https://TheVirtualLibrary.org

Leon Roch, A Romance

by

Benito Pérez Galdós

Volume I

Translated by Clara Bell

William S. Gottsberger publisher, New York, 1888

CONTENTS.

VOLUME I.

Chapter		Page
I.—	From the Same to the Same,	1
II.—	Life at a Watering Place,	9
III.—	In which the reader will enjoy hearing the praises lavished by Spaniards on their Country and Country-men,	15
IV.—	More conversation, giving us some idea of the Spanish character,	24
V.—	Illustrating another trait of Spanish character,	31
VI.—	Pepa,	37
VII.—	Two men and their schemes in life,	45
VIII.—	María Egyptiaca,	57
IX.—	The Marquesa Tellería,	69
X.—	The Marquis,	79
XI.—	Leopoldo,	88
XII.—	Gustavo,	94
XIII.—	The last illusion,	103
XIV.—	Husband and Wife,	111
XV.—	A Modus Vivendi,	127
XVI.—	In the Dog-days,	133
XVII.—	Deserters,	142
XVIII.—	The Ascetic,	149
XIX.—	The Marquesa goes to a concert,	159
XX.—	The old, old drama,	166
XXI.—	A struggle with the angel,	179
XXII.—	Conquered by the angel,	185
XXIII.—	Weather permitting,	188
XXIV.—	Reminiscences—Anxieties,	200
XXV.—	María Egyptiaca dresses in grey and does not wash her hands,	211
XXVI.—	The devouring ogre—Croup,	222
XXVII.—	The mother,	238
XXVIII.—	The Marquis de Fúcar enjoys the special favour of Heaven,	242
XXIX.—	Erunt duo in carne una,	253
XXX.—	An irruption of the barbarians; Alaric, Attila, and Omar,	263
XXXI.—	The crisis,	275
XXXII.—	Reason *versus* Passion,	293

Leon Roch

LEON ROCH

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

FROM THE SAME TO THE SAME.

"*Ugoibea*, August 30th.

"Dear Leon: Think no more of my letter of yesterday; it must have crossed yours, which I have just received. Vexation, and a fit of petty jealousy, made me write a great deal of nonsense, and I am ashamed of having covered my paper with so many dreadful words, mixed up with such childish prevarications; but no—I am not ashamed; I can only laugh at myself and my style, and ask you to forgive me. If I had only had a little patience and waited for your explanations—but that again is nonsense.—Jealousy and Patience! Who ever saw the two things combined in one person? You see there is no end to my absurdities; this proves that after having been a fool, though only for a day, a woman cannot recover her natural balance of mind all at once.

"But now I am recovering mine. An end to recrimination; I am firmly resolved never again to be irritable and suspicious and inquisitive—as you say I am. Your explanations really and entirely satisfy me; their frankness and fulness impress me strongly—I hardly know why—and leave no room in my mind for doubt, but fill my soul with a conviction—how can I express it? that is in itself a sort of affection, that is its twin brother and as inseparable from it as—as—I cannot finish my sentence; but what does it matter?—To proceed; I was saying that I fully accept your explanation. A denial would have increased my suspicions; your confession has removed them. You tell me that you did love—no, that is not the word, that you had a fancy, a mere fancy, as a boy—as children together—for Pepa de Fúcar; that you have known her since she was little, and that you played together—I remember you used to tell me something about it in Madrid, when we first made your acquaintance. It was she, no doubt, who used to go with you to pick up the blossoms fallen from the orange-trees—who was frightened at the rustling made by the silk-worms when they were feeding, and for whom you used to make crowns of Marvel of Peru? Yes, you told me many funny stories of your companion as a child. You and she used to dye your cheeks with blackberries, and make paper crowns to wear; you loved to take birds' nests, and her greatest delight was to pull off her shoes and stockings and paddle in the streams among the rushes and water-plants. One day, almost at the same instant, you fell from a tree and she was bitten by some reptile. That was Pepa de Fúcar, was it not? You see I remember very well, and could write your history quite accurately.

"The truth is that I really did not pay much attention to those baby stories; but when I saw the girl, and when they said you were in love with her.—It is ten days ago and I still feel as if I were being suffocated—as I did when I first heard it. Believe me; I felt as if the world were coming to an end, as if time were standing still—I cannot express the feeling—or had turned backward and revealed some horrible spot, some unknown desert where—another unfinished sentence! To proceed.

"I remember now some more stories of your childish amusements, which you told me

not long ago. How such trifles cling to our memories! When you were a boy, and were studying that science of stones of which I can never see the use; when she—for I think that again it was Pepa de Fúcar—had left off putting her feet in the water and staining your cheeks with blackberry juice or decking herself with your paper crowns, that you played at being lovers with less innocence than before, but still—come, I will allow thus much—still with perfect innocence. She was at some school where there were a great number of lilac shrubs, and a porter who undertook to receive and deliver notes. Are you not astonished at my good memory? I even remember that porter's name; it was Escoiquiz.

"Well—enough of ancient history. What you have just told me, what I did not know till I just now read your letter (and I repeat that I was not particularly pleased to hear it) was that two years ago you met again where the orange-trees blow and the silk-worms feed and the water flows in the brooks; that you suffered a slight illusion, so to speak, and at that time began to feel a sincere affection for her, which grew and grew until—and here I come to the story—until you knew me.—Thank you Sir, and I make you a pretty curtsy, for the string of compliments, polite hints, protestations, and loving words which here follow. This shower of praises fills a whole page. Such pages as these come before us like a face we love, and this one made me cry with joy. Thanks again, a thousand thanks. It is all charming, and what you say of me is much too kind and good. You are worth a hundred of me.—You live for me? Oh Leon! How can I do better than believe all these romantic speeches? My heart opens wide to accept them all. I am a good catholic and have been brought up to be a true believer.

"Yes, I will be so foolish—I have read that blessed page once more. Oh! it is good to be told that 'a true, deep, and lofty devotion has blotted out that fancy and left no trace of it'—very good! 'the illusions of childhood rarely last into mature years' of course; 'Your sentiments are sincere, and your intentions thoroughly honest'—yes no doubt; 'The voice I heard, the words that made me feel as if the world had come to an end, were simply one of those wild suppositions thrown out at random, to be taken up by malice and used by her as terrible weapons'—so it is, so it is; 'Pepa de Fúcar is as indifferent to you at this moment as any other woman living'—that is perfect, exquisite! and finally 'I and I alone'—me and no one else.—What joy to press my hand closely to my heart while I think to myself—me, me alone, and no one in the world but me!

"A potent argument in your favour has just occurred to me; Pepa de Fúcar is immensely rich and I am almost poor. However, when one has faith no arguments are needed, and I have faith in you. Every one who knows you, says you are a model of uprightness and noble generosity—a rare thing in these days. I am as proud as I am flattered. How good God has been to me in bestowing on me a gift which, by all accounts, is so seldom found in this world!

"I cannot avoid telling you—though this letter already seems interminable—the impression that girl produced on me, even setting aside the rancour I could not help feeling at first. But now the storm is over; I can judge her coolly and impartially, and though, when I heard what you know, I thought she must be perfectly charming, I see her now in her true light. Every one talks of her shameful extravagance. It is an insult to Heaven and humanity! Papa says she spends enough in clothes in a week to support several families comfortably. She is elegant, no doubt; but sometimes very affected—as

much as to say: ‘Gentlemen, I behave in this way that you may all see how rich I am.’ Mamma says, no man would ever think of marrying a girl who thinks of nothing but displaying the products of industry. Rothschilds are not to be met with at every turn, and Pepa de Fúcar is enough to frighten away her suitors. She is recklessly extravagant and wilful, full of whims, and very badly brought up, and will end by falling into the hands of some fortune-hunter. So Mamma says, and she knows the world; and I really believe she is right.

“I do not think her so pleasing even as some people do, nor as I thought her myself, when I was dying of jealousy. She is too tall and thin to be graceful. It is impossible to deny that she has a fine complexion, but one needs a microscope to see her eyes, they are so small. They say she is very amusing and agreeable, but this I know nothing about, as I never talked to her, and never wish to. I have seen her from a distance, on the sands and in the gallery of the bathing house, and her manners struck me as decidedly free and easy. I fancied she looked rather particularly at me; and I looked at her, intending to convey to her that I did not care a straw about her. I do not know whether I succeeded.

“She was here three days and I would not go out; I never cried more in my life. At last she went away; but the joy I felt in her absence is somewhat clouded by the knowledge that you and she are in the same place. All day yesterday I was wishing that there were some very, very high tower here, from which I could see what is going on at Iturburua. I would be at the top with one jump. But indeed I trust your loyalty—and if you will tell her that you love no one but me, if she has any affection for you still, and is furious when she hears it—yes, furious—do let me know; I long to have that satisfaction.

“We expect you on Monday. Papa says that if you do not come, you are not a man of your word. He is very anxious to see you to discuss some question of politics, for, by his account, there is a perfect plague of politicians here who utterly disgust him. If they would but make him a Senator!—and to tell you the truth, I almost fear for his reason if he does not attain to that bench of the blessed. He still suffers from a mania of writing letters to the papers. We have had some these last few days, and some articles as well. Mamma, of course, knows them, and they invariably begin with: “It is greatly to be regretted….”

“He came in to-day quite proud to show me your new book. He praised it highly and read the opening sentences aloud to Mamma. It was a most laughable scene; neither he, nor Mamma, nor I understood a single word of it; but, in spite of that, we had the highest opinion of the learning displayed in the book. You may fancy how much we should understand of an ‘Analysis of the Plutonic rocks in the Columbrete islands,’ and the interest I should take in quartinary deposits or in metamorphic or azoic strata. Why, I find it hard enough to spell the words, and have to copy them letter for letter. However, the mere fact that it was you who wrote this mass of mysterious learning, is enough to give it a charm in my eyes. I spent a long time poring over your pages, as though I were trying to learn Greek, and—you will not believe me, but it is quite true—I read and read, full of admiration and respect for you who had written them. Among all those monstrous names too I came on some which took my fancy in a vague fashion, such as *syenite*, *variolite*, *amphibolite*. They sound to me like the endearing names of fairies and cherubs who danced round you while you were studying the works of God down in the bowels of the earth.

“You see I have become poetical without intending it, a thing which is past endurance I admit, and yet this villainous letter will not get itself finished! But Mamma is calling me to go out with her; she is dreadfully bored here. She says it is the most detestable of bathing places, and that she would rather stay in Madrid than ever come here again. There is no casino, no society, no excursions to make, no shops with pretty things, no company worth looking at—in fact there is no second Biarritz in the world.

“Leopoldo, too, is bored to death. He says it is a population of savages, and he cannot understand how any decent person can like to bathe among the Caffirs—so he calls the poor Castilians who swarm on the sands. Gustavo is gone to France, to visit that good angelic creature Luis Gonzaga, who is very ailing. Poor little brother! A few days since he sent an Italian priest to call on us, Don Paoletti by name, a charming man who talked delightfully. But I want to tell you everything and really cannot. My paper is coming to an end, and Mamma is calling me again. Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye. Do not fail us on Monday, and we will talk of that—you know what. At night, when I say my prayers, I pray for you. Now do not put on that disagreeable face. There is a dark corner in your soul which I do not at all like. Well, I will say no more for fear of assuming the airs of a preacher, and for fear too of anticipating a great work—that sentence too may remain unfinished. Give my love to Syenite, Pegmatite and Amphibolite, the only fair beings of whom I am not jealous, and good-bye. I love you with all my heart; nay I am simpleton enough to believe all you tell me, and I expect you on Monday. So till Monday, farewell. Beware of failing me. If you do, you will see what you will see!

María.”

CHAPTER II.

LIFE AT A WATERING PLACE.

The young man who was reading this letter was walking while he read, up and down an avenue of tall trees. At one end there was a low building with a pretentious Greco-Roman façade, from which a sulphurous smelling vapour came out in tepid gusts, and at the other, one of those phalansteries in which Spaniards congregate during the summer carrying with them into the country all the restrictions, inconveniences, and unhealthy accessories of a town life. Rough slopes, covered with grass and mosses, came down close behind the bath house, as if trying to push it into the stream below; and the torrent itself, striving to make up for its smallness by the noise it made—like some human beings who are Manzanares[A] in size and Niagaras in noisiness—rushed tumultuously past the foundation-wall, swearing and muttering obstreperously that it would carry away the hotel, the promenade and the drinking-bar; the doctor, the inn-keeper and the visitors.

[A] The river on which Madrid stands, which in Summer is almost dried up.

The visitors were limping and coughing in the avenue, or sitting in various groups on the banks of turf under the trees. Whole monographs on every imaginable complaint were being delivered by the sufferers; elaborate calculations as to digestion, past or to come; grotesque diagnosis; narratives of sleepless nights, of spasms, headaches and hiccoughs; inventories of palpitations; dissertations on the irritability of the sympathetic nerve; mysterious hypotheses as to the nervous system, as impenetrably obscure as the arcana of Isis; observations formulated into aphorisms by optimist speculators; forebodings of the apprehensive who thought each cough was a step towards the grave; hopes from the credulous who believed the waters might work miracles and bring the dead to life again; suppressed sighs of these who were in pain; soliloquies of those who were past curing, and glad laughter of the convalescents.

No one who has not lived for some few days in the midst of such a panting and wheezing community—with its sick folks who look quite well and its healthy folks who fancy themselves ill; and men who are dying visibly by inches, eaten up by the diseases of vice—can form an idea of the dulness and monotony of this hotel life, which society has rushed into with such extraordinary unanimity since the invention and extension of railways, and which scarcely ever affords any of the pleasures or peaceful rest of the real country.

Nevertheless there is a certain charm to be found in this invalid community. The constant change of drama; the beautiful faces which arrive every day followed by more satellites than a planet; the luxury, the evening meetings; the delicate ambrosia of gossip, served up constantly fresh and spicy, never satiating and never exhausted in spite of the incessant demand; the flirtations begun or revived; the moral friction, sometimes against the grain but sometimes delightfully soothing; the thousand floating ends, as it were, that get tied or sundered; the little dances; the parties to see this or that grotto or panorama, or

heap of ruins, which every one has seen a year ago but which must be once more admired in chorus; the harmless or very venial gambling; the jokes, the plots, the small intrigues, with which some members of this little world are so bold as to disturb the monotony of the common contentment, the common amusement, the common hygiene—for this sort of society is eminently a Commonwealth, and its gaiety and splendour hide a regimen as dreary as that of a hospital—all these accessories make such colonies highly attractive, to a certain class of mind at any rate, and, as it would seem, the commonest. For this reason the whole Spanish nation resort to such spots, some with their own money to spend, and some with that of others; and at the beginning of July, the 'Governor' or the money-lender is put under requisition to supply the funds necessary to the attainment of this great desideratum of modern life. It would seem that there is a certain form of dipsomania, a craving to drink of sulphurous waters; and, to slake that elegant thirst, a man is willing to become a sort of hydropathic Anacreon.

The young man who was reading the letter was dressed in deep mourning; having read and folded the three sheets, he was about to continue his walk, but was hindered by the approach and greetings of some of his fellow-visitors. It was now the hour when most of the patients came out to the spring to drink their quantum, and take a walk. Disconsolate and pinched were many of the faces, some old and yellow, others young and hectic, with forced smiles, clouded by a drawn look of suffering; and nothing was to be heard by way of conversation but an incessant flow of questions and answers as to every phase of illness, and manner of being ill.

But pathological small talk is altogether intolerable, and so the young man with the letter seemed to think, being himself on very good terms with Esculapius; for he turned off as if to leave the grounds. He was detained, however, by a party of three persons, two of whom were men of middle age and important appearance; nay, not without a certain dignity.

"Good-morning Leon," said the youngest of the trio in a tone of confidential intimacy. "I saw you just now from my window, reading the usual three sheets."

"What! friend Roch, up as early as ever," cried the eldest who was also the least good-looking.

"Leon, my good fellow, choicest of souls—won't you walk with us this morning?" said the tallest, a consequential personage, who was walking, as usual, between the other two, so that they looked as if they occupied their place on each side of him for purely ornamental purposes, and to throw his personal and social dignity into the strongest relief. The young man in mourning excused himself as best he might.

"I will return within an hour," he said walking briskly away. "Au revoir."

The other three went on along the promenade, and it will be proper here to give some account of this illustrious trio which formed, as the reader must understand, a constellation such as may be seen in Spain at any hour, in spite of the frequent cloudiness of our climate. The reader, like the writer, will of course say at once: We know them—let them pass and disappear. But then, they never disappear. This constellation never sets, is never dimmed by the radiance of the sun, never hidden behind a cloud, never in eclipse. It is always in the ascendant. Alas! yes, it never fails to shine with terrible splendour, and at the

zenith of social life in Spain.

Who does not know the Marquis de Fúcar? Flattery speaks of him as an Oasis of Wealth in the midst of the desert of universal poverty; he holds the first place among the stars of the Spanish capital, and is the very *Alpha* of the society he moves in.

Who, again, does not know Don Joaquín Onésimo, that beacon light of Spanish bureaucracy, which burns so brightly wherever it shows itself, the central glory of the myriad Onésimos who, under different pretexts, fill various offices of the State? “Not a family, but an epidemic,” was said of the Onésimos. But there is no doubt whatever—Heaven knows—that if this luminary were to be extinguished, all the precincts of the administration would remain in darkness, and all social order, social institutions—nay, society itself, would revert to primæval chaos. The third side of this triangle was formed by a polished and well-dressed man, in whose pallid and languid features all the freshness and energy of his two and thirty years seemed prematurely quenched. His manners were insolent, and his whole aspect gave that impression of exhaustion and fatigue which is common enough in those who have wasted their moral strength in politics, their intellect in party journalism, and their physical vigour in vice. The type is peculiar to Spain, and to Madrid—nocturnal in its habits, perfervid, lean; the very incarnation of that national fever which betrays its burning and devouring heat in night work over newspapers, in gambling-houses where the lamps are put out only when the sun rises, in twilight rendezvous, and in mysterious meetings in the corridors of theatres, in the corners of cafés and in Minister’s offices. Such a specimen looks strangely out of place in this pure clear atmosphere, under these gigantic trees. It might almost be supposed that he would feel uncomfortable at such a distance from the dens of corruption and wickedness, that there could be no corner in his heart for the glories and graces of Nature, nor a perception of its beauties in his dulled eyes, with their red and swollen lids, heavy and bleared with late hours.

Federico Cimarra—the young man in question—Don Joaquín Onésimo, who expected ere long to rejoice in the title of Marqués de Onésimo, and Don Pedro Fúcar, Marqués de Casa-Fúcar, after having paced the avenue two or three times, sat down.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH THE READER WILL ENJOY HEARING THE PRAISES LAVISHED BY SPANIARDS ON THEIR COUNTRY AND COUNTRY-MEN.

"It is quite clear that Leon is going to be married to the Marqués de Tellería's daughter," said Cimarra. "She is no great catch, for the marquis is more out at elbows than an actor during Lent."

"He has nothing left but the house in the Calle (*street*) de la Hortaleza," added Fúcar indifferently. "It is a good property—built at the same time as that of the Marqués de Pontejos; but before long that will go too. They say they are all a scatterbrained family, from the marquis down to Polito."

"But has Tellería really nothing left but his house?" asked the man of politics with the anxious curiosity of a creditor appraising an estate.

"Nothing whatever," repeated Fúcar, with the certainty of a man perfectly informed on the subject. "The land at Piedrabuena was sold two months ago by order of the commissioners. He gave up the houses and factory at Nules to my brother-in-law as long ago as last February, and he cannot have any money in the funds. I know that in June he was borrowing money at twenty per cent. on Heaven knows what security. In short, he is a thing of the past."

"And it was such a great house!" said Onésimo. "I have heard my father say that in the last century these Tellerías laid down the law to all Extremadura. It was the second in point of wealth. For half a century they took all the taxes and duties of Badajoz."

Federico Cimarra planted himself in front of the other two, his legs stretched out like a pair of compasses and twirling his stick in the air.

"It is really incredible," he said with a smile, "that that poor fellow Leon should be about making such a fool of himself. I am really very fond of him, he is a great crony of mine; but who would venture to contradict him? What is the good of trying to argue with those wooden-headed creatures who call themselves mathematicians? Did you ever know a single *savant* who had a grain of common-sense?"

"Never, never," cried the marquis, laughing loudly, as he always did. "And is it true, as I hear, that the girl is a perfect bigot? It will be a funny thing to see a full-blown freethinker caught by a little chit with *Paternosters* and *Avemarias*."

"I do not know whether she is a bigot, but I know that she is very pretty," said Cimarra smacking his lips. "She may be pardoned her sanctimoniousness on the score of her good looks. But her character is not formed yet—she is a mere child, and since she has been in love she has forgotten her piety. The woman who seems to me to be really on the high road to saintliness is her mother, who cannot escape the law by which a dissipated youth

ends in a strictly pious old age! How she has changed! I saw her last week at Ugoibea, and she is a wreck, a perfect wreck! María, on the contrary has grown to a goddess. Such a head, such an air, and such style!”

“There you are right,” said Fúcar with a rather satirical smile. “María Sudre is worth looking at. I fancy the mathematician must have lost his bearings and had his head turned by her bright eyes. I should not like such a girl for a wife. Very handsome no doubt, excitable, romantic, reticent—very different from what she seems—in short I do not like her—I do not like her.”

“Nonsense,” exclaimed the official slapping his knee emphatically. “The idea of speaking ill of María Sudre. I know her well, she is a miracle of goodness—much the best of the family.”

“Bless me!” said the marquis with a roar of laughter. “The family is the most perfect family of fools I know; not excepting Gustavo whom they think such a prodigy.”

“No, no; the girl is a good girl, a very good girl.” Onésimo insisted. “I cannot say so much for Leon. He is one of your new-fangled *savants*, a product of the University, the Atheneum and the School of Mines, and I have no confidence in them whatever. A great deal of German science that the devil only can understand; obscure theories and preposterous words; an affectation of despising the whole Spanish nation as a pack of ignoramuses; a great deal of pride, and above all that infusion of scepticism which annoys me above everything. I am not one of those who profess themselves catholics while they admit theories that contradict the faith—I am catholic, catholic!” And he slapped his breast defiantly.

“My dear Sir, be as catholic as you please,” said Fúcar, laughing less boisterously than usual, nay with a certain solemnity. “We are all catholics.—But let us avoid exaggeration. Exaggeration, Sir, is the bane of the country. Let us put religious beliefs out of court, not but that they are to be respected, deeply respected. What I say is that Leon is a man of mark, a man of very great merit. He is the best specimen the School of Mines has turned out at all since it was founded. His enormous talents find no difficulties in any branch of study; he is as good a botanist as he is a geologist. As I hear, he is familiar with all the latest discoveries in Natural History, besides being a capital astronomer.”

“Oh yes!” exclaimed Cimarra, with the patronising pomposity that ignorance assumes when it is driven to do justice to learning. “Leon Roch is a first-rate fellow. He is one of the few good men we have produced in Spain. We are great friends; we were at school together. In point of fact he did not distinguish himself at school, but since then….”

“He does not suit me; I cannot get on with him….” said Onésimo, with the accent of a man who refuses to swallow a bitter pill.

“But my dear Onésimo,” said the marquis solemnly, “there is no need of exaggeration. Exaggeration is the bane of the country. Because we are catholics we condemn every man who cultivates natural science without doing penance for it as a sin; and they go astray; I admit that they go a little astray; or very far astray perhaps, from the ways of Catholicism.—But, after all, what does that matter to me. The world will go its way. The chief thing is not to exaggerate. It seems to me that Leon’s chief fault—and I have known him from childhood, for he and my daughter played together as children, at Valencia—well his chief

fault is his readiness to sacrifice himself, his youth, his wealth, and his prospects to a connection with a reckless and ruined family, who will simply devour him beyond all rescue.”

“Is he rich?”

“Oh! very rich,” said Fúcar emphatically. “I knew his father at Valencia—poor Don Pepe, who died three months ago after spending fifty years in toiling like a negro. I used to deal with him when he had a chocolate mill in the Calle de las Barcas. As a matter of fact, Don Pepe’s chocolate was in high estimation there. I remember at that time I used to see Leon, a scrap of a boy, with a dirty face and ragged elbows studying arithmetic in a corner behind the counter. At Christmas, Don Pepe sold marchpane (cakes). Indeed he dealt in such goods till about fifteen years ago, and it is not thirty since he transferred his business to Madrid. When he had accumulated some capital he began to wish to increase it more rapidly. The amount of money is incalculable that has been made in this country by manufacturing chocolate out of canary-seed, out of pine-kernels, out of red ochre, out of everything rather than out of cocoa. We live in a land of bricks,[B] and we not only build our houses of them, but we eat them! Señor Pepe worked hard; at first with his own hands, then with those of others; finally with a steam engine. The result being (and the marquis pushed his hat back to the roots of his hair) that he bought land by the acre and sold it by the foot; that in ’54 he built a house in Madrid, that he got the management of the best lands belonging to the nation, and that by his command of public funds he added considerably to his fortune. In short, I should think Leon Roch must be worth eight or nine millions.”

[B] *Ladrillo*: cakes of chocolate are also called ladrillos.

“But you have left the choicest bit of the biography untold,” said Cimarra, seating himself by his friends. “I mean the intense vanity of the deceased worthy. In most cases these manufacturers who have enriched themselves—though they are the bane of the whole human race—are modest enough, and only care to end their days in peace, living in humble discomfort, and in the same narrow circumstances as they were used to, when they were working for their daily bread. But poor Don Pepe was quite the contrary, and his weak point was to be called marquis.”

“Indeed,” said Fúcar gravely, with the air of a man who felt it his duty to suppress such levity in the young. “I can assure you Don José Roch was a good-natured soul, kind and simple in all the relations of life; I knew him well. He made chocolate of the flower-pots in his wife’s balcony, or so said the spiteful gossips in the neighbourhood; but he was a worthy old plodder for all that, and so wrapped up in his boy that he thought of nothing else. There was in his mind but one creature in the world: his son Leon; he was insanely devoted to him. He regarded every man as his enemy who did not consider Leon the handsomest, the most learned, the first and greatest of all men on earth. All his pride and vanity were centred in being his son’s father.—We met one evening last year at Aranceles. I wanted to discuss a sale of cork with him—for he had a large property in cork-woods—but he would talk of nothing but his son. It was almost with tears in his eyes that he said to me: ‘My friend Fúcar, I want nothing for myself; six feet of earth and a stone at the top will do for me. My one desire is that Leon should have some title in this country.—It is the

only thing I wish for.’

“I began to laugh: A Spanish title! Is that all you ask?—My dear Señor Don José, if you told me you longed to be handsome or to be young again—but to be a marquis! Coronets are given away now as freely as orders, and before long it will be a matter of pride not to have one. We are fast coming to a time when if a diploma of rank is sent to us we shall be ashamed to give a dollar to the porter who brings the document. Well, you shall be a marquis….”

At these words Fúcar went into one of his fits of laughing; it began with a shrill chuckle, and ended with a general contortion of his features and a sort of convulsive explosion, while he turned very red in the face. Even when this violent hilarity was over it was some time before he recovered his natural colour and his normal aspect of dignified gravity.

“Gentlemen,” said the official, hitherto silent, but not a little annoyed, perhaps, by a consciousness of his own craving for the marquisate, “however lavishly titles may have been distributed, I am not aware that any have been bestowed on chocolate makers. We are a long way….”

“Friend Onésimo,” said the marquis with cool irony, “they are bestowed on all who like to take them. And if Don Pepe never took the title of Marquis de Casa-Roch it was only because his son positively refused to be as ridiculous as the rest of the world. He is a man of principle.”

“Oh, certainly!” exclaimed Onésimo, who was always ready to support a time-honoured institution. “But in general, these learned men who are constantly manipulating principles in scientific matters lack them utterly in social questions. There are plenty of instances here; and I believe it is the same everywhere. We have seen how they govern when the country is so unfortunate as to fall into their hands, and they govern their own homes in the same way. Learned men, take my word for it, are as great a calamity in private as in public life. I do not know one who is not a fool—a perfect and utter fool.”

“You speak figuratively.”

“It is the simple truth.”

“We live in the land of *Vice-versa*.”

“No exaggeration, no exaggeration pray,” said the marquis, in the tone of voice he always adopted for his favourite protest. “We make a sad misuse of words nowadays and apply them too recklessly. Envy on one hand, Ignorance on the other—What is the matter?”

The question was addressed with an expression of alarm to a servant who was hurrying towards them.

“The Señorita has sent for you, Excellency. She is very unwell again.”

“I must go, my daughter is in a terrible state to-day!” said the marquis rising. “You will ask me what is the matter with her and I can only say I do not know; I have not the remotest idea. I will go and see her.”

The two friends watched him depart in silence. The marquis walked slowly, on account of his obesity, and his gait reminded one of the stately motion of some ancient ship or galleon freighted with the rich spoils of the Indies. He seemed to be carrying on board, as it were, all the weight of his immense fortune, collected during twenty years of such unfailing prosperity that the outer world could only look on and tremble and wonder.

CHAPTER IV.

MORE CONVERSATION, GIVING US SOME IDEA OF THE SPANISH CHARACTER.

In front of the grotto where the water-drinkers swallowed glass after glass, eager to counteract the *oidium* in their blood, there was a summer-house. It was now ten o'clock, the hour when all the visitors came out to the spring, and a party had gathered in this pleasant spot, consisting of Don Joaquín Onésimo, Leon Roch and Federico Cimarra, who was sitting astride on his chair and making it creak and groan as he seesawed.

"Do you know Leon what ails Fúcar's daughter?"

"She left the drawing-room early last evening; she must be ill." And having thus spoken Leon sat looking at the ground.

"But her complaint is a very strange one, as the marquis says," added Onésimo. "Consider the symptoms. As you know, she collects china; last month, on her way back from Paris, she spent two days at Arcachon, and the Count de la Reole's daughters gave her three pieces of Palissy-ware. They are considered handsome; to me they are no better than common crockery. Besides these she brought from Paris eight specimens of Dresden so fine and delicate you can hardly feel their weight. Well, Pepa's whole mind seemed set on these precious works of art; she talked of nothing but her china. She took them out to look at, fifty times a day. And then—this morning she collected all this rubbish, went up to the topmost room in the hotel, opened the window and flung them into the court-yard, where they broke in a thousand pieces."

Federico looked at Leon who merely said: "Yes, so I heard."

"Yesterday evening," Onésimo went on, "when we were returning from the Grotto—where, by the way, there is no more to be seen than in my bed-room—one of the large pearls dropped out of her earring. We hunted for it, and at last I found it close to a stone. I stooped to pick it up, as was natural, but she was quicker than I was; she set her foot on it and crushed it, saying: 'Of what use is it?'—Then, they say, she tore up some costly laces. But did not you see her last night in the drawing-room? I could swear she is out of her mind." Neither Leon nor Cimarra made any reply.

"I can tell you one thing," continued the intelligent official, "the man who marries the damsel will have hard work with her. What bringing up! my dear fellow what training! Her father, who knows the value of money uncommonly well himself, has never taught her the difference between a bank-note and a copper piece. She is a real treasure is the Señorita de Fúcar! I had heard that she was capricious, extravagant and had the most preposterous and outrageous fancies you can imagine. Poor husband—and poor father! If she were only pretty; but she is not even that.—She will vex Don Pedro at last.—And no one listens when I thunder and declaim against these modern and foreign fashions which have spoiled all the modesty of our Spanish women—all their christian humility; their

delightful ignorance, their love for a retired and domestic life, their indifference to luxury, their sobriety in dress, their neatness and economy. Only look at the hussies that are the result of modern civilisation. I quite understand the dread of matrimony which is spreading among us and which, if it is not checked, will compel the government to pass a law for betrothals and a law for marriages and create a president over bachelors.”

“But, bless me!” cried Cimarra, slapping Leon on the shoulder. “Here is the man who can tell us all about Pepa’s eccentricities, for he has known her ever since they were both children.”

Leon answered coldly:

“Whether Pepa’s attacks or eccentricities consist in breaking china or destroying her ornaments, it matters little after all. Her father is rich enough—enormously rich and richer every day.”

“On the subject,” said the phœnix of the bureaux, “of the immense wealth of Fúcar, the most characteristic thing ever said, was spoken by our friend here, who is a man of epigrams.”

“I? I never said anything, not a word about Don Pedro,” declared Federico with becoming modesty.

“Nay, nay, biting tongue! Was it not you who said at Aldearrubia’s house—I heard it myself—*apropos* of Fúcar’s vast fortune: ‘We must have a new formula in political economy: National bankruptcy is the fount of riches?’”

“But that might be said of so many men,” remarked Leon.

“Of so very many,” Cimarra hastened to add. “If Fúcar has amassed a fortune at the expense of the public treasury—as they say he has?—then I say: so far as the augmentation of his fortune in dealing with public moneys is concerned, he is by no means the only man to whom the remark as to National bankruptcy applies.”

Onésimo winced; but recovering himself at once he added:

“I have heard you render a merciless account of the millions amassed by the marquis, my dear Cimarra. But a wit is always allowed to find fault. You need not prevaricate, though I know that at this time you and your victim are excellent friends. Still, you described him admirably when you said: ‘He is one of those men who make money out of solids, liquids and gases, or—which comes to the same thing—out of paving-stones, wine for the troops, and gas for lighting the streets.’ The tobacco he provides by contract is a particular kind which has the property of turning bitter in the mouth and the advantage of being useful as timber; his rice and his beans are equally unique, the beans are quite famous in Ceuta; the convicts call them *Apothecary Fúcar’s sprouting pills*.”

“That is talking for talking’s sake,” replied Cimarra. “In spite of all this I appreciate and esteem the marquis highly; he is a most worthy man. And which of us has not, at some time or other, trodden on a neighbour’s corns?”

“I know quite well that this is all merely in joke. In this country everything must be sacrificed to a witticism. It is the way with us Spaniards. We flay a man alive, and then give him our hand. I am criticising no one in saying so—we are all alike.”

At this moment the marquis himself entered the summer-house.

“And Pepa?” asked Leon.

“She is very happy now. She passes from sadness to merriment with a rapidity that amazes me. She was crying all the morning; she says she is thinking of her mother, that she cannot get her mother out of her mind—I do not understand her. Now she wants to leave this place, at once, without waiting for me to take the baths. I did not want to come—I detest the horrible, inconvenient hotels in this country. As for my daughter’s freaks and follies! No sooner were we in France than she took it into her head to come to Iturburua. I could not help myself—Iturburua, to Iturburua Papa—What could I do? I am getting accustomed to this vagabond life, but to tell the truth it vexes me now just as much to go away as it did to come—to go without having taken six baths even. For I do not believe there are any waters to compare with these in the world.—And then where are we to go? I have not the remotest idea, for my daughter’s vagaries make all reasonable plans impossible. I am hardly allowed time enough to secure a saloon carriage; Pepa is in as great a hurry to be off as she was to come. I am to be ready at once, to-day, early to-morrow at the latest—the mountains oppress her, the hotel is crushing her, the very sky seems falling on her, and she hates all the visitors, and it is killing her—suffocating her….”

While Don Pedro was thus pouring out his paternal troubles, his three friends sat silent; only Onésimo now and again murmured a few commonplaces about nervous irritation, the result, as he stated, of some strange influences to which the fairer half of humanity are exposed. The marquis took Cimarra’s arm saying:

“Come, my dear fellow, do me the favour of amusing Pepa for a short time. At present she is very well content, but she will be bored to the last degree in a short time. You know she always laughs at your amusing notions; she said to me just now: ‘If only Cimarra would come and whisper a few spiteful things about the neighbours….’ For we all know you have a special gift that way. Come my dear fellow; she is alone.—Good-bye gentlemen; I am carrying off this rascal, for he is more wanted elsewhere than here.”

Don Joaquín and Leon Roch were left together.

“What do you think of Pepa?” asked Onésimo.

“That she has been very badly brought up.”

“Just so—very badly brought up.—And now I think of it, tell me: Is it true that you are going to be married?”

“Yes—my hour is come,” said Leon with a smile.

“To María Sudre?”

“To María Sudre.”

“A very sweet girl—and what a Christian education! Honestly my good fellow, it is more than a heretic like you deserves.” He tapped Leon kindly on the shoulder and the men parted.

CHAPTER V.

ILLUSTRATING ANOTHER TRAIT OF SPANISH CHARACTER.

It was getting late and the dancing was beginning to flag. The last whirling couples were gradually disappearing, as do the last circles of a pool into which a stone has been dropped die away on the margin; the conventional embrace which does not offend even the most coy was finally relaxed, and at length the murderous pianist, whose ear-splitting music inspired the dancers, consented to retire. A fair visitor however took his place and endeavoured to prolong the entertainment by wringing a doleful *Notturno* from the chords of the instrument—the most dreary and dismal form of second-rate music ever devised. This parade of lamentation however was happily short, for the mothers were out of patience and the gay groups of girls began to move away across the polished floor. The legs of the chairs creaked and clattered on the boards; with the babble of young voices mingled a hollow chorus of coughing, and the fair bevy threaded their way through the door where their exit was impeded by a knot of the elderly men—the orators, lawyers and politicians who were the glory and lustre of the company at the hotel.

In the next room the clink of the counters as they changed hands at the card-tables made a noise like that of false teeth gnashing and chattering. The coughing and throat clearing increased as the older people followed the young ones out of the dancing room, and the little tumult of youthful chatter mingled with the sad sighing undertone of premature decrepitude which seems to afflict the flower of the younger generation spread along the wide corridor, mounted the stairs, and died away by degrees in the different rooms of the many-celled phalanstery. An ingenious fancy might have likened it to a vast organ in which, after every sound had been roused to symphony, each note, deep or shrill, sank back into its own pipe again.

In the card-room sat the Marqués de Fúcar, reading the newspapers. His invariable attitude when engaged in this patriotic exercise was one of perfect rigidity; he held the paper almost at arm’s-length, while a pair of glasses assisted his sight, riding on the tip of his nose and pinching his nostrils. If he wanted to look at anything but his paper, he did it over the top of the glasses or with a furtive glance on each side. He was very apt to laugh aloud whilst reading, for he was keenly alive to a joke—more particularly when the point of it—as is not uncommon in a newspaper—was not only palpable but envenomed. Two other gentlemen were also reading, and four or five were engaged in conversation, lolling at their ease on the lounges. Federico Cimarra, after walking up and down two or three times outside, with his hands in his pockets, came into the card-room at the moment when the marquis laid down his last newspaper, and taking his *pince-nez* off his nose, closed them up and stowed them away carefully in his waistcoat pocket.

“What a country this is!” exclaimed the great merchant, his face still beaming with a smile at the last epigram he had read. “Do you know, Cimarra, what strikes me? Every one here speaks ill of political men, of the ministers, of the employés, of Madrid—but I begin to think that Madrid and the ministers and all the ruck of politicians—as they call them, are the pick of the nation. The representatives are bad enough, but the electors are worse.”

“Then everything is bad together,” said Federico, with the cold philosophy which is the sarcasm of a worn-out heart and an atrophied intellect, united to dwell in a sickly frame. “Equally bad—and nothing to choose from.”

“And at the bottom of all the mischief is laziness.”

“Laziness! That is as much as to say the national idiosyncracy—the very Spirit of Spain. Yes I say: Laziness, thy name is Spain. We have a great deal of smartness—so I hear; I do not perceive it anywhere. We are all alike; we hide I believe….”

“Oh! if only we had a government that would give a spur to industry and labour….”

Cimarra put on a very grave face; it was his way of making fun of his neighbours.

“Labour!—Why we scarcely know how to weave homespun cloth; hemp-shoes are fast disappearing; our home-made water-jars are growing quite scarce and even our brooms are brought from England.—Still, we can fall back upon Agriculture; that is the favourite theory with all these fools. There is not an idiot in the country who will not talk to you of agriculture. I should like them to tell me what agriculture you can have without irrigation, how you can have irrigation without rivers, or rivers without forests, or forests without men to plant them and look after them—and how are you going to get men when there are no crops? It is a vicious circle from which there is no issue—no escape! My dear Marquis, it is a matter of race I tell you.—It is one of the few things which are of the nature of primary truth: the fatality of inheritance. We have nothing to rely upon but communism supported by the Lottery—that is our future. The State must take the national wealth into its own hands and distribute it by means of raffles.

“What—you are astonished? But you will live to see it, take my word for it. Why it is a splendid idea—and as good a theory as any other. Ask your friend Don Joaquín Onésimo, who is a beacon-light of knowledge in such matters, and who, in my opinion, has one of the best heads that ever thought in Spain.”

“Is he here?” said Fúcar laughing and looking round. “He should come and hear your theory.”

“He is discussing social science with Don Francisco Cucúrbitas, an equally great man according to the Spanish standard. He is one of these men who are always talking a great deal about administration and management which simply means expedients. What would this world become but for expedients! The Almighty created these gentlemen for the express purpose of preaching social Quietism; and they might do worse. My scheme of communism and lotteries will float, my dear Sir. The taxes will bring the money, the lotteries will redistribute it.—By Jupiter! Do you know my friend we might have a very snug little game here.” And before Fúcar could answer Federico went to the door to call the men who were still in the next room; then returning to the marquis, he took a pack of cards out of his pocket and spread them on the table; they lay in a curve, overlapping each other, like an angular serpent.

“Here too!” exclaimed Fúcar with some annoyance.

Cimarra went back to the drawing-room where the lights were now being put out and presently four other men came in at his request. Only Leon Roch remained walking up and down the darkened room. After speaking a few words to the waiter, Cimarra took the

young man’s arm and walked with him for a few minutes. The words that passed between them were somewhat sharp; however, Leon at length went up to his room from which, in a few minutes he returned.

“Here—vampire!” he said contemptuously to his friend, filling his hand with gold coin;—and then he was alone again.

Looking into the card-room he could see the group in the centre,—six men, some of whom bore names not unknown to fame among their countrymen. One or two, to be sure enjoyed not a very enviable reputation; but there were others too who had gained credit by their splendid speeches, amply spiced with high-sounding words on social anarchy and the national vice of indolence. Of them all the Marqués de Fúcar was the only one who played for the sake of the game and shuffled the cards with a frank smile and a jest at each turn of fortune. Cimarra dealt—he had his hat on, his brows were knit, his eyes sparkled keenly with an expression at once alert and absorbed, a solemn look of divination—or idiocy? His thin lips murmured inarticulate syllables, which an uninitiated bystander might have taken for some formula of invocation to call a spirit up. It was the jargon of the professional gambler who keeps up a running dialogue with the cards as they slip through his hands, sometimes growling, sometimes only breathing hard, as they alternately smile upon him or mock him with impish grimaces.

The contest with Chance is one of the maddest and fiercest battles in which the human mind ever engages. Chance, which is neither more nor less than an incessant and incalculable contradiction of facts, is never tired out; we can never meet her face to face, and to defy her is folly. She is as nimble and supple as a tiger, she fells and clutches her prey, while her favours—if by a whim she bestows them—light a flame in her victim’s soul that consumes him from within. His brain reels and he raves in dreams like those of the drunkard—for a vague picture of the Gorgon with whom he is contending takes possession of him and reduces him to bestial madness. Fighting in the dark, desperately and wildly, the gambler is the victim of a hideous incubus; he finds himself started in an orbit of torturing unrest, like a stone flung off into measureless space.

And at each deal the marquis would say:

“Gentlemen, it is getting late—it is time to go to bed. It is good to have a little amusement—but we must not have too much of a good thing. We must not exaggerate.”

CHAPTER VI.

PEPA.

Leon Roch having seen enough, left the house. A calm mild night invited him to walk along the terrace where there was not a living soul to be seen, and not a sound to be heard but the croaking of the toads. After pacing the avenue to the end and back for the second time, he thought he discovered a figure at one of the nearest ground-floor windows. It was in white, a woman beyond a doubt, whose arm rested on the sill, above which she was visible as a half-length. Leon went towards her and perceiving that she did not move, he went quite near. She might have been carved in marble but for her black hair and a slight motion of her hand among the leaves of a plant that grew near.

"Pepa?" he said.

"Yes, Pepa—I have turned romantic and am gazing at the stars. To be sure, there is not a star to be seen—but it is all the same."

"It is a very dark night; I did not recognise you," said Leon, putting his hand on the top of the window railing. "The damp air is not good for you. Why do you not shut the window? It is of no use to wait for your father. That rascally Cimarra has got him to gamble and they are all quite happy—Go indoors."

"It is so hot inside!"

The night was in fact pitch dark and Leon could not see the girl's face; but he could study the tone of her voice, for the voice is singularly treacherous. Pepa's voice quavered. Her head, leaning on one side, rested against the window-frame. In her hand she held a flower with a long stem—Leon thought it was a rose. She kept raising it to her lips and biting off a petal which she blew off again. Leon noted the situation and understood that it was the moment to say something appropriate, but he racked his brain in vain; he could think of nothing, and so he said nothing. Both were silent; Leon quiet and motionless, both his hands resting on the cold iron railing, Pepa pulling out the rose petals and blowing them away.

"I hear strange stories of your whims and fancies, Pepa," he said at last, thinking that he might presently say something to the point, if he began by saying something foolish. "You break your china, you tear your lace…."

"And what a specimen she is!" cried Pepa interrupting him with a bitter laugh that made Leon shudder. "The poor lady is never to be seen except in church! You do not understand!—You seem to have lost your wits. I am speaking of your future mother-in-law, the marquesa de Tellería. When I was stopping at Ugoibea I had a fancy to see her. They told me all the nonsense she talked about me. The usual thing—that I am badly brought up, that I am wildly extravagant, that my manners are too free, and my style of dress disgusting—yes, disgusting. But the poor woman herself has been so very different ever since she began to lose her beauty—Besides, you see, she cannot live such a worldly

life now that she has such a saintly son—for of course you know that Luis Gonzaga, your María's twin brother who is at the college of the Sacred Heart at Puyóo, is said to be a perfect angel in a cassock? Why, my dear fellow, you are going to live in the very courts of Heaven! Your mother-in-law even wears a hair shirt. You do not believe me? But I know it—her lovers say so…." And Pepa blew away a rose petal which fell on Leon's forehead.

"Pepa," he said with some annoyance, "I do not like to hear any friend of mine speak in that way of a respectable family…."

"But *they* may talk of me! *They* may call me violent and crazy and I must not say a word. Of course! Everything I do is ill-manners, wild behaviour, ignorance, insolence….! Change the subject then. I am very sorry never to have seen your future Saint Mary face to face. They say she is very elegant-looking—she always was. But she goes out very little at Ugoibea; she and her fool of a mother only walk out together to get fresh air. They say they give themselves no end of airs;—however, you are rich and the marquis—they say he is the only idiot known who has failed to get a place in the government."

"Pepa, Pepa, for pity's sake do not talk so wildly; you really hurt me deeply with your heedless speeches." Pepa pulled at the rose which was now much reduced.

"But you see I am badly brought up," she retorted bitterly. "And now people are discovering that I have no heart, that I am spiteful, rebellious, and capricious…."

"That is not the truth; but you should not behave so that people cannot believe it."

"Much I care what people believe. Do I want any thing they can give me?"

"You are too proud."

"And they say I shall never find a man of any sense to marry me!" she went on with the same angry laugh, which seemed almost convulsive. "As if there were such a thing as a man of sense. Well, I am not one of those girls who pretend to be very meek and goody-goody just to catch a husband; and I can tell you one thing: I will never marry a learned man—I loathe a *savant*. Perfect happiness for a woman consists in having heaps of money and marrying a fool."

"I see you are in the mood to talk at random to-night," said Leon pleasantly. "But you do not mean what you say, and your sentiments are better than your words."

His eyes had by this time become accustomed to the darkness, or the night was perhaps a little clearer; Leon could, at any rate, make out Pepita Fúcar's face against the black interior behind her like the dim blurred outline of an old picture. The whiteness of her skin, her chestnut hair, the brilliancy of her small eyes, where in each pupil burned a tiny spark, the pout of her parted lips and the savage whiteness of her teeth as she still blew away the rose-petals, above all her petulant air made her seem almost pretty, though in fact she was very far from it.

"You might make other people fancy that you were as wild as you pretend to be," Leon went on, "but I know you better. I have known you since we were children together, and I know you have a good heart. A good mother would have taught you some things you sadly lack and have corrected some faults of manner which make you appear worse than you

are; but you have been neglected as a child and now when you are growing up your father has suddenly flung you into the world in a perfect vortex of luxury, folly and riches. You know, better than I, what a state of confusion your household is in—even strangers cannot help reminding you that you are spending at the rate of three months' income in a week, while your father is too entirely absorbed in making money to think of anything but business. Poor Pepita—so rich and so lonely! I can quite understand all the vagaries which the outside public comment on so severely; I can excuse you—yes, quite excuse you. First you built a hot-house in the garden; then you had it moved to the other side—then you gave up your plants and began to collect china—then bronzes, carvings, old stuffs, what not, and sold them again for a quarter of what they had cost you. They say you established a photographer in your house that he might take views of the garden and portraits of the horses, and all the time you never looked into a single book unless it were some silly almanac or rubbishy novel.

"You are charitable I know, for you are tender-hearted; but Pepa, in what a foolish way! A woman comes to you for help to get masses said; you put two thousand reales into her hand. The same day comes the widow of a bricklayer who has died of an accident while at work on your house, and you give her only a dollar. You have no idea of the magnitude and proportion of the needs and miseries of the poor.

"Poor Pepita—do not wonder at my speaking to you so harshly; it is out of a sincere desire for your good. I speak as your brother might—a brother who wishes to see you wiser and happier.—I tremble for you Pepita; I dread lest hard and bitter experience should teach you, by some awful shock, these realities of life of which you are still ignorant. It really troubles me to see you go so far astray—so lonely too in the midst of your wealth, and to be unable to help you; for our roads lie apart. But I feel for you deeply, and if I may speak to you truly I pity you, yes—I pity you. I admire and esteem you greatly; I can never forget that we have been play-fellows—nay—why should we deny it?—that as boy and girl we had a warmer liking, though a transient one, and that the outside world imagined we were lovers.—All this I can never forget. I have always been, and always shall be your best friend."

Pepa bit furiously at the stem of the flower, and snatching off the few remaining leaves she almost spit them away again. One or two fell on the young man's beard. Pepa put her handkerchief to her mouth.

"Bleeding!" exclaimed Leon, seizing the hand that held it.

"A thorn has pricked my lips," said Pepa, in such a choked voice that Leon Roch was startled and grieved. After a short pause the girl spoke again:

"Do you know," said she, "that your household will be a funny one?"

"Why?"

Pepa had clasped her hands to stop the beating of her heart.

"Because when your brother-in-law, Luis Gonzaga, who is preparing to be a missionary, begins to preach on one side, and you begin to utter heresies on the other, you will be a match for each other. Leon, I tell you plainly, you are an insufferable prig and your learning makes me sick."

“But I happen to know that your real opinion of me is a more flattering one.”

Pepa leaned out over the balcony and Leon felt her breath on his face; it seemed to scorch him like a passing flame.

“A man who has studied nothing but stones is an idiot,” said Pepa with a bitter accent.

“There I agree with you—Come, dear Pepa, be friends with a man who has a true and frank regard for you. Give me your hand.”

Pepa started to her feet.

“Give me your hand and say good-bye. Do you not feel in your heart that some day you will want me—perhaps to give you some honest advice, perhaps even some help, such as mortals must ask of each other in the shipwrecks of life.”

Pepa angrily flung away the spray she still held, and it struck Leon on the forehead. He started as if he had been lashed with a whip.

“I—want you!” she exclaimed. “What conceit! Upon my word you must have lost your senses. It is more likely that I shall one day meet a pompous prig with a simpleton on his arm and ask: ‘Pray who is this?’—say good-bye?—Good-bye; and whether it is till to-morrow or for all eternity, it is all the same to me.”

“As you please,” said Leon putting out his hand. “Good-bye. You are off to-morrow with your father. I shall not be going to Madrid at present. We may not meet for some time.”

Pepa turned away and disappeared in the darkness of the room; Leon gazed after her but could see nothing. A faint perfume—as subtle as a dream was all the trace the Marquesita de Fúcar had left as she quitted the window.

“Pepa, Pepilla!” he called in a coaxing tone. But there was no reply, no sound, no sign from the darkness within. Presently, however, he heard a low sob. He remained some time calling her name at intervals, but receiving no answer. Still he heard the sighing, betraying that in the depths of that blackness lurked a sorrow.

At last he went away slowly and softly—as stealthily as a criminal and as gloomily as an assassin.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO MEN AND THEIR SCHEMES IN LIFE.

He stumbled over a root and at the same time felt a heavy hand laid on his shoulder, with the words: “Your money or your life.”

“Leave me in peace,” said Leon shaking off his friend and walking on.

But Cimarra put his hand through his arm and held him so that he was forced to spin round on one foot. Their tottering gait, and their position, arm in arm, might have led a spectator to fancy that the pair were tipsy; but this evil suspicion would have been dissipated by Cimarra’s next speech as he said, very gravely and with an accent of reproof in his harsh metallic voice:

“I have had desperate ill-luck! I am distinguishing myself greatly in Iturburua.”

“Let me be, gamester!” said Leon angrily shaking the arm his companion was holding. “I am not in the humour for jesting—and do not intend to lend you any more money. Has the Marqués de Fúcar left the table?”

“He is just going to his room. I never saw a man have such crushing good-luck. This is the way with the country—to-night I represent the country. Alas! poor Spain!—Solés has won enormously; since they made him governor of a province he has had tremendous luck; his victims are Fontán, X—— and I. But it is early yet. Leon, go up and fetch some more shot from the locker.”

Leon did not reply; his mind was disturbed; but his thoughts were far from the ignoble ideas which agitated his companion. Instead of going upstairs as Federico had asked him, he went with him into the card-room. One of the ‘victims’ was snoring on a sofa; the other was saying good-night, with a voice and demeanour that did justice to a diabolical temper; but he did not hurry himself and wrapped up elaborately, as a protection against the night air.

The two friends were left alone.

“I shall not play,” said Leon shortly.

Cimarra, knowing Leon Roch’s tenacious nature resigned himself to his fate, and seating himself by the table he took up the cards and began turning them over in his slender and exquisitely-kept hands. A large ring on his little finger reflected a pale light from the lamp, by this time burning low, and with his eyes fixed on the pack, he dealt and shuffled and shuffled and dealt so as to make an infinite variety of combinations. The cards seemed plastic in his hands and obedient to his touch.

“It is not my fault—it is not my fault!” muttered Leon gloomily from the corner of a sofa on which he had dropped, evidently much disturbed and agitated.

“What is not your fault?” asked Federico looking up in amazement. “Something has

gone wrong with you old fellow—where have you been?”

“No—there is nothing the matter with me; I cannot tell you what has gone wrong. It is a strange sensation, a kind of remorse—and yet, no, not remorse for I have done nothing wrong—it is a pain, a regret—But you would not understand even if I were to explain it to you; you are a libertine; your feelings are depraved, your heart is dead, your emotions are all selfish and sensual.”

“Much obliged I am sure. If I am unworthy of a friend’s confidence….”

“Friend! you are not my friend.—No friendship can subsist between us two. Chance made us friends in childhood, but our natures have made us indifferent to each other. In that atmosphere of frivolity, of mere superficial virtue, if not of actual corruption in which you have your being I can neither move nor breathe. My poor father’s vanity flung me into its midst; his devotion to me led him into many follies and illusions. He—who had made his fortune by the sweat of his brow in a chocolate factory—wanted to make a fine gentleman of his son, a finikin and aristocratic creature such as he pictured in his deluded fancy. ‘Be a marquis,’ said he, ‘enjoy yourself; ride your horses to death, drive your carriage, make love to other men’s wives, marry into a noble family. Get into the Ministry, make a noise in the world, let your name stand at the head of every list.’—These were not his words, but that was what he wanted.”

Leon was too excited to sit still and he stood up as he spoke. There are times when we must give vent to our thoughts lest they should gather into so heavy a cloud as to darken the brain with a dense fog of murky smoke.

“And what is the end of all this?” asked Federico with some disgust. “Talk no more nonsense, but come and….”

“I say all this to you because I have made up my mind to desert. The inhabitants of the social sphere into which my father insisted on bringing me, I find simply unendurable. I cannot breathe this air; all my surroundings depress and weary me—the people I meet, their actions, their manners, their language—their very feelings, though they are all well regulated, and in the very best taste. It positively saddens me to look on at the extravagant fancies, the capricious or sickly sentiment which possesses every mind that is not sunk in selfish indifference.”

“You are energetic in your denunciation,” said Cimarra, laughing at his friend’s emphatic *tirade*. “Something serious has happened to you Leon; you have had some sudden blow. This evening you were calm, reasonable, friendly, a little sad perhaps, with the peevish melancholy of a man who is engaged to be married and who is eight leagues away from his lady-love—and then, all of a sudden, I meet you in the promenade, agitated and excited—you blurt out a few incoherent words, and I see you are pale, with an expression—how shall I describe it.—Whom have you been talking to?” And as he spoke he gazed at him curiously, but without ceasing to shuffle the cards.

“I have nothing to tell you,” said Leon, already more composed, “but that as I am tired I will cut the matter short. I intend henceforth to mould my life on my own pattern, as the birds build their nests where their instinct leads them. I have laid my plans with the calm reason of a practical man—eminently and strictly practical.”

“Ah—well, I have heard it said that the whole race of practical men is the veriest set of dolts on the face of the earth.”

“I have laid my plans,” continued Leon, paying no heed to his friend’s interruption. “I am going straight on with it—straight ahead. It will not disappoint me; I have thought of it a great deal, and have weighed the *pros* and *cons* with the accuracy of a chemist who weighs the elements of a compound, drop by drop. I know what my aim is—a lofty and a noble one, tending to the good of society and of humanity, advantageous to my prospects as a man, to the health of body and mind alike.—In a word I am going to be married.” Federico looked and listened with an expression of covert amusement.

“And in choosing my wife,” Roch went on—“I ought not to say choosing for I fell in love like any fool—but that did not prevent me from realising my position and calmly and coldly reviewing the character and qualities of my future wife. It is my duty to marry her, Federico, distinctly my duty; there I am on firm ground and that much is beyond a doubt. María captivated me by her beauty it is true; but that is not all—far from it. I smothered my passion, I studied her closely and I found behind that beauty, a mind in no respect unworthy of it. María’s goodness, her sense, her modesty, the submissiveness of her intelligence, her exquisite ignorance of life added to the seriousness of her tastes and instincts—all made me feel that she was the wife for me—I will be perfectly frank with you: her family are not at all to my liking. But what does that matter? I can separate from my relations. I only marry my wife and she is delightful—she has feeling and imagination, and that sweet credulousness which is the most ductile element in human nature. Her education has been neglected and she is as ignorant as can be; but on the other hand, she is free from all false ideas and frivolous accomplishments, and from those mischievous habits of mind which corrupt the judgment and nature of the girls of our day. Do you not think me a happy man? Do you not see that this is the very woman I want; that I shall be able to form my wife’s character, which is the most glorious task a man can have—form it to my own mind and on my own image—the highest achievement I can aspire to, and the only guarantee of a peaceful life.—Do not you think so?”

“You ask me—a hardened and selfish worldling!” said Federico ironically. “My dear fellow you are out of your mind.”

“I ask you as I might ask this bench!” retorted Leon turning his back contemptuously. “There are occasions in life when a man feels that he must speak his thoughts aloud to convince himself of their validity. It is as if I were talking to myself. You need not answer me unless you like.—I mean to mould her in my own way. I do not want a ready-made wife, but a wife to make. I want a woman with a firm basis of character—strong feelings and perfect moral rectitude. Any extensive knowledge of the world, or the absurd teaching of a girl’s school, would hinder rather than help my purpose. I should have to pull down too much and to build on the ruins; I should have to dig deep down to find a safe foundation for the edifice.”

Federico had risen during this harangue and thrown down the cards: after walking two or three times round and about Leon who had not moved; and now, laying his hand on Roch’s shoulder, he said in a low voice:

“Most worthy and wisest of men, we, the depraved and ignorant, look into the future

as well as you; we too lay our plans, not indeed mathematically but perhaps with better hopes of security than you practical men. We are apt indeed to think of the ass as a practical animal. We do not condemn matrimony; on the contrary, we regard it as indispensable to the progress of society and the improvement of the condition….” He paused a few moments and then went on—“of the condition of the individual. You will understand what I mean. We, to be sure, are not learned and when we have fallen in love like a schoolboy we do not make an elaborate analysis of the qualities of the women whom we choose to be our wives. We do not aspire to form their character; we take the article ready made, as God or the devil has wrought it. This marrying to become a school-master is in the very worst taste. There is something else to be thought of in these latter days besides a woman’s character. The inequality of fortune among human beings, and the luckless fate to which some are born, the hideous disparity between a man’s fortune and the ‘material of war’ which he requires to fight against and for life—the miserable ‘Struggle for existence’ as the evolutionists have it—that is what weighs on me—the scarcity of work to be done in this accursed country, and the impossibility of making money without having money.—Do you hear what I say?—All these things and many others make it necessary to look out for something besides virtue in our future brides.”

“What?”

Cimarra shook his hands as if he were clinking coin.

“Cash,” he said, “hard cash and ready.” Cimarra talked the mongrel language of a man of fashion, mixing the style of an orator with the slang of a gambler, and quotations in foreign languages with the low blasphemies of a street boy, which shall not be recorded here.

“Life,” he went on, “is getting more difficult every day. It is all very well for rich folks like you to send moral platitudes flying about the world, and never to feel a base desire or harbour a thought that is not the quintessence of the purest ether. However, we need not exaggerate, as Fúcar is so fond of saying. I maintain that what sanctimonious fools call filthy lucre may be a potent element of morality. I, for example….”

“You! And what are you an example of pray?”

“I was going to say that I, if I found myself the possessor of a fortune, should be a model gentleman, and might even be known to posterity as the Illustrious Cimarra. For is it not a matter of course, a phrase ready coined?—Tom, Dick and Harry are Illustrious nowadays.”

“Though you may try to conceal it, I see some remains of shame in you,” said Roch. “Your laxity of morals is not as great as you try to make the world believe.”

“Everything is relative, as my friend Fontán always says in jest,” replied Federico shrugging his shoulders. “You cannot judge off-hand, in that light and easy way, of a man like me who lives with the rich and is poor himself. Get that well into your head. I talk to you with perfect frankness. My projects after all are as yet merely visions—sketches, my dear fellow. We shall see—I flatter myself I have made a good beginning. Time will show. Some day perhaps when you have quite forgotten me, lost in the bliss of pedagogic matrimony, you may hear that that reprobate Cimarra has found a wife. We all have to come to it—sooner or later. Even a poor devil like me has his schemes and his philosophy.

We are all tortoises together, but some have more shell to cover them than I have.—Do not take it into your head that I am indifferent to the moral graces of my wife—nor that I propose to marry a monster. I shall have a virtuous wife, my learned friend, thoroughly respectable, take my word for it, and a fine family of children and grand-children.”

“Then you have made your choice.”

“I have.—But I must warn you that I make no great point of personal beauty. I am not like you; I have a soul above being caught by a pair of fine eyes and a mouth that time can only spoil. Beauty is only skin deep. It lasts, as the poet says ‘*l’espace d’un matin*.’ But she has a pleasant and attractive expression, *distingué* manners, a quantum of dignity, a quantum of liveliness, wit and even *chic*—Education? Well nothing much to speak of, but we do not intend to set up for Professors. She has a great deal of good in her with a spice of the devil too; she has wild ways occasionally, freaks of temper, habits of extravagance….”

Leon turned pale and fixed a gloomy eye on his companion.

“What do I care if she smashes a lot of rubbishy plates, or cuts a Murillo into strips, or makes mince-meat of her lace? There are some things in which no husband should interfere.”

Leon sat staring dully at the green cloth of the table on which he had propped his elbows.

“Mercy, how the time goes, man!” he exclaimed rising abruptly and throwing open the window. “It is day!”

The white dawn fell into the room and its light fell on two pale and haggard faces. The dying lamp still burnt forlorn and dingy; a long sooty flame flared up the chimney, smelling detestably.

“What a life—by way of recovering one’s health!” said Leon.

Outside, the sky was gray and rainy, a dismal background to the gloomy faces of the two men who had been up all night. Leon stood a few minutes, lost in that vague meditation which leaves no mark on the mind in moments of extreme fatigue, a state half-way between dreaming and suffering, when it is hard to be sure whether we are sleeping or only enduring. Federico gazed at his friend who stood the living image of melancholy; everything about him was black—his dress, his hair and his beard; his handsome features, and clear olive skin were marked with dark lines for want of sleep. His fine forehead, dignified though charged with painful doubts, might suggest a lowering and threatening sky where the light of day was hidden behind a shroud of clouds.

Suddenly he turned to Cimarra and said:

“Well, I wish you luck!”

“I wish I could get a little rest,” said Federico. “I am simply dying for want of sleep; but I must start at once with Fúcar.”

“You are going too?”

“Did I not tell you?—Yes, they made a point of my going with them. We are getting on

you see—like a house on fire!”

Cimarra emphasised his words with a cunning smile.

“*Bon voyage!*” said Leon turning his back on him.

At this juncture they heard the rumble of the Fúcars’ carriage coming up to convey the travellers to the station of Iparraicea. Federico rushed up to his room to prepare to start, and for a short time the hotel was full of the bustle that always accompanies the arrival or departure of guests—the dragging of luggage, the chatter of boys and the calling of servants. Leon did not stir from the card-room, and even when he heard the voices of Fúcar and his daughter at breakfast in the dining-room, he did not care to go out and bid them farewell. In half an hour an omnibus was sent off, packed with servants and baggage, and the travelling-carriage followed with the Fúcars and Cimarra. Leon saw the first vehicle pass close by the window and before the second could come past he turned away, put his hands into his pockets and walked to the opposite corner of the room.

“What need I care?” he muttered to himself. “It is no fault of mine.”

Then he went out into the hall, where the most inveterate bathers were beginning to put in an appearance, in motley deshabille. The bath servants, with their aprons tucked up, went into the dens where yawned the marble vats; through the doors came the noise of the bubbling mineral water and the swish of the brooms in the baths, with a strong whiff of sulphur. He loitered down to the avenue and seeing in the distance the two carriages slowly mounting the hill of Arcaitzac, he could not help saying to himself with a sigh: “Alas, for those who have no control over their imagination!”

For a couple of hours he lay down to sleep, and at nine o’clock took a place in the coach that was starting for Ugoibea. His whole appearance was altered; he looked the happiest man on earth.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARÍA EGYPTIACA.

Several months had passed since that spring season by the sea; Leon Roch—on the appointed day, at the appointed hour, and in the appointed church—had been duly married, without any hindrance to the fulfilment of the plan he had made. His soul was full of the calm satisfaction which steals over it softly and silently like the breath of spring; a peace which brings refreshment and not intoxication, and which, as it is innocent of excess, never satiates the heart, and so leaves no aftertaste of tedium. Leon, as a philosopher and a student of nature, thought that nothing could be better and wished for nothing more. His wife's beauty had improved wonderfully since her marriage and in these additional charms the husband discovered an appropriate tribute paid by nature to an union so judiciously planned in theory and wrought out in practice.

"We form a compound being," he would say, "each the complement of the other, and it is hard sometimes to say whether the image produced is mine or hers, our feelings are so intimately blended."

María's affection for him, which at first had been bashful and cold as that of a well brought up Cupid who has just had his eyes unbandaged, was soon as ardent as he could wish. The passion, that at first had sat shyly behind a blind, soon peeped out, with its flaming torch, its ambrosial chalice and its chain of yearning anxieties, choking its victim with the pain of a too great happiness; so that for some time her husband forgot his educational schemes, though, in his more lucid moments, his common-sense reminded him that it would be needful to put them into practice and realise the effects of his very superior system. By degrees he recovered his habitual equanimity and his excited feelings subsided into the subordinate place which he had always assigned to them as compared with his intellect. At last he felt like a man who wakes from a long dream; he regarded his mind as a wide and fruitful territory which has been for a time drowned out by an inundation, and where, as the waters subside, at first the highest points become visible, then the hills and at last the plains.

"This will pass away," he said to himself, "it must. When the land is clear I will attack the dreaded subject and begin to mould"—he was fond of this form of speech—"to mould María's character. It is of exquisite clay, but formless—almost formless."

Leon Roch's young wife was slightly and elegantly-built, every part in such perfect proportion that a sculptor could have hoped for no better model. Her hair was black and her skin white with very little colour, giving such refinement to her grave, fervent expression that all her admirers were her lovers and envied her husband his happiness. It was not a face of Spanish type, and the outline of her profile was an uncommon one in our country, for it was that of the Athenian goddess, so rare here though occasionally met with, even in Madrid. Her eyes were large and open, of a sea-blue colour with changing tawny lights, and their gaze had a sentimental serenity which might have been thought

insipid among a crowd of black eyes, firing endless volleys of flashing glances. But María's looks gained her the reputation of being proud rather than stupid, her lips were brilliantly red, her throat slender, her figure round, and her hands small and "moulded of soft flesh" like those of Melibea. She spoke in measured tones with a sort of deliberate plaintiveness that went to the souls of her hearers; she laughed but little—so little that it added to her reputation of pride, and she was so reserved in her friendships that in fact she had no friends. Even while quite a child she had always been credited with so much good sense that her parents themselves regarded her as the choicest production of their illustrious race, throughout the whole course of its glorious existence. To this almost superhuman beauty—this woman, in whose form and face were combined, as in a perfect æsthetic union, all the charms of antique sculpture, Leon Roch, after ten months of a most platonic engagement, found himself married. Love at first sight had enslaved him: he had met her and spoken to her at a court ball, when she, having only recently been presented, was at that wondering and budding stage when a girl's beauty still bears the stamp of innocence and still blushes with the reflection of the rosy dawn of infancy. Leon fell in love like a country swain, to his shame be it whispered, and he was himself astonished to find that his theodolite and his blow-pipe had turned to a shepherd's crook and pipe in his hands. Did he see anything in his wife beyond her uncommon beauty? What share had his heart in this dream of ecstasy? It would be amusing indeed if he, whose boast it was that he was master of his imagination, should find that it had fairly run away with him.

María had been brought up on an estate near Avila by her maternal grandmother, a woman of great tenacity and determination, who talked a great deal about her principles without ever defining what they were or in what they differed from those of her neighbours. Under the protection of this very superior woman, who, at the age of sixty, made up her mind to renounce the vanities of the world for the narrow life of a country house—fashion and society for the dull solitude of a desert—and the *chronique scandaleuse* of Madrid for the gossip of a village—María learnt her first lessons. She could read well, write badly and say her creed and catechism without missing a comma. Beyond a few notions of grammar and geography, which were infused by a governess of unusual learning, she knew nothing else whatever. However, as she grew older, María, as she turned over the leaves of the books she happened to meet with, gained some items of knowledge on such subjects as do not require any very high degree of intellect.

Her companion during these years passed in the wilderness was her twin brother, Luis Gonzaga. Their grandmother worshipped them both and called them "her death sighs," because she declared that at her last hour, if they could but stand by her side, she would be able to lift up her last thoughts to God with purer devotion.

The two children were inseparable, sharing their games and their lessons, their bread and cheese at luncheon, and their grandmother's caresses. They would walk arm-in-arm along the horrible lanes of Avila, and would sit at night, with their heads close together, to count the stars, which shine more brightly in that part of the country than anywhere else in the world. You might have heard them saying: "you must count on that side and I will count on this—you are not to come out of your piece of sky into mine—there, all on this side are mine—we can each have half the sky."

"No, no, it is all for you both," said a clacking voice from a window behind them.

“Now, my pretties, come in to supper, it is getting late.”

Their only reading in that remote spot consisted in the Lives of the Saints, and the two children took the amazing narrative so deeply to heart, with its tales of suffering, toil, and death, that all they themselves learned to long for was to be martyrs too; and they were possessed by the same idea that mastered St. Theresa in her infancy, when she and her brother discussed the possibility of travelling all over the infidel world that they might at last have their heads cut off.

María and Luisito set out one morning for those heathen lands, fully determined not to return—not to stop, till they should fall in with a troop of Moors who should hew them in pieces. They lay down to sleep that evening under shelter of a rock, where the God who protects the innocent softly kissed their baby lips, and—betrayed them into the hands of the night-patrol, who recognised the pair and took them home.

That home was in a very remote spot from the rest of humanity. The parish priest used to call them “the children of the wilderness” and he would seat them on his knees to amuse himself with their baby games: they would stick up their little fingers and call each by a name, performing a kind of drama with them, known to the children of most lands: the middle finger is a friar who comes to the door of a convent and calls in a big voice, and the third finger answers in a feeble squeak:

“Rat, tat!”

“Who is there?”

“Your brother, who wants to be let in.” And the end of the story is that friar Pedro is sent off with a flea in his ear, the nuns thrashing him with sticks, and he disappears grumbling.

At this the twins would still laugh with glee at an age when most children begin to crave for better playthings than their own fingers; but, as they grew up, their games lost their primitive simplicity and their reading and their characters became more serious. Luis Gonzaga was the delight of his seniors from his quiet good sense and his incapacity for getting into mischief; the only fault to be found with him was his love of solitary wanderings among the rocks, breathing the keen and bracing air that perpetually fans our granite ramparts, which look like the ruins of some cyclopean fortress, or the broken teeth of a giant’s jaws from which the flesh has long since disappeared. He delighted in being alone, and his chief ambition was to be a goat-herd and follow the kids that spring from peak to peak in that dead and dessicated arcadia; he heeded neither cold nor heat.

One day he was discovered lying at the foot of a pine-tree, the solitary specimen of vegetable life within sight, that stood melancholy, senile and leafless, as though in dismal warning, like the motto on a tombstone: “we all must die.” The boy was writing “something” on a scrap of paper with a black lead pencil which he frequently moistened by putting in his mouth. It was the priest who found him, and who took possession of the manuscript, which consisted of a number of lines without rhyme or rhythm, devoid alike of grammar and spelling, which made the worthy man laugh heartily—for he knew something, if not much, of the humanities.

“This is neither verse nor prose,” he said.

No, it was neither verse nor prose; but it was poetry. These were stanzas on the model of verses from the Bible expressing the feelings of a contemplative nature. How the priest laughed as he read:

“When the darkness of night falls, the flocks of Heaven are scattered over the vast blue field and watched over by the gentle angels.—

“The Lord passed by yesterday in a chariot of thunder drawn by lightning which cast down hail and sweated rain; I trembled like a flame in the wind and my mind was tossed like a pebble carried away by a flood.

“I am like dried flax that catches fire, and turning to smoke, rises from the ashes and ascends to Heaven.”

One day their grandmother rose much later than usual, her face was flushed, her speech slow and strange, while her eyes glistened like two old metal buttons that have been rubbed very bright. All the servants observed to their great consternation that their mistress talked a great deal of nonsense—not that this in itself was an alarming novelty—but she repeated the same thing again and again, without any interval of better sense. When the priest felt her pulse, the good lady grasped his arm and throwing a cloak over her shoulders exclaimed with a wild laugh:

“Let us dance, Señor Cura—come dance with me!” She dragged him round two or three times and then suddenly fell senseless.

She only lived long enough to receive Extreme Unction.

When their grandmother was dead and buried the twins went home to their parents, who at that time were in extremely narrow circumstances. The boy was sent to a seminary and from thence to France, while María, whose country manners distressed them greatly, was sent to a college for girls. At the end of two years she emerged from this retreat with the polish acquired in such establishments and her mother introduced her to her circle of friends; a favourable turn in their fortunes had now given the family of Tellería a chance of rising from the depths of poverty and obscurity; at length the marquesa was able to quit the apartments she so sincerely detested, and for some time the mother and daughter were to be met constantly in various fashionable circles. Their names were familiar on the lips of María’s admirers and to the pens of the fashionable chronicler; they were on view at the play and out driving; they disappeared in the Spring to reappear with revived brilliancy in the Winter season. Then at last came the longed-for day when María was married.

This match was regarded as a great stroke of fortune for the whole Tellería family, whose nobility was not of the highest rank and whose wealth was not such as to justify any extreme fastidiousness in the selection of a son-in-law. In spite of all that may be said to the contrary, the aristocracy of the present day have no blind reverence for their pedigrees, and if we except half a dozen names which, besides their historical glory, have a spotless descent, our nobles do not hesitate to accept an alliance of which the honours are merely substantial and to bolster up their pride by the aid of a fine fortune; thus we see every day damsels of high degree giving their hands—and giving them willingly—to nobles of very recent creation; to marquisés all hot from the mint as it were; to colonial counts, to adventurous politicians, distinguished officers and even to the sons of industry. Modern society is blessed with a short memory; low or inferior birth is soon a buried part

of the buried past. Personal merit in some cases, and fortune in others, effect the levelling process with irresistible force, and society progresses with giant steps towards equality. There is no country in the civilised world more nearly bereft of a real aristocracy than Spain; trade, on one hand, which marks every one plebeian, and the government, on the other, which makes every one noble, are gradually doing away with it.

The happiness of the two young people was undisturbed for the first few months, excepting by the shadow cast over it occasionally by María's relations. After a time however Leon began to think that his wife's anxious and suspicious affection had lasted longer than was reasonable. This would not have been alarming but that it was allied with an iron resistance to some of her husband's views and feelings, and it troubled him greatly to perceive that, without ceasing to be devoted to him, María showed not the slightest disposition to yield to his doctrines—not religious doctrines in any sense, for he respected his wife's conscience. It was a puzzling disappointment; hers was not an embryonic nature, but a formed and stubborn character; not a flexible wire ready to take and keep the form given to it by a skilful manipulator, but hard set bronze which hurt his fingers and never bent under them.

One evening, about a year after their marriage, they were together in María's sitting-room; they had been talking long and affectionately on the conformity of ideas which alone can form the solid foundation of a happy marriage; the subject being exhausted, he had opened a book and was turning over the pages by the fire, and she had taken her beads to pray. Suddenly she rose from her knees and coming up to her husband she laid her hand on his shoulder.

"I have an idea," she said, fixing her mystical gaze on his face, and her eyes, with their strange greenish and tawny lights were curiously soft—perhaps because they had just been raised to God—"I have an idea that fills me with pride, Leon!"

Leon read on for a moment, finishing a paragraph, and then he turned to his wife.

"I will tell you what it is," she went on. "I, a mere weak woman, utterly your inferior in many things and above all in learning, will achieve a triumph which, you with all your superiority, can never attain."

Leon took her hand and kissed it three times, saying: "I am no one's superior, and your's, least of all."

"But indeed you are; and it is that which adds to my satisfaction in my purpose…. You, you believe yourself so strong that your judgment can radically change my character. I … I, with only my love that is stronger than the wisest intellect, propose to conquer your judgment and mould it after my own image and likeness. How great a battle and how grand a victory!"

"And how will you set to work?" asked Leon smiling, as he put his arm round her.

"I hardly know whether to begin quite gently, by degrees … or so," and as she said "so" she violently snatched the book out of her husband's hands and flung it in the fire which was blazing brightly.

"María!" cried Leon, startled and disconcerted, and he put out his hand to rescue the hapless heretic. But she clung closely to his arms so as to prevent his moving; then,

kissing his forehead, she went back to her *prie dieu* and returned to her devotions. What was there in his book? What in her prayers?

CHAPTER IX.

THE MARQUESA TELLERÍA.

The Tellería family occupied the whole of their house, so Leon Roch, willing that there should be as large an expanse as possible of the habitable globe between them, had taken a pretty house at the furthest east end of the town. There, two years after his marriage, we may find him.

"Good-morning, Leon…. Alone? Where is Mariquilla? Ah, at Mass of course; I had half thought of going too—but now it is too late…. I will go to the eleven o'clock service at San Prudencio…. But what is the matter? You are pale. Have you quarrelled?… I will sit down a while—tell me, what did you give for those statues? They are lovely. You have certainly a beautiful collection of bronzes…. But tell me, are you going to put more books into this study of yours? It is like the library of Alexandria already. Well! You are not at all like the young men of the present day. A silly set of boys. What will become of the world when the vicious, idle, sickly creatures who are the ornament of society nowadays are the men of their time, I do not know! … However, there is a greater evil still, for if the young men are frivolous and impudent the old ones are worse; more vicious, more dissipated, and more indolent…. But I am forgetting the matter—a very delicate matter—that I came to speak about, my dear son. Sit down and listen to me for a minute or two."

The marquesa waving a pretty hand and arm pointed to a seat close by, and Leon, obeying her, prepared to hear what his mother-in-law had to say.

She was a woman of good figure, who had grown suddenly old after a prolonged youth and fallen a victim to those ravages which are severe in proportion as they are staved off. Nevertheless, certain traces of past beauty were still visible in the lady's face; though her sun was setting behind mists of paint and powder, not always judiciously or skilfully applied, and it was not a glorious evening of life. Her tall figure, which had formerly been dignified, was now bent, as though in anticipation of her descent into the chill tomb, though the steel ribs of a pair of stiff stays did what they could to buttress up the decrepit form. Her eyes, still bright and black, were the only living sparks in the dilapidated mass; they, from time to time, glistened with eagerness and vivacity, reminding one of a flash of true inspiration in the midst of the academic dulness of archaic and commonplace ideas. Her hair, which had long since exchanged its Andalusian blackness for Venetian gold, had now passed from Venetian gold to a dull and powdery white. Her complexion, always coarse and sheenless, was disguised under an artificial texture commingled with various perfumed chemicals intended to deceive the spectator, just as in a theatre the painted scenes simulate the greenery of a glade and even the diaphanous purity of the sky. The effect, successful to a certain point in embellishing the withered cheeks of the faded beauty, failed of its result now and then, because when she smiled the dead whiteness of the paint gave a yellow hue to her teeth, though they were still perfectly sound and even; and she constantly displayed them with her gracious and condescending smile—an old habit that would need to be modified if once that double row

of ivory keys should begin to desert, like an army that has had enough of fighting. She was always well and elegantly dressed; she talked indefatigably, attempting—sometimes not without success—to insinuate some more intelligent formula among the flood of empty words that usually form the basis of conversation among such brainless individuals.

“I am listening, Señora,” said Leon.

“I hate circumlocution,” said the lady; “and besides, María has doubtless spoken to you on the subject. Your father-in-law is a lost wretch….”

“Nay—that, as it strikes me, is an exaggeration. The marquis likes amusement…. It is not an uncommon taste with men who have nothing to do.”

“No, no. It is of no use to try to defend him. His conduct is indefensible … and at his age! The strange thing is that in the prime of life he was a steady and prudent man, content to stay quietly at home. I assure you I cannot bear to see him behave like an elderly boy—that describes him exactly: an elderly boy! about two years since—just about the time when you married my daughter—my worthy husband began to go to the young men’s club; there he met with some young fellows who turned his head; he took up a new set of words, and a new style of dress, stayed out at night, took to gambling … you must have noticed that he has grown quite young again; you must have laughed, if you confess the truth, to see his efforts to look like a boy among boys. Why, you may see him any day with some party of dandies, fluttering like a butterfly about Madrid.—It really is too ridiculous—with a flower in his button-hole. Only this morning I spoke to him rather sharply about it. How he is ever to pay his tailor I do not know for his outlay in dress is frightful to think of! … In short, to you, in the strictest confidence I can say all this: the fact is my husband spends more money than he has got, or ever will have as long as he lives. He never was economical, but, on the other hand, he was not extravagant; he never kept any kind of accounts but then he never let himself do a mean thing for the sake of some impossible luxury … and who is the victim? I—I, who after having had always to sacrifice myself, must do so now when my health is failing and I need care and rest and peace of mind. Oh! how I envy the mistress of this house, and how thankfully I would accept a corner here, even the humblest. My life is one incessant misery. My husband spends what he has not got; Gustavo is well conducted and careful it is true, but he has no great affection for his parents; Leopoldo neither is, nor ever will be, good for anything, he is a helpless being and has idle and dissipated habits in spite of all I have done to prevent his acquiring them. I can only thank God, who has given me so many trials, for having at the same time given me such proofs of his mercy; for what greater pride can a mother have than to be the parent of two such children as Luis Gonzaga and María?—He, so devoted to his vocation, and promising, as I am told, to be a shining light in the church; she, married to you, happy with you, a pattern with you of perfect and harmonious union.—But what a pity it is that you should have no children!” At this point the marquesa, giving way to her feelings, shed a few tears, which she promptly dried with her handkerchief before they could roll down her cheeks. Then she went on with her description of her woes as a wife and a mother.

She had suffered much, she explained, from her husband’s levity, and the refractory or venial conduct of her two eldest sons had necessitated her passing her youth, and indeed chief part of her life in heroic efforts to avert the ruin of the family; she had indeed given

up some of her own fortune, which had been considerable; still she had kept back the larger portion of it, and she intended to keep it till her husband's gallantries and her sons' extravagance drove her to extremities. She could not expose herself to a pinched and miserable old age nor look forward to living on the charity of her daughter and a rich son-in-law. Her habits, her principles, and her dignity would not allow her to sacrifice her whole fortune to the reckless man who had dissipated the patrimony of the Tellerías on the green tables of the gaming houses and in the dressing-rooms of ballet-dancers. If she were only to tell him all the things she knew!

"Yes, but I will tell you—I can say anything to you," she exclaimed, looking at her son-in-law with a vehement flash. "Are you not my son—the husband of my child? It is your duty and your right to know your father's weakness—I am told that the marquis is entangled with … but you must know her, you must have heard of her … some woman they call Paca or Paquilla—no matter which—she is very pretty and very charming. She ruined the Duke of Florunda of the little he had left—and would you believe that that old idiot Agustín, with one foot in the grave!—it is too pitiable to be angry about, do not you think?"

Leon did not answer.

"What are you thinking of?" she asked.

"That the cardinal virtue in married life is indeed patience," he replied.

"Which is as much as to say endurance and fortitude … but my whole life has been a martyrdom!—and I could bear everything if my husband's extravagance and follies did not threaten to compromise the honour and good name of the family. But I am terribly afraid of that…. What do you think? And I feel very deeply having to tell you that I cannot pay you the sixty thousand reales that you lent me and that I was to have repaid you this month."

"It is of no consequence," said Leon, wishing to avoid this delicate subject; "do not let that trouble you."

"Not only that I cannot pay you those three thousand dollars, but that I am in desperate need of three thousand more."

"You can have them."

"What! three thousand more? But it is outrageous—it is abusing your generosity! It shall be the last time, for I have quite made up my mind to practise the narrowest economy in the house—I will give you a lien on my house at Corrales de Arriba."

"It is quite unnecessary—I assure you…."

"Thanks, a thousand thanks! How good you are, how dear a son! How can I ever repay you?" cried the marquesa, evidently agitated by sincere feeling. "You cannot imagine what a kindness you are doing me…. But I am always thinking of you, and not unfrequently I am able to intercept half-way some cloud that threatens your happiness. Last night I had quite a quarrel with your wife."

"With María?"

“Yes, with María: even she has her faults, though they are only the excessive side of her virtues. You know that she is very devout—devout to excess; indeed, at times I have felt that this question of religion has given rise to some little differences between you.” Leon sighed.

“To some,” he said, “but nothing serious.”

“Well, you need not speak of your annoyance as a mere trifle,” said the marquesa, vexed that Leon should speak lightly of a matter that it suited her to treat as important. “The poor child is blindly attached to you: her love for you is the ruling motive of her life, and your reputation as an atheist is a standing misery to her. And you know that my daughter’s opinions are as independent and as indomitable as the beasts of the desert.” Leon nodded a sad assent.

“You can understand that she sees your lack of religion with very great pain; that is but natural. We have instilled a faith in which she will live and die. But she weeps with despair because you will not go to prayers every day as she does, will not confess once a month, will not spend your money on trumpery—it is really quite absurd! How I lectured her last night—in short, she vexed me, I got angry, I hammered away at her as if her stupid little head had been an anvil, and at last….”

“Well—at last?…”

“At last I convinced her that it was preposterous to expect men to carry out practices, which, in us, are all very well, but, in them, would be ridiculous, purely ridiculous. The men of the present day have something else to do than to be sitting in church. It seems to me that María and you—she spending her time in devotions, and you spending yours at your studies—may both be very happy. What is the use of discussion? You do not want to prevent her praying to her heart’s content. The men of the present day have their own ideas and it is senseless to try to combat them. No one need be more religious than I am, but I have no notion of enquiring into things that I do not understand. Women are not learned; their part is to believe, believe, believe.

“That a married couple should quarrel over that appears to me the height of folly. But do you know that her ambition is to convert you? To lead you to abhor your own views and devote yourself to hers—upon my word I can hardly help laughing when I think of it. Do you know what she says? That it would be her highest happiness to burn all those books of yours—what a sin! So beautifully bound as they are! Much I should care whether my husband were as regular at Mass as I am, so long as he loved me and cared for no one else—jealous of his books! Not I indeed, such a woman must be a perfect fool!

“You cannot think how strongly I spoke to her; I told her that you were the best man living—to that she agreed—I told her that you were far superior to her—infinitely superior; that all this talk about atheism is a mere bogey; that though we hear people speak of atheists there are no atheists—just as we talk of magicians but there are no magicians. I told her that she was not to think of such nonsense as trying to convert you, and that the best thing she could do was to keep the peace in her home and get rid of her monomania—do not you think so?—She had better change her confessor—do not you think so? She should do as I do. I am extremely religious, I perform all my devotions with the greatest exactitude, I give all I can afford to the church, but that is all; do not you think that María

should do the same?”

Leon did not reply; he sat silent and gloomy. Suddenly he seemed to shake off some depressing idea, as we wave off a bee that buzzes in our ears, and looking at his mother-in-law he said:

“I will send you that money to-day.”

“Ah! is that what you were thinking about?” cried the marquesa and her face shone with satisfaction till it seemed positively phosphorescent. “Very good; do so, and I will give you a receipt…. But here I have stayed chattering, and in your delightful society I forget that I have business to attend to—heaps of business! Eleven o’clock! I shall be too late for Mass!”

She bustled up and held out her hand to her son-in-law. “And Padre Paoletti is to preach.—Good-bye, I must fly. What shall I say to your wife? I will tell her to make haste home and that you are very dull without her.”

CHAPTER X.

THE MARQUIS.

He was a little man, with delicate and effeminate features, on which he wore a look of assumed gravity, at first carefully cultivated, but now as much a matter of habit as though it had been a cosmetic applied daily out of a gallipot in his old dandy's dressing-case. His eyes, nose and mouth were, like his daughter's, perfectly well shaped, but what in her was charming, in him was ridiculous, and what was beautiful in her, in him was purely comical; for there is nothing more preposterous than the face of a pretty woman hung on, like a mask, to the figure and manners of a pottering old man.

His fashionable dress, his easy demeanour, his refined and frigid courtesy, which masked a total absence of kindliness or intelligence, decorated his exterior as a gorgeous binding covers a book that is destitute of rational contents. He was not a vicious man; he was equally incapable of wilful evil or intentional good; he was a vacuous compound of weakness and dissipation, corrupt rather from "evil communications" than from inherent wickedness; one of so many! a creature so hard to be distinguished from the rest of his species, since absence of character has reduced certain groups of the upper classes—as well as of the lower—with a few notable exceptions, to a common type which will lack a generic name till the advance of terminology allows us to speak of them as "the masses of the upper class." Still, this empty-headed and unenlightened mortal had a great command of words in no respect deficient in meaning, and was an admired master of all the commonplace of the press and the law; he added nothing to be sure, but, on the other hand, he deprived them of nothing. He was, in short, always prepared with a perfect thesaurus of those ready-made phrases which to many people form the Alpha and Omega of learning and wisdom. He was constantly insisting that "administration rather than legislation was what was needed;" he was convinced that "Spain is a nation past all government;" he was for "upholding the venerable creeds of the past so that we may once more become a terror to our foes at home and abroad;" he was convinced that nothing of native origin could be good for anything; that Spain is a ruined country, notwithstanding the fertility of her soil; and at the same time he maintained with punctilious exactitude the immovable dogmas of Castilian Nobility, of the Faith abandoned by the modern populace, of the materialistic tendencies of the age and so forth; he had a sacred horror of "Utopian dreams"—and anything he did not at once grasp was to him an Utopian dream. In short, not a string was wanting to his inexhaustible fiddle.

"In here as usual, always in this blessed study of yours, which is as dark and as small as a prior's cell and might be a prince's boudoir for the treasures it contains!… Here as usual Leon! I never meet you anywhere. And María? She was with us last evening … tears and lamentations as usual; her mother tried to comfort her, and they sat whispering and talking—between them I suspect, they made things pleasant for you. They have nothing to think about but their subscription to the theatres, and the festival-services at San Prudencio's; and after Mass they lay their heads together to talk of the fashions…. But you, are you ill? You look pale, what is the matter?"

"I?" said Leon, looking at his father-in-law like a man who suddenly wakes face to face with a stranger, "what were you saying?"

"That you look ill. We were talking of you last evening at the Fúcars'. Since Pepa married Cimarra, poor Don Pedro's life is a bitter one—Poor Pepa! I hear dreadful things of Federico … and what a sweet child that is of Pepa's! Have you seen it? Do you never go there?… Your cigars are first-rate."

The smoke of their Havanas mingled as it curled up to the ceiling, and for a minute or two there was silence in the pretty little room; nothing was to be heard but the bubbling trickle of the water in the hose with which the gardener was sprinkling the shrubs outside, and the twitter of caged birds in a window near, whose chirruping song sounded like a piping medley of musical notes trying to agree as to the best way of producing a Wagnerian symphony. In the study, on a book-stand as large as a pulpit, a huge geological atlas lay open, showing the successive ages of the globe. On the table were flowers, dissected so as to show their inmost mysteries; insects undergoing autopsy; shells sawn down the middle, revealing their secret chambers of enamel and pearl; prints, displaying eggs at the various stages of incubation; a model in papier-maché of the human eye of the size of a coconut; and in the midst of all this paraphernalia stood a microscope, the lens reflecting a sunbeam on to the marquis' head which, being perfectly bald, offered a convenient subject for the study of craniology.

"So you are studying natural history now?" said Tellería with an air of condescending tolerance. "Well, it seems to be the science of the day—the science of materialism. Much good you are doing the human race by depriving it of its time-honoured beliefs and giving it in exchange … what?—The precious discovery that we are first cousins to the apes of Retiro." And he laughed with childish glee at his own idea as he cast his eye on the litter of books.

"You know," he said suddenly, "that I am on the commission to report on the law concerning vagrants."

"You will make a brilliant report."

"It is a delicate matter," added the marquis, throwing himself back in his chair so that he sat with his eyes fixed on the ceiling and his feet in the air. "It is the question of the day. I have said again and again to the president of the council: 'so long as we have no good vagrancy law legislation is impossible.' We must go to the root of the matter, to the foundation of things, do not you see? It is the immense number of idle and disreputable souls, the starving and thieving classes, who count on a revolution to make their harvest, who are the festering cause of the ferment in which we live. Sweep away all this low filth and I will be responsible for social good order."

"Very true," said Leon. "Sweep them away—a clean sweep, that is what is wanted."

"But the worst of it is that I cannot give as much time as I could wish to the commission; I am so much occupied. And that reminds me, Leon, I had some business to discuss with you."

He had in fact reached the point which was the object of his visit; but though he approached the matter with a degree of anxiety that made his heart beat, he contrived to

conceal his agitation. The man was too weak not to suffer from such qualms, but too highly artificial to betray them.

"You are aware that I am one of the directors on the board of administration of the Bank of Agriculture. It is a grand national undertaking; our function is to raise the credit of landed property from the abyss into which it has sunk." Such phrases of financial cant were a frequent garnish to the marquis' conversation, and he went on to deliver himself of a variety of novel ideas: as for instance, that Spain is essentially an agricultural country; that its territorial wealth cannot be developed for want of capital; that the capital nevertheless exists—why should it not?… That all that is needed is to concentrate it, to secure it, and to redistribute it, so as to enable it to fertilise—to benefit—to fructify—and the marquis, having lost his thread, could not finish the sentence, which he was improvising instead of repeating by heart. He stopped short. The Bank of Agriculture was closely connected with a great English company, "The Spanish Phosphate Company, Limited," which was destined to effect a complete transformation in the country; it was a magnificent scheme. "Funds, subscribers—these were the two poles of the axis on which the regeneration of Spain was to turn." This, again, was borrowed from the company's prospectus, and the marquis wound up his harangue by saying with apparent indifference: "Well, what do you think of it? Will you invest some of your capital in our shares."

"I must save my capital to secure my income," said Leon with feigned simplicity.

"What, man!"

And then Leon went on to tell him such plain truths about certain companies that his father-in-law suddenly lost the delicate hue that his complexion usually wore and a deep purple tinge, like mulberry stain, flushed his cheek and betrayed his indignation. After a short pause, during which he devoted himself to twirling the waxed ends of his grizzled moustache till they looked as formidable as bull-darts, he rose and began to examine the objects of natural history.

"Well, there is nothing more to be said on the subject," he muttered.

He touched and turned over everything, taking up this thing or that to inspect it more closely and then peeped through the microscope.

"But I cannot see anything," he said, with that odd pride of ignorance that is occasionally to be met with. "I am no good at all at such things … thanks…. How much your microscope helps you! Now, do tell me—can they see the soul with this? Or is it because they cannot see it that they maintain that it has no existence?"

And before his son-in-law could reply he went close up to him, and, standing in front of him, looked at him for a minute or two; then shaking his head he said: "I cannot help thinking that my poor daughter has very good reasons for complaining…. I do not mean that you are not a thorough good fellow, Leon; but really if you think of it … she has her beliefs, you have yours—or, to be accurate, you have none. Your lack of religion and your contempt for the time-honoured beliefs of the Spanish People grieve and offend her deeply. My dear fellow," he added, laying his hand on his son-in-law's head with an affectionate gesture. "You must remember that the Spanish People are above everything religious, and you know Leon that we are not in Germany here—that land of Utopian dreams."

Leon attempted some explanation. “No, no, to leave her at liberty is not enough,” Tellería began again with some vehemence. “You must take some definite step. You have a reputation for atheism that is really appalling. I am frank with you, and for my part I would rather lose my position and my name in the world than have such a character for atheism as you have gained. I quite enter into María’s feelings; she is deeply religious—she and her twin brother were born to be saints—and in the end she will hold you in horror; she will fear and detest you, and be unable to live with you … and if it comes to that, the fault will be yours for having expressed yourself so extravagantly in your works. Of course we all have our leaven, more or less, of heresy … that is to say, I have not; I am orthodox to the bone, I do not meddle with philosophies … however, we all, even the firmest believers, fail in our duties and neglect them; but at any rate we exercise some caution, we have some tact, we keep up appearances, we remember that we live among an eminently religious nation and that we must set an example to the lower classes or they will kick over the traces. This is not Germany. There is nothing I hate more than a Utopia. The Spanish People have many faults but they will never outrage the sentiments which have formed the foundation of their country’s glory and of the respect it commands both at home and abroad. To crown our misfortunes the aristocracy of Castile….” But the worthy gentleman did not succeed in finishing his sentence, for Leon interrupted him with some energy.

For a long time their voices could be heard alternately even in the distant room where the birds were singing. María and her brother paused in their conversation to listen to the parliamentary muttering that reached them from the study.

“Those tiresome birds do not allow us to hear a single word,” said the young man. “Listen María, papa and your lord and master are disputing over something. What a waste of time!”

“Be quiet, you little plagues,” said María impatiently to the birds and she tried to hear what was going on. Presently the curtain over the door was hastily jerked open and revealed the pointed horns of the marquis’ moustache and his face, in which solemnity was now tempered by affability as though nature had intended it as a living symbol of the eternal and supreme duplicity of the human species.

“Well, you know,” he said in a bitter-sweet tone between grave and gay. “I am a hypocrite, and tact is my profession…. Your amiable wife has told me so in so many words…. A humbug, a hypocrite—yes, that is what she calls me….” And he kissed his daughter. “Do you know I really think Leon is a little weak in his mind,” he went on. “It is a pity, for he is such a clever fellow…. Oh! those dreadful birds will not let one speak.”

“Be quiet you little torments,” said María.

What a wonderful interest they take in the affairs and disputes of their masters; between the sentences of the conversation their shrill notes try to drown the differences of humanity in a flood of rapture.

The party sat talking for some time longer, but the birds prevented their being overheard, and the reader must have patience till the birds have ceased singing.

CHAPTER XI.

LEOPOLDO.

One morning when Leon Roch was sitting at work in his study he was suddenly interrupted; raising his eyes and looking in the large mirror that hung over the chimney opposite to him, he saw a lean, tall figure surmounted by a death's-head, on which the grave seemed to have spared little but the skin; eyes that looked starting from their sockets, like those of a delirious creature; a long, thin neck, all red and scarred; a nose, also purple, finely-cut, though its extreme sharpness gave it the aspect of a beak and lent the face a bird-like expression; a meagre crop of yellow hairs that straggled round the cheeks and chin, forming a narrow line that irresistibly recalled the band tied round the face of a dead man; a low forehead, on which his hat had stamped a livid line, like a streak of blood; a flat head with the red hair parted into two elegant wings; a face in short which seemed the transfiguration or parody of a handsome countenance, the caricature of the family type; and at the same time he saw a man with his hands in his pockets, feet like a woman's of which the toes were scarcely visible below the loose trousers that covered them, and a body devoid of roundness, of modelling or of grace, like a lay figure made to wear a coat. His dress was a morning suit, striped from head to foot, with an elegantly-knotted cravat; a stick that he held in one hand stuck out on a level with his pocket-hole, and a gorgeous flower blazed in his breast like the blood-stained handle of an assassin's knife. As he caught sight of this personage Leon exclaimed with frank good-nature:

"Ah! Polito, sit down…. What brought you here?"

The young man let himself sink into an arm-chair and stretched his legs with demonstrations of fatigue. He spoke, and his voice, which one would have expected to be thin and effeminate, was hoarse and rasping, a sort of articulate cough or choke, like those voices which, in the lowest social grade, are formed by crying out wares in the streets, and which grow harsh under the influence of the morning air and the nightly dram. After making some brief remark he paused to put a lozenge or pill into his mouth.

"I cannot do without my tar," he said, "not for an instant.—The moment I stop it I feel as if I were choking.—And what are you doing, Leon? Always at your books? How I envy you your peaceful life!—No, thanks, I dare not smoke, it is quite forbidden. We must try to conquer these epileptic attacks, just now I am very well. I am going to Seville do you know? All the fellows are going away and I cannot stay here; we are a party of four: Manolo Grandezas, the Count, Higadillos and I. Higadillos means to do bull-fighting during the three days of Easter—Why do not you do something! María would like immensely to see the fêtes."

"If she wishes to go I am quite ready to take her."

"She does not wish to go, and that is the fact," said the hoarse-voiced youth. "By-the-bye, my dear Leon, I hear people say that you and she are very unhappy, that you do not get on together in the least, and that your infidelity is a constant torment to my poor sister. I, of course, laugh at such nonsense. 'I tell you he is the best soul living, a thorough

gentleman as you will find.’ That is what I answer, and by Jove, you know I do not say a thing unless I mean it. Last night the Rosafrías were saying that they could not imagine—What simpletons!—They could not imagine how my sister could have married you. ‘But, ladies, be reasonable,’ said I, ‘consider….’ It was of no use, they were utterly out of humour. I heard one lady whom we all know—I give no names—I heard her say in so many words: ‘I would rather see my daughter in her grave than married to a man like that….’ Of course you had plenty of defenders, even of the fair sex—‘Oh! but he is so clever, such a gentleman!’ But she cast you off by word and gesture…. ‘There are things that are impossible, quite impossible,’ said she. At last, I really did not dare put in a word for you. What I advise, by Jove, is that you should cease to go to certain houses; you will only expose yourself to insult or to a snubbing. There is that little Señora Borellano who speaks of you as the *bête noire*, still, she allows that you are very attractive. Pepe Fontán said a sharp thing apropos of that woman’s aversion for you. ‘It is all vexation,’ she said, ‘because Leon is the only man she knows who never made love to her.’ You know she has had an admirer at her heels for this year past, and Cimarra says she cannot conceal her age. Poor Federico! They say he has quarrelled with his wife and his father-in-law—he forged some letters it would seem. I suppose they will send him to Havana. What is the time? Eleven! And María is not home from church? You must allow that it is rather too much of a good thing. Oh! I know; she and my mother will have staid to chat with Padre Paoletti—an Italian dyed black, as dark as a negro! By Jove! if I were married I would not be henpecked, I know. My wife should go my way or I would know the reason why. María is as good as gold; but when she has got a thing into her head!—You may not believe it but I myself have spoken to her roundly before now for her nonsense.—Why, my dear fellow, it is intolerable to have a wife who is perpetually at you with her one tune: ‘Go and confess: go to communion: go to Mass.’ By Jove! it is enough to make you go and shoot yourself! Since you leave her free to go her own way she ought to know better. You are wrong to take such folly so much to heart. Look here: I should never forbid my wife attending four hundred and twenty-six Masses a day and undergoing penance from every confessor; but by setting a limit to her spending my money on processions I would soon cure her of her fancy. If she tried to talk to me about religious matters I should say to her: ‘Very good, my child, just as you please; I quite agree to all you say.’ In short, we should never quarrel over a dogma more or less; and meanwhile, my dear Leon, I should amuse myself to the top of my bent. Why, my good fellow, on your plan we should go to the devil without having any fun first; there can be no greater folly! You bury yourself among your books in this world, to be damned in the next. For that is what you will come to as well as I, we are all in the same boat!” And he laughed as loudly as his short breath would allow.

Then, rising from his seat, and leaning on the table with both hands, as though his body could not remain upright without support, he went on:

“Do you know, my dear fellow, that you are going to lend me four thousand reales?”

Leon opened a drawer; he smiled—why, it is hard to say, but of all the members of his wife’s family, this inoffensive creature was the one who filled him with the deepest pity, for which reason perhaps, he loosened his purse-strings for him from time to time, not merely with patience but with a vague kindliness, not to grieve so hapless and frail a being. Or perhaps Leon approved of the system of the Vicar of Wakefield who, when he

wanted to rid himself of some importunate relative, would lend him some money, a coat, or a horse of no value, “and never,” said he, “did it occur that he came again to my house to return it to me.”

“Thanks, best of *beaux frères*!” said the young man, not attempting to hide the pleasure that every human being feels at the acquisition of cash; “I will repay you next month with the rest. Not all at once, I tell you frankly that I cannot pay it all in a lump, but in instalments. It is really frightful! If there were three Easter-tides in the year every Spaniard would be reduced to beggary. By Jove! it all goes in charity; the other night those Rosafría girls coaxed me into giving a thousand reales for the Pope. Now if the world were properly constituted the Pope would give to us.—Here, you little villain! Lady Bull, come here this minute when I call you.”

The last words were addressed to a small dog that had come into the room at the same time as its master and that had immediately settled itself into an attitude of respectful patience. It was an odious little brute, of the King Charles breed, of the colour of a rat and the shape of a porcupine, with a monkey’s muzzle between long dappled ears, and a bloated body feebly supported on four tiny paws. Towards the end of the conversation, the creature’s little bell, till then silent, began to tinkle energetically and Polito found the dog rummaging among the books that lay piled on the floor.

“Come along, this minute!” said he, taking it up in his arms.

At this instant they heard a noise of wheels and the tramp of one of those wonderful Spanish horses which seem to us as indefatigable as the bronze steed of an equestrian statue that trots perpetually without ever descending from its pedestal.

“Ah! there they are!” cried Leopoldo going to the window. “Higadillos on horseback, the Count in his break. I told them to come round this way to pick me up—I am coming, I am coming!”

From where he sat Leon could see the carriage drawn up by the gate, and the bull-fighter on horseback; a huge young fellow with his legs swathed and a voluminous scarf—a supple figure, not wanting in sculpturesque beauty, crowned with a head of vulgar Spanish type, of the hue of tobacco, under a wide sombrero. His horse snorted and pawed, and the count had his hands full with those in the break, a fiery pair of a cross-breed between the Bearnais and Andalusian. Polito was soon seated in the carriage with Lady Bull, and the jolly party set out down the street, Higadillos leading the way, and cheered by the jingle of the horses’ bells. Leon looked after them with some curiosity; it was a small but significant fragment of contemporary Spanish history.

CHAPTER XII.

GUSTAVO.

He looked at him and a friendly smile lighted up his melancholy face in token of welcome; then they both gazed out—for they were sitting by the window, at the fresh and scented verdure of the garden, over which the showers from the garden hose swept like a light broom of water, laying the dust, startling the birds, frightening the butterflies, drowning the insects and caressing the plants. Skilfully directed by the gardener, it penetrated the glistening density of the euonymus shrubs, dashing off the surface of the leaves in jets of spray sparkling with miniature rainbows. The garden was a new one, one of those parterres that are turned out complete by the nurseryman as the furniture of a house is turned out by the upholsterer; methodically planted with a tiny wood, lawns, orchards, rockeries bordered with ivy, and baskets full of sweet-william and convolvulus. Conifers grew in appropriate spots, each surrounded by a formal bed in which rows of petunias crept as if on their knees, before some lordly araucaria, or the insolent loftiness of a dragon-tree all spikes and blades. It all looked as if it had just been taken out of a band-box and was the work of human industry rather than of nature; still, it was very pretty, and fresh, and gay, and nothing could be fitter to divide the road which belonged to all, from the house which belonged to one only.

After contemplating the scene for some minutes they sat down to drink their coffee.

“Before I forget it,” said Gustavo, “I want to mention my disapproval of a virtue in you, which, when not judiciously exercised, must lead to mischief: I mean your liberality, which must in the end injure you, as well as my brother who takes advantage of it. I know that you have at times given Polito money, and it annoys me, for he is a ne’er-do-weel of the very worst type. Now and here, in the strictest confidence, I may tell you exactly what I feel, and pass impartial judgment on the various members of my family. If their conduct puts me to shame it is better to blush openly than to feel it seething in my blood.”

The speaker was a young man of a very precise and rather severe expression, a good deal like his father and his brother, less handsome than María and far from the ridiculous effeteness of Polito. His face was perhaps a little hard; at any rate it indicated a firm and self-contained nature quite exceptional in the family, settled convictions and a healthy self-respect. He spoke gravely and his manners were high-bred, free alike from arrogance and from familiarity, with an equable and chilling politeness which many persons thought supreme affectation. Thoroughly honourable and gentlemanly in all the relations of life, he was also well educated, though not brilliantly talented.

Neither tall nor short, neither fat nor thin, dressed in dark colours with a calm eye behind his spectacles, free from every vice—even smoking—simple in his tastes and pitiless to the dissipation of others, Gustavo, eldest son of the Marquis Tellería, was generally spoken of as the best of the family, as an honour to his rank, and one of the hopes of the country. It is needless to add that he was a lawyer. His brother Leopoldo was

a lawyer too; almost all young Spaniards are; but while Polito hardly knew what a book looked like, Gustavo studied every day and even found employment under the protection of one of the most eminent pleaders of Madrid. He had chosen what may be called the national career, and having left the university a nobody, he was now on the high road to becoming somebody. It should be added that he had a natural gift for oratory.

"To you, my dear Leon," he went on, "I may confess that the conduct of every member of my family causes me many hours of bitter reflection—excepting of course the angel who is your wife and that other angel, even more perfect perhaps, who now lives so far from us. Is it not terrible to see my brother corrupted by dissipation? Wallowing in the low frivolity which debases so many individuals—I will not say of our class, for the disgrace is not ours alone, but of every class? Desiring to play a part above what our fortune warrants, he has been led away into insane extravagance, for his companions are rich and he is not. It enrages me to see Leopoldo driving carriages and riding horses which cost more than his whole year's income; besides, his ignorance distresses me, and his idleness makes me desperate. Ah! you were quite right in what you once said; there is a great deal of truth in your remark that 'while there is an aristocracy of nature among the lowest, there is also a low class among the aristocracy.'—However, all this is beside the mark; we will not talk any longer on a subject that is so painful to my feelings. I have, I think, made it sufficiently clear that you really ought not to encourage Polito in his recklessness."

Leon inserted some remark but Gustavo went on: "The blame, I admit, lies with my father. Our education was very desultory. It would be absurd to try to hide the fact that my mother, much as it costs me to own it, has never succeeded in weaning herself or in preserving us from the seductions of the gay world; she has always lived more out of her home than in it. To this day—for what is the use of denying what you know as well as I do?—to this day, when our fortune is so much impaired, and when, as I believe, the little that remains will fall into the hands of our creditors, is it not preposterous that my mother should keep up the house on a footing which is so far beyond our means? It is outrageous vanity; and you may take my word, Leon, when I tell you that I pass hours of anguish in thinking of it. When I see the expensive entertainments she gives, the outlay to keep up appearances while so many—so very many—necessaries are overlooked; when I note the shameless variety of her dresses, her constant presence at the theatres, her anxiety to vie with others who have a great deal more to spend—when I see all this, Leon, I feel impelled to renounce the career of which I have dreamed in my own country, and to go and earn my bread in some foreign land."

Leon again put in a word, but his brother-in-law replied promptly:

"I should be quite willing to go, but what would you have me do? I cannot give up my prospects when I am on the eve of success; it is cruel to abandon a position gained by so many years of hard study. And indeed, the very fact that I foresee disaster for my family makes me feel that it is my duty to stand by the wreck. We must take life as it comes, dreary as it is.

"You can know nothing of this occult disgrace, Leon; you cannot know what it is to live in a house where nothing is paid for, from the carpets on the floors to the bread we eat; nor the shudder that comes over one at the sound of that recurring knell, the front door bell, announcing some doleful or insolent creditor come to claim his dues; you can have

no idea of the farces that have to be played day after day by people whose name seems a guarantee of respectability and honour; nor dream of the moments of acute misery that we, in a more than decent position, endure for want of a sum of ready money that would not spoil the night's rest of a common workman. You who are both rich, and moderate in your requirements—and that is as good as a double fortune—cannot conceive of the anxieties of acting this bitter comedy among scenes of vanity on the boards of poverty. You—calm and content, with no passion but for your books, superior to those ambitions which scare sleep from my pillow, and free from the slips and reverses which embitter life—you are the spoilt child of Providence; here in your own house, never besieged by creditors, never molested by intruders, in the delightful society of your wife who is a perfect angel…. Poor María!"

After a brief silence, during which the young lawyer seemed to be reading something on his brother-in-law's forehead, he went on in a bitter tone:

"And yet Leon you have not made her happy!"

Leon answered sharply, and the lawyer retorted with the brevity and vehemence of a rifle shot; at length, after a distinct assertion on Leon's part, he began again:

"Your first duty was to avoid all scandal and not to give to the world the spectacle of a household disunited and made miserable by questions of religion. If it is your misfortune to be an infidel, you ought to have hidden the plague spot from your wife, you ought to have abstained from certain scientific publications of which you have been guilty. Atheism is hideous under every aspect, and when it has no sense of decency, when it does not even blush to show itself, it is most horrible of all. Deformity of whatever kind should be veiled, above all that of the soul, so as not to be an offence to public morality! Never hope to find me lenient on such a matter. You know what I am; you know that I never can conceal what I feel strongly. I esteem you highly, and fully recognise your fine qualities: your goodness—comparatively speaking—your quiescent morality—for the virtues and good qualities of those who deny revealed truth can rank no higher; I admit that your life is better than that of some who proclaim themselves believers, that you have all the cold and immaculate merits of a heathen philosopher, and that you carry out certain principles on the rational grounds that it is right to be virtuous, or because the performance of a duty is always advantageous in the long run: that you obey your frigid philosophical moral law just as you pay your taxes and submit to the laws of health or to the regulations of the police; I grant that you are one of the best in this mad turmoil of folly and wickedness; I esteem you—nay I have a great regard for you; I admire your talents, and in spite of all this I tell you plainly if I, Leon, if I"—and he rose, extending his arm, in an apostolic attitude. "If I had had my sister's hand to bestow I would never, never have given it to you. Do you hear? Never!"

Leon interposed warmly, but Gustavo went on:

"Oh! I loathe and detest hypocrisy as much as you can. I admit but two alternatives: you are a Catholic or you are not? In our sacred faith there is no trimming or compromise. I—I am a Catholic, and as such I act in every phase of life; I do not carry my creed on my lips and atheism in my heart; I scorn the ridicule of the frivolous—I go to Mass, I confess, I communicate, I fast, I glory in defying the outrages of the mob that seems to direct

public opinion; I face its cynicism with courage and answer its Voltairian heresies with the holy dogmas and the authority of the Church. And these ideas, this strictness of conduct, I purpose to carry with me into public life. I shall take it up with all the resolution of a soldier and a martyr, guided by the Almighty hand that will not leave me defenceless in the blood-stained arena of human passion. Though men have dared to let loose the wild beasts of infidelity and rationalism, be assured that God will not fail to send among them those who can tame them.

"You need not expect a man who can express himself so frankly and resolutely on the subject, to show you any pity, or to join issue with you on any scheme of compromise which would divide the onus of your differences equally between you and my sister. No! and a thousand times no! She is in no respect to blame. The fault is yours, entirely yours. Truth and falsehood can never effect a compromise. It is your part to give way, and she can only remain supreme and triumphant."

Leon could have replied, but he was weary of his brother-in-law's harangue and he turned the conversation into a channel which he judged would be more attractive to the young advocate. Gustavo gave up his didactic vein at once.

"It is true," he said, "the votes of your tenants at Cullera have saved me, and I feel sure of success. Between you and me, in the strictest confidence, I particularly wish to be returned. It will be the high road to success for me you see—my career. When a man has fixed principles and the immovable determination to defend them against all comers, a public life is an honourable one. In the times we live in, it is a duty to fight! Do you not think so? For when all character is fast sinking into a gutter of corruption, it is well, and very profitable, to show that one has some character, so that men may say, 'this is a man!' When human reason and outraged truth insist that there should be some flogging, is it not a worthy and brilliant achievement to wield the lash? Christian civilisation is like a noble forest; it has taken religion centuries to produce it, and philosophy dreams of destroying it in a single day. We must stay the hand of these ruthless destroyers. The civilisation of Christianity cannot be left to perish at the mercy of a handful of theorists, aided by a mob of lost wretches who, to escape the stings of conscience, have suppressed God." He flourished his large white hand, brandishing it like a school-master's ferule; and as he prepared to depart he added: "My friend—almost my brother—I have the deepest regard for you, but when I think of that black spot I am anxious—very, very anxious. If the plague in your dwelling increases, beware! You will find me on the side of the victim—my poor dear sister.—Good-bye." And he went.

As he watched him depart Leon's soul sunk within him, and for some time he felt quite incapable of fixing his mind on anything.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST ILLUSION.

The man whom we have seen in the retirement of his study, disturbed at intervals during many months by such scenes as we have described, did not, however, give up his whole time to scientific work. He, like others, was a wheel in the social machine, attached to it by his instincts, by his marriage, nay by science itself; and he was by no means one of those cobweb-spinning savants of whom we are told in romances that they are inseparable from their books and their alembics, and as ignorant of the outer world as they are of the true mysteries of science. Leon Roch went into the world, he dressed well, and indeed was not to be distinguished from the well-clothed multitude which constitutes the most important, though not the most picturesque portion of society. He never excused himself from the methodically dull routine of the life of the wealthy classes in the Spanish capital and he might be seen with his wife in the fashionable employment of "taking a drive"—a pleasure which consists in going at a fixed hour to a particular avenue and gently jolting to and fro in single file, one carriage behind another and close together, at a regular pace, so that the ladies who lounge in the landaus feel the hot breath of the horses just behind them, while the quadrupeds, mistaking the flowers in their bonnets for real ones, try to make a mouthful of them. He frequented the theatres, on the delightful system by which the subscribers share a seat and go in turns, and which has the advantage of providing them indiscriminately with emotion or amusement, quite irrespective of their frame of mind at the time. He invited a select number of friends to dinner on one day in the week, having asserted and won his right to choose his guests from among the best of the few distinguished men of whom Spain can boast. Nor did he select them by any rule of creed or opinion, but solely to suit his personal sympathies; as a consequence his weekly entertainments and his evening parties gathered together superior men; independent thinkers, staunch Catholics, politicians of the epicurean pattern, aristocrats of the most ancient coinage and nobles all hot and shining from the press, with men who had risen to social importance by their talents as omniscient gossips, or by the genuine charm of their conversation; there too were rising stars from the university—young men distinguished as professors, or who shone in the debating societies. Perfect harmony reigned however, for nothing is so soothing to the temper as a good dinner, the presence of elegant women, and the necessity for observing the laws of good breeding.

Though certain individuals, no doubt, detested each other cordially, the general atmosphere was one of mutual consideration, and the hours were passed in conversation always polite, tolerant, instructive and delightful—the happy product of this friction of various minds. Art, letters, manners, politics—all were discussed; there was a little grumbling, of course, a little scandal; one group would take up some serious question—of religion, for instance, a theme sure to occur where two or three men are gathered together, and one which has a perennial and unfailing interest. This absorbing subject, which is so constantly discussed, in the family circle, among students, and in the highest conclave—in the confessional, in the palace, in the hut—among friends and among foes—with words in

every human tongue, and sometimes with the roar of cannon—with the jargon of party-spirit, the formulas of reason, the slang of flippancy—overtly or in secret; with ink often, and not seldom with blood—fills the air with an incessant murmur, that rolls its ceaseless tide from pole to pole without pause or lull. If our ears were but a little keener, we might hear the dull unceasing soliloquy of the ages.

Leon's outward features were a clear olive complexion, expressive eyes, black hair and beard; his moral distinction was his inflexible rectitude and a firm determination never to deceive. His frank gaze captivated most people at first sight, but his uprightness of spirit was not so immediately discernible, since a man's conscience does not lie on the surface. The place he held in the estimation of his acquaintance depended consequently on their view of things; to some he was an admirable character, to others a malignant being; and since his person was beyond question, handsome and attractive, there were plenty to say of him: "He is a very good fellow on the surface, but below that he is a monster of deformity."

He was not one of those rationalistic bigots—for there is such a thing—who laugh the faith of others to scorn, and ridicule their pious fervour; on the contrary, he respected all who believed—nay he envied some. He had no spirit of propaganda and desired to convert no one to his own way of thinking; for though his studies had brought him great enjoyment, they had also given him many hours of isolation and bitterness, hence he had no mania for casting souls afloat from the blessed isles of the faith, only to see them land on the cold solitudes of scepticism.

He had begun by devoting himself to the natural sciences, finding in these the purest delight; then the study of philosophy had sorely vexed his spirit, and he finally returned to the pursuit of experimental science in which he had found *terra firma* and a familiar country. While natural history amused him, physiology fascinated him; he was fond too of astronomy, to which he was led by his taste for mathematics. "History," he would say, "dwarfs us; physiology restores us to our natural measure; astronomy makes giants of us."

There was in his spirit a certain aridity, the result of the small play his imagination had enjoyed in childhood and youth.

He was born in a room behind a shop, where he had trotted in and out by the side of his mother, a woman, coarse and rough by nature, of no breeding or education. She worked hard, but she could not read. In her vanity she had set her heart on her son being very precocious and she firmly believed that he would rise to be a general, a bishop, or a prime minister. After her death he had lived for some little time at Valencia with a maternal uncle, a potter, who had made money and whose opinions were thus formulated: "Learning is rubbish. A man who can make a brick is of more use to the human race than if he could write all the books that ever were printed."

After this Leon went through a period of development utterly devoid of follies or escapades of any kind; he never fancied himself a dramatic poet; he never plotted schemes of elopement or duelling; he went through no moods of melancholy, no agitations as to the choice of a profession, no ambitious dreams. He was set to learn mathematics and told to "get on if he could." He did get on, it is true, and then he was launched on an ocean of rocks where he had to struggle with the petrified waves that bear testimony to the Plutonic

and Neptunian storms that have vexed the globe; he was thrust head foremost, as it were, into the bowels of the earth as revealed by deduction or represented in museums, and told: “All these pebbles, that look as if they had been gathered out of the roadway, form a book of marvels; each flint is a letter of it, and you must learn to read it.”

There he saw the rushing waters, roaring ere yet there were ears to hear them, and refracting rainbows ere yet there were eyes to see them; he read the pedigree of the world in the remains of Bivalves, Crustaceans and Ophidians, which had left the stamp of their forms, like the seal set by ancient dynasties to record the fact of their supremacy; he found plants that had grown before there were teeth or mills to grind them, or men to need them; he saw man himself, the latest product of creation, born when the forests had succumbed to become store-houses of fuel, before the seas and rivers had levelled the plains, while thousands of huge volcanoes were still belching fire and giving the finishing touches to the crests of the loftiest mountains. All this he saw and much more.

At a later period, when he had worked hard and found himself a rich man, when he need no longer be the slave of science but could be her master, he to some extent cultivated his imagination. He knew full well that he could never be an artist; still, he took in hand the finer chisel which is commonly given to one of the muses when they are painted on our ceilings; but his hands, which could so ably wield the lever, were too clumsy for so delicate an instrument.

“It is quite clear,” said he, “I shall always be a bumpkin!”

He had succeeded in writing in a fairly good style, clearly rather than elegantly; he spoke in public very badly, very badly indeed, though in private conversation he had a certain eloquence, especially on lofty subjects. He had a free command of similes and constantly used them, from the habit, now so largely adopted by science, of flattering rather than scaring the ear of the studious public; also because a parabolic form of speech has in all ages been congenial to superior natures. It is the instructive homage paid by Science to Art who in return borrows the radiant lamp of truth to light her on her glorious path.

This man, to whom it was a matter of absorbing interest whether one pebble were more or less silurian than another, and whether a solution crystallised in rhomboids or in prisms, had from his earliest youth cherished a dream of ideal life—a quiet and virtuous existence, soaring on love and study, the two wings of the spirit, as he used to say in his figurative jargon. The end of his career of toil was to be the beginning of such a life, secured by a marriage that should realise his dreams, and by the growth of a family. This family that he dreamed of—the one ideal family, the happy circle of souls that he could call his own—constantly occupied his thoughts. Could there be a sweeter or a brighter lot? To see himself united to a wife he adored, loving and submissive, with a sound understanding and a heart of inexhaustible goodness to watch the growth of tiny creatures who might ask him with tears for the bread of learning—to work upon them by the best methods for the development of their moral and physical nature—to live for them, and provide the necessaries of life for that beloved and ever charming group, whose crown and centre, the ideal wife, would appear as the living image of Providence, and the dispenser of its benefits; now the mother, and now the teacher—clothing them, feeding them, guiding their first tottering steps, checking their over-boldness—Ah! for such a dream it

would be worth while to live! His imagination painted the joys of a rich man, who can taste all the pleasures of toil without being its slave…. A perfect life, partly given to study, partly to the cares of a family; divided in fair proportion between the country and the town, since in that way nature and society, each in turn, appears most delightful; a life neither too secluded nor too public, in a calm retreat—not dull, but far from the bustle of life, though not inaccessible to a few select friends.

Yes, this was the goal he must aim at and grasp as soon as possible, before his span was run in a ceaseless and giddy whirl. He must find, as quickly as might be, the woman who was to lay the foundation of this happiness—a dream, no doubt, but still capable of being realised. The choice would be difficult. She must be studious, prudent, and grave; was he himself qualified to make such a woman happy? Yes, he could make her happy. Was he not learned, clever, calm-tempered, judiciously critical, accustomed to analyse human nature?—And yet—and yet….

CHAPTER XIV.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

“And yet I made a mistake.”

This he said to himself one night as he sat alone with his wife in the silent quietude of his home, at the hour when the mind wanders in the vague meditation that is the precursor of dreams, after recalling the facts of the past day which so lately were living realities and so soon may become a nightmare. Before him, already prepared to go to bed, sat the noble and beautiful Minerva-like figure. Her sea-blue eyes, by some unaccountable artistic blunder, were fixed on a book of devotions—one of the popular and commonplace manuals, full of magniloquent verbiage, and idle subtleties, devoid alike of piety, of style, of suggestiveness, of spiritual feeling and of evangelical truth—nothing but a monotonous jangle of words. But what did it matter? As she sat, nodding to sleep over this farrago, María was charming to look upon.

Leon had dropped his evening newspaper—no less a jangle in its kind, of broken strings, of tuneless bells, and the vacuous clack of rumour—and was gazing at his wife, raging inwardly at the hideous mockery of Fate. He—he who through all his early years had been absolute master of his fancy, had one day, all unconsciously, given it the reins, and then, cheated and betrayed, had allowed himself to be carried away by an illusion altogether unworthy of so sober a character. How could he have failed to see that between himself and this woman there could never be any community of ideas, nor that sweet union of minds that subsists even among fools? How could he be thus deluded by the witchery even of such perfect charms? How had he overlooked the wall of ice—high, dense, insuperable, which must stand for ever between them? Why had he failed to detect that recusant will, that deeply-rooted standard, that narrowness of purview, that absence of magnanimity, for all of which there was so little compensation in an over-wrought religious excitability? Why had he not foreseen the dulness, the emptiness of his home—lacking so much that was tender and attaching, lacking above all the tenderest and most attaching element of life: mutual confidence?

In a fit of desperate regret he raised his hand to his brow and clutched it convulsively, as if in malediction on the uselessness of learning. María did not notice the gesture, but kept her eyes fixed on her book.

“I fell in love like any idiot,” he thought, looking at her again, “but how could I help it?—she is lovely!”

All his efforts to form María’s character had been vain; at the earliest stage of her married life she had loved him with more passion than tenderness, but ere long, without ceasing to love him, she had begun to regard him as an erring soul—to be pitied but shunned. Leon had given her all liberty in the exercise of her religion, and at first she availed herself of it in moderation; but as he tried by degrees to influence her mind—not undermining her beliefs, as his detractors declared—but endeavouring to bring her

intelligence as far as possible into harmony with his own, she abused the liberty he had granted and gave up almost all her time to her devotions. Not that she renounced all worldly pleasures and vanities; on the contrary, she enjoyed them keenly, though in due moderation. She went to theatres, except in Lent—she dressed well, frequented the fashionable promenades, and gave up part of the year to the excursions and country visits that became her position and fortune. She took great care of her personal appearance (for she liked to be admired by Leon), very little of her household, and none at all of her husband; the rest of her time and thoughts she devoted to the various pious meetings and benevolent dissipations to which she was carried off by her mother or her friends; in short, she served in the charmed ranks of fashionable religionism.

"And after all, is it not I who am the recalcitrant party?" Leon said to himself with crushed resignation. "Of what can I accuse her? Which of us is the believer? If I had faith we should be happy—why have I none?"

Then there was a third phase, during which María's devotion to him was as great as ever, though still vehement rather than tender, and no more sympathetic than at first. At this time María would attack her husband with a mixture of human passion and mystic piety, which did not exclude each other because they reacted and complemented each other—trying to seduce him into the path of religion *à la mode*, faint with incense, splendid with tapers, gay with flowers, smoothed with suave sermons and graced with women of elegance and rank. Her fondest dream was to remain a bigot without forfeiting the man who had so completely realised the visions of her girlhood. To get him to church—that was the hard task she had set herself.

"Leave me—pray leave me," Leon would say, tortured by regret. "Go and pray God for me."

"But without you half of myself is wanting; I cannot feel as though I were good throughout, as I want to be."

Then she would fly to him, clasp him in her arms and rest her head against the weary man's breast, saying, with a sort of sob: "I love you so much!"

Leon's persistent refusal to take any part in her pious practices brought them at length to that chronic state of misunderstanding, or rather of moral divorce, in which we have seen them two years after their marriage. They had ceased to share their ideas or to consult each other on any opinion or plan; they never enjoyed that community of pleasures or of trouble which is the natural marriage of souls; they neither wept together nor rejoiced together—they did not even quarrel. They were like those stars which look as if they were but one, and which in reality are millions of miles apart. All their friends could see that Leon was wretched, and suffering deeply though in silence.

"He has set his heart on making his wife a rationalist," they said, "and that is as absurd as a sanctimonious man would be."

"That is just what I say," another would reply, "belief and disbelief are a matter of

sex."

"The fact is that he is desperately in love with her."

And this was the truth. Leon was bewitched by the beauty of his wife, who every day seemed more lovely and who, without interfering with her pious exercises, had the art of enhancing it by the luxury and taste of her dress and the perfect care of her person. It was equally true of María: she too was desperately in love; for no earthly consideration would she have changed the husband with whom fate and the church had blest her. The void in her heart had been filled by a perfectly unspiritual passion for his extraordinarily handsome person. Nor was he indifferent to the homage paid by the multitude to the lord and master of a gracious and beautiful wife—on the contrary, he was extremely proud of it, and the thought that María could under any conceivable circumstances have belonged to any other man, even in thought or intention, maddened him with rage. In short, they were two divorced beings, so far as mind and feeling were concerned, though united by the power of beauty, on the stormy territory of imagination.

It was of this that Leon was meditating at this hour of the night. At last he came to this bitter reflection:

"The world is governed by words and not by ideas. Hence we see that a marriage may degenerate into mere concubinage."

"Have you done?" he asked his wife, seeing that she had closed her book and was praying silently with her eyes shut.

"Have you finished your newspaper?—Give it me; I want to look at something. The Duchess de Ojos del Guadiana does not wish to be at the whole expense of to-morrow's ceremony. Let me see if it is announced in the column of services." Leon looked and read the column aloud.

"A sermon by Padre Barrios!" exclaimed María with surprise. "We had asked him to withdraw, because he is asthmatic and no one can hear him—What a shame! San Prudencio is getting quite a name as the place of refuge for all the worst preachers, and all the scoffers congregate there to laugh at the chaplain's stammering and Padre Paoletti's Italian accent; it is all the result of certain persons undertaking to manage the services and not doing it properly. However, some one will come down upon them and put their house in order.—No, no; do not put down the paper; what is the opera to-morrow night?"

"The same again," said Leon, laying down the paper and putting his hand on his wife's arm as she was about to rise. "Wait, I want to speak to you."

"And seriously it would seem," replied María smiling. "Are you vexed with me? Oh, I know you are going to scold me. Yes," she added, curling herself up on a sofa close to his arm-chair, "you are going to scold me for spending too much this month."

"No."

"Well, I have been rather extravagant, but I will make up for it by being very economical next month.—I know, my dear, I have spent more than my allowance. Let me see—there are three dresses, sixteen thousand; the triduo, four thousand; the novena which I ordered, ten thousand; the new hangings in my room—but that was all your fault, for

laughing at the white angels playing with the blue corn.—Then I have to add the presents made to the actors who would not charge anything for the charitable performance; two watches, two snuff-boxes and two brooches.—But I will give you the whole account to-morrow.”

“It is not that, I tell you—nothing of the kind. You may spend as much as you like—you may ruin me for aught I care, and waste all my substance on dressmakers, priests, and actors. It is a much graver matter than your extravagance that I want to discuss, María: I want to ask you whether you do not think it high time that the emptiness and misery of our married life should have an end—that you should recognise that your excessive devotion to church ceremonies is almost a form of infidelity, and that by giving up so much to the cause of piety you are in fact doing an injury to me and to our common interests?”

“I have told you before,” replied María very gravely, “that I am prepared to account to God for my devotions—for good or for evil.—Not to you, who cannot understand them. Try to do so—be converted to the faith, and then we can talk about it!”

“Faith! it is you who do not understand. I have none—I can have none such as you require. Indeed and if I had, your conduct and your way of carrying out your religious duties would cure me of it. I may tell you, once for all, that in your actions and your fevered excitement about sacred things I see nothing that becomes a Christian wife. My house is not a home, and my wife is no more than a beautiful dream, as remote as she is fair. This, I tell you is not marriage—you are not my wife nor I your husband.”

“And whose fault is that but yours?” she exclaimed eagerly. “If harmony and confidence are absent, who is to blame?—Your atheism, your infidelity, your separation from the Holy Church! I stand safely within the pale of matrimony—it is you who are outside. I call you, I invite you to enter with open arms and you will not come—Coward!”

And she stretched them to him, but Leon made no attempt to throw himself into them.

“I should come,” he said, “come with rapture, if I saw in you the faith which regards religion as the purest form of love. I should admire and respect your faith, and only wish that I could share it—but as it is I do not—I cannot—wish to follow.”

“You are mad, utterly mad! What is it that you do wish? That I should deny God and the Church, that I should turn rationalist like you, that I should read your books full of lies, that I should believe that we are all apes, that materialism is truth, that Nature is the only God, or that there is no God—all your hideous mass of heresies? Happily I have been able to escape falling into that abyss. I am pious and can believe all I ought to believe; I worship sincerely and constantly, for that is the best means of keeping faith alive and active, and of closing the soul against the entrance of any false doctrine.—I go to church too often? I am unreasonably particular in my attention to the rules of the Church? I am extravagant in the services I pay for? I listen every day to the Word of God? I pray night and morning?—This is the old story—is it not? I know I am looked upon as a fanatic. Well, there is a reason for everything. Do you suppose that I should cling so passionately to the Cross if I had not you for my husband—you—an atheist; if I were not—as I am—in constant peril of contamination by your views, and by my daily intercourse with you, nay, by my very love for you? No—if you were not so far from devout I should be less so. If you were a sincere Catholic I should not be a bigot—I should fulfil the most necessary

duties but nothing more. It is like this Leon—supposing two men are out together in a small boat on a stormy sea; if both row with equal strength they will easily reach the shore; but no—one only lifts his oar, and does not pull at all. Must not the other work twice as hard or else they perish? Understand that clearly my dear—one oar must save us both.”

“That figure of speech is not of your invention,” said Leon, who knew full well the extent of his wife’s rhetorical powers. “Whose is it, pray?”

“Whether it is mine or not can be of no importance to you,” retorted María with contemptuous asperity. “The important point is that it covers an indisputable fact. Do you wish me to learn the truth from your miserable books?”

“No, no—I do not ask that,” said Leon sadly. “But wicked as I may be—reprobate as you believe me, do you think I am so bad as to deserve that you should not accept a single idea from me, and that you must always conceal and reserve your own, and keep yourself as far away from me as possible?”

“Nay—I accept your love which I believe to be sincere, and your respect for my beliefs which I feel to be honest, and your personal protection—but your views, your opinions….”

María spoke with such emphasis, and broke off with such a sparkle of scorn in her eyes with their dazzling, cat-like gleam, that Leon felt a chill about his aching heart like the stab of cold steel.

“Nothing that is mine!” he murmured, and his gaze fell on the ground as though death were his only hope.

“Nothing that proceeds from your haughty and erring intellect,” said his wife, giving what she thought was a decisive thrust. “Nothing that can contaminate me with your diabolical philosophy.”

There was a pause, and then Leon, with a prolonged sigh, looked up at her, pale and anxious.

“And who has taught you to say all this?” he asked.

“That matters not,” replied María, also turning pale but without losing courage. “I have told you already that, as a devout Catholic, I do not feel bound to render an account to an atheist of all the secrets of my religious conscience or of what regards my devotional practice. You need only be certain that I am faithful to you, and that I have never been false to my marriage vows in act, intention or thought. That is enough—I fulfil my pledge and duty as a wife and this is all the confidence you need look for from me. As for that part of my conscience which concerns God alone, do not hope to read it—it is a sanctuary into which you have no right to enter. Do not ask me: ‘Who taught me to say this or that’—You have no right to an answer.”

“I do not require it,” he said. “I never took it into my head to be uneasy because my wife went to the confessional three or four times a year to make a clean breast of her shortcomings and crave absolution in accordance with her creed. At the same time the confessional has its abuses: it asserts its rights to spiritual control by devious and

underhand means, by daily interference, by constant and secret discussion of details, fostered on one hand by the scruples of an innocent soul, and on the other by the prurient curiosity of a man who has no natural family ties."

"Indeed!" said María sarcastically. "It would be better, no doubt, that I should seek rules of conscience from the spiritual direction of your atheistical friends! I am sickened as it is, by the flippancy with which some of them speak of sacred subjects. I have told you, before now, that the parties in our house were an ostentatious and scandalous parade of evil principles and the day will come when I shall resolutely refuse to countenance them. I do not deny, of course, that some of your visitors are highly respectable; but others are not—I know what opinions some of them hold."

"And who has informed you?" asked Leon eagerly.

"Oh, I don't know.—All I say is that I am tired of being civil to them, of concealing my disgust in the society of men who have written or who have said in public—or who have neither written nor spoken—but I know what their opinions are all the same; yes, I know…."

"Much indeed you know!—But you have pronounced sentence on our evening meetings, and that sentence will be followed by others." And with the strange but natural revulsion of a dull persistent grief, that relieves itself by delusive flashes of bitter amusement, Leon laughed aloud.

"Indeed," said María, a little abashed. "Your evenings are a constant vexation. They are very discreditable, for with all your discussions on politics, or music, or some invention, or perhaps on history, our house is a hotbed of atheism."

"And it would be a hotbed of virtue if we danced and talked gossip?—No, in my drawing-room no one has ever discussed atheism nor anything approaching it. Your pure and childlike conscience may rest easy! Do not let that distress your happy and innocent soul, if you believe that you have accomplished every duty by carrying the external practice of religion to the verge of folly and by worshipping words, symbols, dogma and routine with superstitious fervency, while your spirit lies cold and torpid, devoid of joy or sorrow, of struggle or of victory, lulled to sleep by the drone of sermons, the braying of organs, and the rustle of silken vestments! You believe yourself to be perfection, and you have not even the grace of a wavering spirit held firm, of doubts sternly silenced, of temptation resisted, or of contentment sacrificed. How easy, how accommodating is the piety of our day! Formerly, to dedicate yourself to the faith meant the total renunciation of every pleasure, the abdication of self-will, hatred of the pomps and vanity of this world, contempt for riches, luxury and comfort, so as to cast off the flesh and spiritualise the soul and meditate more freely on heavenly things; it meant living only the spiritual life to the highest pitch of rapture, of frenzy even—the rich emulating the poor, the healthy praying God for chastening disease, and the clean craving to be covered with foulness. It was an aberration, no doubt; but it was a sublime one, for self-sacrifice and abasement are of all virtues those which least lose their merit by excess. It was suicide, but it was guiltless suicide, since it was the very madness of self-abandonment! While now…." and Leon fixed on his wife a gaze fired with enthusiasm and scorn—"now the rules of piety demand constant oblations and a positive competition in the matter of ostentatious services; still,

every one is dealt with according to his rank, the poor—as being poor, and the rich as being rich; provided, that is to say, that they do not refuse to contribute in due proportion. The devout women of the present day attend Mass, mortify themselves in comfortable chairs, pray kneeling upon cushions, and sweep the dust of the sanctuary with their trains. This only occupies their mornings; in the evening they are free to dance, to go to the play, to cover themselves with jewels and finery, to meet at the tables of the rich—though they may be Jews or heretics, to display themselves in promenades, and enhance or improve their charms to captivate men!—After all, what is the harm? The devil is in his dotage—he has come to terms—he is grown old and has forgotten his business!"

"Your jest is a coarse one," exclaimed María in some confusion. "According to that I am in mortal sin because I dress well and go to the theatre.—You are talking of what you do not understand; you atheists are the maddest souls that live."

She was not angry, and to prove it she coaxingly stroked her husband's face. "Do you think your eloquence has brought me to nought, my dearest?" she went on. "But when you see that I dress carefully and go to the theatre, you must know that I have got leave to do it, and so can please myself without staining my soul. Nay, who has been more anxious to set me at rest on this point than yourself; for you have always said that, as a married woman, I have no right to break the ties that hold me to society."

"Yes, that is the right thing to say, I know!" said Leon laughing. "Amuse yourself as much as you can, so long as…."

"Your reservations are blasphemy—say no more, foolish man. Sooner or later I shall yet succeed in proving to you that all your wisdom is mere foolishness!"

"Foolishness?" said Leon, putting his hand under his wife's chin—soft, round and delicate.

"Think how I shall laugh at you when, at length, by the efficacy of my prayers, of my faith, and of my piety…. You smile? Nay do not smile; some wonderful cases have been seen—some of the instances I could tell you of would astonish you."

"Then do not tell me of them," said Leon, turning his wife's face from side to side, as he still held her chin between his finger and thumb.

"Yes, cases that seem incredible—cases of wicked men who have been converted;—and you are not wicked."

"Then I have not been denounced as a reprobate yet? Make yourself easy my dear, all in good time. Thanks for your friends' good opinion of me—while it lasts!"

María threw her arms round him, and clasping his head to her bosom, kissed his forehead.

"You will come to me yet," she said, "you will be a devout Catholic and be one with me in the practice of my beautiful religion…."

"I!"

"Yes, you. You will come to my arms!—How happy we may be then—I love you; you know how I love you!"

And how handsome, how lovely she was! Leon could not but feel the irresistible charm of such perfect beauty of face and form—of eyes whose depths seemed as translucent and as mysterious as the sea when we peer into the waters to find some lost treasure at the bottom.

María went across the room and stood in front of a mirror, raising her hands to let down her hair. The black tresses fell on her shoulders, which could not in justice be compared to cold hard marble since they were of the tenderest texture; but there is Parian flesh, though mysticism calls it clay, and the Divine Artificer has used it to form some few human statues which hardly seem to need a soul to give them life and beauty.

“She is lovely!” Leon exclaimed, as he sat sunk in his arm-chair, gazing like a simpleton. “Lovelier every day!”

After making various little arrangements at the glass, María went into her alcove. Leon’s head sank between his hands, and he remained for a long time lost in thought. He was in a fever. At length he rose—angry with himself or with some one else. “I am a fool!” he said. “I wanted a Christian wife and not a hypocritical odalisque.”

CHAPTER XV.

A MODUS VIVENDI.

He sat in silence for some little time; suddenly María gave a loud and terrified cry; he flew to her alcove and found her sitting up in bed, her eyes fixed, her arms extended.

“Leon, oh Leon!” she gasped in alarm, “Are you there—oh, where are you? Ah! Yes—here you are—Hold me—What a hideous dream!”

Leon soon succeeded in soothing her by recalling her to waking reality, the best cure for such vagaries of the fancy.

“I was dreaming—I dreamed I had killed you, and that from the very bottom of a deep, black hole you looked up at me, with oh! such a face—And then you were alive again, but you loved some one else.—I will not have you love any one else….” and she flung her arms round her husband’s neck.

“What o’clock is it?” she asked.

“It is late. Go to sleep again; you will have no more nightmares.”

“And you—are you not going to bed?”

“I am not sleepy.”

“Are you going to sit up all night—What is the matter? Are you reading?”

“No, I am thinking.”

“What we were talking about?”

“Of that, and of you.”

“That is right. Think over all the truths I told you and so you will be unconsciously preparing your mind.—Hark! I hear a bell. Is it a fire?”

They listened. They could hear the barking of the dogs, which in the suburbs of Madrid, where every house has a wide and vacant let attached, meet in dozens to unearth kitchen refuse and rummage in the gutters; they could hear the distant creak and jangle of the latest tram-cars, and the faint, steady, metallic ticking of Leon’s watch in his waistcoat pocket—nothing else—much less a bell.

“No,” he said, “and it is not the hour for tolling for prayers.—Go to sleep.”

“I am not sleepy—I cannot sleep,” replied María turning on her pillow. “I feel that I shall see you again at the bottom of the pit, staring at me. You laugh at it—and it is preposterous to dream of seeing a man lying dead who believes and declares that this life is the end of all things.”

“Did I ever say such a thing?” exclaimed Leon with annoyance.

“No—you never said so; but I know that is what you think—I know it.”

“How do you know it? Who told you so?”

“I know it; I know that is what philosophers think at the bottom of their souls, and you are one of them. I do not read your books because I do not understand them; but some one who does understand them has read them.”

Leon rose and turned away, deeply provoked and troubled; he was about to quit the alcove, but suddenly he came back to his wife’s bedside; he took her hand, and said in a stern firm voice:

“María, I am going to say a last word—the last. An idea has just flashed upon my mind which seems to me to promise salvation—which, if we both accept it and act upon it, may yet save us from this hell of misery.”

María, overcome by the pathos and solemnity of his address could say nothing in reply.

“I will explain it in two words.—Happy thought! I cannot think why it never occurred to me before—: I will promise to give up my studies and my evening meetings—the society alike of my books and of my friends. My library shall be walled-up like that of Don Quixote; not a word, not an idea, that can be thought suspicious shall ever be uttered in the house, not a remark that can be regarded as flippant or worldly on matters of religion; there shall be no discussions on history or science—in short, no conversation, no talk whatever….”

“What a comfort! what happiness!” cried María raising herself to kiss her husband’s hands. “And you really and truly promise me this—and will keep your promise?”

“I solemnly swear it. But do not sing your *Te Deum* too soon; you will understand that I do not propose to make such concessions without requiring some on your part. I have told you my side of the bargain—now for yours. I will sacrifice what you ignorantly call my atheism—though it is an entirely different thing—now you must sacrifice what you call your piety—doubtful piety at the best. If we are to understand each other, you must give up your incessant, interminable devotions, your weekly confession—always to the same priest,—and all the scenic accessories to religion. You may go to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days, and confess once a year, but without previously selecting your confessor.”

“Oh! this is too much!” exclaimed María hiding her face as if in self-pity for the miserable remnant left to her of her religious dissipations.

“Too much!—you think this too much to ask, silly child! Well, I will make a compromise: If you reduce your church-going I will go with you.”

“You will go with me!” she cried starting up in her bed impulsively. “Is it true?—do you mean it?—No, you are mocking me.”

“No indeed, I will go with you, on Sundays.”

“Only on Sundays!”

“Only on Sundays.”

“And you will confess, like me, once a year.”

“Oh! as to that….” Leon murmured.

“You will not?”

“No.—You ask too much at once. I am making an enormous sacrifice, while yours is but a small one. You are giving up superfluous luxuries to enjoy all that is necessary and reasonable; you are snatching off the mask of hypocrisy and bigotry to reveal the true beauty of a Christian wife. This is not a sacrifice. Mine on the other hand is the loss of everything;—in laying my studies and my friendships at your feet, I am cutting off half of my life that you may trample it in the dust.”

“But still it is not enough,” said María passionately. “Of what use is it that you should cease to read if you continue to think—if you still think and always will think the same? You will go with me to church as a mere formality; your body will go in, but your soul will remain outside; and when you see the sacred Host raised in the hands of the priest, a feeling of abominable mockery will laugh within you—unless indeed you are meditating on the insects you can see with your microscope, and which you believe to be the cause of thought and sentiment in our souls, and which I believe to be divine.”

“Your sarcasms cannot touch me,” said her husband. “I know too well the source of these ignorant prejudices. I can only pledge myself to honest and reverent attention.—But I was forgetting another matter. You will have to quit Madrid; we must go to live elsewhere. Now take your choice.”

“You ask too much—it is a shame!” cried María in the voice of a spoilt child. “And what do you offer in return? A sham of religion, a mask of belief to cover your infidel’s face! No, Leon; I cannot agree.”

“Then there is no hope for me,” cried Leon burying his head in his hands. After a few minutes of silent anguish, he coldly looked up at his wife and went on:

“María, then we must live apart. I cannot endure this existence. Within a few days it shall be settled. You can remain in this house or go to your parents, which ever you prefer; I shall go abroad, never to return—never.”

He rose; his wife, after the manner of fashionable wives, burst into tears, seizing his hands and pressing them to her breast.

“We must part?” she sobbed. “But you are mad—cruel….” María’s love for her husband was as great as his for her—a gulf, an absolute divorce of their souls she could bear, but to live apart…!

“My mind is quite made up,” said Leon sadly.

“I agree—I consent to all you propose.”

Long after, when she had been sleeping for some hours, again Leon heard his wife wake with a cry of horror.

“I have been dreaming again—a horrible dream. I was dying and again I saw you—you were caressing and kissing another woman.—But it is daylight; the bells are really ringing now.”

The air was in fact full of the discordant jangle and clang of bells from the towers of the numberless stuccoed and whitewashed structures which, in Madrid, boast of the name

of churches, and bear witness to the piety of the natives.

“They are ringing for Matins,” thought María, “I am dying of sleepiness—I must sleep. It is eight o’clock and still they ring, still they call me.—But I cannot go—I have given my word. Heavens! it is nine! Forgive me—spare me, beloved bells; I cannot go till Sunday.”

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE DOG-DAYS.

The season of exodus and dispersion had arrived. Madrid was swarming and bustling like an ant-hill, every one exhausted by the heat and eagerly seeking money. The price of gold went up as though war were impending, and transactions in small shares were as lively as though there were some real increase of business. Many a family drew the rope that the extravagances of the past winter had tied round its neck, yet a little tighter; while others, not owning even a rope to pull, consoled themselves by singing the praises of the Madrid Summer, and declaring the charms of its promenades and its beautiful nights to be far superior to the solitude and dulness of the country. A summer at Pinto or Getafe was as bad as a winter at El Escudo or Pajares!

The Tellerías were among the number of those who would not for worlds have stayed in town. They too were off in defiance of all the laws and logic of arithmetic and economy. The marquesa, however, stretched out the spring to its utmost span, saying that the heat was still very endurable and that in the north the weather was rainy and cold. Leon, having no motive for deferring his departure, but, on the contrary, every reason for hastening it, fixed it for the first week in July. But the day before they started an unexpected event upset every body's plans. The sons of the marquis had long known that their brother, Luis Gonzaga, was out of health; Gustavo and Leon knew more indeed—they knew that he was suffering from a painful and lingering complaint, that scourge of the young, consumption, which frequently attacks a delicate constitution or one that has been undermined by dissipation or study. As the fathers of the seminary where the young man was living pronounced his malady to be only at its incipient stage, nothing had been said to his mother, with the idea that it would come quite soon enough to her knowledge when, in the course of the summer, she should go to see her son. But now, suddenly, like a bolt of wrath from Heaven, came a letter from the Principal, announcing that Luis Gonzaga's disease had assumed an aggravated form and that "as the young man was anxious to see his family he would travel to Madrid next day by the express train."

They were all startled and dismayed at the news and still more so when, on the following day, the poor lad appeared, so surely stamped with the marks of suffering that he looked like a spectre in a priest's gown. Though his features were shrunk under the cold kiss of Death, they had a strong resemblance to the bright and lovely face of his sister. As has been said they were twins, and were as much alike as a man and woman can be, but that the girl, full of health and vigour, had always had the advantage in strength and beauty over her brother, who had been frail from infancy. Delicate and beardless, he had believed himself destined by Nature for the priesthood and had accepted his vocation to prayer and devotion. His eyes, which in form and colour were the very duplicates of María's were set in dark circles; he had even in childhood always had the hectic flush of fever which had lurked in his veins as though it were part of his temperament, and now, when the end was drawing near, it was an internal fire, consuming his existence. The flowing black robe

revealed every angle of his emaciated frame as he sat or walked; his voice was that of a man speaking in some deep, invisible airless pit, where the sound dies away in dull vibrations like the dropping of hidden waters.

Leaning back in an easy-chair, he responded to the warm and loving greetings of his family with short sentences, in which intensity of feeling made up for brevity of expression, pressing their hands and gazing at them with tender and hungry eyes. His mother, in utter despair, could not control her grief, though her lamentations always ended in schemes for giving her son change of air—pure, country air—the air of cowsheds, or for taking him to some health-giving waters. The first thing decided on was a medical consultation; the sick man smiled incredulously, but he offered no opposition; the long habit of obedience in which he had been so severely trained, gave him strength to endure to be tormented even in his suffering.

Leon had never yet seen him. When he came in the marquesa introduced them:

"Here," she said, "is a brother you do not know."

"Yes—I know him," said Luis Gonzaga, placing his thin, damp, burning hand in Leon's strong one, while he fixed on him a steady, piercing gaze for so long, that his mother, alarmed by his mute examination, added anxiously:

"You know how good he is?"

"Yes—I know, I know," and he turned to look at his sister. "You are leaving Madrid?"

"Nay—how could we go and leave you?" said María with tears in her eyes.

"But your husband will not like to be detained."

"We shall stay at home now," said Leon sitting down with the group that had gathered round the newcomer. "María will not wish to part from a brother whom she has not seen for so long, nor can I wish that she should."

"Nor would you like to leave her," added the marquesa. "You are a model of kindness and amiability.—Perhaps we may all go together."

"When Luis is better," said Leon. "And meanwhile we will put off our journey."

The same, or the following day, Leon found himself alone with his mother-in-law, and witnessed one of her most violent fits of grief, expressed in sighs and lamentations over her miserable fate, and remorseful protestations of economy and moderation for the future. The good lady shed a few tears, pressing her son-in-law's hand with the fondest display of maternal affection and endless terms of endearment.

The Tellería family, she explained, were in financial difficulties; the illness of her youngest son required immediate and considerable outlay; she really could not find it in her heart to treat a party of physicians as her husband treated his back-stairs creditors—his extravagance indeed was positively scandalous; for her part she was weary of the life of superficial display which her husband and sons insisted on keeping up out of sheer pride,

and in spite of all she could say. She was sick to death of balls and parties, and could only endure in silence the hidden misery and incessant care which made a hell of her wretched home. Oh! her education, her birth, her principles, her best feelings were all in revolt against the hideous farce; but she was weak—she was led by her affections, and even though she found no return, she loved the authors of her wretchedness—she could not break them of the habits they had acquired. However, now she was resolved to be firm and energetic; to put an end to the malpractices of her household; to check the marquis in his recklessness; to speak plainly—very plainly—to her sons, to institute a strict—an excessively strict régime; to live on their regular income, and to renounce delusive splendour and ridiculous pretentions in favour of a respectable sufficiency. Then she sat bathed in tears, praying God to spare her daughter such woes as had fallen on her parents' hearth—a mercy which indeed He seemed disposed to grant, since he had blessed her with so exemplary a husband—a wise, a model husband—a man of a thousand—worthy to be a saint, if he were so happy as to win the absolution of the Church.

The same day, or the next, the marquis caught Leon and shut himself up with him in his study, where in pathetic accents, he unfolded the tale of his troubles and drew a picture of his present position with highly effective touches—grouping the shadows, and giving relief to the most immediately important feature: the sickness, namely, of the best and dearest of his children. This misfortune was the final blow to the house of Tellería, weak as it was already and tottering to ruin, though dressed out with tinsel, gilding and useless frippery. He—the illustrious but unfortunate speaker—must face a terrible problem, his honour as a public official and his dignity as the father of a family, were alike in jeopardy. The hardest thing was that the fault was not his but his wife's; she was the instrument of the filtration—a word he greatly affected—the constant filtration which was draining away his fortune.—At the same time he was, he admitted, also to blame; he had liked to keep up an unnecessarily handsome appearance, he had owed it to his name, to his party, to his country—he had counted on the success of operations in the money-market, on the advancement and prosperity of his sons. Alas! in vain; he was deceived and disappointed. He could not wholly exonerate himself to be sure; he had been weak, foolishly weak with regard to the reckless luxury in which his wife had chosen to live; he ought never to have sanctioned with his presence all the luncheons, tea-drinkings, balls and routs which, on fixed days of the week had filled his house with turmoil, and gossip, with pretentiousness and vanity; he ought to have resisted—to have protested; no doubt of that. He had not done so, he had made himself her accomplice; he had been false to the sound conservative principles which were the pole-star and beacon of his life. But now he was determined to stop these abuses, to introduce a radical reform of his household, to insist on economy, to maintain domestic order, which was the basis of all virtue, public or private.

Nor was his son-in-law to suppose that he had discussed this painful subject with the object of obtaining any assistance to get him out of his difficulties; no—this would ill become his dignity, which was extremely susceptible on such matters—his only purpose was to let Leon know, once for all, the painful truth, so that he might use his influence in the family and point out the abyss that lay at their feet. The illness of his favourite son was a great grief to him, and he cared for nothing now in this world; he was the victim of a fatality, of all the desperate ills that weighed on his ungovernable country—a poverty-stricken land in spite of its fertility. How was a man to make headway against the

difficulties of such a state of things? Why, he himself—the marquis—ought to take sulphur baths for his rheumatism, but he could not, he did not care to undertake the journey. Duty kept him in Madrid by the side of his invalid son and prohibited his spending on himself the money which was needed to prolong that precious life—a young man of a thousand, almost a priest, and quite a saint sent down from heaven!—But the marquis knew where his duty lay and was prepared to fulfil it. His rank as a Spanish nobleman required it; still he craved the advice of a sympathetic and disinterested friend, who might encourage him with brave words and help him by spirited example; he needed an upright, judicious and outspoken man who hated all shams; he wanted moral support, purely moral support.

“Moral support and nothing more,” he repeated with a deep sigh, as he wrung Leon’s hand.

If praise, well-merited praise, could have made Leon vain, he must have been elated when a few days later his mother-in-law said with an accent of perfect sincerity:

“It is strange but very certain, my dear son, that a man may have a warm good heart with a head absolutely devoid of religious notions.” And when the marquis added:

“I believe you are the best man alive. You are good enough to make me believe in a Utopia—and you know I am not apt to believe in Utopias. I cannot tell you all I feel when I think of the interest you take in the credit of the family. You appreciate the fact that even in the storm and deluge of passions the Family must be respected! Yes—society is being submerged in a universal flood, but the Family will float—the Ark!”

Truth to tell, Leon cared less for the safety of his wife’s family, which the marquis had so elegantly compared to that of Noah, than for the melancholy state of her twin-brother and for María’s distress at seeing how ill-prepared her parents were to face the sorrow and the expenses which were gathering round them.

CHAPTER XVII.

DESERTERS.

In fact the doctors' verdict was a hopeless one, though they thought the end was as yet far off, and this brought some relief and even hope to the anxious household. Time, whether future or past, is a great consoler, and a misfortune postponed, like a misfortune long past, is lost on the vague and distant horizon behind which lies the wide realm of forgetfulness. The Tellería family settled down into comparative ease of mind, and its members by degrees reserved their usual tone and demeanour. Gustavo was elected and spent his days in the Congress chamber. His mother, though she could not entirely throw off the anxiety that weighed upon her, resumed that sweet expression of bland conformity to the ways of the world, mixed with a certain plaintive pietism which implied that she was, on the whole, resigned to enjoy herself, and the futility of life filled up a large portion of her time.

One morning Leon found her in a state of bewildered indecision, contemplating a collection of summer hats that had come from a shop in a large basket covered with oil-cloth; there was every variety of headpiece conceived, month after month, by the ingenuity of the French mind—birds' nests buried in ears of corn and sparkling with beetles, baskets piled up with tufts of moss, straw platters with wild flowers, round helmets, formless mats cocked into corners, saucepan-shaped erections with flat brims trimmed with hummingbirds, turban hats wreathed with gauze veils, in short every extravagant and absurd device that a milliner can create to tempt women to hasten their husbands' ruin. The marquesa examined them all, criticising each with a sharp or a severe remark, as became a woman of superior taste. Some she tried on before the glass, turning her head from side to side to judge of the effects of shape and colour, and at last she put them all back into the basket:

"I will not take any of them," she said. "It is quite possible that we may go to France and then I can get all I want there, as I have in former years, and bring home something new, quite new—I will make it all right with the Aduana (custom-house). Yes it is quite possible we may go to France; you did not know, Leon?"

Leon with María and Luis Gonzaga had assisted at the review of the hats, giving his opinion when it was asked. The conversation now turned from the fashions to the custom-house duties. The twins sat silent and sad, more particularly Luis, who kept his eyes fixed on the flowers in the garden which was full of rhododendrons and lovely pink-flowered azaleas.

"You did not know?" the lady repeated. "That wretched boy Leopoldo is leaving us to-day. He is off to Biarritz with some other young fellows—friends of his. I could not prevent him—I explained to him that as we had all remained at home to be with Luis, he ought to stay as well. He says that he requires sea-baths and gave no end of reasons—he is taking advantage of the convenience of going with the Duke de Ceriñola and Count de Garellano who have secured a saloon carriage."

On enquiring of a servant for Señor Polito they learnt that he was breakfasting out, and that he intended to go straight from his friend’s house to the station without coming home again. His packing was done and his trunks locked. This extraordinary proceeding, proving how much family and filial feeling her worthless son could boast of, was a deep grief to the marquesa, who, with all her follies, lacked neither tenderness nor the sense of right. Leopoldo, she frankly admitted, had been shamefully ill-brought up—though by no fault of hers—and was a hardened scapegrace, impervious to all good feeling, and capable of leaving his family in the lurch in their hour of greatest need if he saw a chance of riding a borrowed horse, of driving a friend’s coach, or riding in a friend’s phaeton, of being hand and glove with some sprig of the nobility or staking a few dollars at cards.

The marquis, who had just come into the room in an elaborate light-coloured spring suit, heard the news with the utter indifference which some people assume as the very acme of good taste.

“It is natural,” he said, “boys must amuse themselves. They will be men all in good time, with the ties and troubles of a social position and public life, with rheumatism—for instance here am I, in absolute need of repairs, and I shall be obliged to have them. My doctor was quite furious when I told him I could not get away this summer: ‘What!’ he exclaimed. ‘Señor Marqués! the head of a family ought never to neglect his health. I condemn you to take baths; it is a sentence without appeal!’ In short my dears—I set out to-morrow.”

His wife’s astonishment seemed to be caused by annoyance and disappointment. All were to be free while she was to be a slave, harnessed to the dreary round of a summer in Madrid.

“Our dear Luis,” the marquis went on, stroking his son’s cheek, “gets better every day; I am not anxious about him; nothing will do him so much good as rest. A summer in Madrid with his mother at his side—how glad I should be to stay with you, but I am most unlucky!—Several friends have begged me to share their carriage in the train to-morrow.”

He stopped, finding himself alone with Leon; his wife and the twins had left the room.

“It is really no fault of mine,” he went on as he walked up and down the pretty drawing-room, crammed with a thousand costly trifles of French exportation, tapestry, porcelain, furniture, and all the expensive magnificence which fills our houses for lack of the real works of art which are taken away from their proper place and use, to be stored in museums by an æsthetic government.—“It is no fault of mine; you can easily believe that I go very much against my will. I am truly distressed at the levity of my two sons who have deserted their father’s roof just when poor Milagros most needs their society to cheer her and when Luis is so ill—for he is very ill, it is of no use to deceive ourselves. I believe he will go on getting worse; he may get through the autumn—but the winter.—In any case the boys have behaved badly, very badly. Leopoldo is going to-night and Gustavo to-morrow. I should not have thought it of Gustavo—however, he is going, he is in love, over head and ears in love. The Marquesa de San Salomó starts to-morrow for Arcachon, Paris and le Havre; Gustavo accordingly is going northwards too and the labels of his luggage are addressed for le Havre via Arcachon and Paris—a very nice little journey. The marquesa is very pretty and elegant, and Gustavo is very attractive—whether all they say

is true! who knows? I don't believe a word of it. But there is no doubt that Gustavo's fiery eloquence and his fearless and vigorous defence of the Church made a great sensation in the fashionable world. The ladies' seats were filled quite early with pretty faces under the most elegant hats, and there was a constant murmur of discussion and approval. And it is certainly the fact that women are among the staunchest guardians of the time-honoured creed of our ancestors. Do you hope to pervert the national conscience, you atheists? Then you must begin by annihilating the fairer half of the human race.—The truth is that Gustavo is an admirable speaker; his fervid language moves the Chamber and delights the galleries. Then he has found a congenial subject, a subject that speaks for itself—that appeals to the feelings, to the heart, to all that is most sacred and precious in the soul and which is altogether consonant to the spirit of Castilian nobility. The Marquis de Fúcar said to me yesterday with a knowing wink: 'That young fellow has struck into the right path'—and I replied: 'Oh, yes! Gustavo knows where he is going—and how to get there.' He is so full of talent that, as my friend Don Cayetano Polentinos said to me: 'He is a perfect manual of hopes!' Clever, good-looking, full of eager eloquence. However, I must own I should have liked to see him with more family feeling. I leave home because I absolutely need rest and health; but Gustavo.—Still, I can understand the attractiveness of such a woman as the Marquesa de San Salomó.—Yes, yes, I am coming. (This to a servant who had come in to say that breakfast was getting cold.) Are you ready for breakfast Leon? You too will be weighing anchor I suppose…."

The next day Leon went to see off his father-in-law and Gustavo, who left by the same train though in different carriages and very different society—both however with free passes due to the kindness of some member on the Company's board.

"I could not possibly put off this journey," Gustavo said to his brother-in-law, leading him away to the least crowded part of the station. "If anything happens at home you will telegraph to me at once.—Look, do you see that woman? I expected as much as soon as I heard that my father was going away.—Do you see her?"

"Her—who?"

"Paca, Paquira—there she goes…." And among the crowd, above which surged a mass of plumed and wreathed hats, with gaudy birds, and blue and green veils shrouding pretty faces, like clouds, Leon distinguished a young girl of pleasing appearance and elegantly dressed, disputing with the guard for two seats in a carriage.

"And there is my father with two friends who are getting in with them.—Now, I ask you—what can such folly lead to in a man who ought to remember his age and his duties, the state of his household and his own social position? That mania for remaining young is the ruin of modern society.—Well, if you do not go away be as much as you can with my mother and Luis. My mother has a soft heart and this misfortune has come upon her like a warning from Heaven—a warning that she should cease to regard this life as one long scene of amusement. Will she take the lesson to heart? I fear not. She has a kind heart but too weak a nature. I am furious when I see that swindler Leopoldo getting money out of her. But that is just like her—whatever he asks for she is ready to give him.—Ah, my father has got into another compartment; he is in the next one, with his friends. Well, so long as he saves us from any public scandal. Good-bye; write to me, or send a telegram if anything happens. Arcachon, Hotel Brisset—and then Paris, *poste restante*."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ASCETIC.

Leon was not long in discovering that Luis Gonzaga was out of his element in his father’s house. The lean, angular figure, wrapped in a black gown with a cord round the slender waist,—bare-headed, feeble and drooping, with eyes always fixed on the ground, with a dull, clammy skin and weak swaying neck that could hardly support the head above it, with broad, yellow, transparent hands like little faggots of thin sticks, too weak for anything but to be folded in prayer—wandered like an ominous shadow through the drawing-rooms hung with gaudy papers or tawdry tapestry. It was a dark and dismal stain on the gilded furniture, and the oriental and Japanese decorations, in which the queer figures, like those of a grotesque dream, seemed to harmonise, though remotely, with that of the emaciated student. He was always to be seen wandering and restless, like an imprisoned bird that seeks some escape; and when he cast an eye on the objects that environed him it was to select the most uncomfortable seat in the most obscure corner, where he might pursue his meditations. Now and again the servants, when dusting or tidying a room, would come upon the black and silent form, and pause in their bustle with a mechanical gesture of reverence, while Luis would fly to seek some fresh refuge in this desert of worldly adornment, of profane pictures, of damask and chintz, of satin and rosewood. The hapless, dying anchorite, as he fled from one corner to another, hunted by his own fevered mysticism, would stumble against a piano, a Chinese screen, a stand supporting a bowl of gold-fish, a pillowy sofa covered up with brown holland, or a nude bronze Venus.—He could not understand this covering up of furniture and uncovering of statues.

The servants did not trouble themselves about him, perhaps because he never spoke to them and never asked for anything out of pure humility; he could endure hunger and thirst for an incredible length of time, and knew no vexations, for his spirit, greedy of mortification, accepted them as a boon. A little lad with a jacket all covered with buttons, a merry mischievous face and a closely-cropped head, nimble of foot and with rough warty hands, was the only person who ever did anything for him, and that against the young man’s will. But he would ask him a few questions:

“What is your name?”

“Felipe Centeno.”

“Where do you come from?”

“From Socartes.”

But not much more; the young anchorite kept his eyes down; the page left him to himself. The other servants all looked sour and disobliging, like men doing penance willy-nilly, and condemned to poverty and abstinence in the midst of luxury and splendour.

The marquesa and María sat for hours with the invalid, trying to cheer him with trivial chat.

“I do not fear death,” he would say with perfect truth, “on the contrary, I long for it with all my soul, as a captive longs for liberty. You do not understand, for you cling to the world—you do not live that inner life, you have not broken, as I have, with every tie of earth.”

His mother listened with a sigh to these seraphic aspirations, which filled her with grief and admiration as she reflected how far she was from such heights of piety. Seclusion and the intense heat had made the poor lady melancholy and despondent.

One evening when Leon was going home he said to María:

“It is nothing but a feeling of dignity, or rather a dread of ‘what people will say,’ that has kept your mother from following the others in their miserable desertion. What a hideous world we live in! But since all the rest have fled we will stay. Your brother is very ill—he may outlive the summer, but on the other hand he may flicker out of life when we least expect it.”

The following day the physician declared that the Tellería’s house, which was in a densely-built quarter, very sunless and ill-ventilated, was quite an unfit residence for an invalid; and it was agreed that he should be removed to Leon’s house, which was in the outskirts of the city, exposed to fresh breezes and peacefully retired from all noise and bustle. The sick man made no difficulties—he never did—and was taken to his sister’s home. He was settled on the ground floor to avoid the fatigue of stairs with a bed-room next to Leon’s study; and the study itself, a large, sunny, cheerful room, to sit in. But none of these advantages seemed to strike his attention; to him a palace and the gloomiest dungeon were alike.

The first day he suffered much from the move and the pain was so constant and so prolonged that his mother and sister were much alarmed; he, in the intervals of the paroxysms, was calm and smiling:

“Why,” he said, “are you uneasy? Why do you shed tears? I am neither alarmed nor sad, but the more I suffer the more I rejoice. I assure you that, seeing death so near at hand, I am full of contentment; though perhaps it may be that the hope of soon finding myself free from this corrupt and earthly body has given rise to some vanity in my soul, or to some other feeling displeasing in the sight of the Lord. I can only pray that if indeed I am too proud to be dying, God will chasten me and condemn me to live yet a little longer.”

He hardly ever spoke to Leon, for whenever his brother-in-law went to enquire how he was, or to sit with him for a while, he always found him engaged in his endless devotions which he would never shorten or postpone even on his worst days. They brought him everything that was choicest and most nourishing to eat, but he always picked out the worst pieces.

“Not that,” he would say, “I like it too well.”

When they begged him to take this or that remedy he always refused.

“But if you would rather not take it,” his sister would say with subtle logic, “mortify yourself by taking it,” and he would smile and give way.

He received visits from various priests, principally Frenchmen, with fringes of hair and three-cornered cocked hats, highly-bred, worldly, soft-tongued, and they discussed the affairs of the Seminary. There was a veneer of polish in their conversation with an affected tone peculiar to certain circles. More rarely there came grave Spanish priests, who, when they are really good men, are the most priestly priests in Christendom, true ministers of God, pious, affable without affectation and full of sound and healthy wisdom. Luis Gonzaga liked their company, but he preferred solitude; still, in conversation he displayed his keen judgment—not devoid of flavour and wit, his perfect piety which none could fail to appreciate, and his gift of grave, subtle and impassioned eloquence. He went every morning in the carriage, carefully wrapped and watched, to church, and came back towards evening; on his return, he meditated for a time on his knees, and would take no food but when his emaciated frame was fainting for lack of it, and even in the midst of his scanty meal he would often be seized with such acute spasms that it seemed as though his last hour had come. He would allow no one to help him to dress and undress, nor to sleep in his room; María pointed out to her husband that sometimes the bed was undisturbed and he must have lain on the floor. The padded sofas and chairs, which the march of industry has placed within the reach of the most modest household, knew not the weight of his bones; he commonly sat on a cane stool without a back and remained there for hours, rigid, weary and bathed in sweat. When he could no longer hold himself up, he would push the stool to the wall and lean his aching shoulders against that, with his head thrown back, his eyes closed, and his hands clasped—he looked like a criminal about to be throttled.

He never spoke of his absent brothers or his father; the person to whom he showed most attachment, and some confidence was María; Leon he never even looked at.

He was often tormented by religious scruples and would sometimes speak of them. If by chance his mind wandered for a quarter of an hour from the contemplation of death he was deeply distressed and blamed himself severely. His ambition was to imitate exactly, or as nearly as possible, the famous and saintly child whose name he bore—that angelic spirit that fled from earth, burnt out by mystical fervours, at the age of twenty-three, and which during its brief existence here was a voluntary martyr to every form of mortification, repressing every natural impulse, and cherishing the inner life of the spirit, by relentlessly cutting off and plucking out every thought and feeling that was foreign to the aim of self-purification and a passionate yearning for salvation.

Like his Jesuit model, Luis Tellería suffered frightfully from headaches. Acute neuralgia, which had frequently attacked him at the Seminary of Puyóo, tormented him no less at Madrid, scorching his brain and upsetting his whole frame; his head felt like a mould filled with molten lead. But through all these periods of intense suffering, his soul, thrown back on itself, revelled in the martyrdom and accepted physical torture with a defiant rapture which bordered on pride, and a sort of delirious luxury. He never uttered a complaint; nay, when his brain seemed turned to fiery serpents he could force his lips to smile. When Saint Luis Gonzaga suffered thus, his Superior advised him not to think so much and he would have less pain. His friends gave his namesake the same advice; but the young man, rejoiced at the implied comparison, answered:

“You wish me to think less that I may have less headache, but it would hurt me far

more to try not to think.”

His physician ordered him a variety of soothing and other medicines. He took them as he was desired when his mother besought him with prayers and sobs; but the medicine he preferred was a scourge of leather with iron spikes which he always carried twisted through his girdle. His sister often stole on tiptoe to his door at night, and found him on his knees in front of the crucifix which he had placed at the foot of his bed.

The Seminary of Puyóo could boast of many saintly men and many wise ones, some clever and some worldly, but all agreed to sing the praises of Luis—of his virtues and of that holy hatred of himself which, notwithstanding all that is preached in its honour, would seem to be a somewhat archaic form of piety. Nevertheless, the very tendency of modern devotion to come to a compromise with good living and easy sleeping, makes the resolute abstinence and voluntary martyrdom of the marquis’ son, all the more praiseworthy. His fame was great throughout the catholic world and talked of even in Rome.

He lived habitually in tranquil silence, and in spite of his sincere affection for his parents, he had fought out many a desperate battle with himself to keep his mind from ever dwelling on the thought of them, so that nothing should alienate his mind from the constant presence of God which was the sole aim and end of his hopes and sufferings. His talents were as conspicuous as his saintliness; he had made rapid progress in his studies and was so versatile and keen-witted that he had early mastered philosophy and theology, and could argue so closely that the most practised debaters were astonished. But this became a great anxiety to his conscience, for all these praises jarred on his humility; so, for fear they should make him vain, he affected stupidity; to be treated as the lowest and least in his college was his greatest desire, and it was only by the peremptory command of the Superior that he consented to display his talents, but then his convincing logic and persuasive eloquence drew tears from the most strong-hearted. He always obeyed his Superior, was exact in his observance of rules and regulations, and achieved such perfect command of his senses that at length he seemed to have lost them; his closed ears and eyes always fixed on the ground, paid no heed to anything that went on. He passed other people without even seeing them; now and then he would take a walk with his companions, but he observed nothing. He had registered a vow never to look on the face of a woman excepting his mother or his sister, and he kept it with the utmost strictness. By such a system he must surely keep his spirit pure—almost as pure, as that of the babe unborn!

When his doctors pronounced his illness incurable, he declared himself infinitely happy, nay, he rejoiced so fervently in the idea of suffering much and dying in torments, that he made a crime even of that joy, and asked his spiritual director whether he had not in fact sinned in glorying in the certainty of approaching death, and if it were not a snare of vanity. When his conscience was set at rest on this delicate point, he watched the progress of the disease and aggravated it in secret by his austerities, and by never following the advice of his doctors. The decision of the Superior to send him home when death seemed certainly near, had at first greatly grieved him; but then a plan formed itself in his mind that reconciled him to being removed to Madrid, and to an imprisonment in the splendid rooms which to him were like a reflection or embodiment of his own disease, no less horrible, diabolical and revolting.

Thus, in direct contravention of all natural law and instinct, he encouraged his disease

as we cherish a precious plant; he fed the monster that preyed upon him, triumphing in the wasting and decay of his miserable flesh, which he regarded solely as a burden.

“The world,” he would say, “is a foul and narrow alley in which mankind revels and struggles as in a wild delirium. We are all condemned to pass through it, disguised in the loathsome mask of our body. How happy are they who are soon at the end, and who may then cast aside the mask, and appear as they are before God!”

This was the angelic spirit, the enthusiastic and ecstatic soul, full of faith and contempt for the world, that was worthy to give our age what, indeed, it still lacks—a Saint, if the nineteenth century did not seem inclined, on the contrary, to break the die that coins saints. To be sure Luis did not work miracles; but who can tell whether he may not have had the power, and have concealed it in obedience to his pious habit of chastening his vanity? Some indeed said that all this piety was nothing more than a well-acted part; but this, in fact, was without foundation; those were nearer the truth who said that sanctity, like chivalry, has it Quixotes. Luis was pious in good faith; if he deceived any one it was himself, and he certainly was magnanimous and heroic. Not one of the young novices who at that time tried to imitate Saint Luis Gonzaga—and there was a perfect mania for it among the aspirants to the priesthood—could compare with Tellería in the closeness of the copy. Still, no one can imitate the inimitable, and of what avail is an exact reproduction of certain acts and words when all that is most essential is overlooked or ignored?

My readers may perhaps say that this figure is an anachronism, a reminiscence of the middle ages. But it is not; it is a sketch of our own day; at the same time, to see it you must know where to look for it, and that is not in a fashionable promenade. They do exist, these seraphic youths, and are the glory of our Church. The nineteenth century—the richest and most encyclopedic of the centuries—has produced them as it has produced every type. Ours is a monstrous synthesis of all the ages, and who can foresee how far it will go before it has ceased shuffling and mingling its own inventions and marvels with the relics and curiosities of the distant past?

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MARQUESA GOES TO A CONCERT.

Leon's house was to the north-east of Madrid, on one side overlooking the town with its pretty, bright houses and verdurous gardens, and on the other, miles of dusty waste. The capital of Spain lies within strict limits, as laid down by its builders; it does not straggle and melt away into the country and is not enclosed in that half agricultural, half urban zone which surrounds many cities and through which the bustle of the streets imperceptibly dies away into the silence of the fields. The medley of dwellings ends abruptly; not a house has dared to part company and step forth, for fear of heat, of cold, and of thieves. It reminds us of a vast caravan settled down for a night's rest and which will be raised in the morning to pursue its march without ever looking back at the place of its encampment.

On the eastern side of the house lay the melancholy landscape of parti-coloured downs—in winter showing a prevailing, dingy green tint, in summer yellow, grey and brown; fields that are never tilled, that are swept by the winds that dance in the hollows of the hills and fling clouds of dust in each other's teeth. Here and there the dreary monotony is broken by a smoking brick-kiln, or a lonely and forlorn house which, if it has any expression, it is that of astonishment at finding itself there. The brick factory is surrounded by hovels constructed of straw and mud—architectural efforts which the house-martin, the mole, and the beaver would laugh to scorn; and round these huts, that a good kick would demolish, those eager speculators in nastiness, the scavengers, busily analyse the morning's dust-heap, raking in the mounds of rags, sweepings, paper and other nameless trash which form the daily refuse of a great town. A little way off, groups of half-naked brats are at play, their dirty brown skins scarcely distinguishable from the soil. They look as if they had just sprung from a crack in the earth and must vanish there again—graceful, blaspheming, mischievous creatures, engagingly and innocently impudent, a combination of angel and gipsy. Here too, routing away the heaps of refuse, sneak numbers of mangy dogs—not above biting your calf if you give them the chance—and here, in April and May, starveling hens bring out their broods of chicks and teach them the rudiments of gaining a living. Here and there is a pool of stagnant water into which the sky looks down, astonished to see itself so dingy; black caravans of ants cross the land in every direction, loaded with tares stolen from some carelessly sown field. In the mornings the silence of these barren solitudes is broken by a delightful pastoral concert—the bleating of the flocks that wander from Vallehermoso to their pasture at Abroñigal to return in the evening, when the sweet stillness of the twilight is disturbed by their low, melancholy tones. Goats too go by, jumping and butting, and meditative asses for milking, whose shrill bells are heard at break of day at the door of the consumptive sufferer, pass calmly by.

This dismal, drouthy, thankless, stubborn landscape, with its gloomy suggestion of robbery and assassination and its look as of an abandoned graveyard—this landscape, which does not invite and yet detains the traveller, whose yellow stony stare stays his steps

and makes his heart quake with Dantesque terrors—is a very different scene when night has fallen on it, when the winds are at peace and a mysterious calm broods over it all, under the immensity of the starry sky. The purple arch looks so high and remote that the eye and mind throb as they gaze upward. The wanderer holds his breath as he contemplates the glorious firmament that covers the wide plain of Castile, like a spiritual life bending above the barrenness of asceticism. In some lands the beauty of the landscape lies in smiling meadows, woods and streams, tenderly overshadowed by fleecy clouds. The views from Madrid must be sought overhead in the vast space sprinkled with suns and worlds. From Leon's house, as evening fell, might be seen the fiery glow on the horizon reflected from the setting sun and the pleasing regularity of the landscape which seems to set no bar to the east—where the most vital events in the world's history have taken place; then the successive lighting up of infinitely distant suns, as though each one dropped into its place and burst into flame; the vast vault of the sky, where some stars seem to be eager to rise while others, wearied out, sink to rest; the rapid scintillation of some, which wax and wane; the wondrous fixity of others which pierce, as it seems, with a single shaft of light, the immensity of space; the twinkling hesitancy of some, the solemn, almost stern, steadiness of others, the grand haze of the milky way—and beneath the sky the wide unbroken levels of the earth, noiseless, treeless, streamless, a present image of humanity which lies dreaming—in sleep or in death—with darkened senses under the splendours of the midnight heavens.

"María, give me your arm; I want to go into the garden and look at the sky," said Luis Gonzaga to his sister. It was the end of July and the heat was suffocating. Leon had had a cane seat placed in the garden so that the invalid might enjoy the evening till the breeze from the Guadarrama should begin to blow. The four went out together. The sick man walked a very little way in front of Leon, and as he went he dilated with eager eloquence on the beauty of the scene, on his joy in the approach of death and on the mercies of God.

During the past month his illness had varied greatly; there had been days when he was thought to be dying, and then came days, or even weeks, of such visible amendment that the marquesa began to entertain some hopes. The doctors however encouraged no illusions, but said to Leon, "short of a miracle, he cannot survive the fall of the leaf." On this particular evening he was feeling better, remarkably happy and alert, and unusually eager and quick of speech, except when Leon approached him.

As they were all sitting in the garden, they heard carriage-wheels and immediately after the voices of the Marquesa de Rioponce and her daughter, who had come to persuade the Marquesa de Tellería to go with them to a public concert in the garden of the "*Retiro*." The invitation had already been often repeated, but the lady had always excused herself on the score of her son's serious illness. "Really she could find no enjoyment in anything; how could she take any pleasure when her household was in such anxiety? Her friends she was sure would excuse her, they would not insist on carrying her off to entertainments and would understand that she could not—in fact ought not.… She had sacrificed herself to stay in this furnace to be with her son, she had submitted to make the move to Leon's house, though it was exile—complete exile.… But her feelings as a mother … she could not hesitate. And how could she be seen in public at the gardens when every one knew that her poor Luis was suffering so constantly.… He was better no doubt, much better; you could see it in his face; but in spite of the improvement she—the miserable, anxious

mother—could not think of amusements and music. To be sure, her spirits sadly needed cheering, that she knew very well … and what more innocent or soothing pleasure could she have than a little good music?… But she really could not make up her mind to leave him—not for a single evening. She was so absorbed and fettered by her sorrow that she could not escape from its clutches. Suffering as she was, her very anguish bound her to the side of her dear invalid.”

Her friend found arguments to combat all this declamation, for human logic and a woman’s tongue can find arguments for every circumstance of life.

“It was as clear as day that Luis Gonzaga was better … better? Why, out of danger. It was visible in his brighter looks, his eager gaze, the way he walked about the garden, and the gay tone of his voice when he spoke—the marquesa might go out without the faintest shadow of a doubt and come to the concert. Why not? Was it not her duty to take care of her own health? Was she wise to allow herself to be crushed by groundless anxieties; that high sense of duty which had kept her by her son’s side demanded some care of her own health to enable her to continue to bear her burthen of affectionate solicitude. She could not be required to make such extravagant sacrifices to the injury of her own health, and the thorny crown of abnegation might surely be varied from time to time by the introduction of some little innocent flowers.”

This skilful reasoning, seconded by the love of festivity that seethes in the veins of every native of Madrid, was too much for the constancy of poor Milagros. Still she made difficulties: “she did not wish to go, and besides she must dress, and to get a dress she must go home.”

“What nonsense. You look very nicely, quite well dressed as you are, you want nothing more. You have the art of always looking well whatever you wear, and this evening you really are charmingly dressed as if you had guessed that you were going out.”

At last her son’s entreaties persuaded her, really in spite of herself.

“I will go then, if it is only to please you,” she said tenderly. Luis pulled two roses from a bush by which he was standing and gave them to his mother to pin to her dress.

“I know you like the simplest kind of adornment,” she said to him with a smile, “and I am only going to oblige Rosa and to please you. I am of your school, dear boy; obedience sometimes is doing the thing we like. Good night.”

“Good night, mother.”

And the carriage rolled away, carrying the marquesa towards the blaze of gas that lighted up the haze of city dust and the exhalations of the dog-days.

CHAPTER XX.

THE OLD, OLD DRAMA.

"María dear, are we alone?" asked Luis pressing his sister's hand to his heart.

"No," said she, looking anxiously at a dark shadow that came towards them from the other side of the garden, "here comes…. No," she added, after watching it for a minute, "he has turned round; he is walking up and down…. He does not seem to dare to join us—he seems to be afraid of you, or, if not afraid, to feel a respect—a great respect for you. His conscience cannot be at ease in your presence."

"Do not talk nonsense. Respect for me, a miserable sinner! Besides, my dear, men like your husband respect no one and nothing. In his heart he mocks and scorns us."

"No, that he does not, I assure you," said María firmly. "I assure you he does not scorn us. Leon is thoroughly good and he will learn to believe; yes, he will believe. There, do you see he has turned again, but he keeps away."

"He is very sad," said Luis, gazing at the shadow slowly wandering up and down like a soul in torment. "He looks as if some great misfortune had crushed him; and yet he has health, he is rich, he has this world's goods in abundance. Look at me—sick, dying, bereft of everything, poor and unknown, and yet I am happy. This evening my soul is full of peace and contentment—it is as though a strong and tender hand were lifting it up to heaven." He put his face quite close to María's, looking straight into her eyes and added: "María, I am dying."

"For God's sake do not say that!" she cried in terror. "You are better, you will get well…."

"I cannot bear to hear these empty platitudes from your lips; they are all very well for doctors and people who have no true Christian faith. I am dying, and I am glad to die. This morning when I was at Mass I fancied I heard a celestial voice announcing that my end was near, and from that moment I have felt that triumphant rapture which still possesses me. All my thoughts to-day have been of thankfulness and joy; when they sang the *Te Deum* I felt such a rapture of happiness that at last I began to fear lest it should in fact veil some kind of human pride and be an offence to God."

"But you will not die…. You will not die!" said María caressing his head.

"Ah! your soul, contaminated by the world's breath, cannot understand the exquisite joy of dying. To you the word has no other sense than that given it in the dictionary and in the conversation of the unrighteous. Rejoice at my death, child, rejoice as I do, and thus you may learn to long for your own! Ah! my dear sister, one, and only one thought mars my happiness, one single worldly anxiety still links me to the burden of the flesh. Do you know what it is? Bring your chair quite close for I cannot raise my voice."

She did as he desired.

“My great trouble is to know that your precious soul, the twin of my own, as your body is to mine, remains in constant danger of being infected by him…. This idea disturbs my last hours on earth, and though I hope to gain much by entreating the Lord for you, still I am uneasy.”

“I—infected! with what? You know me very little, nor the heroism and constancy with which I can defend my faith, small as it is, humble and dim, a mere reflection of yours, which is as great and as bright as the sun. Have no fears for me. I told you before that there was no danger; I explained to you that, loving him even as I do, I always preserve a fixed impassable gulf between us. He wished to bridge the abyss. So did I, and we made the attempt; but since talking to you I see that nothing can do it short of a miracle.”

“Well, not a miracle, but a special intervention of His grace … and this you ought still to hope for. Ask it of Him without ceasing, and meanwhile do not neglect for a day—for an instant—the precious work of your own salvation. Devote yourself to that, María; regard your life on earth as a ladder by which to scale Heaven; cultivate the inner life, strengthen it by unfailing devotion, arm yourself with patience and crown yourself with sacrifice, for your situation is a perilous one. Your liberty is fettered; through a fatal error of your youth you are bound to a man who will strain every nerve to drag you out of the only path that leads to eternal glory. So that you have in fact a double task before you. Your sorrows will be terrible—you must sweat blood, drink gall, and suffer those lacerating tortures of the soul which are more acute than the flames of the martyr’s stake…. Poor, poor, darling sister!… When the Fathers of the Seminary sent me home to Madrid I was miserable. ‘Why,’ said I, ‘will you send me to that hotbed of sin? Why not let me die here in peace?’ But I was resigned to obey when a sudden thought flashed upon me: ‘Rely upon it the Lord has some good work for you to do there’ … and I soon saw what it was. This voice, so soon to be silent to the world, might yet utter some precious words to the sweet and innocent soul that the Lord would fain keep for his own. God knew full well that you were the being I most love on earth; he formed us as one, and our feelings, like our faces are intimately kin; we both had a natural taste for the spiritual life; why, when we were little enough to play games we would make believe we were martyrs. Our life together in that dreary little town laid the foundation on which we each had to build up a structure of piety. My vocation to the priesthood preserved me from contact with the world. You wandered from the path of light into darkness; and in that darkness, when the eyes of your soul were blinded, you married … but whom? I do not condemn marriage, which is a holy estate, but your choice. However, the good seed in your soul will fructify in spite of everything; yes, thrive and fructify…. I, by a special mercy, have come to die in your arms; I was sent to you that you might see and hear me.”

“Blessed be God for that,” cried María passionately. “I thought that in your pious retreat you knew nothing of what was going on here; I thought you knew nothing of my husband’s views.”

“We know everything there; I knew his deeds, his opinions, I had heard of his amiable person and of his many natural good qualities. I knew too of the vices that are undermining our wretched family—vices which between you and me can be no secret. Our poor father does not lead the life of a Christian gentleman; our mother is wholly given up to worldly vanities; Leopoldo is a dissolute rake, sunk in wickedness; and Gustavo,

though he is an energetic defender of the faith, does it with too much ostentation and more out of vainglory than from any religious zeal. They all forget that beauty, human glory, riches, honours and applause, are at last no more than food for the worms that eat our bodies, and that whatever pains they spend on anything that is not a gain to the soul, profits no one but those same horrible worms … you alone seem to me to have some light of holiness and virtue, which shines conspicuous; but even you, superior as you are to the others, are not devoid of evil and are in danger of losing your soul….” As he spoke his voice suddenly failed him and his words died away in a gurgle, as though a hand on his throat were strangling him.

“I am suffocating,” he murmured indistinctly, throwing back his head. “I cannot….” He could scarcely breathe and he writhed in his seat with pain and helplessness.

“Leon, Leon!” María called in extreme alarm.

“It is nothing … do not call,” said Luis with great difficulty, as he began to recover his breath. “The hour has come … it is not far off … give me your hand, do not leave me.”

Leon ran to his wife’s assistance.

“It is nothing,” Luis repeated. “There is nothing to be alarmed about…. I thought I was dying … but not yet, no, I have something more to say.”

Then they were all three silent. “It is not wise to stay out here,” said Leon. “The evening air has been heated by the day’s sun and it is like a furnace. Shall we take you to the eastern side, where it is a little cooler?”

“Yes, and it is better there because we hear less of the noise of the road and the bustle of the people.”

Luis rose and went a few steps quite briskly, leaning on his sister’s arm, while Leon followed with the two seats; but suddenly the invalid lost his footing and, clinging to María’s arm, tottered like a drunken man.

“Leon, Leon, for heaven’s sake!”

Held up between them, the hapless youth reached his seat on the other side of the garden and sat gazing at the vault of sky that bent over the plain.

“This reminds me,” he said, as he recovered his breath, “of our beloved wilderness of Avila which was such a perfect emblem of human life; of that glorious night landscape, consisting of a bare stretch of land, and a blazing sky suggesting a sort of mystic tree of which nothing could be seen but the root and the shining flowers…. It is the same here—do you see? The roots in the earth, the flowers in Heaven … rocks below and blossoms above—eternal, unfading, and shedding their promise of everlasting joys.”

Then there was a long silence while nothing was heard but his painful breathing. His eyes were fixed on the stars and he seemed to be counting them, as in his infancy. María was praying speechlessly. Leon took his brother-in-law’s hand, felt his pulse and laid his hand on his forehead, watching him carefully for some time.

“I am quite comfortable,” said Luis without looking at him.

Leon presently rose and left them; his step rang on the path with that bell-like clink

that sometimes is more soothing than music. When the faintness of the sound showed that the master of the house had turned the corner of the garden, Luis called his sister.

“María,” he murmured without moving.

“What is it dear?”

“Soon, very soon, my soul will escape among those hosts of stars, which look as though they waited there to receive triumphant souls … ah how glad, how happy I am!… If I could only make you feel how happy; if I could only make you understand what joy there is in casting off this weary burthen and soaring free. Up, away, to the immensity of space made everlastingly glorious by the rejoicings of the redeemed!… Away, alone, without casting a glance back at this miserable earth. Do you see that wondrous vault of stars? If they, which are so splendid, are not worthy to be compared with the dust that the blessed tread under foot, what must those be which crown the head of the immaculate Mother in the furthest distance, the supremest height … where our gaze cannot pierce?”

“For pity’s sake do not talk so much!” said María anxiously. “Be calm … you are excited.”

“María, I talk to you as a prisoner might when awaiting his release and you interrupt me with your commonplace remarks!—Stupid doctors’ saws.—What now can the health of my body matter to me? The life of the merest insect that settles on my face to sting me is of more value than mine! And how can you expect me to care for your useless precaution when I know that to-morrow—yes, dearest to-morrow, after attending mass, I must bid farewell to this world? I am sure of it; I hear the same voice that has warned me of so many things in my secluded life. I cannot doubt it—it is an announcement from Heaven!—To-morrow, to-morrow.”

María was speechless with dismay. Her brother’s face was like that of a dead man who has suddenly recovered speech and sight; she dared not leave his side for an instant; his sufferings alarmed her, but his eager flow of speech fascinated her.

“Listen to my words,” said Luis, holding her hands, “and mark them, so that they may sound in your ears throughout the rest of your existence. They are the last exhortations of your dying but happy brother; and even if my person lends them no authority my death will, since there is something of the prophet in every departing soul. María, I quite admit that you have already done something towards saving your soul; that you have started on the right path, carrying out, besides the devotions which are incumbent on us all, others of a more special character addressed to the Blessed Virgin and the Saints; but this is not enough, my darling sister; nay, it is as nothing so long as you give up part of your thoughts and time to the vanities and delusions of the world. The devotions in vogue, which allow you to frequent theatres and gay society, to dress with audacious luxury, to drive out always in a carriage, and to foster your pride and extravagance, are a mere farce of piety. Reform your life altogether; flee from the world, avoid gaieties, renounce splendour, rich clothing, and the elegancies of life, walk instead of riding, give up the show and comfort …” and as he spoke he waved his hand as if to strike out each item of the catalogue. “Let it be your aim to be looked down upon,” he went on in his saintly and poetical vehemence. “To be laughed at, to be caluminated, to be despised as ridiculous and unsociable, to be forgotten and rejected by the whole human race. Have no care for the things of earth, but

only for heavenly things…. We were born together, and as our bodies have been twins, growing with one growth even before our birth, so let our souls be as one in the life to come. We will be twins to all eternity, María. Say, do you desire this? Do you long to be for ever one with me in the presence of our Father, can you desire, as I do, that our righteousness may be as that of one, and that the praises we shall sing before the throne of God may sound as one hymn?”

“Yes, yes, I do,” sobbed María, as she flung herself into her brother’s arms. He was in a state of feverish exaltation, almost amounting to delirium, and her brain too was on fire; it was as though she had felt the sweep of some blazing comet in this critical moment of her existence.

“Yes,” she continued, and her hot tears fell on the dying man’s breast. “I long to soar with you, eternally one with you, to be indeed inseparably your twin, to save my soul with yours, and to enjoy the same bliss and glory that you attain to!”

“That is well,” said Luis, “then never forget me. I must depart; but I leave my hopes, my words with you. Listen to me,” he went on in sentences broken by coughing, “your husband, utterly corrupt through his philosophical speculations and his atheism, will always be a terrible obstacle to your salvation. You must surmount these obstacles without failing in the duties imposed on you by the sacrament of marriage. A more difficult position I cannot conceive of; still, I think I can point out to you the right way. None but a superficial union can ever exist between you; your souls are parted by the gulf that lies between belief and infidelity. No true marriage-tie can bind your souls. Still your faith forbids that you should abhor him. Love him with that christian charity which the law of Christ enjoins towards the reprobate; obey him in all that does not contravene your religious practices, acknowledge him as your lord and master in all things so long as you never let his tyrannical atheism enslave your conscience as a Catholic. Always pay him due respect, do him no wrong, and pray for him every day—every hour—not forgetting our parents and brothers, who also need our intercessions. God has given you no children; do you not see in this a curse on your marriage? It is a curse, but at the same time a special sign of grace so far as you are concerned, since, by leaving you childless, the Lord plainly shows that he claims you as wholly his own and signifies his will that you should dedicate yourself solely to him. Ah! we poor twins have much to be thankful for.”

“Much, much!” exclaimed María, carried away by his flood of feeling. “But while you are a saint, I am a sinner!”

“Nay, you will be as much and more a saint than I, for you will suffer and strive, and your triumph will be all the more meritorious. Having no children you can consecrate yourself entirely to the improvement of your inner life. By breaking entirely with the world you can have nothing to fear; and the utter opposition of your ideas to your husband’s, leaves your conscience perfectly free. If, in external matters, he plays the tyrant, you must be his slave; but if he tries to domineer in matters of opinion, pay no more heed to him than to the dropping of the rain. If he revenges himself, suffer in silence; if he smites one cheek, offer the other; but if by insidious argument or diabolical persuasions he tries to insinuate any heretical notions, shut your ears and flee from him in spirit. By yielding superficial obedience you will preserve your liberty of thought. If he forbids you to go to church, stay away, and make up for your absence from public worship

by constant meditation and silent prayer; if on the contrary he allows you to go, do so as often as possible, and aim at that exaltation of spirit which may fit you to receive the Eucharist every day. If he does not seek your society, do not seek his; if he insists on being supreme in all your actions, still let me be supreme in all your thoughts; do all you can for his salvation, but never for an instant neglect your own. Do not try to convert him by talking; it will only excite his atheism, and your best arguments will be your virtues and humility. Never on any consideration join evening parties, either in your own house or elsewhere, and make no friends of either sex; though you cannot make your home a sanctuary, never permit the slightest scandal; an orgy or a meeting of infidels will amply justify you in flying from his roof. And if, after all, some day God should in his mercy touch the heart of your most wretched husband, and enlighten his mind—if he should at length confess the true faith, entreat him at once to consent to a separation so that you may each of you retire to a convent and dedicate the remainder of your lives, apart, to winning heaven."

"Oh! my dear brother," cried María beside herself, "I cannot doubt that God himself speaks to me through you."

Luis pressed his sister's head to his breast. Then suddenly he gasped for breath, moaning as he threw his head back. Life seemed fast ebbing in the struggle; his eyes rolled, till presently he closed them as if to shut out a blinding light; his breathing was a hoarse and laboured sobbing.

"Leon, Leon," María screamed in terror; but all was silent, not a footstep was to be heard.

"Leon, Leon!… It will pass away," she added putting her face close to her brother's and trying to revive him by her appeal.

Then she called again and again, but Leon was not in the garden. She heard no servants, nor any sound but the noises in the road where the children were at play, and a party of thieving dogs were prowling about the gutters. There was not a breath of air to stir the leaves on the trees; all was so still, with a sort of awe-stricken peace, that the very stars seemed to María to twinkle less fitfully than usual, and to gaze down like anxious eyes. She glanced round her and shuddered at finding herself so completely alone with her brother who, to all appearance, was dying. Again she called—nay, screamed; and at last she heard her husband's step coming slowly towards her.

CHAPTER XXI.

A STRUGGLE WITH THE ANGEL.

Our hero, whom we have found to be almost always grave and silent in the midst of the events and personages that surrounded him, performing as it were a wordless rôle with the weary air of a tired-out actor, and who hitherto has betrayed but a very small part of his thoughts and feelings, was this evening more occupied than usual with his own affairs, and was taking anxious counsel with himself. When he had moved the invalid to the eastern side of the garden he had taken a turn round the house; he could hear the chatter of the servants in the yard, and the laughter of the girls and women, who were sitting out in the street to breathe a little fresh air and carrying on a flirtation with the coachmen and grooms from next door. The noise disturbed him, and he went on along the winding path through the vines; then, seating himself on a bench facing the north, with his eyes fixed on the sky, he remained for a long time, his elbow on the back of the seat, his hand supporting his head, and his limbs stretched at ease.

He was learned in astronomy, and he longed for something that might divert his mind from the gnawing pain that oppressed it. What better respite could he find than in the contemplation of the unchanging heavens—the covenant of promise of our high destiny—and in the regularity and order of their motion—the emblem of eternity? His saddened spirit flew away through those shoreless depths as to its native element, and revelled in the thought of those incomprehensible distances and unimaginable masses. High in front of him, solitary, apparently motionless, watching, as it were, from its sublime immutability the endless circling of the other stars, he saw the Pole Star, the Alpha of the great scroll. Round it rolled the Great and Little Bears, Cassiopeia and the rest, and his eye rested on Vega, loveliest of the stars, with a mysteriously melancholy, tearful gaze—a star so beautiful that we long to grasp it—if only we had an arm 1,000,330 times as long as that which would enable us to light a cigar at the sun. To the west sparkled the diamond fires of the Northern Crown, dancing hand in hand as it were, and always in pursuit of the glorious Arcturus—one of the grandest of those distant suns, blazing serenely as if smiling in proud consciousness of its splendour. It was growing late and Arcturus was sinking on the horizon; but opposite rose Pegasus, then the hapless Andromeda, reaching out towards Perseus with the Gorgon’s Head in his hand. Capella alone by the shoulder of Auriga, shedding angry rays like arrows and looking down on us from a distance of 170 billions of leagues. Its burning glance takes seventy-two years to reach us. Close followed the twinkling tangle of the tearful Pleiades, flying from the hot pursuit of Aldebaran. Leon calculated how soon Orion would appear, the glory of the heavenly panorama, and Sirius, before whose splendour minor fires pale. His eye sought the coy glance of Antares and the Scorpion’s head and tail; it lingered on the more conspicuous nebulae, wandered along the Milky Way, where the Eagle spreads its wings and the Swan displays its shining cross; he let all this beauty and glory sink into his soul, reflecting how hard it must be to the uninitiated to conceive of it as a dense dust of stars, till at length he was tired of gazing. Something in the background of his mind seemed to recall him to earthly cares, and a

presentiment of terror; he rose and went indoors.

Going from one room to another he presently heard voices; they were those of María and her brother, talking in the garden, close to the dining-room window. The subdued broken voice, interrupted by coughing, sounded in his ear like María's plaintive muttering and sighing when she told the beads of her rosary. Going close to the window he could hear more distinctly, and though he hated himself for listening, a feeling, something like the morbid curiosity of a criminal, rooted him to the spot. His eyes stared horror-stricken on the couple in the garden and he turned pale as a guilty man might who hears his doom. The very acuteness of his indignation made him presently start from the window and set him wandering about the empty rooms, every door and window having been left open for air; his drooping figure was reflected in the mirrors as he passed, as if they were tossing it from one to another; the birds that were asleep in their cages fluttered as they heard him, and the curtains waved aside to admit him as if he had been some important visitor.

At length he flung himself on a sofa in the library that was now used as the invalid's sitting-room, resting his head in his hands. Now and then he muttered something to himself, or exclaimed as if he were addressing some other person. Then he laughed—a laugh of scorn, of mockery, or more probably of anger—for anger at its bitterest has its sense of humour—and at last a phenomenon occurred in his brain which is not uncommon when wrath and grief meet to work their will on a man in solitude, darkness, and silence.

With his eyes shut—and this is the strangest part of it—he saw the room in which he was sitting and himself just as he sat. Before him stood a queer Japanese-looking figure, black, definite and distinct against a background of brilliantly-lighted colours. The haggard form was seated and as rigid as an inquisitor, the pallid passive face was pinched and disfigured by a constant habit of putting on a sour and mystical expression; the eyes, with greenish lights, were raised to the ceiling or wandered round the room, gazing with indifference at the drawings, maps and prints that covered the walls, or at the matting on the floor.

Leon was asleep—that painful sleep which supervenes on the acuter paroxysms of a suffering so deep that it cannot rise to the surface, but makes itself a channel to the very depths of our being. There was some one else in the room. Who were the group sitting there in solemn conclave? These were Arcturus, Aldebaran, Vega, Capella, Orion, Antares and, glorious above all, Sirius himself…. In his delirious dream Leon saw himself start up, raging with fury and courage; he flung himself on the gaunt dark figure; without a word of warning he clutched him in his arms, shrieking: "Viper you have come to rob me of my last hope! Die…."

The viper fixed on him a gaze of intense anguish, writhing and groaning in his iron grasp, and his frail ribs gave way, cracking like a nutshell.

"Who bid you interfere in the government of another man's home?" said Leon blind with rage. "Who gave you a right to rob me of what is my own? Who are you? Where did you come from, with your hideous boast and hypocrisy of virtue? Of what avail is it that you should flay yourself alive if you have no true spirit of charity?" and the hapless creature, gasping for breath and helpless with anguish, closed its eyes in death under his crushing embrace. Leon, mad with fury, still tightened his clutch; his victim seemed to fall

to pieces in his arms; nothing remained but a black bundle with shrunken shanks, bony grasping fingers and a limp body—broken like a cardboard manikin in the hands of a child….

Then, suddenly, the starry conclave laughed aloud and vanished, each to his proper place; the lifeless mass slipped from the murderer's grasp and was transfigured before him. Its squalor turned to grandeur, its feebleness became strength; it rose and grew stately; a glory crowned its brow, shining wings grew from the dusty form; he saw it stand before him on bare white feet unstained by the dust of earth, and lift its muscular right arm holding a sword of fire. He put his hand to his girdle—he, too, had a flaming sword and he drew it forth and waved it with threatening defiance.

"Coward! do you think I fear your blade?"

"Impious wretch! Die!"

And then between them, her beauty illuminated by the glare of the swords, stood María, lovely and seductive, her eyes glowing with passion while her lips affected a peevish hypocrisy.

"Priest!" she cried, "leave him to me! Do you not see that he is mine—that I love him?"

"Wretch, begone…."

"Oh! what wild raving," exclaimed Leon, passing his hand across his forehead which was damp with cold sweat, and shaking off the hideous vision. Then he heard his wife's voice calling him.

That cry: "Leon, Leon!" rang in his ears like a knell. He rose, and slowly, slowly—grudgingly, almost revengefully—he went into the garden.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONQUERED BY THE ANGEL.

"It is nothing, it is over," murmured Luis as he saw his brother-in-law coming towards them. "A sharper attack than usual … to-morrow…."

Leon stood looking at him but he did not touch him; silent, gloomy, and oppressed by his recent nightmare, he dared not trust his own feelings.

"No," he said to himself, "it is nothing more than an antipathy which will fade into pity—for the poor wretch is dying."

Luis took his sister's hands and addressed her in his weak, quavering, broken voice, half-solemn but excited by the force of the fever that was consuming him:

"The worst danger that awaits you is that you will be asked to yield to compromises, to arrange matters. Guard yourself against this snare of the devil. It is a snare, though it is hidden under roses, my child. Between faith and unfaith no compromise is possible. Nay, can you conceive of any between everlasting life and death? There is no common measure for the temporal and the eternal. Make no concessions, do not yield an inch of the firm and lofty ground you now stand upon. You cannot be religious by halves; if you are not wholly religious you are not religious at all. Our Lord requires that the work, to be perfect, shall be so intimately complete that the abstraction of a single jot nullifies the whole. Beware, I say, beware of the snare!… Compromise is the note of the times we live in, and it has sent more souls to hell than the crassest infidelity…. But you … remember me, think of me. Do not forget that I came here to save you, to call you into the true path, and to die in your arms that my presence should be more real to you. God sent us into the world together and he bids us meet again at the foot of his throne of glory…. María! María…!"

"Be calm; pray, pray be calm," said María in desperate alarm.

Luis opened his eyes and looking up at Leon exclaimed in bewildered accents: "there is some one there! María, who is that man?"

"It is Leon—my husband…. Send for the doctor, do not you think that we ought, Leon? Call the servants—where are they all…?"

María started up and was going to call some one, but her brother clung to her arm.

"Do not leave me alone," he said. "Your husband, did you say; oh, God, what is this doubt that torments me? Is it a foolish scruple, like so many others I have suffered from, or is it a true warning of conscience? Tell me, who is it…? Leon did you say?" But neither of them replied and he went on: "I have offended him? What an idea. I only gave my sister such advice as my faith required of me. It was God that spoke through me … God himself…. It is a mere scruple—and yet even a scruple must be listened to…. Ah! here is my good Paoletti!" But his eyes were still fixed on Leon.

"Padre Paoletti, tell me, have I offended him?" Then after a pause, as though he had heard an answer he added: "no, no, very true. I cannot have offended him, and if I have,

to-morrow—on my death-bed, I will ask his forgiveness. Then, too, I will warn her—María … once more….”

“We must carry him indoors,“ said Leon.

“I will call the servants,” gasped María who could hardly speak. But the dying man pushed her aside, as she and Leon were about to lift him.

“Let me be,” he said. “Sit down by me.” María obeyed, and bent her head over his. “To-morrow, to-morrow when I have received my Saviour—I will deliver up my soul … but how cold it is! It is snowing, is it not?” his dimmed eyes wandered heavenwards.

“There are no stars to-night,” he murmured hoarsely. “A dark night before the dawn of glory. To-morrow—I will ask forgiveness of you all, and fall asleep in the Lord’s arms—you see I am quite easy now, quite at rest…. My only fear is that this respite may prolong my life. Oh! I do not long for health, I do not want to be better, all I ask is to suffer, to choke—suffocate—die. The relief I feel now….”

His head fell gently on his sister’s shoulder and lay there as helplessly as though his neck were broken. He shut his eyes, his breathing was no more than a fluttering sigh. He was dying as softly as a bird drops to sleep.

“It is over,” said Leon bending over him.

María clung to the body and kept it from falling to the ground, and when the servants came hurrying out and carried him to his bed, she kissed him passionately again and again, kneeling by the cold form. Leon, hardly certain even now that he could be dead, came to the bedside to feel his pulse and hold a mirror to his lips; but his wife started to her feet and standing in front of her husband, with a prohibitory gesture and eyes flashing with horror and tears, she cried out in a tone of furious scorn:

“Wretch! would you dare to touch him?”

CHAPTER XXIII.

WEATHER PERMITTING.

The sky was in a state of anarchy, neither clear nor overcast, blue and smiling in one quarter, dark and gloomy in another. The tempest seemed about to do battle with the fine weather, for they paused looking at each other from opposite horizons and disputing the sky inch by inch. The sun, as a neutral party, alternately shone down upon the earth and hid behind the clouds, leaving it cold and dark. Notwithstanding the crowd on the *Plaza de Toros* did not seem to fear the result. It was an afternoon like most April or May days in Madrid, rough and windy, but, on the whole, inviting rather than repellent; bringing more dust than rain, and threatening worse than it performed, beyond drenching wedding parties, blowing up the women’s skirts and whisking off the men’s hats.

The amphitheatre was crowded but dull. Excepting for a few minutes occasionally it was all in shadow. The high structure of iron, painted slate-colour, looked dingier than ever, its elegant suggestion of manufactured architecture being little in harmony with the boisterous, clamorous, inebriate, and debasing character of the national Spanish festival. The uniformity of dress, which increases every day to the great loss of æsthetic effect, would give a public entertainment the aspect of a solemn congregation or a patriotic meeting, if the picture were not disturbed by the roar of voices—now an impatient murmur, now harsh yells of rage, in every key of passion, pleasure and frenzy, forming the hideous music of the sanguinary opera of which the libretto is the struggle in the arena. Coloured handkerchiefs are fast disappearing; still, a few bright spots of red and yellow, like gaudy butterflies, here and there relieved the huge black spot, and the incessant flutter of fans gave animation to the long rows of men and women. The uncovered seats on the shady side, especially those affected by the youth and students of the town, were closely packed with heads in ranks like the seeds in an ear of maize. The less crowded places on the sunny side were occupied by busy knots of press reporters, by country folks, by a hundred or more of Andalusians, in manners and dress a grotesque caricature of the *torero*; of hardworked artisans, seeking in this wild orgy of excitement some respite from the dreary round of labour. The distinguished society of *mataderos*, butchers, leather-dressers, tanners, the myrmidons of the slaughterhouse and purveyors of fodder, seethed like a boiling pot; and the hubbub, with the fitful ringing of a bell, sounded like the spasmodic progress of a neighing and kicking beast. The detestable medley of slang and dialects rose up like the hissing of some coarse and malodorous fry as it simmers over the fire. The *chula* muttered a hoarse oath as she insolently forced her way through the crowd, diffusing a mixed perfume of musk and garlic; and the miserable lout whose natural destiny it was to clean tripe and bladders, being incapacitated by nature for any more worthy function in life, made a speaking-trumpet of his hand to hurl a torrent of abuse, flavoured with a hot vapour of raw spirits, at the president’s box, where it would, no doubt, reach the ears of some official of the Spanish capital—the governor perhaps, or perhaps the president of the council.

The front seats of the amphitheatre presented a more pleasing spectacle; here there were a good many white mantillas decking pretty heads, on which camellias as white as milk or as red as blood, bloomed as naturally as though they had grown there. The ladies of the *demi-monde*, with their unmistakable and characteristic air—a sort of family likeness—their obtrusive elegance and vulgar assertive beauty, formed a notable proportion of the long row, elbowing here and there a woman of still lower morality. Some of these faces were of wonderful beauty, others mere masks of white and red, and burnt cork. Respectable families of the middle classes filed in, led by the father—a merchant perhaps, or a rising stockbroker, the head of a house of business, an infantry officer, a retired magistrate, a contractor for the supply of bacon to the public asylums, a stage baritone, an attorney, a professor of music—in short, whatever you choose—and closed by the youngest child, a little schoolboy. Here and there might be seen the essentially Spanish figure of a wealthy woman of the shopkeeping class; showy, generally very stout, with a certain loftiness as of a Roman matron grafted on to her florid native smartness; equally proud of her black eyes and her sparkling rings which cut into the flesh of her fat fingers; shedding contemptuous glances on all sides, as much as to convey that she is a very great lady and very rich, that her shop, with its stock of ancient furniture, or her butchery, or her pawnbroker's parlour, is as good as the Bank of Spain, and that so long as she lives there will be no lack of occupation for the horrible gladiators below, who are loitering round the arena in green and gold, or crimson and silver, their cruel weapons in their hands and their spirits high with bold adventure. There is in the lavish proportions and air of satiety of these women, in their pretentious and sometimes cynical expression—particularly when they traffic in human creatures—an indefinable look of depravity suggesting Vitellius, Otho, or Heliogabalus; excepting that they are apt to turn pale when they hear the fatal '*morituri te salutant*.'

Behind are four long rows of humbler folk, the respectable class looking down on the disreputable class, very unpretending persons, plain, pretty, or commonplace. Above, in the boxes, there are more white mantillas—some covering grey heads, others framing the sweetest specimens of youth and beauty; fiery carnations or starry jasmine in their hair, cheeks like blush roses, eyes black or blue, with lashes quivering like butterflies; cherry lips, a glance as fickle as the light nod of a flower in the wind, and smiles that reveal teeth like pearls; the all-pervading fan with its wordless telegraphy in a thousand colours. This forms the bewildering charm of all large assemblages in Spain—the same in the boxes of a theatre as in the balconies over the streets—whenever there is a procession or a spectacle, or whenever a king makes his entry or takes his departure to do honour to a brand-new constitution.

There were faces there, withered, and faded, which betrayed even at a distance the pains that had been taken to hide their ruin, and others, young and innocent, that hid behind a fan when the loathsome teasing of the bull began; there was no lack of splendour—an atmosphere of elegance seemed to emanate from the style of dress, the glances, the air with which the women were pretty or ugly, and pervaded everything that they wore, from a blossom to the white paint, from the curl that the breeze fluttered on their temples to the jewel that rose and fell with every breath, and the glove that waved as the little hands clapped applause.

There were groups of men too in the boxes, all in black, with their elbows on the

balustrade, and their hats tilted over their eyes, with nothing vulgarly loud in their dress, but talking a language savouring equally of the chamber of deputies and of the bull-ring, a strange medley of high-flown phrases, witty conceits, and slang terms full of point and metaphor, suggesting a mixture of cabbages and roses in a basket of flowers. The tone of their conversation was one of flippant scepticism; that of men who had ceased to believe even in bull-fights, while they directed the fire of their opera-glasses up and down the rows of ladies and made brutal comments on not a few of them. Morality and frivolity were inextricably mixed and fell together on the ear, just as gold and copper alike slip into the slit in a poor-box. The same lips pronounced technical criticisms on the tactics of the arena, and, almost in the same breath, blighted a reputation.

Among them were legislators and men whose daily occupation was the issue of decrees and regulations; some were impoverished aristocrats, some enriched plebeians, wealthy country proprietors, retired bull-fighters, elaborately preserved old dandies, here and there an inquisitive foreigner. But the flower of the moneyed youth sat below, in the places close behind the barrier—the favourite seats of the true *dilettanti*, where a distinguished company of critical spectators sit in judgment, including some names famous in the history of the time; young men who lack neither talent nor culture, and reporters, who dip their pen in the blood of the bull, so to speak, to indite a style of prose which, like the atmosphere of the cheaper boxes, is a steamy compound of raw garlic, musk, and brandy.

The hero of the fight was a bull called Sacristan, a huge brute, broadly marked with black, strong, wild, and well armed. The sound of the Olympian roar that hailed the fury of the beast’s first onslaught was immediately succeeded by a dull murmur of dissatisfaction, and every face—strange to say—was averted, for across the blood-stained arena swept the spectre of a horse dragging its bowels, as a kite drags its tail before it sinks for lack of wind.

The sport went on, though heavy rain-drops were already falling, and at length, when Higadillos, in scarlet and gold, with his knife in his iron hand, was inciting the beast just in front of the president’s box, there was a general stir throughout the amphitheatre. Every one got up, some screaming and some grumbling; there was a universal upturning of heads, pushing of elbows, and trampling of feet; a tremendous thunderclap rattled through the air, and at the same instant the rain came down as though a sluice gate had suddenly been opened in the clouds; a torrent—a cataract, that thrashed the earth like whip thongs.

The confusion was frightful. Annoyance and good-humour vied with each other in curses and jests. The strongest fairly elbowed their way through the weaker, the nimblest leaped from seat to seat between the old and stout, women implored for help, boys howled, the smart bourgeoise had a head like a sponge and the men streamed like Tritons. A few here and there, opened umbrellas which got in each other’s way, their points hooking and catching like bats’ claws.

In the arena, meanwhile, the dripping fighters went on with the sport and the bull, startled and drenched, was in no mood for play. The flood of rain washed away every trace of the blood and the wretched horses snorted up the moist air that refreshed them in their agony. However, it was soon impossible to continue the fight; the flags were streaming, it was hardly possible to see across the amphitheatre. The bell of the tame bull was heard,

and the baited beast, following the sound, was led back into the stable.

The crowd, flying from the rain as if it had been a fire, collected in the passages which could not contain them in spite of their great size. Every staircase was blocked, and as no one cared to leave the place so long as the torrent continued, the vast circular structure was more like a huge barrel of soaked sardines than anything else. Not one more could be wedged in. The women shook their cloaks, the men cursed the skies, and some wrangled to get their money back. Cries, laughter, jokes; feet trodden on; hats shedding little rivulets of water; sneezing, shivering, coughing.

A party of young men from the barrier seats tried to force a way up to the boxes.

"Let us get upstairs," said one, "I think that Leon is there. He will lend us his carriage and go home with the minister."

"And if he is not there we can go with the Fúcars—gentlemen, if you please—allow me.—Go on Polito, why are you staying behind?"

"Confound you! don't you see that I am dying for want of breath?… and wet to the skin? Wait till I have put a tar lozenge in my mouth—what a deluge! what a scene!"

With the greatest difficulty, pushing hard and being roundly abused, they succeeded in reaching the boxes. The crush there was equally great for, as the rain fell obliquely and had flooded the boxes on one side of the amphitheatre, the occupants had crowded out into the corridor behind.

"Here is Leon," cried Polito, going up to a group that stood round some great man. "I say, Leon, will you let us have your carriage?"

"Yes, take it, I do not want it."

"Bravissimo! you are a brick; we can have the carriage—come on!"

Among the men stood ladies in couples, in groups, in dozens, waiting for the weather to clear. Up here every one was in a good-humour, laughing and jesting; for this class of spectators is not so seriously annoyed by a delay which to those below is a serious grievance. Indeed, the unforeseen has greater charms for them than a programme fulfilled; they have plenty of pleasures and a surprise or a little check has a certain relish. After all, the rain is not a serious evil to people who keep a carriage.

"How will those poor people from the open seats get on?" said a lady to her companion, as they came out of their box with an elderly man. "They are really almost justified in asking for their money back. They paid to see the bull-fight and not to get drenched. However, as it was for charity…."

The two ladies stopped to speak to one and another of their acquaintance.

"What fun! What an excitement! It is quite delightful! Where are you going now? What, are you wet?… They are asking for their money back, how glad Higadillos must have been—he was dying of fright…. It seems not to be raining so hard now, but the arena is flooded…. Well, I am going." The speaker lightly laid her hand on the arm of a gentleman who was talking to some others; bankers, deputies and a minister or two.

"Are you coming to dinner?"

"With pleasure; but now? at once?—I have burnt my ships—that is to say I have sent away my carriage."

"Then come with us," said the lady taking the arm that Leon offered. "I have no patience to wait any longer."

"But it is still pouring; you will have to wait at the entrance and the line of carriages will be a long one."

"Never mind, let us go." The other lady followed on the arm of the old gentleman.

"I thought you were at Suertebella. You told me that you were not to come back till next week."

"I came back to-day because Papa wrote to me that he was to arrive soon with a Frenchman—a banker—and I had to arrange matters in the house."

"When I saw you in the box I meant to go round and speak to you; to ask if you had any news of Federico."

"I!" exclaimed the lady with surprise and annoyance. "He does not write to me; he cannot write to me. I heard from his cousins that he was leaving Cuba to go—how should I know where he is going; no where for any good."

"And the little girl, how is she?"

"I did not bring her with me; I left her there. Sweet pet, she is not very well, she has been ailing for some days. When are you coming to see her? I want to get back again; I should not have been here now but for Papa…. I cannot bear to leave her. He is going to have a sort of meeting of bankers at our house; you know … about the national loan. Don Joaquín Onésimo can tell you all about it and I had better say nothing about it."—Here she lowered her voice so as not to be heard by the couple who were close behind them.—"For he would bore us to death with the national debt, and taxable property, and the mortgage of shares. That man is a deluge of administration; but Papa desired me to be very civil; so this evening we four will dine together—quite a family party. I hate ceremony; I am so accustomed to be alone at Suertebella with my little girl that society tires me and upsets me."

The two couples made their way down with considerable difficulty. The wet and dripping mob waiting for the rain to cease had no mind to be accommodating to those happier individuals who had carriages.

"Allow me, gentlemen—would you mind…?" And at each entreaty they advanced a step or two.

Once down the stairs and safe in the large hall they drew a breath of relief, as though they had accomplished a long and difficult journey, though it was full of people impatiently watching the incessant drip from the eaves, and putting out their hands to feel whether the storm were abating. Some ventured forth under umbrellas, others made a rush for an omnibus. Gentlemen's coachmen were on the look-out for their masters, and Pepa's took up the two ladies and the two gentlemen and rolled off, splashing up the mud, down the broad street which turns out of the Carretera de Aragón (Aragón Street). There it turned into the court-yard of the Fúcars' house and drew up under a covered vestibule—a

large alcove with scagliola columns and two enormous candelabra, shrouded in linen covers and looking like a couple of Carthusian friars.

Leaving the great staircase on the left the party went into the splendid rooms on the ground-floor which were arranged for daily use; the first-floor rooms—the most airy, sunniest, pleasant, and by far the most magnificent, were only opened to the public on great occasions; thus it is that vanity overrides sanitary considerations.

CHAPTER XXIV.

REMINISCENCES—ANXIETIES.

They sat down to dinner, as Pepa had said, a party of four. Happy to find herself with friends so good and few, the millionaire’s daughter showed her pleasure frankly but discreetly during the meal, after which they all went together into the drawing-room where Pepa received her more intimate acquaintance. There she had collected various treasures of art and numberless trifles of French workmanship, adding prettiness to splendour, and novelty to beauty, all so skilfully arranged to surprise or delight the eye that the palace of caprice itself could not be more delightful. They sat together for some time till the Countess de Vera left to go to the theatre, Don Joaquín Onésimo offering to escort her. Then the other two were alone.

On a crimson divan, over which hung a genre picture representing a squalid party of gypsies with their asses—fashion attributes a very high value to this class of work just now, and pays for them their weight in gold—while not far off, on a pedestal representing three elephants’ heads, stood a Chinese vase in which grew a drooping broad-leaved begonia—Pepa and Leon Roch sat side by side; she very communicative; he gloomy, and silent.

“It all happened just as I foresaw,” said Pepita. “Federico, far from improving at Havana, went from bad to worse. I told papa he would, here he had got into some absurd and discreditable business, and there … well it would seem that distance makes men reckless. I am ashamed when I think of it; I cannot get used to the idea that my husband could be guilty of such dirty work. Why, out there he had to hide and make his escape, for my father’s correspondents there would have put him in prison … when I think that it was my madness, my idiotic folly, that brought this disgrace on my father’s house!… All the mischief arose from that cursed passion for gambling; but who could control it? It was in his blood—part and parcel of his being. I assure you,” she added after a pause and passing her hand across her eyes, “that I have gone through hours of intense misery and untold struggles; for there were some things that I could not tell papa, and at the same time I was forced to apply to him to get out of the compromising difficulties in which my husband placed me by his enormous losses. But you too have suffered, more than enough Señor de Roch. I do not believe that hearts are made of flesh and blood as anatomists tell us; they are stone and iron which cannot be broken, or mine must have been crushed. I have shed so many tears,” she again wiped her eyes—“that I think I can have none left to shed if any further grief befalls me…. But how could I hope to see the fulfilment of all the fancies and bright dreams of that bygone time? Ah! reality tames us; we live to learn. Good heavens! when I think of what I have gone through for mere appearances!… Indeed Leon, I have suffered cruelly. This palace, which to others is a scene of feasting and amusement, to me is full of sorrows; there is not an object which does not bear the mark, as it were, of my sighs; there is not a spot of which I could not say: ‘Here I cried on such a day; there I thought I should die of grief.’ If I were to try to tell you all I should never come to an

end.” And Pepita waved her hand to indicate the endlessness of what she might relate if she were not afraid of boring her friend.

“No, no, tell me everything. Do I not know the worst, the really incomprehensible beginning of it all: your marriage to that rascal Cimarra? That you, with your morbid imagination—a sort of moral atrophy in spite of your good heart—should have made such a mistake I cannot understand; but that your father should have consented!… To be sure, when his party came to the front and made Federico a provincial governor, he seemed for a time to have amended his ways; he was the model man in office. When he held a high position in the exchequer no one could have recognised the old Cimarra in that punctual, almost stoical functionary; he was so anxious to be thought a judicious and important personage that it was quite ridiculous, and I believe your father allowed himself to be taken in by the masquerade. Besides, your father had dealings with the exchequer in those days; I heard something of a loan on the salt tax and a mortgage on salt mines … but it was you, Pepa, who were to be given in pledge and put in the power of that ruffian. I was not surprised at the trouble that followed, but oh! how deeply I pitied you. At the time when you married I was happy; since then … but you see I know the worst of your miserable story, and if there is anything I do not know, lose no time in telling me.”

Pepa laughed; then turning to her friend with a reproachful air she said:

“But I like your coolness; ‘tell me, tell me,’ you say? But you tell me nothing. It is not that there is any lack of interesting chapters in your history—nay, of grand, not to say poetic passages, but that you are the most reticent soul alive. You can endure the bitterest griefs without any one ever knowing it. But I am very much interested in what goes on in your house; I know that you and María never meet but at meals, and that not every day. You see, though you are so prudent, your mother-in-law is not. She answers those that ask … and Polito; he tells tales of what occurs—and of what does not occur as well.”

Leon sighed. Pepa hid a smile with her fan and went on:

“You have married into a delightful family!”

There was a long silence during which they both sat gazing at the flowers in the carpet. In this hushed and solitary house, where not a sound was to be heard, a sort of melancholy or sleepiness pervaded the air which was conducive to meditation. Pepa rose and paced the room as though she were racking her brain for some adequate mode of expressing something that was stirring in her mind and that must be said.

The reader has been told that she was not handsome, and why should I repeat it. But there is nothing so bad as to have good in it, nor woman so plain that she has no detail of beauty. Pepa indeed did not lack charms, and to some she possessed them in a high degree; her eyes were effective, small but very bright, with a sweet and caressing glance. What was most conspicuous in her was her thick red hair and the dead whiteness of her skin which gave her the effect of a statue of alabaster and gold. She was tall and somewhat bony, but this defect was qualified by her well-proportioned limbs and the exquisite lightness of her gait, with an air of gentle confidence that was extremely captivating. The volubility of her tongue covered a grave and thoughtful nature; she seemed to have no pride at all, and her manners, somewhat independent of etiquette, were most engagingly frank and cordial. Her caprices and eccentricities were so much changed from what they

were when we first saw her at Iturburua, that she was hardly like the same woman. Sorrow, that tames all, had brandished her scourge over Pepita's head, and there was little left of her old violence beyond a rare and transitory echo. She presently returned to her seat, and for some minutes she silently watched the intelligent but melancholy countenance of her old friend. Leon remained lost in thought, like a mathematician absorbed in the depths of a calculation.

"What are you thinking of?" Pepa suddenly asked.—But it would fill three chapters to say what Leon was thinking of at that moment.

"Of nothing," he said with affected indifference, "of the miseries and farces of life."

"You cannot forget your mamma-in-law?" said Pepa laughing. "Do you never go to her parties? She began them again with great display when she went out of mourning for her son Luis Gonzaga, who died just six months ago, if I remember rightly. I can keep account of the most important events in your family. Would you believe it … her evenings are quite famous."

"Oh, I believe it. They will no doubt become famous."

"The Count de Vera tells me that she gave a capital supper the night before last. Do not you think that your brothers-in-law must have pledged the family standard for a good round sum? But some people really do not know what to do with their money!"

They both laughed, but Leon suddenly turned melancholy.

"Change the subject," he said; "it is a painful one."

"Your mother-in-law has found the philosopher's stone," Pepa went on, "you ought to be proud of having any one in your family who is so clever in that art!… Well, I heard—servants always have the most delightful stories, and they tell each other everything—oh! the most amusing detail … shall I tell you?"

"No, for pity's sake."

"Nonsense, let me tell you."

"I can guess it: that on the very day of the great supper there was nothing to eat; that there was a commotion in the house because some purveyor or confectioner brought a bill for twenty or thirty dollars … oh! I know it all; it is an every day dilemma."

"But perhaps you do not know of the scandalous flirtation that the Marquesa de San Salomó carries on with Gustavo, in his father's house even. Vera told me that they were always together, sitting in a corner, whispering and cooing with an air of mystery and devotion in the most impudent, the most audacious way!… So they say, but perhaps it is slander; so many lies get about."

"So many!"

"And have you heard of her poet?" Pepa went on with malicious enjoyment. "Has not the marquis told you about him? This inspired being whose verses are all about white doves and lilies of peace, the Christian home, the glories of Sinai, the Virgins of the Lord, pious aspirations, the azure empyrean, the spirits of the deep and the soul of Virtue—this sublime Christian poet adores your mother-in-law as his Beatrice." Pepa could not help

laughing. “It is she who inspires him with all these divine visions and metaphysical raptures. It is a pity you should not have seen him; he is quite a character. To talk to him after reading his verses is like falling from the clouds into a mud heap. You have not only dramas in your family but farces!”

“Pepita for pity’s sake do not torture me,” said Leon rising to go. “You know that I can never get accustomed to certain things which some people do not mind at all so long as they do not go on in their own houses. They do not, to be sure, go on in mine; but still, I see them in that of a man who has a right to call me his son. It crushes me … I feel that I cannot live here, I must leave Madrid, my mind is quite made up; I must go….”

“Go! where?”

“Anywhere. I must find some excuse.—I can make one,” he said with prompt determination. “I know that it is my fate to live in isolation, to have no home, no family … well if I must, I must. And what can be better? A very good thing is solitude….”

“And you will leave Spain?” asked Pepa, trying to conceal her emotion.

“I do not know even that.”

“Nothing calls you abroad?”

“No … I shall not leave the country. It might seem that after all that has happened in my house and in the isolation in which I live there, I could have no interest in my home; and yet, if I am far from Madrid I feel utterly forlorn. I have friends here….”

“Stay, I can suggest a delightful retreat,” said Pepa eagerly. “Do you know that close to Suertebella there is a charming little house to let?”

“Close to Suertebella?” muttered Leon, on whose fancy the plan smiled greatly. “I will think about it; I will go and see the rooms.”

“There you can devote yourself entirely to study; no one will interrupt you. It is such a pretty place, especially just now when the corn fields are all green, and you should see the poppies! You can look over our grounds and those of Vista-Alegre, and beyond that miles of lovely fields with flocks of sheep here and there. The house is flooded with light and sunshine; you will see how cheerful it is. Then it is so snug—just big enough for one person. A splendid sitting-room for studying in—for fighting it out with your books, arranging your papers, notes, and names, and thrusting pins through your miserable insects. You will be so comfortable there. The people of the house are quiet respectable folks, and the silence, the stillness, the peace!…”

Pepa folded her hands devoutly to convey an idea of the peace she described. “They will not feed you very well perhaps, but you are not an epicure, and when you want a good dinner you can come to us. You have only to go down into the cow-yard, open a door—two steps….”

“Two steps?” said Leon, pleased by this tempting description.

“Two steps, and you are in the cow-yard and then in the little garden where Monina plays.”

“Where Monina plays.”

They had drawn closer together in their eager gestures as they had become more interested in the dialogue and their hands met now and then, like birds that flutter and coo.

“Monina may perhaps make a little noise and disturb you at your work—but you will forgive her, will you not?” As she spoke Pepa winked her eyelids to keep her tears from falling.

“Forgive her! Why Pepa, you may think it lucky if I do not devour her with kisses.”

“And it is a fortnight since you saw her, you bad man!”

“I will go to see her to-morrow,” said Leon, his face as bright now as it had before been gloomy.

“To-morrow; then I am to expect you?” said Pepa, who was half reclining on the divan so that her elbow was buried in the pillows.

“Yes, you may expect me; did you say the child was ailing?” he added with some anxiety.

Pepa was on the point of replying when a servant hurried into the room who had just arrived tired and breathless from Suertebella. Pepa gazed at him in horror. What had happened? A very simple matter. The little girl had suddenly been taken ill—very ill indeed.

“Good God!” cried Pepa starting from her seat. “And I here, idling … amusing myself! I must be off at once. Order the carriage … Lola, my cloak … make haste! What is the matter? She coughs you say—is choking?… Has she had a fall? or caught cold. She got wet in the park. My poor darling. A doctor … send at once to Dr. Moreno.”

“I will see to that, go at once,” said Leon, not less alarmed than the mother.

“She has been in a draught and I told them again and again to take the greatest care … but servants will always give a child everything it cries for….”

“Oh go at once, do not delay. I will see that Moreno follows you in my carriage as quickly as possible … and perhaps it will be nothing after all!”

Pepa started, and Leon went in search of the doctor.

We must go no farther in our story without explaining that Leon Roch visited at the Fúcar’s house as the friend of the marquis, no less than as a true and loyal friend of his daughter’s. Theirs was not the only house in which he was intimate; he went to many in search of some diversion from his melancholy in pleasant society and worthy friendships. At the same time it must be owned that his visits to Pepa had of late been long ones. Why? Some people would have answered the question promptly, to his discredit; but their answer lacks evidence. There had budded in Leon’s soul, without his dreaming of its strength, a pure and tender passion of which more will be told presently.

CHAPTER XXV.

MARÍA EGYPTIACA DRESSES IN GREY AND DOES NOT WASH HER HANDS.

After calling on the doctor, who lived in the house opposite his own, and imploring him to go at once to Carabanchel, for which he lent him his carriage, Leon went home, fully determined to follow him thither as early as possible next morning. The house was silent and unlighted; every footstep echoed and every shadow seemed exaggerated. A sleepy man-servant opened the door, following him, half-nodding, to his room.

"You can go," said his master. "I shall not go to bed to-night. Is your mistress gone to her room?"

"She was in the oratory till eleven—I will go and ascertain."

"No, you need not ask. Who has been here this evening?"

"The Señora Marquesa de San Joselito, and Doña Perfecta."

Leon repeated the names with dull indifference.

"And they went away when prayers were over."

"Very well, you can go."

The man went away; but he noticed in Leon Roch an anxious and absent manner, indicating that he was absorbed by some ruling idea; still, a servant cannot offer to console his master or to persuade him out of his melancholy by demonstrations of affection, so he went.

Leon was alone, and flinging himself into a seat with his elbow on a little table and his chin resting on his hands, his eyes—eyes as black as night—half-closed, he sat thinking. Of what, God alone knows. So complete was his abstraction from external things that he did not hear the soft footfall of a dark form which entered noiselessly, more like a ghost than a woman, and came close up to him. It touched him on the shoulder, and as he turned to look up Leon gave a cry of alarm. The fact is that there are occasions and circumstances when our mind is in a state that makes the simplest events and the most familiar faces seem strange and terrible.

"You startled me," he said.

"That is strange! so cool a man, so brave and sensible, to be frightened at me!" said María in the doleful, mechanical voice that she had adopted for the last few months. She was robed in a morning gown of a dull mouse-grey and of the most exaggerated simplicity of make; she was pale and looked sallow, but from want of care rather than from self-mortification; her neat feet were concealed in a pair of coarse felt slippers, and her figure revealed neither shape nor grace; her fine hair hid itself as if ashamed under the folds of a cap of hideous dimensions.

After looking at him for a minute or two María said in a hard voice: "well, are you

afraid of me?”

“Yes, I am afraid of you,” he replied, taking his eyes off his wife and looking at the ground.

“What next!” said María, smiling with an expression of disdainful superiority. “Because I am so ugly? But, would you believe it, I am delighted to see you quail before me. It is the privilege of humility that it can abash the gaze of the proud.” And as she spoke she seated herself.

Then, either because she detected a look of disgust on her husband’s face, or because she fancied she did, she added: “it annoys you that I should disturb you? So I supposed. That is the very reason why I shall stay. My duty comes before everything: and my conscience requires me to ask you what you have been doing for so long. Leon, your conduct is far from right. You never were a Christian but you kept up appearances at any rate; now, you do not even do that.”

“You do everything in your power to make my home unendurable,” replied Leon coldly. “Your disgust at the presence of those friends whom I most care to see, added to your fancy for filling the house with people whom I dislike; your constant absence—for you too go out, and a great deal more than I do—spending whole days in church; the extraordinary change in your very nature from being loving and amiable to harshness and scolding, are additional motives for my remaining within doors as little as possible. The house is full of gall and bitterness which weighs upon my soul as soon as I enter it.”

“Oh! how can you say such abominable things?” cried María, casting up her eyes to Heaven and clasping her hands under her chin.

“It is only the truth; I have no art to conceal the truth. You have made my house a desert cave, cold, empty, and dark … and I want light, light!”

María was cowed for an instant by his vehemence, then, making great efforts to check her tears, she went on:

“You need not fancy that your violence will wear out my patience. For some time you have taken to talking to me as if I were one of the men you argue with at your club, or debating societies, or whatever you call them. Light, do you say? Light? Then you are at last tired of your blindness? What do I ask better than to show you the light? It is you who are determined that I shall not—that you will remain as you are—blind. You refuse to see! To me it would be the greatest comfort if we could save our souls together; but you will not … you will rush on to destruction. I, so far as I am concerned, to my dying hour will never cease to say: ‘Leon, Leon, look and see…. And you laugh? But I am hardened against your laughter; God grants me such patience that I can bear to be the victim of your mockery as well as of your scorn and spite. Laugh as much as you please—laugh me to scorn! I do not care; nay, I ask it of you; my one hope, my one desire is to suffer and endure.’”

“Suffer and endure!” exclaimed Leon bitterly. “That is not my desire, to be sure, but it is my lot. God has so ordered it that where I looked for peace and love I find constant war—war to the knife. I hoped to bear a gentle burden, and a hideous log fell on to my shoulders, tiring me, galling and wounding me!”

“And that log am I! Thank you,” cried María spitefully, unable to swallow the worldly mortification which struggled with her less genuine mysticism. “This weary burden is your wife?”

“Yes, it is you. I can only speak plainly. I am bound to be honest.”

“Then cast it off! Rid yourself of this intolerable burthen,” she cried with nervous excitement, her cheeks glowing and her eyes sparkling. “I am a load on your shoulders and you hesitate to throw me off! Kill me, kill me at once!—martyrdom is my vocation!”

Leon looked at her scornfully and said very gravely:

“I do not kill—for that.”

“For what then? Nay, you kill for everything. There are other ways of killing besides blows; grief kills too.”

“If grief could kill, María, I should by this time be dead and buried. This infernal torture by a slow fire, this incessant discussion and recrimination arising from the radical opposition of our views on the things of the next world—and indeed of this—are a constant succession of blows that kill … aye more surely than steel or lead! Ah! the misery of two beings, together and yet apart; of feeling that two souls that ought to be one are growing further and further asunder, each on its own side…. For all this I grieve bitterly, bitterly, child—and then to find a cold and lonely hearth where the wife I loved once sat—to be isolated and abandoned….” And Leon, deeply agitated, broke down and was silent.

“And in this separation,” said María, “who is to blame but you? You, who by nature are obdurate to all arguments, blindly obstinate in your atheism and materialism. What have I done constantly, repeatedly, but offer terms of peace and union?”

“What can you have to offer but thorns, bitterness and repulsion? What peace but that of the grave, the peace of a perfunctory, absurd and debasing formalism. You have no genuine feelings—nothing but capricious terrors, horrible stubbornness, a barren and morose mysticism which excludes all genuine love. Nay, do not talk to me of peace, you who have turned against me, doing all you can to vex and gnaw my heart with the fangs of ferocious fanaticism; to me you are like a harpy who calls your venom by the name of Faith, and who have poisoned me with that diabolical secretion.”

“Nay,” cried María with the air of a martyr, “abuse and insult me as much as you will, but do not attack my faith; that is blasphemy.”

“It is not blasphemy; I only tell you that you, and you alone, have made our marriage tie a chain of bondage. You, María you! When we married you had your beliefs and I had mine, and my respect for every man’s conscience is so great that I never thought of trying to eradicate your faith; I gave you complete liberty; I never interfered with your devotions, even when they were so excessive as to mar the happiness of our home. Then there came a day when you went mad—I can find no other word to describe the terrific exaggeration of your bigotry since, six months ago, here in my garden, your hapless brother died in your arms. Since then you have not been a woman but a monster of bitterness and vexatiousness; an incarnation of the inquisition in the form of a woman. You have not merely tormented me by ceasing to be in any way amiable and by your odious assumption

of sanctity, but you have persecuted me with attempts to make of me too a hypocritical and ridiculous bigot. I have tried to make you give up your monomania; I have even tried giving way to some extent to your earnest entreaties; but you asked too much. It is impossible, utterly impossible, that I should lend myself to the sanctimonious farce, when I thought the moment propitious for acting with determination I have made superhuman efforts to free you from your own fanaticism, but, as you know, it has proved impossible. I have fought for it desperately, have tried every means, every argument of reason, of affection, of command—all in vain. Your spirit has succumbed to some irresistible power, and you live under the dominion of dark influences which I cannot defy. There are some invisible meshes, inscrutable ties, bonds that unite and shears that divide, without my seeing how or when. Against these I am impotent. María, I am defeated—I acknowledge it. I can have nothing more to say to you but a sad farewell, and to remind you that you once loved me—that we have been for a time happy together. It is a sad, a very sad, end; it leaves no room for hope!"

María was so impatient to be heard that she hardly waited for him to cease before she broke in:

"I too have my bill of indictment, and it is a heavy one. I was brought up in our holy faith and taught to put my faith into practice in all sincerity and truth. I married you—I loved you, I believed you to be good, kind, honourable, and did not understand the hideous void in your soul; I loved you—and I love you still, for it is my duty to love and respect you; but I soon began to see that in loving you I followed the promptings of a worldly passion, and that my choice was a fatal mistake; that my soul was in the utmost peril of contamination; that we could never come to an agreement; that your learning was of a most pernicious character; that I, as your wife and influenced by your reprobate ideas, might fall into the depths and lose my faith.—I was on my guard. I fully admit that you were tolerant and lenient, that you did not abuse my devotions, nor mock at religion as you have done since. But you cannot deny that there was a certain amount of contempt in the facilities you granted me; you had a particular smile when I spoke to you of such subjects.—However, we got on very well. Then one day it struck me: 'I am a fool if I do not convert him. Why should I not light the lamp of faith in that darkened soul?' But you gave me to understand that I was mad, that all believers were mad; and you smiled—how you smiled—and with what affectation of good humour you would laugh at all our sacred dogmas. 'Let things alone,' you said, 'let every man save his soul in his own way.' This made me miserable, for there is but one—if I repeat it a thousand times—there is but one way of being saved. Then came those dreadful days, that I can only call my sainted brother's Holy Week—the days of agony of that angelic being, whom God vouchsafed to send to me that he might direct my steps into the right road—I see that the recollection of them vexes you. You cannot forget the bitter humiliation of your spirit in those days when the mere presence of my brother was a constant ground of remorse to you."

Leon made no reply, he did not even look at his wife. There was something so repellent in her appearance that it vexed his sight as much as her words revolted his feelings.

"I too felt remorse or rather deep repentance for my sins, and an eager desire to grow more like the angel whose soul, as God had willed, was twin to mine. I believe I am

reserved for a death no less glorious than his. Celestial fires were lighted in my heart, ardent but pure—different indeed from my love for you! What joys I felt, what heavenly strains I heard, what visions I saw, what glories I dreamed of, what anxieties I endured, what a craving for sorrow on earth that I may be happy in heaven! What a longing to die that I may enjoy, if only a small part of that sacred peace in which my brother revelled. I have prayed and longed till my brother has appeared to me, whether in my dreams or no I know not, radiant with happiness and beauty, calling me to him, and repeating the exhortations and warnings he gave me in the last hour of his life. I never pass a night without hearing his voice in my ears! You, of course, will not believe in this ecstasy, you are fast bound in materialism and can see only with your bodily eyes. Oh! wretched handful of clay! And this is what the world calls a wise man, because he has learnt half a dozen facts which cannot matter to any one. Wretched and miserable man! Still more miserable if you had no one to intercede for you, to beseech God for the mercy you do not deserve."

"Thank you!" said Leon drily; and as his wife came nearer to him he put out his hand to keep off the contact of that grey dress. There was something in the smell of the coarse woollen stuff that sickened him.

"Your irony will not avail to quell or to shake me," exclaimed his wife. "I know that your stubbornness will yield at last, a voice in my soul tells me so. God himself tells me so, when I feel myself uplifted by thoughts of him; the blessed patriarch Saint Joseph assures me of it—my friend and intercessor, my most loving, most tender and most pitiful patron," and she spoke the canting superlatives with honeyed unction. "O Lord!" she went on, raising her eyes and crossing her hands, no longer marked by the refined cleanliness of former times, "save him, snatch him from the pestilent and atheistic set among which he has fallen, raise him up to thy glory and make him abhor these damnable doctrines!" Then she remained absorbed in muttered prayer, presently however she laid one hand on his shoulder, and raising the other with a gesture of threatening admonition, she went on in a low voice:

"The day will come when you will crave my pardon on your knees, when you will entreat me with tears to teach you how to pray; when you will fling yourself, like me, at the foot of dusty altars caring not that your hands should be dirty; when you will dress in sackcloth; live, like me, in perpetual fear of your conscience; feel that a smile, a glance, a frivolous thought is a sin; renounce all the joys of the world and find delight in incessant prayer and unwearied worship, neglecting all outward things, contemning all care of your body in perpetual penance. Ah! yes, you must save your soul; my patron saints cannot do less than grant me this; they will intercede to God for you, and God will forgive you and call you to himself, with me for your guide! What a triumph, what a victory that will be!"

She took her stand in the middle of the room in a dramatic attitude, with her hand raised, her eyes fixed, and her head thrown back, and exclaimed:

"Wretched atheist, I will save you in spite of yourself!"

Leon watched her in silence as she left the room. Long endurance had made him stoical; she had hammered so long and so constantly on his heart that it seemed to have turned to a dead cold anvil. But he let his fist fall on the arm of his chair with such force

that the very floor trembled. It was as much as to say: “No more, no more of this!”

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DEVOURING OGRE—CROUP.

Quite early in the morning Leon set out in his carriage for Carabanchel. The air was fresh from the rain which had not ceased during the night, and every object was reflected dully in the liquid mud, as in a dirty mirror. Workmen and carters swearing like gentlemen—the comparison is commonly made the contrary way—were wending their way along the roads and across the bridge, met by muleteers from Fuenlabrada, and market gardeners from Leganés or Moraleja; while Madrid, in the dismal dawn, was sending out her pauper dead, borne on the shoulders of the living, to San Isidro or Santa María.

After passing the lower village of Carabanchel, Leon skirted a splendid park lying between the lower and the higher villages; upper Carabanchel having the advantage if not actually in point of architecture, at any rate in situation and outlook.

The demesne of Suertebella is one of those estates which ample wealth and perseverance have succeeded in creating in the neighborhood of Madrid, and which can stand comparison with the more famous grounds of Vista-Alegre, Montijo and others. There was a noble growth of elms, acacias, sophoras, with the still rarer beauty of a wide spread of turf planted with grand sequoias, Japanese medlars, magnolias and other exotic trees with huge shrubs of fuchsias, tree ferns, cactus and araucarias; aviaries full of every variety of wild and tame fowl; stables in which the horses lived like gentlemen, cow-houses and poultry-yards. There was a river running through the estate with a boat on it, a shooting-gallery, a croquet-ground, a grotto, a pond stocked with fish, and even a heap of ruins with the inevitable adjuncts of ivy and moss. The house, though recently built of brick and stucco was sumptuous and elegant; especially the interior, where a lavish hand and experienced taste had collected all the rarest and costliest luxuries that modern art can produce. All the rooms were on the ground floor, the sitting-rooms in a long suite, handsomely decorated. Of course there was an Arabian divan in the latest fashion, and a Japanese room, and a Gothic room, and an orthodox Louis XV. drawing-room. The Marquis Fúcar prided himself on each being perfectly "in keeping," and the most beautiful object in creation would fail to meet his approval if it had not what he called "character": "In perfect character you see," was his favourite form of praise.

Leon made his way through half a dozen of these vast empty rooms, dismally draped in silk, like shrouded princes; their vacant spaciousness made him think of huge yawning mouths. The carpets—softer and deeper than the mattresses in some houses—deadened the sound of his steps; the splendid parcel-gilt bronzes, still smelling of the packing-case, and the varnish on the freshly-cleaned pictures reflected every intrusive ray of light, while the clocks repeated their tedious monologue, breaking the silence of the cavern-like rooms. There were historical portraits, frowning sternly; Poussinesque groups of figures dancing or playing rustic games on the tapestry; Dead Christs of jaundiced hue, reposing in the lap of the weeping Virgin; dozens of bull-fighters and mincing ladies, such as the modern Spanish school turns out by hundreds to meet the taste of the amateurs of the day;

watercolours of a rather free and easy character; stalwart nymphs à la Rubens, and lean studies of racers painted with as much elaboration as though they were the most eminent portraits. Graceful vases, little porcelain kittens grinning over the edge of a jug, and flower stands supported on the backs of some hideous hippopotamus or monstrous griffin.

The servants he met, looked full of consternation and the maids had their eyes red with crying; a few hasty words put him in possession of the facts. In front of several pictures of saints, tapers were burning, and he heard the sound of prayers and sobs.

At last he reached the silent, half-darkened room which was the centre of all this woe. He approached very softly as though it were the scene of some event of transcendental importance to the whole human race. It was a very tiny, humble drama that was being enacted there; the death-struggle of a frail insignificant creature—one of those inappreciably small catastrophes which make no echo in the world since they snatch away no great man, no useful woman, though they bring anguish and terror into a thousand homes. This death would leave no one widowed or orphaned, would bring neither ruin, nor wealth, nor change, nor even mourning on any house; it would be no more than one more victim added to the hecatomb of little ones through whom Providence, by snatching them away at the very threshold of life, wrings the heart of mothers. The human race must be daily decimated it would seem, to prevent its overwhelming increase.

Pepa, still dressed as she had been at the bull-fight had sunk into a chair, her hands folded, her eyes fixed; her speechless despair terrified all who were with her, and some who could not control their grief left the room to cry. She was sitting close to a little bed so daintily pretty that the fairies themselves could make nothing more innocently fresh; it was like a little basket of gilt cane fit to contain the most delicate flowers, and the white curtains, with their lace and pink ribbands, were so fine and white that the angels might have played at hide-and-seek among the folds. Leon went up to the head of the dying child that lay heavy and motionless on the pillow; the pillow was covered with golden curls and wet with tears. Leon himself was tremulous with apprehension; his heart stood still with anguish as he looked at Monina—the little face, pale with suffering, the lips blue, the eyes wide open and the lashes wet with tears, her throat swollen and dark from the swelling of the veins—and worst of all as he heard the plaintive, stertorous groaning which was neither a cough nor a sigh—hoarse, guttural and yet sharp, as harsh as the whistle of a pipe in a demon’s mouth, a horrible, mechanical recurring crow. The child struggled with suffocation, clutching at her throat to seek relief, as if she could give a passage to the air for which her lungs were panting. This agony of an infant by strangulation with no possibility of relieving it, while neither science nor a mother’s love can loosen the invisible cord that is choking the baby throat—the little neck, generally as white as a lily and now as livid as a piece of dead flesh; the ebbing of a pure, blameless, loving, angelical life in the most tragical torments, with the convulsions of a strangled criminal and the misery of asphyxia, is one of the most appalling instances of the inexorable fate which, whether it be for trial or for punishment, oppresses humanity.

In the clutches of this monster Monina looked from one to another, at her mother and at the nurses, as if to implore them to release her from this dreadful thing, from this undreamed-of punishment—a cruel drama of Dame Nature! Despair filled every heart; in the face of this terror no one could shed a tear; through each mind flashed the sacrilegious

thought, like a gleam of infernal light, that there was—there could be, no God.

Leon knew not what to say, and for a minute or two his eyes wandered in bewildered horror from the child to the mother, and noted the most trivial details; the table covered with medicine bottles, the child's playthings scattered on the floor—shabby undressed dolls, horses without legs and cats without tails—they looked as forlorn and disconsolate as the human watchers. When he studied the child's face and then looked into that of the doctor who was still standing by her, Leon augured the worst. Pepa looked up at him with tearful eyes and said in a low, heart-broken tone:

"She will die."

Leon, for the sake of saying something tried to assure her that it was not certain. In vain.

"There is no hope," she said, "Moreno says there is none. That now…." But she could say no more she covered her face and burst into floods of tears.

This form of suffering was new to Leon, a terrible and unfamiliar grief that had fallen on him like a bolt from the skies. He had first seen the child some few months since, and had found infinite delight in her bewitching little ways, though this alone perhaps hardly suffices to account for the acuteness of his pain in seeing the suffering of a child that was not his, and of a woman who was not his wife.

The croup, to make it more cruel, has deceptive intervals each invariably the precursor of a worse attack. The monster relaxes his grip that the victim may breathe once more, and know how precious air is, how sweet is life. After a violent fit of coughing a spurious amendment is perceptible. Under the influence of tartar emetic, Monina was able to cough away some portion of the false membrane that forms in the windpipe; relieved for the moment, she breathed more freely, and looked round her brightly; Pepa leaned forward to rearrange the bed clothes which she had tossed off in her struggles. When Monina caught sight of Leon she set up the peevish whimper of a sick child when it sees any one standing with its mother or nurse; it is its way of expressing jealousy which is one of the first sentiments developed in the human breast.

"But my pet, it is Leon…. Do not you want him? Then he shall go…. Go away, naughty man," and a plaintive murmur repeated: "Naughty."

"Go away, go away. I will punish him…. Spit it out my pretty." The little girl did as she was bid; then her mind seemed to wander. "More, more," she said—always a child's cry when it is pleased or amused. Then, with her eyes shut, and as if in delirium, she put her tiny hand out from under the coverlet and waved it up and down. The infant gesture struck them to the heart; she was bidding them farewell. Its baby grace was tragical.

A moment after all the worst symptoms reappeared—the hard, rasping cough, the suffocation, the agonised struggle and the shrill, crowing noise. Leon, as he heard it, felt as if a red-hot needle was piercing his brain. The child was choking, dying.

Pepa, with a cry of anguish, fell senseless on the floor.

They carried her to her own room. Leon stayed with Monina. How many things flashed through his brain in a minute—in a single minute. He himself wondered to find

that his grief completely filled and occupied his mind as if the poor little child was all that the world contained for him to love and care for. Since his father's death he had not felt his heart so strongly drawn to any creature at the moment of death. He was not even remotely connected with the child's parents, and yet he felt as if its death would rob him of something strangely near and dear. No doubt the mother and child were to some extent one in the passion of pity which absorbed his soul to the exclusion of every other feeling.

On their first acquaintance he and Monina had established an ardent friendship—not wholly disinterested to be sure on the child's part, since it involved frequent visits to the toy-shop and the confectioner's—and not unfrequently he had found himself neglecting a more important engagement in order to go to the Fúcars' house to play with Monina. She was so sweet, so merry, so intelligent, so inquisitive. Her ungrammatical chatter was so expressive, she made such intelligent remarks, she was so lively, so graceful, so gentle, so docile! The friendship had been but brief, but in that short time Leon had played every game that a man can devise; he had carried her pick-a-back; had tried to teach her to speak, to give a penny to a beggar, to forgive when she was hurt, to pity the poor, to be kind to animals, to obey her mother, to answer as soon as she was spoken to, not to cry for nothing. He had grown accustomed to her winning smile and could not bear to miss it. How could any one help adoring such a rosy dawn even though it were veiled in mist? Monina's real name was Ramona, after Pepa's mother, the late Marquesa de Fúcar. She was two years old and not very like her mother, for she was very pretty—pink and white, with eyes of cherubic blue and a sweet round lisping mouth, slightly built and as restless as a bird. Her chirping jargon, with every verb made regular, fascinated him; and when she took a fancy to flit from spot to spot—fluttering like a butterfly and as busy as a bee, he could not take his eyes off her. Play brought roses to her cheeks; she was so overflowing with life that she laughed when she talked, flew rather than walked, and her innocent questions and baby comments would startle him with an innocent logic with which infants so often confound the wise.

And now, what a terrible change! A single day had sufficed to transform this bright and guileless being into a suffering wreck. In a few hours there would be left on earth of tiny Monina but a fast corrupting mass from which men must avert their gaze.—The idea was too hideous; Leon could not resign himself to it. No, Monina must not die. Without that sweet life he could not live.

Why?—but he could not tell why; all he knew was that a fibre, a nerve, an aching cord was tied—nailed, to his heart, and that Ramona was pulling at it, to fly away to heaven. Till now the bond had seemed a mere nothing, a fancy, an amusement; now he felt that it had struck deep roots which must be torn up and carry a large part of his heart with them.

All this crossed rapidly through his mind; then he turned to speak to the doctor. There was no hope; the child could not live twenty-four hours; the medicine he had given did not seem to produce the perspiration and relief which might have opened the door of hope.

"And is there nothing else to be done?" asked Leon, as pale as a corpse himself.

"We can try mercurial rubbing."

Not a minute was wasted; the doctor suggested, Leon gave orders with fevered haste, and the nurses and servants executed them with eager promptitude.

Pepa, having recovered her senses, had returned to her post by the child's bed, to watch the last flickering of that precious life, to give her baby, water, kisses, gentle touches, to listen to her breathing, and gaze into her dim eyes. Her face betrayed the efforts she was making in order that her anguish as a mother might not hinder her usefulness as a nurse; alert, careful, forgetful of herself and of everything else, her whole soul was absorbed in covering up the little tossing arms and in listening to the choking cough, the rattling breath, the gasping croak, more tragical than any cry—sounding now like the creak of metal that needs greasing, and now like a low, shrill whistle, or a musical note in a dream.

The hours went on—what fearful hours! And yet the day was too soon gone and it was night! No one had kept count of the time, not a sound was to be heard but that of suppressed sobs; all hearts sank under the pressure of a crushing weight. The whole great house was full of dismayed grief; and of the odour of the tapers that were burning before the Virgin and the Saints. The daughter of the house was dying; she no longer even put her hands to her throat to "take that away." She lay there helpless, worn out, conquered in the fight; her head was sunk deep in the pillow, and her little hands, spread motionless, had ceased to twist the sheet into cords. If only the cruel scourge would let her die thus. But no; once more its clutch was relaxed for an instant and Monina again murmured: "more."

"She is dreaming of her toys," whispered Pepa, pressing her handkerchief to her lips as though to hush her sobs while her tears ran in streams through her fingers.

The child still murmured softly, calling Tachana and Guru, the two children of a neighbour with whom she was in the habit of playing. Then came another fit of suffocation so violent that it surely must be the last. Pepa cried aloud:

"She is dying now … she is dying." She flung herself over the bed, clasping the child in her arms then, wild with grief, the wretched mother clutched at her own throat as if she would strangle herself in her delirium of woe. It was a natural semi-savage gesture, a primitive instinct of suffering with the sufferer she loved.

They tried to lead her away, but it was impossible to move her; she clung to the bed.

Leon whispered to the doctor: "why do you not, as a last resource, try tracheotomy?"

But Moreno Rubio answered in a hollow voice:

"At that age it is tantamount to murder."

"We must try everything; even murder."

The two men looked like spectres risen from the grave to conspire.

"You desire it?"

"Yes—I desire it."

"We must consult the mother."

"No—I take the responsibility."

The physician shrugged his shoulders; then he went to a table that was hidden by the curtain.

“My darling,” cried Pepa, “why must you die? Why leave me alone—more lonely than I am? O Lord God! O Blessed Virgin of Sorrows! Why do you take my child … my only child? Monina—Mona….”

She had no suspicion of what Leon and the doctor were projecting; she did not see that Moreno held in his hand a blade—a tiny but terrible weapon, more fatal perhaps than the executioner’s axe.

“Monina, sweet angel, my cherub—open your eyes, look at me….”

Her grief was growing fierce; the terrible glare of her wild eyes, her dry, white, quivering lips, the nervous tension of her hands, all betrayed that intensity of misery which gives a bereft mother the aspect of a fury.

“Monina! my child, my darling! If you die, I die; I cannot let you go without me!” And she devoured her with kisses.

“Pepa,” said Leon, “we are going to make a last effort … do not be frightened.”

“She is dead—I tell you she is dead….”

But Monina, as though in reply, turned over suddenly and with a violent fit of coughing threw out some more of the suffocating growth; then again she lay still, though breathing hoarsely.

“She is cold—icy cold!” exclaimed Pepa. “Doctor, doctor—”

Moreno went at once.

“No, not icy,” said Leon, laying his hand on the child’s head, “on the contrary—she is moist.”

“Yes, with perspiration,” said the doctor after a pause.

He felt the baby limbs and his eye, accustomed to watch the fluctuations of life, were intent on the flickering of this one which, when it was so nearly extinct, wavered—though perhaps only for a moment.

“Yes, her skin is moist,” Leon repeated.

“Quite moist!” Pepa echoed with a deep sigh.

Then they were silent; a faint ray of hope had fallen on them—almost adding a pang—for it was not possible—no, not possible!

“Keep her well covered,” said the doctor, in the short imperious tone of a pilot steering a life-boat; and then, unable to contain himself, he swore a mighty oath. Six hands covered Monina closely.

Leon and Pepa looked at Moreno. But they dared ask no questions; it was better to be in suspense, which is a kind of hope, and the doctor’s face revealed nothing beyond a reprieve of immediate fear.

“She is still perspiring?”

“Yes.”

“Still?”

“Yes—rather more.”

And they watched the almost imperceptible moisture on the delicate skin as if the existence of the universe depended on it.

“But is it not a favourable symptom?” Leon said at last.

“Favourable, yes. But even….”

“Can we not help nature?“ said Pepa.

“Nature does not require our aid at present.”

“But—is it possible…?”

“I can say nothing, nothing.”

“And it is still going on?”

“Yes, so far….”

“Oh, my darling! She will live….”

Behind the chair on which Pepa was sitting hung a picture of the Virgin with two tapers burning in front of it. Pepa started up, flung herself on her knees and kissed the very ground before it. For a few minutes she remained sobbing violently with her face buried in the carpet. Certain that she could not overhear him Moreno whispered low in Leon’s ear:

“If expectoration continues to any favourable extent it is possible that she may be saved; but for four chances in her favour there are ninety-six against her.—So say nothing to the mother….”

“Four in her favour,” thought Leon, “that is something—and I feel hopeful … sure!”

His heart seemed to leap with a mad jubilation. The life of the whole human race might have been in the balance. There, under his very eyes, hanging on a thread—a breath.

Time went on; Pepa had come back to watch and was walking up and down like a wounded lioness. She did not want to ask anything; it was enough to read their faces and note their actions. There was something new and fresh in the air—the circling of the universe seemed to have been suddenly reversed. The two men were visibly anxious, but not downcast.

“What is it?” asked the mother.

“Hope,” said Leon.

“Very little,” muttered Moreno.

Pepa clasped her hands in an ecstasy of thankfulness.

“Nay, do not allow yourself to be too sanguine,” said the doctor. “The reaction that has set in is not, so far, sufficient—far from it. It may be a delusive relief, like the former ones —go and lie down for a little while.”

“I! lie down; I, rest, when my baby is getting better?”

“But still….”

“She is perspiring a good deal—a great deal,” exclaimed the mother, whose excited hopes magnified the cool moisture into a heavy dew. “God will let her live, He will give me my treasure.”

She knelt down by the bedside, clasping her hands close to the child’s little form without daring to touch her; hardly daring to breathe lest her sighs should disturb the blessed reaction. Monina was lying comfortably and her breath came less painfully.

“It is possible? say Doctor….”

“I can say nothing yet….” said the inexorable physician. “The hope—the chances, are very slight. We shall see how she goes on.”

“Oh! all will be well; the Blessed Virgin will have pity on a lonely mother … Leon what do you think?”

“I, I cannot tell,” replied Leon. “I do not know, but I feel … but I dare not, I dare not. Still I feel encouraged … who can tell … perhaps….” Pepa could hardly repress a cry of joy.

“Oh! how can I bear it? She may live! But if we are deceived, if we are mistaken. Merciful Father! Blessed Virgin! Why do you let me hope if after all you rob me of my only treasure—the joy of my life, of my home, of my soul?” And she wandered vaguely about like a demented creature, not knowing what to do.

“Let us pray, let us pray,” she said at length. “The Virgin has heard me and I will beseech her, entreat her, till I can see and feel no more. Pray, Leon, with me—why do you not pray?”

“I too am praying,” replied Leon, bowing his head.

“You! you? Those who ask in fervent humility will be heard; but you! How do you pray?”

She seized his arm and dragged him towards the picture, in her frantic energy her strength was surprising.

“As you will,” said Leon, who was no longer master of himself; and he never knew how, but he found himself on his knees, and with eyes raised to Heaven he exclaimed in piteous accents: “Merciful God! save her life, she is what I love best.”

A dying child, a despairing mother, a man on his knees praying after a fashion of his own. It strikes me that it is folly to write of such commonplace occurrences.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MOTHER.

What a night they passed. Nothing happened, and yet it was as full of interest as the years of an eventful life. Pepa was in such a state of nervous excitement that her brain seemed to be affected; she laughed while she cried, and her broken sentences, often incoherent and irrelevant, betrayed that her mind was tossed between despair and hope. She would sit trembling like an old woman, and again, flit restlessly about the room like a child that does not know what it wants.

Monina’s skin was still warm and moist—that moisture was as a dew from Heaven. The deadly greyness of her face gave way to a faint pink tinge; it was a joy to watch the frail flowers of life blossoming again where, so lately, had been a desert of death. Her breathing grew easy, and on her silent and slightly parted lips dawned the sweetest charm of infancy, a happy smile. It was impossible to look at her and not to hope; and it was impossible to refuse to listen to that hope which seemed an inspiration from Heaven.

The dawn was breaking when Moreno Rubio once more addressed Pepa:

“I can now pronounce a definite opinion.”

“Yes? My little girl….”

“The child is out of danger,” said the doctor, clasping the mother’s hand. “This favourable reaction has saved her. Leon wanted me to try tracheotomy…. But the treasure we thought we had lost is restored to us.”

Pepa kissed his hands, bathing them in tears.

“It is none of my doing, Señora, but Nature’s, helped by tartar emetic and the caustic solution … nay, Nature’s only; or, to speak truly, God’s. Now it is time that I should get a little rest.”

And after giving a few instructions he left.

Pepa could not speak; she was dumb with joy; she knelt down and remained absorbed in prayer for more than half an hour. Leon sat by the child’s bed, his head sunk between his hands. Suddenly he heard a voice close to him; he looked up and saw Pepa.

“What a night you have had,” she said. “Hours of anxiety—death and then joy! You have no children; if you had, how happy your children would be! The interest you have shown in this little one—a friend’s child only, not related to you….”

“It is an irresistible passion,” he said, “that I cannot account for; it is a strange folly indeed.”

“A folly! Oh, no! I like you to love my child. If I were to live for a thousand years, Leon, I should never forget the hours during which my heart and brain went through so much suffering; and the last thing I should forget would be the moment which was to me

the most solemn and critical of all, and the words I heard and which are stamped on my mind as if they had been burnt in.”

“I do not know what you are talking about.”

“Nor I, either, I believe,” she answered, leaning over him. “Joy has turned my brain, I think, I feel a sort of aberration or bewilderment…. Can it be true that I have my little one? That this angel is still left to comfort me in my loneliness?”

She looked at the child and bending over her, kissed her forehead very softly, so as not to disturb her sleep. When she looked up again at her friend he noted a strange light in her eyes.

“You are too much excited,” he said. “You ought to go to bed and sleep for some time. Poor little mother! You have gone through a great deal since the night before last.”

“Yes,” replied Pepa, “a great deal; but not only now; before that too; I am familiar with misery.”

“Be calm, you are half delirious.”

“And as I was saying,” she went on with an air of sudden recollection, and a bright smile, “I shall never forget your words: ‘Spare her life. She is what I love best in the world.’” Leon looked down. “But I am glad, so glad, that you are so fond of her,” said Pepa on the point of crying. “For then I am not the only creature to love her. You are a good old friend, a friend of my childhood. I have always valued you, and now more than ever, when I see what an interest you take in Monina, a true warm interest.—Leon, I feel that I must break a silence that is killing me and tell you a secret that I cannot bear to keep….”

Her head drooped on Leon’s shoulder; she wept copiously, and he did not speak. He felt the weight of her head, the warmth of her breath, and the moisture of her tears, and he sat silent—stern and self-controlled. Pepa might have been shedding her tears on a rock. Suddenly a sense of dignity and modesty sprang up in Pepa’s soul; she lifted her head, crimson with blushes and gave a little cry of dismay.

“Pepa,” said Leon, taking her hand in a firm, kind grasp, “your child is safe. I am going now.”

At this instant they were both startled by hearing a sweet, silvery voice—an angel’s voice speaking from Heaven—which said:

“Mamma, Mamma!”

Pepa covered her with kisses. Monina sat up and began to ask for everything: she wanted meat, and fish, beef, sugar-plums, bread and butter—all at once, altogether and a great deal, more, more … and then not knowing words enough for her desires, she asked for ‘things,’ a comprehensive word, representing in a child’s vocabulary its insatiable desire for possession; epitomising its instincts of craving and greed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MARQUIS DE FÚCAR ENJOYS THE SPECIAL FAVOUR OF HEAVEN.

From this moment Ramona's illness needed no special attention, and as soon as its favourable termination was known in Madrid, the great house was filled with friends who called to congratulate the mother, just as they had before called to condole with her and make enquiries. There are people to whom this is the whole of life, who spend year after year in congratulating or condoling, and who would perish for want of occupation if there were no deaths or christenings, no carriages and visiting cards.

Leon set out for Madrid when the carriages with their gaudy coats of arms were beginning to stream into the park of Suertebella. Even when he had got half way he turned back to leave a message about some medicine that he feared might be forgotten, and his mind was so full of Monina that all day long he was thinking: "If they let her get up too soon—if they do not keep her warm enough…. If they put too much chloral in the cough mixture…. If they let her eat sweets…."

After settling various matters of business and paying one or two indispensable visits in the evening, he went to bed early. He did not see his wife and she took no steps to see him.

Next morning he set out for Suertebella where a surprise awaited him; the Marquis de Fúcar had just arrived there, accompanied by his French friend, the Baron de Soligny, who, like Fúcar himself, was one of those banker-princes who go about the world in search of those tremendous strokes of business which seem most easy to meet with in bankrupt or impecunious communities, just as there are certain trees that grow spontaneously and flourish best on the poorest soil.

They were soon joined by the Marquis Joaquín de Onésimo whom Fúcar had invited to discuss, without loss of time, a grand project for a national loan.

Leon found the marquis unusually grave and thoughtful, with gleams however of good spirits; a most unaccountable state of affairs, for the most precarious business never seemed to affect the serenity of his perfectly artificial exterior. When he spoke of Monina's illness and marvellous recovery, Don Pedro, who was devoted to his little grandchild, was quite happy; but his eyes fell again and he frowned—he smiled—then he was solemn; and at length, putting his arm through Leon's and taking him aside, he said:

"We must prepare Pepa for some bad news."

"Bad news?"

"Yes, and I say bad news because…. Well, I hardly know why. Still, the news of a death, whoever the victim may be, is in a way bad news." And the marquis fumbled in his pockets which were full of cards, letters and papers, covered with notes in pencil scribbled in his carriage, in the train, in his office.

“Here is the message. It is a frightful catastrophe—the wreck of an American steamer between Puerto-Cabello and Savanilla…. The papers here have not mentioned it, but my Havana correspondent telegraphs this…. Do you see? The steam packet *City of Tampico*….”

Leon turned pale as he read the message.

“So that Pepa….” he murmured.

“Hush, not a word; she might hear you and she is quite unprepared. Yes, my daughter is a widow.”

Leon Roch was speechless.

“Between ourselves, and in the strictest confidence,” Don Pedro went on, putting his mouth close to Leon’s ear that he might not be overheard, “it is a real mercy for Pepa, and for me too, in spite of the shock of the catastrophe. If Federico had returned to Europe he would have ruined her and me too. A merciful providence, it would seem, has cut the knot in a sudden and tragical manner, and released my daughter and me from the miserable position in which we were placed by her marriage with that gambling, swindling, forger. It was a girl’s fancy which cost us all very dear. Do me the favour to shut that door that we may talk freely. We must not be overheard.”

Leon did as he was desired.

“You,” he said, “are the proper person to tell her.”

“There is no help for it; I must confess that I do not think that Pepa will be heart-broken or even grieved. It will be a painful shock—not even that perhaps. Between you and me …” and he lowered his voice to a whisper, although the door was shut—“I believe that Pepa loved her husband as little as it is possible to love a husband, do you understand? I cannot help thinking that her feelings towards that scoundrel of the first water were very nearly akin to mine, and I never concealed the fact that I hated him—hated him with all my heart. Pepitinilla will not shed many tears—By Heaven! Very likely none at all!”

And the marquis rubbed his hands as he did when he had concluded a good stroke of business. The very Exchequer office quaked in the recesses of its empty vaults when the Marquis de Fúcar rubbed his hands. “It is a mercy, a real mercy, for her and for me,” he repeated, as if he were talking to himself, “Providence has interfered to save us. If that man had come back to Europe—and he would have come back when he had spent all his money—Ah! Vampire! You were not satisfied with fleecing me in Madrid but you must need get hold of all the moneys in the hands of my Havana correspondent, you were not content with forging letters to rob me of the thirty thousand dollars I had in Ferguson’s house in London, but when we sent you to Cuba you must try the same trick again. Rascally gambler! But God can punish, God will not let a rogue escape!…” and he ground one fist into the palm of the other hand. Then, as if he had remembered the duty imposed upon him by human dignity and christian charity, he added:

“But we must forgive the dead, and I forgive him with all my heart. His punishment has been terrible. What awful disasters these fires on American vessels are! Not a soul was saved on board the City of Tampico but the cabin boys and one passenger—a mad Quaker.

Federico embarked in her with the intention of going to Colon, and on to California, the natural home of adventurers; he had made away with all the money I had in a house there—how wonderfully Providence has put a stop to his criminal career! And then you freethinkers declare that the Almighty is too great to trouble himself about our miserable little lives! I tell you he does; I tell you he does! Of course we must not exaggerate, and I do not pretend to say that he attends to every trifle when he is asked. But you see?—my daughter filled the house with tapers when Monina was ill and put up prayers to all the saints…. They would have enough to do up there if they attended to all the mothers whenever a child coughs or sneezes; but great crimes, great rogues….”

Leon had nothing to say to this interpretation of the working and ways of Providence.

“Well, well,” the marquis went on. “He disgraced my name and tormented my little fool of a daughter. But it is all over; may the earth—the waters—lie lightly on him…. There is one thing I never could comprehend, and that will always, always be a mystery to me….”

“I can guess what,” said Leon quickly. “You cannot imagine what made Pepa marry Cimarra. She is kind-hearted, intelligent, and full of feeling; Federico was always a heartless reprobate; you had only to talk to him for half an hour to discover what a shallow, selfish creature he was.”

“Just so. Well, I do not deny that I brought up Pepa very badly. She is very much altered; her troubles have done for her what I failed to do. Only four years ago she was so capricious…. But you can remember her. Really, but that she has a heart of gold, my daughter might have been my greatest grief, I own it.—But then, what a soul she has! What noble sentiments, and what a depth of tenderness under the whims and airs that come to the surface…. Mere bubbles, mere bubbles—I can find no other word—while her true self is sound and good to the core. I will tell you one thing that I am as sure of as I am of the Gospel: if my daughter had but married a good man, judicious and at the same time attractive, whom she could have loved without reserve, she would have been a woman out of a thousand—a model wife and mother….”

“I am sure of it,” said Leon gloomily.

“And the more I feel it,” Fúcar went on, folding his arms, “the less can I understand her fancy for Cimarra; a fancy, I say, for I can think of no other word. She never even tried to justify herself by the attraction that a handsome man always has for a woman, though Cimarra was what you call a good-looking man….”

“Decidedly.”

“In spite of that I cannot comprehend it, for Pepa felt no charm, no fascination; in short, her choice seemed to me a very bad one; however, I could not oppose her, I had not the strength to oppose her. That has always been my weak point. When Pepa was but a baby she used to whip me and I laughed at it; when she grew to be a woman she wasted a perfect fortune in trifles, and still I laughed. When Federico asked for her hand, when I spoke to her about it and she said she would accept him—well, I did not feel inclined to laugh; but I consented. What could I do? At the same time Pepa did not seem to me to be very much in love; still Federico suited her for a husband.

“In short, on an evil day they were married—I spent a hundred thousand dollars on the wedding! What a day! If the whole human race had married on that day it could not have brought more misfortunes on my devoted head. My poor child has never had a happy hour since. She seemed to be consumed by some mysterious anguish—moral? physical? God only knows! She was mad after every form of entertainment and luxury—it is madness. Look at the girls of the present day; they marry for nothing on earth but to be free to amuse themselves, to spend money and whirl giddily through life. Not even during the honeymoon did I ever see Pepa and her husband really loving to each other. ‘This is like having a wooden doll for a husband,’ I said to myself. Sometimes she was silent, sometimes drunk—I can find no other word—drunk with banquets, balls, trumpery novelties, and fine clothes. Every day she must have something new, and sometimes not all the marvels of the Arabian Nights would have cheered her melancholy. Poor foolish child! As for Federico, she troubled herself no more about him than if he had been a chair. She treated him as if he were an idiot. Ah! Leon, my good friend, we live in a strange world. A vale of mistakes, that is what I call it.”

“I do not deny it; but it is even more a vale of tears.”

“Just so. Well, as I was saying, I began to be very anxious about my Pepilla’s health and even her reason. Happily her child was born, and from that time I date her regeneration. She ceased to be captious and extravagant; she devoted herself to the care of the little girl and gained that balance of mind, that majestic dignity—I can find no other word—that she has never lost. It was just at the time when the child was born that Cimarra showed himself the blackguard he was. But you know—all Madrid knows the history of his infamy, his swindling villainy. He shortened my life by ten years, the scoundrel! How many tears has my poor girl shed in this very room! How many times has she begged my pardon for having given me such a rascally son-in-law! ‘I was mad,’ she would say, ‘I did not know what I was doing.’ While he was ruining me, she would kiss me and implore my forgiveness. ‘We must set one thing against the other,’ I said…. Well, it is all over! God Almighty … Providence … You had better prepare her for the news.”

“I?”

“Yes, you are clever; now I should not know what to do but just go in and say: ‘Pepa, your husband is dead….’ Now you can go in and take up a newspaper, and say: ‘What a terrible fire at sea!’”

“I? No, not I. Excuse me, I cannot invent a scene. It is your duty, or that of some member of the family.”

“My dear fellow, do me the favour. You are such an old friend.”

At this moment the door opened and Pepa came in fresh and smiling. Leon Roch felt a thrill at the sight; she seemed to him more beautiful than he had ever before thought her, and his heart leaped with joy. It was a shock of surprise and exquisite pleasure, like that of a happy memory, or the flash of a new idea in the mind, filling his soul with brightness. He gazed at her a moment in silence, seeing her in a haze of glory; she was transfigured in his sight, and her commonplace features, by some miracle, had adapted themselves to the type of the ideal woman.

“You have come at the right moment, Pepinilla.“

“Papa,” she said, “Monina is awake now, come and see her. How are you, Leon?”

“Stop a moment, child? Leon wants to speak to you, he wants to read you something—some paper in which….”

“It is all Don Pedro’s nonsense; I have read nothing.”

“What a lovely day,” said Pepa, going to the window through which the sun was shining gloriously, “look Leon. Do you see a roof there among the trees? That is the house of which I was speaking. Do you know Papa that he is looking out for a solitude where he may retire from the vanities of the world. I recommended him to look at the little house belonging to Trompeta, where the priest of Polvoranca lived.”

“It is a pretty place, and not two steps from here. Do you really want to come to this suburb? Well, my dear boy, if you want to find a den where you can devote yourself to gnawing at your books….”

“I hardly know, I am quite undecided,” said Leon, staring vacantly at the roof which he could just see among the verdure. “Let us go to see Mona.”

Pepa led the way.

“What is worrying you, my dear fellow?” said Fúcar to the younger man in a tone of kindly familiarity and laying his hand on Leon’s shoulder. “I know of course that your wife—ah, this is the deplorable result of exaggeration. You have it in a nutshell: piety is a virtue; but carry it to excess and what is the consequence? Misery and horrors.”

Then, as they went on, Fúcar leaning on Leon’s arm, he said in a low voice:

“My poor Ramona was just such another. There was no bearing it. Still this sort of infidelity—a religious passion—must be winked at, must be forgiven. I ask you, what is a man to do in such a case? It is frightful but irremediable. When a wife is faithful to her husband there is no reason, no excuse even for a separation and nevertheless she may be too much for endurance. I feel for you. I can only repeat what I said: we live in a vale of mistakes.”

Not long after Leon took his leave. He was so absorbed in thought that he failed to bow to Don Joaquín Onésimo who was walking in the park with the French baron, and discussing the pending loan with the deep interest that some men feel in a public calamity. On reaching Madrid he got out of his carriage to walk home, and he wandered through endless streets and turnings like a man walking in his sleep, seeing nothing and hearing nothing but a voice within which said again and again: “A widow!”

CHAPTER XXIX.

ERUNT DUO IN CARNE UNA.

For several days Leon did not go to Suertebella excepting once to leave a complimentary card at the door. He spent most of his time away from home; he had given up study and packed all his books into cases. He frequented clubs and meetings, but his friends found him taciturn and indifferent alike to gossip, news and discussion. He talked of a journey without saying whither, of a long absence; but if he had occasion to speak on any other subject it was with a bitterness of sarcasm or invective very unlike his usual serene and lofty way of viewing the events of life or the persons with whom he had come in contact.

One night at the beginning of April he went home soon after eleven. The door was opened by an under-servant.

“Where is Felipe? Why does he not let me in as usual?” asked the master.

“Felipe is not in the house, Sir.”

“Where is he then?”

“My mistress has dismissed him.”

“What for? Was there anything wrong?”

“She was angry because he would not go to confess, Sir.”

“You do then?”

“Yes, Señor; once a month. My mistress takes care of that; if we do not bring home a certificate she turns us into the street. But Ventura, the coachman, has a friend who is a sacristan and who can get him as many as he wants and so he satisfies my mistress who believes he goes to confess. If it were not for your Honour, Sir, my wife and me, we should have been off long ago from this place where so much is expected and there is never a moment’s peace. When a poor man has been hard at work all the week and Sunday afternoon comes round what a terrible thing it is that he cannot be allowed to go for a walk, but must needs be packed off to hear a sermon. My wife says she can stand it no longer! And then look at the scarecrow she has brought into the house. This morning when she sent off Felipe she said she should put some one in his place at once. I thought she would promote my brother Ramón: but no, she wrote a letter to the priests at San Prudencio, and before we could turn round, in came a fellow that looks like a sacristan, fat, red-faced and clean-shaved, with coat tails down to the ground, a low-crowned black hat, a sanctimonious, spiteful face and the manners of neither a man nor a woman. My mistress told me that I was to take Felipe’s place and the porter was to take mine and that this new gentleman—Pomares is his name—was to be the new porter and a sort of steward and superintendent of the rest of us.”

“You do not know what you are talking about. There has never been a steward in my house!”

“Steward. The mistress herself said steward; and the long-tailed rascal grinned and

looked at us with his fishy squint as much as to say: ‘I’ll send you to the right about.’ And then he preached us a sermon and looked as sweet as he knew how, and called us all his brothers and crossed his hands and declared he loved us all dearly!”

“Is your mistress in her oratory?” asked Leon.

“I believe she is in her sitting-room.”

Leon went into his wife’s boudoir where he found her talking with Doña Perfecta, a confidential friend whom she took with her when she went out at night. The worthy dueña was startled to see the master of the house, and having no doubt a subtle intuition that a scene was impending, she rose and took her leave.

No sooner were they alone than Leon began, without betraying any annoyance or temper.

“María, is it true that you have dismissed poor Felipe?”

“Perfectly true.”

“Before turning him out of the house you would have done well to reflect that I was very fond of the lad for his attention, his desire to learn, and his thoroughly good heart which covered a multitude of childish and provoking faults. I took him from your mother’s house because whenever he came here, he was in such ecstasies at the sight of so many books….”

“And in spite of these admirable qualities I was obliged to discharge him,” said María coldly.

“But why? Did he fail in his duty to you?”

“Yes, shamefully. For a long time I have made him go to confess. To-day I reproved him for having omitted last Sunday and the Sunday before, and the impudent fellow, instead of being penitent, turned upon me and said in the coolest way: ‘Señora, leave me in peace; I do not want to have anything to do with your priests.’”

“Poor Felipe! And in his place,” Leon went on without betraying his purpose, “you have engaged an elderly man….”

“Yes, Señor Pomares. I had hoped that you might come in early this evening that I might speak to you and have your consent. He is a very superior man, full of piety and good feeling, who thoroughly understands his business.”

“I have no doubt of it.”

“And who can do as much work in a day as two or three of your profligate idlers. He is a perfectly confidential person and to whom you may entrust your house, your interests, your most private business without the smallest hesitation.”

“I should like to see him. Send for him.”

María did so and in about five minutes the weak-eyed, red-faced dignitary made his appearance, exactly such as the man-servant had described him. After gazing at him from head to foot, Leon said very quietly:

“Very good, Señor Pomares. I will give you my first instructions.”

“What are your wishes, Sir?” said the new steward in mellifluous tones and arching his eyebrows.

“That you walk out of my house, this instant.”

“Leon!” cried María, seeing with astonishment the wrath in her husband’s face.

“You have heard me. Take your baggage and be off without loss of time.”

“The lady—your wife sent for me,” said the old man with an attempt at firmness, feeling himself strong in his mistress’s support.

“I am the master of the house, and I order you to go,” said Leon in a voice that admitted of no reply, “and I warn you that if you ever set foot within this house again you will go out not by the door, but by the window.”

The man made a low bow and vanished.

“Good heavens!” cried María, folding her hands, “what a shame! To treat such a good, humble, respectable man in such a way!”

“From this hour,” said Leon looking his wife full in the face, “understand that everything in this house is changed. Henceforth I find that I must absolutely interfere with your proceedings and snatch you, either with or against your will, from the monstrous course of life into which you have drifted; I must cure you, as mad people are cured, by removing you as far as possible from the influences that have occasioned your madness. My long suffering has been fatal to us both; but now my determination, which will border I warn you on tyranny—and by no fault of mine—is to straighten somewhat the crooked paths in which you have chosen to walk.”

“I am resigned to endure,” said María with the hypocritical unction she had learnt to display. “I will drink the cup you force to my lips. What is it to be? What do you require of me? Will you kill me; or is your cruelty more refined? Will you force me to renounce the habits of piety that I have formed? Do you mean to make me abjure my faith?”

“I have no desire that you should abjure your faith…. No, what I want is something quite different. Woe is me!”

He turned away as though he really did not know what he wanted. In point of fact while María was calm and played the part of the victim to admiration, Leon was disturbed, and hesitated in his part of executioner.

“I do not wish to have any discussion with you to-night,” he said. “We have fought too long without result, but now it strikes me that some definite action on my part may rescue us from this hideous state of things. Forgive me if instead of giving you explanations I threaten you, if instead of arguing I command, if instead of answering you I say nothing.”

“What do you require? Tell me at once.”

“I am going to leave Madrid.”

“Why? Are you tired of theatres, bull-fights, clubs, and atheistical meetings? Ah! if you leave this it will not be to live in a desert but to go to Paris, or London, or Germany!”

“You forsook and neglected me,” said Leon sadly. “You avoided me and flung me

back upon the frivolities of society; you, entrenched in your impeccability, have destroyed all that might have been the joy and comfort of my life and have made my home the abode of misery.”

María was speechless.

“Well then,” said Leon with unwonted vehemence. “I am tired of having no home. I am determined to have one.”

“And is not this your home? For my part I am always here,” said María, as coldly as though she spoke with a mouth full of snow.

“This my home! And what are you? Harsh, thorny and repellent! Henceforth….”

“You have only to command, and yet you are far more agitated than I; my resignation gives me self-control, while with all your haughty tyranny you tremble and turn pale! In one word Leon, what would you have?”

“I am going to leave Madrid. That is imperatively necessary.”

“What is the matter?”

“I do not want … I cannot stay here; I have no comfort, no affection in my own house; I have no one to care for me, since the companion of my life, instead of surrounding me with gentleness and tenderness and fondness, has shut herself up in an icy shroud. She, in the delirium of her exaggerated pietism, and I, in the gloomy solitude of my scepticism, are not, and can never be, a sympathetic and happy pair. Some men might be able to vegetate in this barren, arid atmosphere; I cannot. My soul cannot be fed with study only; however, as it can have no other nourishment, it is forced to be content with that.”

“And why can you not study here?”

“Here!” exclaimed Leon, amazed at the proposal. “I cannot stay here. I have told you already that I am going away.”

“I do not understand you?”

“I daresay not; it is quite possible that you do not; but who will understand me … who?”

He clasped his hands over his head with a bitter groan of despair; and María, respecting his anguish, refrained from making the impertinent remarks she was accustomed to indulge in on such occasions. At last she repeated her former suggestion:

“You can study as much as you like here. Let us live together. You will not interfere with my religious exercises, nor I with your studies. We shall be two recluses—I devoted to faith and you to atheism.”

“A beautiful prospect indeed! Nay, what I crave is not a cell, but a home; I have no contempt for the joys of life; I ask to enjoy them, in all moderation and honesty; I do not want a life of fevered exaltation, but a wholesome and practical life, the only life that leads to true human virtue, to duties fulfilled, to a free conscience, to peace and honour. What I want now is what I looked for when I married you. Do you understand?”

“Yes, I understand. What I do not understand is why, in order to gain such a home, you

must quit Madrid.”

“You quit it with me.”

“I!”

“Where I go you must go.”

“San Antonio! help me to do my duty!” said María with sanctimonious resignation. “And where do you propose to take me?”

“Wherever you please. But when once we are settled in the place we select for a residence you will lead a totally different life.”

“How?”

“I shall lay down a plan which you will have to follow with perfect exactitude. I shall forbid your going to church on ordinary days; I will not have my house filled with the crowd of priests and bigots that have taken this house by storm; I shall weed out your books, picking out those which are really pious from others that are mere farrago of horrible nonsense and rhapsody….”

“Go on, pray go on; what more?” said María with cold sarcasm.

“I have only one thing to add; and that is that you can take your choice between this and a complete separation, henceforth for the rest of our lives.”

María turned pale.

“You are cruel! abominable!” she exclaimed. “Give me time to consider at any rate. All this is to take place away from Madrid, you say?”

“Yes, quite away. You may choose the place.”

“Come, come, do not drive me crazy with your preposterous nonsense,” she suddenly said, trying to make light of it, “nothing shall induce me to leave Madrid.”

“Then good-bye,” said Leon. “Henceforth you are mistress of this house. Our separation is an established fact—not by law, but by my will. To-morrow my lawyer will call upon you and tell you what allowance I propose to make you. Now good-bye; in matters of business there is nothing like decision and promptitude. It is settled.” And he went towards the door.

“Wait,” said María following him; but then, as though she repented of the impulse, she folded her hands and raised those sea-blue eyes to the ceiling.

“O Lord!—Blessed Virgin!—Luis, my brother! inspire me rightly; tell me what I ought to do.”

Leon waited; they looked at each other in silence. Then, yielding to some instinct, he went up to her and took her hand with tender respect, saying as he did so:

“María, is it possible that I count for nothing in your memory, in your heart? My name that you bear—my person as your husband—do these not appeal to you? Does my presence rouse no feeling in you, no echo of the past even? Has fanaticism crushed every faintest thrill of human feeling in your soul—even pity and charity? Has it extinguished

every glimmer of duty and fitness?”

María covered her eyes with her hands as though in contemplation of some mental vision. “Answer me this last question: do you not love me?” María looked up; her eyes were red but not moist, and she gave him a cold grudging glance, as we bestow a penny on a beggar to be rid of him. Then she said in a dull dry voice:

“Wretched infidel, my God commands me to say: No.”

Leon turned away without a word and went to his room. He remained up all night arranging his things and packing books, clothes and papers. The next morning he left the house, not without looking back at it for the last time; it was not merely a home closed against him; it was hope deceived, an ideal life blasted and wrecked, like a cathedral that has been destroyed by an earthquake. There was still a fibre in his heart that attached him to that cherished ruin, but he wrenched it out and flung it from him.

CHAPTER XXX.

AN IRRUPTION OF THE BARBARIANS; ALARIC, ATTILA, AND OMAR.

"NOW then, Facunda, make haste, Señor Don Leon will be in soon from his ride and he will be put out if his room is not done. Though, Lord knows, he is never put out! A better man never was born. 'Good day, Facunda; have you fed your poultry? And Señor Trompeta, how is he?'—'Pretty well, thank you Señor Don Leon!'—And that is all we have to say to each other. Well, well … and only yesterday Trompeta was saying there must be two hundred books here; more like two thousand! Señor Don Leon Roch—it is a queer common sort of name—as common as ours.—Every time he goes to Madrid, he brings back a whole carriage full of books and then he makes these pictures. Señor Don Leon, I wish you would tell me what is the use of them? They are pretty too. Red and green lines, and spots, and splashes of every colour. Now if I could only read I might know all about it, for here, at the edge, there are letters and words scribbled….

"But come, woman! What are you about Facunda, gaping and dawdling like a booby? Make haste and sweep and clear up before the master comes. Then you can go down to the kitchen and eat the slice of ham that is frizzling in the pan; and then take a turn in the sun!"

The speaker was Dame Facunda Trompeta, whose habit it was to talk to herself whenever she was alone, addressing herself by name and praising or scolding herself in turns. Even when she did not actually express herself in words she did by gesture and grimace. She was the happy wife of José Trompeta, a worthy coal merchant of Madrid, who, having made a humble fortune by his trade, had retired to Carabanchel to spend the rest of his days in peace. No life could in fact be more peaceful and quiet than that of these two childless old folks. They were both easy-tempered creatures and took affectionate care of each other in their old age, with a kindly and respectful tenderness that defied the chill of advancing years. They had bought the little house of which they occupied the ground floor, letting the upper part at a fair profit to some of the swarming families of the city who fled from the whooping-cough or the measles.

In the beginning of April these rooms had been taken by a gentleman, who had previously been very often to the great house of Suertebella and who seemed to be a man of distinguished education, though he hardly ever laughed and spoke as rarely as possible. The room Leon had taken was spacious but bare; it might have been a prior's cell, lofty, airy and old-fashioned. From the windows to the east the trees of Vista Alegre were visible in the distance, and in the foreground the park of Suertebella; between this and the Trompeta's little court-yard, there was a gate in the wall, which almost always stood open. To the west lay the picturesque road through Upper Carabanchel with the park of La Montija, and the blue undulations and green levels of a country which, from March till the beginning of June, is not without a charm of its own. Out of this large room, which served

as drawing-room, dining-room and study, opened a bed-room and two other tiny rooms, in one of which his servant slept. A few articles of furniture brought from Madrid, with books, geological specimens, prints, maps, an easel with paints and portfolios, a microscope, some geological hammers, a simple chemical apparatus for analysis by evaporation and the blow-pipe, filled the large room.

"There, now your room is ready and you can come in as soon as you like," said Facunda dropping into the student's arm-chair; "you cannot complain of my having turned your things topsy-turvy." For the worthy woman not only talked to herself, but addressed remarks to the absent. "And tell me, Señor Don Leon, if you please, is it true that formerly you used to go to dine frequently at Suertebella? Though you now go there very seldom it strikes me that you admire the Señorita Marquesa more than enough. She is so rich that her not being handsome does not matter. You keep away from the great house at present because she is in mourning. I know, I know what you fine folks are!…" And Facunda paused, for she not only addressed her invisible interlocutors but imagined their answers. It was not a harangue but a discussion.

"What do you say? I am talking nonsense? Is it not a fact that you are sweet upon the lady? All that courting of the child, what does that mean; you may talk—San Blas! but if you were not a married man…. However, you fine gentlemen are not so very particular. Don't talk to me; I was in service for twenty years with a countess, and I could tell you things!… But come, come, Facunda, what are you doing idling here? Stir about, woman, trot round. You have not got the *puchero* on yet…. Hark! what is that? What a noise, who can it be?"

On the stairs there was a clatter of baby laughter and the busy patter of little feet. Monina, Tachana and Guru, after playing in the grounds, had wandered into the cow-yard and through the gate into the Trompetas' little plot, and finding themselves there they had set their hearts on a regular exploration of the house, Monina's nurse following in their wake.

We have already made acquaintance with Monina, but Tachana and Guru are strangers. Tachana, a young person of three, was the daughter of the bailiff at Suertebella, Catalina by name, with a sweet little face and a shy, quiet manner; she was Ramona's companion in all her games, and though they quarrelled on an average three times an hour—not unfrequently fighting like infant furies—they were the best friends in the world, and either of them would cry bitterly if the other were threatened with punishment. It is easy to understand how, by the process of transformation that words undergo in baby mouths, Catalina or Catana had become Tachana, what is less intelligible is how a boy christened Lorenzo, came to be called Guru; but so it was, and even stranger travesties of names have been known. Guru, who was Tachana's brother, was nearly six, he was as grave and demure as his sister, an unusually thoughtful but a fine, handsome boy, and the pride of his father—with a sweetheart, and a watch, and a little great coat, and a stick—and he always spoke of the two younger children as 'the girls.'

"Facunda," said the voice of the nurse from below, "the locusts are upon you. Mind, they do no mischief."

They rushed up in a crowd, Monina skipping and dancing, Tachana walking with

much dignity with a shawl tied round her waist for a train, while Guru gave himself the airs of the father of a family, warning them to be careful and well behaved.

“Why here is my little day-star!” cried Facunda, snatching up Monina and covering her with kisses. Ramona kicked with all the strength of her little legs, crying:

“No, no, ugly old woman!”

“Bless her, the darling! You, Catana, don’t get into mischief or I will be after you…. Lorenzo, let Monina alone. Naughty boy, what are you doing to the child? Let her be, poor little thing.”

Monina and Tachana trotted all round the rooms. They were already tired with playing in the garden, and their faces were hot and their eyes bright. Monina had dimples that an angel might have coveted at the corners of her mouth when she laughed, and Tachana’s dark curls fell over her forehead so that she had to push them out of her eyes, which she was constantly blinking as though the light hurt them. Monina, on the contrary, kept hers wide open with a keen, restless, investigating glance, the expression of insatiable curiosity and ambition which wanted first to examine and then to have everything that came within her ken.

Facunda told them to be very good and to touch nothing, and she would have been more precise in her injunctions but that she heard the voice of the nurse down-stairs gossiping with Casiana, the wife of one of the game-keepers. It is within the limits of possibility—happily an infinitely remote possibility—that the earth, rebelling against the laws of attraction, might quit its orbit and perish in flames from dashing against some other globe; but under no conceivable theory could it have been possible that Facunda, hearing the voices of two other women, should resist the attraction and not run to hear what they were talking about. Consequently she left the children, creeping silently and cautiously half way down the stairs. Monina and Tachana meanwhile had come to a standstill in front of the table on which lay the geological plates, and drawings finished or in progress. A smile of triumph, such as might light up the countenance of the discoverer of a new world, shone on each little face. What pretty things! What bright colours! They had no idea of what the pictures meant, but they admired them none the less for that; indeed, they were almost like one of their own works of art, when a kind hand supplied them with paper and pencils. Guru, who had a paint box, could certainly have produced works in this style. These were not mere pictures of babies and houses and horses; they were a gorgeous blaze of colour and splendour!

Now it is a well-known fact that when a child sees a thing it admires, be it what it may, it never takes it for granted that it is finished. It always wishes to add some embellishments of its own handiwork. Children have, no doubt, a loftier ideal of art than their elders, and from their point of view every work of art will bear touching up. This was Monina’s opinion, at any rate, who discovering on the table and close at hand an ink-stand, dipped her small finger in and drew a broad black line across the drawing. Enchanted with the marked effect of the experiment she laughed with glee, looking round at her companions who laughed too, and Monina, encouraged by success put her whole little hand into the ink and daubed the paper from end to end. The result was sublime. Over the strata, carefully washed in with various tints, lay heavy black clouds, charged, it

would seem, with thunder and rain.

Tachana was much too dainty to put her fingers into the ink; on the other hand, she was great at pencil effects. Happy opportunity! On the table lay a blue chalk pencil and on a portfolio stand, close by, a fine geological atlas—a master-piece of German lithography—was lying open. These delightful gaudy pages wanted improving; who could doubt it; an industrious hand might draw a bold line round the margin of each. What could be better? This was Tachana's idea and she was a Raphael in strong lines which she executed with unhesitating dash.

Guru knew that their efforts might end in a whipping and he bid the little girls cease their mischief; but at the same time he felt that it was a grand opportunity for him—he, who had a paint box, and really knew how to "do pictures" almost as good as those of Velasquez. Monina's was horrid daubing! What was the meaning of the black blotches and crosses with which her dirty little fingers had marked the margin of the print? Appearances might be saved if only he were to embellish the picture with a house in one corner of it—a house with two windows like eyes, a chimney at the top, and a dog in front of the door. No sooner thought of than done. He selected a red chalk pencil that there might be no mistaking his work for Monina's, he took another plate and began his house. In less than five minutes he had added a horse with a man riding on it and smoking a pipe bigger than the house.

Three artists can never work in one studio without occasional outbreaks of temper. Monina wanted to add a touch to Guru's house, and he shoved her off with his elbow. Monina snatched away the sheet saying: "Mine, mine!"

Then Tachana echoed the cry: "Mine!"

The plate, which was of folio size, fell off the table, Tachana and Monina each seized one end and—crash. The two babies shouted with glee as it tore across and Monina clapped her inky little paws.

"Oh! you naughty girls, now see what you have done!" said Guru, turning pale with horror. But Monina's only reply was to snatch down another print and tear a piece out of it. Then she clutched the pencil from Tachana and across the long lines that she had so gravely drawn, Monina scribbled a perfect spider's net of flourishes, holding the pencil by the middle and scratching with all her might and main. Guru at last succeeded in putting a stop to her Vandalic energy, and threatened to slap her; but the little imp escaped, skipping about the room and wiping her grimy little fingers on the silk cushions.

In the course of her peregrinations her eye fell on the table on which stood the microscope and she stopped short to stare at it, standing on tiptoe with her hands on the edge of the table. Then she tried to reach it exclaiming:

"My! pretty, pretty!" which being interpreted, meant to convey the idea that she supposed it to be a new toy and intended for her.

"Look at her! naughty, naughty," said Guru, "now she wants the eye-glass."

And Guru himself, anxious to prove his superior knowledge, drew the instrument within reach and applied his right eye to the top of the tube.

“In this glass I can see Paris,” he announced.

Tachana had pulled a chair to the table that she might see too; but Monina had gotten ahead of her; she climbed up on the chair, and from thence, on all fours, on to the table, sending the microscope and the rest of the apparatus crashing to the floor.

At this moment a man entered the room. The three little Vandals were turned to stone; Monina on the table, not in the least abashed but very grave and her eyes very wide open; Tachana on the chair, her finger in her mouth and her eyes downcast; Guru looking for a corner where he might hide himself.

“What have these brats been doing?—San Blas! What a mess!” cried Facunda, who came in at the master’s heels.

Leon cast a despairing glance at the torn prints, the scribbled atlas, the microscope on the floor; that one glance was enough to reveal the extent of the disaster.

“You little wretches, what have you done?” he exclaimed, going up to the table. “And you, Facunda, what were you thinking of to leave them alone here? What were you about? Listening to gossip no doubt—You are a worse baby than they are!”

He stamped his feet angrily. Then he heard a piteous cry from Tachana—a cry from her baby heart.

“Was it you, Monina?” said Leon, looking at the child with grave displeasure. Monina shook her head in denial till it seemed as though she would shake it off; at the same time her conscience no doubt pricked her, for she looked at her hands like a second Lady Macbeth.

“But it was you … look at your hands. You little wretch!”

Monina looked up in his face, imploring mercy; two large tears rolled down her cheeks, and her face was puckered up for a whimper when Tachana’s lamentations suddenly filled the house; she was a perfect Magdalen; there was nothing for it but to believe in the sincerity of such noisy repentance.

“There, there,” said Leon, kissing the two little sinners and taking Monina in his arms, “do not cry any more. What a pretty pair of hands! What would Mamma say? Come and wash them—you dirty little creature!”

“The nurse let them come up alone, that she might stay down-stairs and gossip and chatter,” said Facunda, following with the water jug, “I cannot be everywhere at once; it is all her fault.”

Monina’s hands were washed; then Leon, seating himself, took a young lady on each knee.

“Look, what a lot of mischief you have done,” he said, “and Guru, where is Guru?”

Lorenzo had vanished. “He is at the bottom of it all,” said Facunda. “These poor little dears would have done no harm if he had not led them into it.”

“Guru, Guru,” cried the two babies in a duet, laying the burthen of the crime on the shoulders of their absent accomplice.

“That monkey of a boy! If I catch him here….”

Monina, whose alarm had given place to sauciness, was pulling Leon’s beard.

“Stop! little lady, you hurt,” he exclaimed.

“Tachana say,” babbled Monina. “Tachana say….”

“Well, what does Tachana say?”

“Tachana say … you am my papa.”

“No, no,” said Leon, looking at Tachana who was sucking her fingers. “I am not your papa. Take your hand out of your mouth and tell me why you say I am your papa.”

Very slowly, and in low tones Tachana made answer:

“My mamma say you am.”

Monina, who was a merry little soul and who when she had got an idea into her head stuck to it and repeated it, burst into shouts of laughter, clapping her hands and kicking with delight as if her feet had a language of their own, and repeated again twenty or thirty times:

“You am my papa. You am my papa….”

Facunda turned to leave the room saying to herself:

“Why, it is as clear as day; I did not need the child to tell me that.”

“Señora Facunda,” said Leon. “The nurse may leave the children. I will take them home.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CRISIS.

An hour later Monina and Tachana were playing on the floor with paper birds and boxes that Leon had made for them, while he restored order and sorted out what could be saved from the effects of the invasion. The noise of an opening door made him look up and he saw before him his father-in-law, the Marquis de Tellería. He looked aged, and his face, more lined and wrinkled than usual, betrayed some nervous tension or perhaps the neglect of some cosmetic he was accustomed to use; his eyes, dim with tears or want of sleep, blinked and twinkled like little lamps that flicker for want of oil and struggle with a feeble smoky flame. His dress only remained unchanged and was as precise and neat as ever; but his voice, formerly bold and decided, as that of a man who has always something to say that is worth hearing, was low, timid and deprecatory. Leon felt greater pity than ever for the old man, and he offered him a chair.

"I am suffering from fever," said the marquis, putting out a hand that Leon might feel his pulse. "For the last three nights I have not slept at all; and last night I thought I should have died of exhaustion and shame."

Leon asked one or two questions as to the cause of his distress and sleeplessness.

"I will tell you all about it. From you I can have no secrets," said Tellería sighing deeply. "In spite of all that has happened between you and María—which I deplore with all my heart—oh! but I still hope to see you reconciled…. In spite of everything you will always be a son to me—a dear son."

So much mellifluous flattery put Leon on his guard.

"Well, dreadful things have been happening. Your hair will stand on end when you hear it all, my dear son. But I have a good deal of fever, have I not? My temperament is so sensitive and nervous, and I cannot bear these great agitations. God grant you may never go through in your own house such scenes as have taken place in ours these last few days! I have come on purpose to tell you, and you see I do not know how to begin. I am afraid…. I dare not."

"I understand it all perfectly," said Leon, interrupting this long preamble. "The moment has come when it is no longer possible to carry on the system of drifting. Everything in this world must come to an end, even the dishonest farce of those who live by spending what they have not got. A day comes when the creditors are tired of waiting, when the workmen who have been put off from day to day—upholsterers, tailors, drapers, purveyors of all kinds—send a cry up to heaven, and ceasing to ask, proceed to take; ceasing to grumble, begin to rail."

"Yes," said the marquis closing his eyes. "That day has come. They would not listen to my good counsel and now the catastrophe has fallen; a hideous catastrophe, of which it is impossible to foresee the consequences. In one word, my dear fellow, we are in danger of

having an attachment put upon the house…. I do not care for the loss of all the fashionable rubbish that Milagros has collected from half a hundred shops without paying for it; what I feel is the scandal, the disgrace! The day before yesterday a dealer who supplies us with groceries, and who has been to the house again and again, set up the most terrific hubbub on the stairs. I heard his torrent of abuse in my study, and rushed out in a fury, but he retreated into the street where he continued his harangue. Yesterday the man we hire the carriage from refused to serve us any more, and the worst of it is that he wrote me a most insolent letter…. I will show you….”

“No, no. There is no need,” said Leon, staying the trembling hand with which the old man was fumbling in his pockets. “I can imagine what the poor wretch would say.”

“Yesterday I was summoned before the magistrate; those rascally shop-keepers—fuel merchants, upholsterers, and dealers of every degree, had put in above five and twenty claims against me. It is horrible to have to talk of such low things; the words seem to burn my mouth, and my face tingles with shame. Tell me—say that you pity me.”

“I do indeed,” said Leon moved to sincere commiseration.

“I do not pretend to excuse myself,” the marquis went on with melodramatic pathos and closing his eyes. “Every resource is exhausted and every door is closed. Of our jewels nothing is left—not even the pawnbroker’s tickets. A money-lender to whom I applied yesterday, the only one in whom I had the slightest hope, gave me a very rough reception and showed me out with speeches that I would rather forget. Oh! it is dreadful to have to tell you such things, Leon, and I do not know how I find courage to say them; I go round and round the treadmill of misery into which I have been thrust, and still it seems to me that it is all a lie—that it cannot be I who have to bear such things—I, Agustín Luciano de Sudre, Marquis de Tellería, the son of one of the noblest gentlemen of Extremadura and heir to a name that has been handed down through centuries with dignity and honour.”

“Yes,” said Leon stiffly, “it might well be a lie! and the most improbable part of it is that after having been rescued already, more than once, by generous hands from this abyss of disgrace and misery, you have fallen into it again.”

“You are right, but I am weak; and the fault is not mine alone,” said the marquis as meekly as a schoolboy. “My wife and my sons have given me a push that my fall might be the quicker and more certain. If I were to tell you the worst, the darkest feature of it all—indeed my dear Leon, my only friend, I must tell you all, though these are things that a man only tells to the pillow he sleeps on, and blushes even then. But I have no secrets from you … still it is hard, very hard … all the blood of the Castilian nobles that flows in my veins curdles at the thought, and I feel as if an invisible hand held my lips.”

“But if it is not the aim and object of your visit, you need say nothing about it.”

“Nay, it has to be said, bitter as it is. You know that Gustavo has been very intimate for some time with the Marquesa de San Salomó. Well, Gustavo—but I do not believe that it was his idea, I believe it was some cunning suggestion of my wife’s—Milagros—I hardly know how to speak of it—what words to use in speaking of the members of my own family. In short, Pilar de San Salomó gave Gustavo a certain sum of money, for what purpose I do not know, but a considerable sum, which my miserable wife, on some inconceivable pretence, chose to appropriate; they made their own arrangements; whether

there was any promissory-note or written agreement I did not hear. But my son, who is a gentleman, finding himself seriously compromised, had a violent scene with his mother only last evening about this money, and you cannot conceive the row there was in the house. Gustavo and Polito were ready to fight. I had to strain every nerve to keep peace. At last Gustavo went off to his own room; I, suspecting something worse, followed him and found him with a pistol at his head, about to shoot himself…. Then there was another scene and a fresh outburst, with the addition, this time, of his mother's horror…. Oh, what a night! My dear fellow, what a dreadful night! To crown all, the servants, in despair of being paid a farthing, have left the house after insulting us with a chorus of abuse, calling us … But no, there are words which I cannot utter."

The marquis was quite beside himself; great drops of sweat stood on his forehead and his breast heaved like that of a man who has been carrying a terrific burthen. Leon found no words to break the pause that ensued. It was Don Agustín who at length collected his failing strength and, putting on the most dismal and appealing face that he could command, exclaimed:

"Leon, my son, save me, save me from this depth of misery! If you do not I shall die … we shall all die—save my noble name!"

"How?" asked Leon coldly.

"Do you not see that I am disgraced?"

"Certainly; but I do not see how I am to prevent it."

"But could you bear to see your relations begging their bread?" said his father-in-law, employing a figure of speech that he thought must prove effective.

"I am quite willing to save my relations from beggary. But if you expect me to pay the debts you have incurred by wastefulness, dissipation and vanity, so that you may be free to begin again and get into fresh debt, and go on living in the same scandalous way, I am obliged to say very plainly: No. Not once, but several times, have I extricated you from a similar predicament. I have heard endless promises of amendment, endless schemes of reform; but they have all resulted in greater extravagance than ever. You, the marquesa, and Polito have eaten up a good quarter of my fortune; I can do no more."

Leon's resolute energy startled the hapless marquis, who sat stunned; the bluntness of his son-in-law's refusal deprived him for a time of the power of speech; at last, stammering and hesitating like a man who has lost count in telling his beads, he managed to speak.

"I am not asking your charity … that is not in my nature … whenever I have appealed to your generosity … you have had my bond … and interest."

"The bond is a mere formality, the interest purely visionary; I have accepted the hypothesis simply and solely to give a gift the semblance of a loan. What security can you give who have neither land, nor houses, not even a stick that does not belong to your creditors? What I have done for you has been anything rather than really generous, Señor; it is a crime. I have not succoured the needy but sheltered the vicious!"

"Good God!" cried the marquis quaking with astonishment; "remember—what you

have done for me—for my sons and my wife was the natural outcome of your affection for us … but Leon, for the last time … this is the critical moment of my life. The honour of my house is at stake.”

“Your house has no such thing as honour; it has had none for a long time past.”

The marquis drew up his effeminate head; his wrinkled cheeks were purple, and his eyes flashed as though a sudden light had blazed up in front of him; it almost seemed as if there might be a grain of dignity still lurking in the soul of this man, weak as he was, in mind as in body, a spark of honour urging him on like a dastardly soldier who, after keeping out of danger in a battle, tries in the last extremity to escape the taunts of his comrades by seeking a glorious death. But Leon’s ascendancy over the poor coward was so great that he could not find strength to speak and could only groan, while his head fell again on his breast and he listened dully to his son-in-law. He was but a dry and blasted tree, awaiting the fatal axe.

“No honour,” repeated Leon, “unless we give the word a purely conventional and fictitious sense. True honour does not consist in repeating a set of formulas to protect ourselves against weakness and meanness. It is based on noble deeds, on prudent and respectable conduct, on domestic honesty and an unbroken word. Where these do not exist who can talk of honour? Where everything is falsehood, insolvency, vice and folly how can there be honour? Since we are here in strict privacy supposing I remind you of your wife’s proceedings, of Polito’s, nay of your own?”

The marquis put out a deprecatory hand as if to implore his son-in-law to do nothing of the kind. But Leon thought it right to strike home.

“I entreat you,” said Tellería penitently, “not to go on with your list of grievances. I regret them bitterly; I do not deny that I have committed follies … who has not? It is the way of the world. Now that I am sinking, Leon, either put out a hand to save me or leave me to perish; but do not vilify me, do not make my fate more cruel than it is. Of course I have no right to appeal so frequently to your generosity. Still, you must reflect that your circumstances and mine are widely different. I have children, and you have not.”

“But …” Was he going to say: “‘But I may have some day?’”

The marquis sat for a few minutes looking at the two little girls playing in the middle of the room.

“Well,” said Leon. “I will make you an allowance sufficient to enable you to live decently, but this is all I can do. I have not a gold mine; nor, if I had, would it ever fill up the gulfs that you open at my feet from time to time.”

Don Agustín turned pale, and as he sat gazing at the floor he mumbled with his jaws as though he were turning over the dry husk of a fruit.

“An allowance!” he muttered. In fact the idea stuck in his throat, and though common gratitude forbid his making any overt objection his changed expression plainly showed that this eleemosynary annuity, doled out by pity, revolted his pride and embittered his blood. So complete was his moral obliquity that, while he felt no degradation to ask a loan on fictitious security, tantamount in fact to a distinct purpose of never repaying it, he was wounded to the quick by this offer of a pension which he called “throwing his bread in his

teeth.” Besides, his selfish pride made him recalcitrant to any scheme which did not extricate him from his immediate dilemma. What did he care for living the decent and respectable life that Leon spoke of? What does the spendthrift care for the future? His first anxiety is to avoid scandal at a great crisis, so that, when it is past, he may go on again with a bold front and a confident stride along the same road of ruin and insolvency which was so familiar to him. However, the marquis had too much respect for propriety and too much genuine courtesy to allow him to betray his feelings; on the contrary, he expressed himself grateful for “the St. Bernard’s mess of pottage”—the pittance that his son-in-law had offered.

“An allowance,” he said trying to make the best of it, “you are most liberal; I am grateful for your foresight. But in point of fact it will not get me out of the scrape. The ship is wrecked, and your allowance is land in sight a hundred miles away.”

He could find nothing else to say; but he was paler than ever, and did not raise his eyes from the ground. Vexation and disgust had changed his features as if he were suddenly and miraculously aged. His lips were pinched between two deep wrinkles, and his moustache, all unstiffened, stuck out in every direction, as threatening as a hedgehog’s spines. His cheeks, of a dull and faded pink, were furrowed and worn, and under his eyes were deep ridges of puffy white flesh; it almost seemed as though his neck was leaner and his ears larger and more transparent, while his temples had taken the yellow hue of a mortuary taper; he seemed to have fallen into decrepitude. However, after a few moments of reflection over his hapless fate, he raised his head, and forced his lips into a grimace in which a hypocritical smile hardly concealed the foaming of rage.

“You are, I am sure, most kind and considerate,” he began. “But if we owe much to you, on your part, you have ample reason for your good offices. We cannot be expected to overlook the fact that you have made our beloved María a miserable woman.”

“That I have made her miserable,” said Leon quietly.

“Yes, most wretched! though we have kept it quiet out of consideration for you—too much consideration. At last our feelings are too much for us and we cannot sit by in silence when we see that angel’s sufferings. Do you mean to say that you do not see that the grief of her separation from you will bring her to the grave?”

There is no creature on earth however insignificant that does not try to bite or sting when it is trodden under foot. The marquis, wounded in his pride and cheated of his wild hopes, had recourse to his sting.

“This is too complicated a question to be discussed in a hurry. Do you, as her father, demand an explanation of my action? Because, if so, you have been a long time thinking of it. María and I parted more than a month ago.”

“But the fact that I have delayed it need not prevent my doing so now,” retorted Don Agustín, plucking up his courage now he thought that he had laid his hand on one of those weapons which give a coward the advantage over the most valiant foe. “I am a father, and a devoted one. There is no name for your behaviour to María, that angel of goodness! In the first place you assailed her with your atheism and almost broke her heart by your materialistic views. Do you think that the piety of a woman, brought up as she has been, in the true faith, is not even deserving of respect when she desires to practice it with all due

fervour? Without beliefs and without faith, do you expect to govern the world or a family by the laws of an atheistical Utopia?"

"And what in God's name do you know about governing the world, or even a family?" cried Leon, laughing bitterly at his father-in-law's solemnity. "When did you ever know anything about religion? When had you any beliefs, or faith, or anything of the kind to boast of?"

"Very true; I am not learned in such matters," replied Tellería conscious of his incompetence. "I am ignorant; but I cherish certain traditions which have been stamped on my heart from childhood, that I have never forgotten in spite of my shortcomings; and by the light of those principles I can declare that you have behaved atrociously to María, and that by forcing her to this separation you have trampled on every sound principle and all that the human conscience holds most sacred."

This hackneyed scrap of newspaper bombast exasperated Leon more perhaps than the speaker's pretensions merited. Pale with wrath, he turned upon him at once:

"Of what good are your moral laws and your interpretation of the human conscience? A beautiful thing indeed is your reverence for tradition. Why! I was such a fool as to endure for four years a life of mental asphyxia in a world where everything is dogma and formula! Morality, religion, honour!—Words! mere words! Wealth even is an empty mockery; the very laws are mere formula—made brand-new every day and never obeyed; the whole thing is a miserable farce—a stage, where the actors are never weary of cheating each other and the rest of the world in their lying parts, and making believe to be virtuous, pious, or noble. This is your model society, worthy to be preserved intact to all futurity!… No one must lay a finger on it, or even find fault with it. I, you say have failed in respect to that herd of hypocrites who succeed in hiding their depravity from the million, and are clever enough to pass for creatures with a soul and conscience—I, who have seen and suffered, and said nothing, not even in opposition to the aberrations of a wife, who, though less guilty, is more fanatical than most—I, you say, have broken the laws of morality! How and in what respect I ask you?

"Nay, but I will tell you. I have been such a fool as to yield to the contemptible formulas which in your world pass for principles; I have looked on in silence and been content to screen vice and extravagance, supplying money to a spendthrift father, and wasteful mother, and libertine sons. I have encouraged dissolute living, have lent support to every vice—nay even to crime. These sins I have committed, and I own them to my shame!"

Provoked at first, and lashing his fury with his own words, Leon struck the table, threatened his father-in-law with his fist, till the old man shrank almost to nothing as he sat through this philippic with his eyes fixed on a water-jar that stood on the table, wondering whether it were large enough for him to hide in.

Monina and Tachana, terrified by Leon's vehemence, gathered up their paper playthings and, daring neither to laugh nor to cry, crept silently away into a corner of the room.

"I only spoke as a father," said the marquis in so faint a voice that it might really have come from the bottom of the vase.

“And I spoke as a man wounded in his tenderest feelings, a husband exiled from his hearth by a cruel inquisition, and cast into the loneliness of practical celibacy by gross fanaticism and heartless bigotry. Those moral laws of which you talk so much condemn me, I know, for what they most absurdly call my atheism; but the true atheist, the hardened materialist, are those who trick themselves out in borrowed robes to be my accusers, and who would be just as ready to dress themselves up as harlequins to dance at a fancy ball. But though I should scorn to defend myself before them, I would have them know that I am the victim and not the executioner, and that I have quite made up my mind henceforth to defy the censure of hypocrites and the attacks of detractors. I mean to go my own way; I know where to find truth and the really immutable laws. I can scorn dogmas and traditions! It will be a pleasure to me to show my contempt, not in secret but publicly, for a tribunal that deserves no veneration, and a verdict pronounced in accordance with the clamour of a crowd devoid of all moral sense. Composed of agitators, hypocrites, rakes, idlers and bigots; of antiquated fops and decrepit youth, of foolish women and men who traffic in public moneys and private consciences; of would-be authorities who are but apes, of men who would sell everything—even their honour—and others who would sell themselves, but that no one will buy them; of worldlings who put on an air of sanctity—mere bags of rottenness with human faces; of cowards, sneaks and renegades; of all in short who would like to constitute the basis of society and who do not hesitate to insist that all mankind ought to be moulded after their image and likeness. Well! let them stay where they are! I will withdraw—I have withdrawn—leaving my hapless wife behind me, by her desire, not my own, I can look on from afar at the edifying spectacle. They understand each other—they live from day to day, spending what is not their own; paying for church ceremonies, and encouraging vice; dividing their inheritance between sacristans and ballet-girls. Families are either dying out, or perpetuated by generations of unhealthy descendants; the most serious facts and laws of life are laughed to scorn; virtue and true piety are contemned, while they preach in bombastic rhetoric a scheme of morality of which they are utterly ignorant and a God whose laws they have not studied. They, indeed, are atheists, a thousand times over, who measure the sublime purposes of the Almighty by the puny standard of their mean and selfish souls!”

The burning words had parched his lips; he took the jar from the table and drank some water. His hapless opponent had shrunk so completely into nothingness that he had ceased to think of the vase as a conceivable hiding-place; his eyes now rested on a match-box as though to say: “How happy should I be if only I might disappear into that!”

Being a man of the world with a multitude of commonplaces at his command, even on the most critical occasions, Tellería was trying to find some words that might release him from the present dilemma, or at any rate cover his discomfiture.

“I will not attempt to imitate you,” he began, pulling himself together and clearing his throat. “I shall indulge in no violent language. I have appealed to the laws of morality and to them I still appeal. You have sinned against my daughter and against society at large … that is how I feel it, and how I must continue to speak of it. I go back to the insult you have offered to María, who is a faithful and blameless wife, and to the underhand manner of your separation. In short, I do not believe that it was María’s bigotry that moved you to it, I strongly suspect …”

But the marquis did not finish his sentence. Tachana was heard crying. She and Monina had crept behind a chair and had been peeping through the bars in great alarm at the two men who were arguing so fiercely. Tired at last of this amusement they had begun to quarrel; Ramona had slapped her companion.

“Whose children are those?” asked the marquis eagerly, “that red-haired child is Pepa’s, surely?”

“Yes; Monina, come here.”

“Suertebella is here is it not?”

“Quite near.”

“To be sure!” The marquis had an idea—slow of wit as he was and rarely able to boast of an idea of his own; for his logic, like his phrases, was borrowed ready made. He felt a strange light flash through his murky brain; yes! yes! he had an idea, and nothing on earth should persuade him to abandon it! He rose.

“Good-bye,” he said shortly, putting on a face so solemn as to be quite ludicrous.

“Good-bye,” answered Leon in no way disconcerted.

“We will meet again and renew our discussion of the laws of morality,” added Don Agustín, “of my daughter’s position—your desertion—her honour—all these are very serious matters.” And as he drew himself up he seemed to grow taller; the match-box, the water-jar, the chair he sat in, nay, the room itself seemed too small to hold him.

“Very well, discuss it at once!”

“No. We must be calm, very calm. My daughter must put herself under the protection of the law. I shall communicate with my family on the subject. It is a most serious matter … my honour….”

“Ah! To be sure; your honour!” said Leon with a laugh. “Very good; we will try to find it, and when we have succeeded we can talk about it. Good-bye.”

The marquis departed. Though somewhat crestfallen at the failure of his application for money, he was very proud of himself. There was something in his mind which made him swell as he thought of it; the stairs, the doorway, were not big enough for him—even the street, the fields, the whole wide world! It was the idea which had slipped in hardly visible and expanded within him, suggesting with miraculous fertility a thousand accessory possibilities of the most flattering description, raising him in his own estimation, and lowering others. How comforting it is to have an idea! especially when it condones our own sins by showing us the sins of others, and allows us to say with satisfaction: “Ah! we are all alike, all alike!”

CHAPTER XXXII.

REASON *VERSUS* PASSION.

THE following day Leon had visitors; two friends who gave him some information which, though certainly interesting, was far from pleasing to him, and he spent the day in agitations and the night without sleep. Early in the morning he called Facunda and told her that he was going away; then an hour later he said to himself: “No I must stay—I ought to stay.”

In the afternoon he rode out, and on his return sent a message to Pepa saying that he wished to speak with her.

Since the day when the news of Cimarra’s death had reached them, Leon had hardly seen her; a feeling of delicacy had kept him from repeating his visits to Suertebella.

Pepa received him in the evening in Monina’s nursery, where he had seen the little girl suffering and dying. This evening the saucy baby, lying half-uncovered on the bed, was rebellious to the law which sends children to sleep betimes. Kicking and tossing between the sheets she was chattering to herself, relating scraps of all the stories she knew, full of fun and impudence; beginning long speeches that ended in nothing, punishing her doll after she had fed it, sitting up in bed to bow like a gentleman, and making a peep-hole with her tiny fingers to imitate the Baron de Soligny’s eye-glass. After much ado, between laughter and a pretence of severity, Pepa succeeded in making her kneel up and repeat a *pater noster* with a very bad grace and a great many yawns. This she followed up with a baby hymn and, as though this innocent litany had a soporific virtue, Monina dropped upon the pillow and her eyelids closed over her unwilling eyes while she was still murmuring the last words of the verse.

They stood watching her for some time in silence, and then Leon, bending down to kiss her, said:

“Good-bye, little pet,” in a tremulous voice.

“Why good-bye?” asked Pepa anxiously. “Are you going away?”

“Yes.”

“You sent word that you wanted to see me?”

“To take leave.”

“Are you not happy here?”

“Immensely happy—but I must not stay.”

“I do not understand; have you made it up with your wife?”

“No.”

“You are going abroad?”

“Perhaps.”

“Where to?”

“I have not made up my mind.”

“But you will let us know; you will write?”

“Nay; perhaps not even that.”

Pepa looked steadily at the floor.

“It is folly that you and I should talk in riddles and beat about the bush,” said Leon. “For some months we have always used vague phrases, as if we had something to hide. If there is any guilt in our souls it had better be plainly uttered than hypocritically concealed. In fact I must speak out.

“After I had so completely lost every dream of domestic happiness I became a constant visitor at your house. Perhaps—nay indeed, certainly—I went there too often. My loneliness, my dulness, my longing for some of the pleasures of a home life, led me there in search of that comfort which is as necessary to the human soul as equilibrium is to the body. I was perishing of cold; what wonder then that I went where I found warmth? I began by amusing myself with Monina, I ended by worshipping her, for I felt not merely a want but the maddest craving to love and be loved. It is so easy to win a child’s love. I had a wild desire to revel in childish things, to lay my heart, empty and void as it was, at her baby feet for her to stamp upon it—I do not know how else to express it—but you will understand. I always fancy you can read my soul since yours is no secret to me. I feel as though for a long time we had been acting a comedy….”

“I never act!” interrupted Pepa.

“No, no, nor I, but listen. I was alone; at home, in the street, in the turmoil of society everywhere; always alone except when I was by your side. A fatality … nay, I will not give that conventional name to the consequences of our own errors and want of foresight…. I will say the situation in which we had placed ourselves forbid our declaring honestly the feelings of our hearts. We were both married.”

“Yes,” said Pepa calmly and steadily, as having often made the same reflection, and said the same thing to herself, having contemplated the fact many times and from every possible point of view.

“Now, to be sure, you are free, but I am not. The situation is not materially altered; but the fact that you are a widow is maddening me.—I ought not to be here at this moment—and yet here I am! When I see you and Monina dressed in black I am filled with a ferment of sacrilegious passion; I struggle to quell it and be silent, but you yourself drag me on with irresistible force and compel me…. Well, there is but one way of saying it … to tell you that I love you; that I have loved you for a long time. I cannot find courage or words to curse this passion, which in me is the outcome of my banishment from all happiness, and in you of … I don’t know what.”

“It was born with me,” said Pepa under her breath. “You have told me what my heart knew already…. But to hear you say it … with your own lips … here, to my face…. Here, where only God and I can hear….”

Her voice failed her and she turned as pale as death: she could find no utterance for the feelings that crowded on her soul, but she seized one of Leon’s hands and kissed it again and again with passionate tenderness.

“We are in a very difficult position,” he said. “We must face it together.”

“A difficult position!” repeated Pepa with candid surprise, as though to her it seemed a very simple matter.

“Yes, for at this moment we are both the victims of calumny.”

Pepa shrugged her shoulders as much as to say: “What do I care for calumny?”

“You will feel with me that I made a great mistake in coming to live so near you.”

“A mistake! In coming to Carabanchel!” she exclaimed in an accent that conveyed that if that was a mistake, then so was the daily rising of the sun.

“Yes, a great mistake. But indeed I, who am regarded by a good many people as a man of sense, am always making mistakes in matters of conduct.” Pepa thought that possible. “My last blunder has given a pretext to scandal. My poor darling, do you know that they say in Madrid that within two months of your husband’s death you have encouraged a lover; that I am that lover; and that we are living in open defiance of all decency and morality. Not content with this they have chosen to invent a piece of retrospective slander, supporting it by what passes for substantial evidence.”

“And what is that?”

“Monina is said to be my child.”

For a minute Pepa stood bewildered; but the terrible charge had made no very deep impression on her mind. By a rapid and inexplicable process of logic she said:

“The calumny is so preposterous, so absurd, that we need not let it distress us.”

“Do you know of any shield against which the arrows of calumny are shattered?” said Leon. “There is but one and that is innocence. Our innocence, Pepa, is not immaculate. The slander that is directed against us is not without foundation; it is mistaken only as to the facts. It is false when it asserts that I am your favoured lover, but it is true when it says that I love you—it lies when it says that Monina is my child, but it is true—” Pepa did not let him finish the sentence.

“But it is true that you love her as if she were!” she exclaimed with joyous haste.

“Calumny may be wrong as to the facts, but failing facts she has intentions, desires, hopes to go upon. Answer me, can you say that we are innocent?”

“No. I, at any rate, am not. The scandal that has dragged my name in the mud is a just punishment,” said Pepa sadly. “And if I think of it with less horror than I ought to feel, it is because there is so much, so very much to excuse part—most—the foundation of the report. You are upright, honest, steadfast—I am not. I have allowed myself to cherish feelings in my heart in opposition to my duty; I am a wicked woman, Leon; I do not deserve your love; I am guilty, and I cannot feel that delicate horror of calumny you feel.”

“Pepa, Pepa, do not talk so,” said Leon grasping her hand. “It is not thus that I have

seen you, dreamed of, as, by degrees, you have conquered my heart and become sovereign of my affections.”

“But if you cannot love me as I am,” she said, her words almost choked with grief and bitterness, “why did you not come in time? Oh! if you had come when I wanted you, you might have found me lofty and pure! What a high and holy devotion—worthy of you indeed—you would have found under the childish follies which were nothing but the mad outbursts of an oppressed heart and a fevered fancy, if you had come in time and vouchsafed a loving word to the wilful girl, mad and foolish as she was, what a treasure of devotion would have been yours!—it was reserved for you, and in your hands it would have been refined and purified. I was a rough ore, apparently of no value—nay, I might have been a misfortune to the owner—you thought so? But all I needed was to fall into hands that were not put out to take me; I was an instrument that could yield no music excepting in the hands for which I was born, and without my natural master all was jangling discord. Do not complain then if you now find me somewhat wanting in principles and moral sense. I have suffered much; I have led a life of constant and fearful struggle with myself, my life has been passed in utter disharmony with those I have had to live with; I felt myself scorned and misunderstood and that has always weighed upon my soul; it made me unreasonable and perverse and so, by degrees, I lost that purity of soul which once I cherished for you—you who would not have it as a gift! I am not so strict as you are; my conscience is less sensitive, and I have no courage left for further sacrifices, for my heart is weary and as full of wounds as a madman who tries to kill himself. I cannot admit that the world has the right to require me to torture myself any more; it has imposed sufferings enough upon me—and so I dare to ask you too to be less severely strong, to ignore the moral susceptibilities of society, to make some concession to feeling, to remain here and see me every day, to pay me some portion of the debt you owe me—by loving a little.”

She could not command her voice to the end of her speech and burst into tears.

“It was my idiotic pride,” said Leon, more ready to accuse than to defend himself, “that has brought misery on us both. May the scorn of which you speak be visited on my own head and all the evil wrought by my mistake be mine to suffer!”

“Nay, you need no more disasters; you have had enough to go through! The fault was not all yours. I had no other merit than that of loving you; I was wilful, violent and spoilt; I quite understand your preference for … her; and she was so handsome; I was never good-looking…. And now, now after so many years, you come to me … and now….” She could not say it; her brow was contracted with despair, at length, with a gesture of horror, as if she saw some terrific vision she said hoarsely: “You have a wife.”

Leon could say nothing in reply to the appalling eloquence of this fact. He bent his head in silence. “A wife! handsome, saintly, impeccable!” Pepa went on. “But even so, have I not triumphed? You have left her and come to me.” And she looked up radiantly.

“No, no,” said Leon eagerly. “It is she who has left me. I loved her and did all in my power to prevent the rupture of the sacred tie that binds us; I have kept my marriage vows faithfully … till now, when I have broken them.”

“And they are better broken!” exclaimed Pepa vehemently. “Why should you respect

the judgment of fools? Why should the image of your wife come between you and me?”

“Pepa, my dearest, be calm for pity’s sake; your wild words alarm me.”

“But I tell you I have no moral sense; I lost it—you took it with my last hopes. When one is hopeless is that not the same as being wicked? I have been wicked ever since that evening when my last hope died out of me as though it had been my very soul, and left me rigid and cold—as if really and truly mad. From that moment I have gone wrong in everything; I married just as I might have flung myself into the sea; I married as a substitute for suicide. I did not know what I was doing, but there was a seed of evil in me that I actually tried to foster into growth. If only I had been well educated! but I had no education; I was a savage, and I loved to display my riches, social advantages and pinchbeck splendour,—just as the Caffirs display feathers and beads. And bitter pique rankled in my heart and made me resolve that I would give to the least worthy suitor what I had intended for the most worthy. If I could not have the best I would take the worst! Do you remember my throwing out my jewels on the dust-heap? I wanted to do the same with myself. Of what use was I if no one loved me? How could I marry a good and worthy man? It would have been folly … no, no, I wanted to hate some one—to hate the man who was nearest to me—whom the world would call my other half, and the church pronounce my mate. You see I longed to be wicked! In our rank of life, you know, when a girl of base instincts craves for liberty, marriage is a wide and open door. In my madness I said to myself: ‘I am rich; I will marry a fool and I shall be free;’ and I never thought of my poor father. Oh yes, I have been very wicked!

“Well, many a girl has done the same, though not with such fatal consequences. I married, and every conceivable misfortune fell upon me and mine … I was free—but you were as far off as ever. Your very virtue enraged me, though it gave me much to think of. Would you believe that I was quite humiliated by it, and at times flattered my fancy by dreams of being virtuous too? God knows what the end might have been! He saved me by giving me my child. Her birth brought an interval of peace which till then I had not known; as Monina grew under my eyes I seemed to become miraculously gifted with intelligence, prudence, a love of order, and common-sense. I was a different creature, I became what I should have been if, instead of the torments of rejected love, I had lived in peace under the yoke of your authority.

“Now I am cured of those vagaries which made me notorious; I am not as good as I ought to be; I do not fear God as I ought; I cannot feel ready to sacrifice my feelings to the laws to which I have been a martyr; I see now that I have been living in a world of empty dogmas, where fine words are more plentiful than good deeds, and so I say: ‘I am free, you are free….’”

“I?”

“Yes, you. For a man is free who breaks his chains. Did you not say that she had left you?”

“Yes!” A pained and doubting expression came over Leon’s features.

“No! I see that it is I—always I—who am really abandoned!” cried Pepa. “Well, so be it!”

“Abandoned, no. But there is a moral impossibility which neither you nor I can fail to see. As for me, I am in the most desperate and wretched dilemma that any man ever had to face.”

Pepa looked straight into his eyes in agonised expectation of what he might say next.

“I am married; I do not love my wife, nor does she love me. We are incompatible natures; there is a gulf between us. We are separated by utter antipathy, as strong in her as in me. But why did my wife become alienated from me? She was faithful and virtuous, she brought no dishonour on my name—if she had I would have killed her! As it is I cannot kill her—nor divorce her; even a legal separation is out of the question. The only crime that has come between us is religion. Of what do I accuse her? Of being a bigot, a fanatic. And is that a fault?… Who can decide? Now and then with shameful sophistry it has occurred to me that I might accuse her of insanity; horrible thought! And what right have I to call any excess of pious practices insane? God alone can read hearts and determine the boundary line between piety and fanaticism. In my own soul I can declare that my wife is a fanatic; but I have no right to accuse her before all the world.”

Leon spoke calmly and judicially as he uttered these questions and answers. As though he were pleading and arguing for and against a criminal.

“My wife has sinned against love, which is as much a law of marriage as fidelity,” he went on. “But she has done nothing to disgrace me; is there then sufficient cause for me to pronounce myself free?”

“Yes, if your wife has ceased to love you; she has annulled the marriage.”

“She has annulled it by her fanatical religion. But I look into my conscience and say: ‘Am I not as guilty as she is?’ For if she has a form of fanaticism that impels her to abhor me, have I not a kindred fanaticism which makes me abhor her? She holds a scheme of belief that parts her from me; I too have a scheme of belief that drives me from her. Am I not perhaps a bigot too?”

“You, no! It is she, it is she.”

“At the stage which we have reached, which of us is the more to blame? Fanatical she is, no doubt; but she has a thoroughly good and upright nature. María is incapable of a dishonourable action; she is a bigot and narrow-minded, but she is honest. She does not love me, but she loves no one else. Am I not perhaps the guilty one … I who love another?” He passed his hand across his aching brow and paused to consider the desperate case.

“Even if I should decide that I would be free,” he said at last. “I could marry no one else. I could not dream of founding another home; neither law nor conscience would admit of it. I must abide by the consequences of my errors. I am not, and I never can be, one of the crowd who acknowledge no law human or divine; I cannot do as those do who have a moral code for their public acts but whose private life is corrupt, whose thoughts are evil. My family, if I had one would be illegitimate, my children would be bastards and nameless, we should breathe an atmosphere of disgrace. Do not suppose that in speaking thus and in flying from the situation in which we find ourselves, I am surrendering to the gossip of Madrid; nor even that, in speaking of the illegitimacy of such ties, I am bowing

to the decisions of the law which is impotent to decide the right and wrong of this vital question on moral grounds. I am simply obeying my conscience, which makes itself heard above all the other voices of my heart. Appeal to your own conscience….”

Pepa drooped sadly as though she were falling to the ground, but putting her hand to her head she murmured:

“My conscience is love.”

There was something deeply pathetic in this declaration from a woman who for long years had been storing up treasures of affection without knowing on whom to bestow them and who now saw herself condemned to lavish them as best she might on the images of a joyless and fevered fancy.

“But picture to yourself,” said Leon, “all the odious and disreputable conditions of an illegitimate, or I would rather say an immoral, family. The children without a name—the ever-present image of the absent wife….”

“Do not name her; I tell you not to name her,” cried Pepa, making an effort not to be too vehement. “Her mad fanaticism excludes her altogether!”

“But if I am no less fanatical?”

“No, that makes no difference!”

“Well, there is one remedy for the state of mind from which you and I are doomed to suffer.”

“What is that?”

“Hope.”

“Hope!” murmured Pepa, shaking her head; the word found a melancholy echo in her brain. “Hope! that is my fate, there are lives in which hope is a torment and not a comfort.”

“Look at that little angel,” said Leon, pointing to Monina who slept in blissful ignorance at the storm that was rolling over her innocent dreams; “there is your true conscience. When all this agitation is over if your bitterness still survives and your sad memories prompt you to wander from the right path, let your thoughts dwell upon your child. You will find that act like a magic charm. A hundred sermons, and all the logic in the world, could not teach you what you will learn from one smile of that tiny creature, whose innocence hardly seems of the earth; and in her eyes you will read perfect truth.”

“You are right, you are right,” cried Pepa bursting into tears.

“Her eyes are like a mirror in which if you can read it rightly you may see something of the future. Think of your child as grown up, as a woman fifteen years hence; how could you bear that some malignant tongue should whisper in her ear shameful tales of her mother’s disgrace? Think of your feelings if some one were to say to her: ‘your mother, before she had been a widow two months, had taken for her lover a married man, the husband of a faithful wife.’”

“Oh, no!” cried Pepa with a flash of indignation, “that they shall never say!”

"But they will say so; why not? If they are ready to say what is not true, why should they not say what is? You must think of the fateful and inevitable influence that a parent's actions have on the children. There is certain tradition of morality which is a great protection against disaster and dishonour."

"I implore you not even to suggest that my child can ever be anything but innocence itself!" exclaimed Pepa, drowned in tears.

Then they were both silent; they sat on Ramona's bed, arm in arm, with their faces very near together, wrapped, as it were, in an atmosphere of tenderness that breathed from them both, gazing in loving contemplation of the child's happy slumbers. Deep, very deep, down in her heart Pepa was thinking: "child of my body and soul, I can be happy so long as I feel that you are mine, and fancy that I can bestow you on some one I can trust."

Presently they rose from their place side by side and Pepa seated herself in a dim corner.

"I must be going," said Leon.

"Already!" said Pepa in dismay and looking up at him imploringly.

Leon was about to answer when they heard footsteps and the marquis came into the room; he was in the habit of coming to bid his daughter good-night before he retired for the evening. He was surprised to see Leon, though there was nothing unusual in the hour for a visit.

"What is the matter? Is Monina ill?"

"No, Papa, she is quite well."

"Ah. I fancied—" and the marquis kissed his daughter. "I am glad to see you here," he said kindly to Leon.

"I came to say good-bye to Pepa and to you."

"You are going on a journey? Well, it is the best thing you can do. And where are you going?"

"I have not made up my mind."

"And you start…."

"To-morrow."

"If you go to Paris I will give you a commission. I will go to your lodgings early in the morning; just now I am going to bed, I have a headache."

Leon saw that he must leave at once.

"Good-bye, good-bye," he said grasping Pepa's hands. Their eyes met with a keen glance; she was disappointed at this abrupt leave-taking. Leon looked at the sleeping child and then, with calm self-possession, he went out. He felt a stranger in the suites of rooms as he passed through them; but the pretty nest he had just left was so intimately part of his life that he could hardly forbear from turning back to breathe once more in that atmosphere of peace and contentment—an atmosphere full of the delicious sense of home, hallowed by a woman's love and a child's slumbers.

As they parted Don Pedro said:

“I am very uneasy at having heard no details of Federico’s death.”

Leon made no reply; he went out into the garden. There, so many remembrances appealed to his affections that at every step he paused to sigh and dream. He had reached the avenue that led from the gardens to the stables when he heard himself called, with a shrill “*hist*” that came on his ear as sharp as a dart. He turned and saw Pepa, wrapped in a shawl with her head uncovered, coming towards him in breathless haste. She eagerly grasped his hand.

“I could not bear that we should part like this,” she said, “it is too hard!”

“It is as it ought to be,” replied Leon greatly disturbed. “And what does it matter? I shall come in to-morrow for a moment.”

“For a moment!” cried Pepa in pathetic reproach. “Think what it is to have given years—long years—as long as centuries, and to be repaid with moments!”

Leon took both her hands firmly in his.

“My dearest,” he said, “one of us must yield to the other. I know, and I tell you, that if I allow myself to be dragged away by you our ruin is complete. Then let yourself be guided—not dragged away—by me and save our souls alive.”

“And then—but I know what you will say: Hope! Every madman has his hobby!” and she smiled, a heart-rending smile of self-pity that might have drawn tears from a stone. “Hope! and if I die first?”

“No, no, you will not die …” Leon murmured, taking her head between his hands as if she had been a child and kissing her.

“I am but a helpless thing,” stammered Pepa, who could hardly command her voice, “you can do what you will with me; but you are cruel.”

“And you will obey?”

“Nay, you need not ask; I have long obeyed you in intention. I used to dream that you came to see me, when you had in fact forgotten my very existence; that you commanded me to break with every duty, and I obeyed you with all the force of my will and desires. This submission was my only joy—a melancholy one! Do not blame me for the aberrations of a broken heart—I only tell you that you may see that if I would follow you to any crime, I shall not refuse to follow you when you lead me to do right.”

“Where would you have me lead you?” muttered Leon clasping his brow. “Tell me, if I were to say …”

“What?” asked Pepa quickly and catching at his idea as a bird catches a seed before it can fall to the ground.

“The idea of flight has passed through your mind?“

“Oh! every idea in turn has passed through my mind.”

“So that if I were to say …”

“If you say ‘come,’ I am ready.“

“Now?”

“This very minute. I would take my baby in my arms….“

Pepa, vehement in her devotions, looked first at the house and then in his face; forgetful of every other consideration, she could think of nothing but the two beings she loved. Leon was going through a brief but agonising struggle. He stamped with his foot like the Warlocks of old when they wanted to call up a familiar spirit.

“But I must bid you let me go alone, and wait, and hope,” he said at length, with a firmness that was almost heroic, and Pepa bowed her head with resignation. “I say it because I love you—out of a certain selfishness too, for I cannot bear to destroy a beautiful dream.”

“I submit,” said Pepa, but the word was hardly more than a moan, and hiding her face on his breast, she sobbed aloud. Then she added: “but you will fix a time. If I were to die before….”

This idea of an early death was fixed in her mind like a sinister star that nothing could eclipse.

“Yes, I will fix a time. I promise that.”

“And when it comes….”

“When it comes—” echoed Leon who could hardly breathe; some demon seemed to have flung a rope round his neck and to be tightening the noose.

“Supposing that God does not open the way….”

“But He will.”

“And if He does not.”

“But He will.”

“But, I say if He does not?”

“You will see He will.”

“Your conviction makes me believe it, but I do not know why,” said Pepa, turning her head on his shoulder as though it were a pillow on which she might fall asleep. “Now, if you want me to go home satisfied, tell me that you love me very much.” Her eagerness had taken a childish tone.

“You know it.”

“That you will love me always—always.”

“That in fact I loved you when we played together and stained our faces with blackberries,” added Leon, stroking the golden head.

“What days those were!” said Pepa, smiling like a soul in bliss, “we could talk for hours of those recollections, taking the words out of each other’s mouth. Ah! our life then was what life ought to be. Really life; not these horribly short moments and sudden

changes. If only we might chatter, laugh, remember, talk nonsense and read each other's thoughts and wishes!"

"If we could…!"

"But we must live apart. We have lived apart all our lives, and yet I feel as if I were saying good-bye for the first time. You go to an inn and I to a palace."

"Take care of your child for me."

"Oh! there is one terrible thought: if it is long before you come again she will not know you, she will be afraid of you."

"She will soon get over that."

"But are you not coming again to-morrow morning?"

"What for? That we may have another and more cruel parting? If I were to see you again my courage might fail me."

"I will send Monina to see you."

"Yes, send her," and Leon coughed.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Pepa anxiously, and turning up the collar of his coat. "You are catching cold! it is chilly—take care of yourself … so—"

"Thank you, my darling; I am cold, I confess."

"Well, then, we part now?"

"Yes," said Roch, "now or never."

The words: "then never!" were on Pepa's lips, but she dared not utter them.

"And you will write to me very often, like a good boy?"

"Yes, every week."

"Long, long letters?"

"As long and as full as the thoughts of a man that waits in hope."

"And where shall I write to you?"

"I will let you know. Let us walk towards the house; you must not go back alone. We will part there."

"Come as far as the door of the museum; I came out there and can get in again."

They walked on; Leon with his right arm round Pepa and holding both her hands in his left.

"It is a dark night," observed Pepa, with that inexplicable impulse to speak of trivial things which comes over us when the mind is fully occupied with a fixed train of ideas.

"Are you happy?" asked Leon trying to speak lightly.

"How should I be when you are going away? And yet I am, glad of all you have said to me. It is a mixture of pain and gladness. First I say to myself: 'what joy!' and then I feel

that I shall die of grief."

"And I feel just the same," said Leon gloomily. They were at the door of the museum.

"Good-bye, good-bye," she said, "remember, you are mine."

"*Au revoir*," said Leon in a choked voice, and he kissed her twice. "This one for Monina, and this for her mother."

The door opened on a dark staircase; Leon gently pushed Pepa in and hurried away; she reappeared for a moment and he waved his hand.

In a few minutes he had reached his lodgings; crushed with grief he threw himself into his study chair, not knowing whether to find relief in tears or in dumb despair. His heart was broken; and yet the deep and spacious reservoir of sorrow and passion had not yet poured the whole of its crushing contents on his devoted head.

END OF VOL. I.

GLORIA.—A novel, by **B. Pérez Galdós**, from the Spanish by Clara Bell, in two vols. Paper, $1.00, Cloth, $1.75.

"B. Pérez Galdós is like a whirlwind, resistless as he sweeps everything before him, while beneath, the waters of passion foam and heave and are stirred to their depths. Some chapters of this novel are absolutely agonizing in their intensity of passion, and the surge and rush of words bears the reader along breathless and terrified, till he finds himself almost ready to cry out. In others, the storm is lulled and the plash of waves is as musical as the author's native tongue. In others still, he drones through the lazy summer day, and the reader goes to sleep. However, the story as a whole is stormy, and the end tragic; yet we are lost in wonder at the man who can so charm us.

"It is throughout a terrible impeachment of religious intolerance. If it had been written for a people possessing the temper of Englishmen or of Americans we should say that it must mark an epoch in the political and religious history of the country. Even written as it is by a Spaniard, and for Spaniards, allowing as we must for Spanish impulsiveness and grandiloquence, which says a great deal to express a very little, we cannot but believe that the work is deeply significant. It is written by a young man and one who is rapidly rising in power and influence; and when he speaks it is with a vehement earnestness which thrills one with the conviction that Spain is awaking. 'Fresh air,' cries he, of Spain, 'open air, free exercise under every wind that blows above or below; freedom to be dragged and buffeted, helped or hindered, by all the forces that are abroad. Let her tear off her mendicant's hood, her grave-clothes and winding-sheet, and stand forth in the bracing storms of the century. Spain is like a man who is ill from sheer apprehension, and cannot stir for blisters, plasters, bandages and wraps. Away with all this paraphernalia, and the body will recover its tone and vigor.' Again: 'Rebel, rebel, your intelligence is your strength. Rise, assert yourself; purge your eyes of the dust which darkens them, and look at truth face to face.' Strange language this for Spain of the Inquisition, for bigoted, unprogressive, Catholic Spain. The author goes to the root of Spanish decadence; he fearlessly exposes her degradation and declares its cause. All students of Spanish history will find here much that is interesting besides the story."—*The Yale Literary Magazine*.

William S. Gottsberger, Publisher, New York.

MARIANELA.—By **B. Pérez Galdós**, from the Spanish by Clara Bell, in one vol. Paper, 50 cts. Cloth, 90 cts.

“Galdós is not a novelist, in the sense that now attaches to that much-abused word, but a romancer, pure and simple, as much so as Hawthorne was, though his intentions are less spiritual, and his methods more material. Marianela is the story of a poor, neglected outcast of a girl, an orphan who is tolerated by a family of miners, as if she were a dog or a cat; who is fed when the humor takes them and there is any food that can be spared, and who is looked down upon by everybody; and a boy Pablo, who is older than she, the son of a well-to-do landed proprietor, whose misfortune it is (the boy’s, we mean) that he was born blind. His deprivation of sight is almost supplied by the eyes of Marianela, who waits upon him, and goes with him in his daily wanderings about the mining country of Socartes, until he knows the whole country by heart and can when need is find his way everywhere alone. As beautiful as she is homely, he forms an ideal of her looks, based upon her devotion to him, colored by his sensitive, spiritual nature, and he loves her, or what he imagines she is, and she returns his love—with fear and trembling, for ignorant as she is she knows that she is not what he believes her to be. They love as two children might, naturally, fervently, entirely. The world contains no woman so beautiful as she, and he will marry her. The idyl of this young love is prettily told, with simplicity, freshness, and something which, if not poetry, is yet poetic. While the course of true love is running smooth with them (for it does sometimes in spite of Shakespeare) there appears upon the scene a brother of the chief engineer of the Socartes mines who is an oculist, and he, after a careful examination of the blind eyes of Pablo, undertakes to perform an operation upon them which he thinks may enable the lad to see. About this time there also comes upon the scene a brother of Pablo’s father, accompanied by his daughter, who is very beautiful. The operation is successful, and Pablo is made to see. He is enchanted with the loveliness of his cousin, and disenchanted of his ideal of Marianela, who dies heart-broken at the fate which she knew would be hers if he was permitted to see her as she was. This is the story of Marianela, which would have grown into a poetic romance under the creative mind and shaping hand of Hawthorne, and which, as conceived and managed by Galdós, is a realistic one of considerable grace and pathos. It possesses the charm of directness and simplicity of narrative, is written with great picturesqueness, and is colored throughout with impressions of Spanish country life.”—*The Mail and Express, New York, Thursday, April 12, 1883*.

William S. Gottsberger, Publisher, New York.

TRAFALGAR.—A Tale, by **B. Pérez Galdós**, from the Spanish by Clara Bell, in one vol. Paper, 50 cents. Cloth, 90 cents.

“This is the third story by Galdós in this series, and it is not inferior to those which have preceded it, although it differs from them in many particulars, as it does from most European stories with which we are acquainted, its interest rather depending upon the action with which it deals than upon the actors therein. To subordinate men to events is a new practice in art, and if Galdós had not succeeded we should have said that success therein was impossible. He has succeeded doubly, first as a historian, and then as a novelist, for while the main interest of his story centres in the great sea-fight which it depicts—the greatest in which the might of England has figured since her destruction of the Grand Armada—there is no lack of interest in the characters of his story, who are sharply individualized, and painted in strong colors. Don Alonso and his wife Doña Francisca—a simple-minded but heroic old sea-captain, and a sharp-minded, shrewish lady, with a tongue of her own, fairly stand out on the canvas. Never before have the danger and the doom of battle been handled with such force as in this spirited and picturesque tale. It is thoroughly characteristic of the writer and of his nationality.”—*The Mail and Express, New York*.

William S. Gottsberger, Publisher, New York.

THE MARTYR OF GOLGOTHA, by **Enrique Pérez Escrich**, from the Spanish by Adèle Josephine Godoy, in two volumes. Price, paper covers, $1.00. Cloth binding, $1.75.

“There must always be some difference of opinion concerning the right of the romancer to treat of sacred events and to introduce sacred personages into his story. Some hold that any attempt to embody an idea of our Saviour’s character, experiences, sayings and teachings in the form of fiction must have the effect of lowering our imaginative ideal, and rendering trivial and commonplace that which in the real Gospel is spontaneous, inspired and sublime. But to others an historical novel like the ‘Martyr of Golgotha’ comes like a revelation, opening fresh vistas of thought, filling out blanks and making clear what had hitherto been vague and unsatisfactory, quickening insight and sympathy, and actually heightening the conception of divine traits. The author gives also a wide survey of the general history of the epoch and shows the various shaping causes which were influencing the rise and development of the new religion in Palestine. There is, indeed, an astonishing vitality and movement throughout the work, and, elaborate though the plot is, with all varieties and all contrasts of people and conditions, with constant shiftings of the scene, the story yet moves, and moves the interest of the reader too, along the rapid current of events towards the powerful culmination. The writer uses the Catholic traditions, and in many points interprets the story in a way which differs altogether from that familiar to Protestants: for example, making Mary Magdalen the same Mary who was the sister of Lazarus and Martha, and who sat listening at the Saviour’s feet. But in general, although there is a free use made of Catholic legends and traditions, their effort is natural and pleasing. The romance shows a degree of a southern fervor which is foreign to English habit, but the flowery, poetic style—although it at first repels the reader—is so individual, so much a part of the author, that it is soon accepted as the naive expression of a mind kindled and carried away by its subject. Spanish literature has of late given us a variety of novels and romances, all of which are in their way so good that we must believe that there is a new generation of writers in Spain who are discarding the worn-out forms and traditions, and are putting fresh life and energy into works which will give pleasure to the whole world of readers.”—*Philadelphia American, March 5, 1887.*

William S. Gottsberger, Publisher, New York.

Transcriber’s note

- Obvious printer errors have been silently corrected.
- Original spelling was kept, but variant spellings were made consistent when a predominant usage was found.
- Blank pages have been skipped.
- Throughout the text the following replacements were made:
  - “Maria” by “María”,
  - “Telleria” by “Tellería”,
  - “Joaquin” by “Joaquín”,
  - “Fontan” by “Fontán”,
  - “Leopold” by “Leopoldo”,
  - “Agustin” by “Agustín”,
  - “Perez” by “Pérez”.
- The following changes were made:
  - Page 18: “Atheneam” replaced by “Atheneum”.
  - Page 28: “Centa” replaced by “Ceuta”.
  - Page 75: “Corralles” replaced by “Corrales”.
  - Page 144: “Cerinola” replaced by “Ceriñola”.
  - Page 147: “Cayentano” replaced by “Cayetano”.
  - Page 199: “Arragon” replaced by “Aragón” (twice).
  - Page 246: “Monilla” replaced by “Monina”.
  - Page 274: “her papa” replaced by “your papa” (twice—after checking the Spanish original version).