me when I am gone."

Borromeo turned to her slowly, a look of consternation spreading in his face. He began wiping his hands on his leather apron as if making them clean to lay hold of and detain her.

"You are not leaving San Fernando, then, doña?" he said, gently, regretfully, as if he took the blame for her going, and entreated her to remain.

"In two or three weeks, Borromeo. They will send us word when the ship returns to San Pedro."

"But you do not want to go, your heart is sad already. There is plenty of room in California. Why will you go against your heart?"

"Let us not talk of it today, Borromeo. I must go along to my kitchen, I must see if the girls are making the dinner ready. We're going to have turnips and beef, Borromeo. You will come in?"

"Trust me, doña, when I smell the steam of dinner and hear the bell. So, you are going away?"

"It is arranged, Borromeo."

"Then I will tell you what I am making. It is plow, my wedding gift to Juan."

"It is a magnificent gift, Borromeo, something made by your own hands. Juan will value it above a silver plow, I am sure."

"I feared it would not be in time, there has been so much to do. Juan would have helped me, not knowing it was for him. But it is ready to be

assembled now; he shall strike the first furrow with it in the land Gertrudis brings to him. Yes; that is so."

"The wedding is a month or more away yet; there will be plenty of time for your plow. But I shall not be here for their happy day."

"They will miss you, as I will miss you when my day comes, Doña Magdalena."

"Your day? What, Borrromeo? have you found a lady?"

"A man wants to stay in California, after all, especially when Juan is to remain," Borrromeo shied from the question bashfully.

"So you are to be married! And I wonder who the lady is? I am envious of her good fortune, dear Borrromeo."

"Well, she isn't so much of a lady, little Maria ——"

"Maria? Oh, she is as sweet as the morning!"

"She is half Castilian, anyway, and that is better than a man can expect in this country."

"She is the best girl in the village, such a house-keeper, so quick with the needle."

"She doesn't eat bugs, worms revolt her. A man can have a Christian home with her, doña."

"You will have the finest shirts, Borrromeo! Maria is a treasure, you are a fortunate man."

"Yes, Padre Ignacio is going to release me when I am married at Christmas time. Then I am going to the pueblo and start a shop. There will be business for a man who knows his trade, Juan will speak

a good word for me among the ranchers, where I am not altogether unknown as it is."

"Your anvil would be silver, your hammers would be gold, if my good wishes could give them to you," Magdalena said. "Now, I must go — there is Juan home from his building on the ranch, waiting at the fountain as he always waits at evening for Gertrudis. The evening bell will ring in a little while, Borrromeo."

"But, doña, there are tears in your eyes," Borrromeo seemed to protest, yet in tender solicitude "It is not our happiness that makes you weep?"

Doña Magdalena shook her head, her lips pressed hard, and went to the door in silence. There she turned, a tremor in her voice when she spoke.

"I am thinking what a desolate place San Fernando will be when all of us are gone," she said.

She went away quickly across the court to her kitchen door. Borrromeo followed to the smithy door and looked after her, rubbing one great hand reflectively upon the other.

"Now, that is so," said he.

Borrromeo stood in his door, looking over the evening peace of San Fernando. Gertrudis had dismissed her class of girls, who spread over the court in sudden enlivening of laughter and shrill words, flitting like little fish in the shallows, running and screaming in impromptu games. Juan stood near the fountain, where the shadow of the lemon trees fell before the low-sinking sun. He exchanged friendly signals with Borrromeo; Gertrudis came

from the door of her classroom to join him. They sat on the bench against the rose trellis, the fallen petals like a thin strewing of a first snow at their feet.

“There is plenty to talk about when a man is going to be married,” said Borrromeo to himself.

It appeared so, beyond a doubt. Borrromeo watched them a little while, measured the distance between the sun and the hilltops, which was not more than the breadth of his thick, broad hand, and went in to gather up his tools after his workmanly rule.

There was the building of the new home to be talked of between Gertrudis and Juan, the adobe bricks for which Padre Ignacio had given them; and the invaluable coöperation of Cristóbal, who superintended the transportation of the same. There was the branch of a grey old roble, which overhung a corner of the new house, to be considered, and pleaded for by Gertrudis, who would alter the plans rather than sacrifice it; and there was talk of the sheepfold, how far it should be from the house; and the garden, into which water must be led from the dam across the brook. In short, there was life, and youth, and hope, and confidence; and all the beginning of this vast, new, marvellous undertaking, the establishment of a family, the keystone of man's felicity.

Juan's face was older and graver for the scars his burns had left; not deep nor disfiguring, such as a man wears a beard to conceal, but more as if sorrow

had touched his cheeks with searing hands, fixing a cast of sadness upon him which gaiety could not again beguile away. He had trimmed his beard on his cheeks again in the Spanish mode, and his face was browned by sun and wind almost to the color of Padre Ignacio's. There was not a shadow in his clear blue eyes.

Gertrudis carried her little scissors around her neck as before; they were bright against her white dress, lending her an air of domesticity that became her well. The happy termination of her recent sorrow had given her a new vivacity, a poise of maturity and confidence. She faced the future with a smile.

"Governor de Arrillaga was here at midday, Juan, returning from San Diego," she said. "He asked to be remembered."

"As if I could ever forget him! Did he say anything about his decision in the controversy between the padres and the ranchers over the grazing lands?"

"They discussed it quite openly, Don Geronimo says. The governor holds their complaints without foundation. There is room enough, he said, for them all without grudging the padres grazing grounds for their sheep."

"He is a just man, his decision was foreseen. And the people of the pueblo? did he speak of them?"

"There is more ground for complaint in their case, he said. It is to be arranged in some way, I

do not know how, to give them more water. Padre Ignacio will tell you. He is downcast over it; he says the mission fields and vineyards must be reduced."

"That is bad news. Still, Padre Mateo, at least, expected it. It is the first little advantage of the citizens over the padres, such as Don Geronimo has spoken of gloomily many times here lately as the beginning of the end. The politicians will have their desire with the mission properties before many years have passed over us, Tula. It will be a sad day."

"I used to hear much talk of it before we left Mexico, Juan. There were many who believed the missions were becoming too dominant in Alta California, that they should be curbed in the interest of the pueblos. The viceroy has that belief."

"Interference will be disastrous. Certainly, everybody can't think of the padres as I do, owing them so much, but it would be a terrible blunder for the state to take over the mission properties, as many are clamoring for it to be done, and turn them into the hands of greedy and incompetent political favorites."

"You will be an influential citizen here, Juan; you can work to defeat this unworthy scheme."

"Well, we must not stand under the shadow of a future event that probably is far away," Juan said cheerfully.

"Padre Ignacio says the fountains must be shut off," she said, sadly, "if the pueblo is to be given

more water. Will our roses die then, Juan?"

"No, they shall never die," he declared. "We'll take some slips from them and plant them at our home — maybe Padre Ignacio will give us one of the roots of these very plants."

Gertrudis reached and drew a trailing spray to her, and pressed the blossoms against her cheek.

"Dear roses!" she said.

"So much must perish here when the water is cut off," said Juan, looking around the court, bordered by orange and lemon trees, with apricot and peach standing tall among them.

"Dear trees of San Fernando!" she sighed.

Then talk of the building again, which was more pleasant than the thought of withering, stricken roses and the pathos of dying trees. Youth is happiest when it is building, and planning building that may never take form beneath its hands. Building is the quickening leaven, it is the very essence of life. There are old men who believe that as long as they can build they will not die.

"We must get ready for dinner," she said at last.

"Yes, there's the sun's last arrow on the hill yonder."

She touched his hand, turning her face to him quickly, in a strange expression of questioning, of hesitant waiting.

"Juan?"

"Tula." He expressed readiness, eagerness, to meet her unspoken desire.

"The governor was discussing today the mystery of the arrow that night at the dam. When you spoke the word just now it sprang into my thought."

"Yes?" said he, pressing her hand between both his own.

"Yes. He said he would give a great deal to know who it was, to whom he really owes the obligation for his life."

"He is a generous man," said Juan. He seemed to have withdrawn some part of him, to have hidden away within himself, and to be far distant from her in a moment. Although her hand was clasped in his, she seemed groping for him, reaching and straining, unable to touch more than his shadow.

"I have wondered, too," she confessed, looking frankly into his eyes, a little color rising in her face on owning to the curiosity which was her right by heritage, if by no other justification. "You will tell me, Juan? Who was it shot the arrow that saved the governor's life that night?"

Juan seemed to go farther away, the elusive personality that had drawn near for a moment while she framed her question, leaped to its concealment again.

"It is strange for you to ask me that," he said.

"No, not strange. It was such a great service, a thing so heroic to tell one's children. Was it Cristóbal, Juan, or was it you?"

Juan looked into her pleading eyes, satisfying himself that something more than curiosity, that pride of which she had spoken, had prompted the unexpected opening of a question he had thought closed forever. He turned his face away, giving her no answer, leaving her trembling in the fear of his displeasure, which seemed so plainly expressed.

The last of the little girls were whirling in a ring beyond them in the court, chanting some childish game; Borrromeo was in his door, letting down his sleeves, his face bright from the strong mission soap, making ready to close his shop for the day; Padre Ignacio was hurrying along the arcade toward the church, his head bent, his manner rapt as if he walked in a dream.

The evening bell, sounding in measured stroke: One; two; three. At the first note the little girls' hands broke the circle of their whirling dance, the little heads bowed, the little hands fluttered on bosoms, the devout lips moved in the quick words of earnest prayer; at the first stroke Borrromeo bent his head, one sleeve up on his bare arm, and Padre Ignacio stopped suddenly, standing as still as the statue of St. Francis in his brown gown at the altar side. Gertrudis and Juan rose quickly to their feet, their handclasp broken, their heads bowed in prayer.

A moment so. And then the bell, quick, joyous; exulting, it seemed, in the call to weary men in the far fields that their day's work was done. The little girls ran laughing off down the arcade behind

Padre Ignacio; Borromeo slipped down his sleeve and closed his doors, the bell calling, calling, its tone now rising, now sinking, its joy unabated, its sweet melody repeating against the rocky hills.

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