



W. HUDSON



*Born on the South American Pampas  
Natus Circa 1846. Obiit London 1922*

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THE  
COLLECTED WORKS  
*of*  
W. H. HUDSON

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IN TWENTY-FOUR  
VOLUMES

EL OMBÚ

# EL OMBÚ

TOGETHER WITH THE  
STORY OF A PIEBALD HORSE  
PELINO VIERA'S CONFESSION

NIÑO DIABLO

MARTA RIQUELME

AND

RALPH HERNE

BY

W. H. HUDSON



MCMXXIII

LONDON & TORONTO

J. M. DENT & SONS LTD.

NEW YORK: E. P. DUTTON & CO.

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## NOTE

Few would recognise the hand of the author of *El Ombú* in *Ralph Herne* were it not for the sombre description of the ravages of the plague in Buenos Ayres—passages worthy of Hudson's genius.

The tale is one of Hudson's early attempts at story-telling, and in submitting it to the criticism of a friend in 1905, he himself spoke of it as "rather tedious and even twaddly." About a year before his death, however, Hudson parted with the American rights, and the tale, therefore, here takes its place in the "Collected Works."



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# EL OMBÚ

## EL OMBÚ

*This history of a house that had been was told in the shade, one summer's day, by Nicandro, that old man to whom we all loved to listen, since he could remember and properly narrate the life of every person he had known in his native place, near to the lake of Chascomus, on the southern pampas of Buenos Ayres.*

### I

**I**N all this district, though you should go twenty leagues to this way and that, you will not find a tree as big as this ombú, standing solitary, where there is no house; therefore it is known to all as "the ombú," as if but one existed; and the name of all this estate, which is now ownerless and ruined, is El Ombú. From one of the higher branches, if you can climb, you will see the lake of Chascomus, two-thirds of a league away, from shore to shore, and the village on its banks. Even smaller things will you see on a clear day; perhaps a red line moving across the water—a flock of flamingos flying in their usual way. A great tree standing alone, with no house near it; only the old brick foundations of a house, so overgrown with grass and weeds that you have to look closely to find them. When I am out with my flock in the summer time, I often come here to sit in the shade. It is near the main road;

travellers, droves of cattle, the diligence, and bullock-carts pass in sight. Sometimes, at noon, I find a traveller resting in the shade, and if he is not sleeping we talk and he tells me the news of that great world my eyes have never seen. They say that sorrow and at last ruin comes upon the house on whose roof the shadow of the ombú tree falls; and on that house which now is not, the shadow of this tree came every summer day when the sun was low. They say, too, that those who sit much in the ombú shade become crazed. Perhaps, sir, the bone of my skull is thicker than in most men, since I have been accustomed to sit here all my life, and though now an old man I have not yet lost my reason. It is true that evil fortune came to the old house in the end; but into every door sorrow must enter—sorrow and death that comes to all men; and every house must fall at last.

Do you hear the mangangá, the carpenter bee, in the foliage over our heads? Look at him, like a ball of shining gold among the green leaves, suspended in one place, humming loudly! Ah, señor, the years that are gone, the people that have lived and died, speak to me thus audibly when I am sitting here by myself. These are memories; but there are other things that come back to us from the past; I mean ghosts. Sometimes, at midnight, the whole tree, from its great roots to its topmost leaves, is seen from a distance shining like white fire. What is that fire, seen of so many, which does not scorch the leaves? And, sometimes, when a traveller lies down

here to sleep the siesta, he hears sounds of footsteps coming and going, and noises of dogs and fowls, and of children shouting and laughing, and voices of people talking; but when he starts up and listens, the sounds grow faint, and seem at last to pass away into the tree with a low murmur as of wind among the leaves.

As a small boy, from the time when I was able, at the age of about six years, to climb on to a pony and ride, I knew this tree. It was then what it is now; five men with their arms stretched to their utmost length could hardly encircle it. And the house stood there, where you see a bed of nettles—a long, low house, built of bricks, when there were few brick houses in this district, with a thatched roof.

The last owner was just touching on old age. Not that he looked aged; on the contrary, he looked what he was, a man among men, a head taller than most, with the strength of an ox; but the wind had blown a little sprinkling of white ashes into his great beard and his hair, which grew to his shoulders like the mane of a black horse. That was Don Santos Ugarte, known to all men in this district as the White Horse, on account of the whiteness of his skin where most men look dark; also because of that proud temper and air of authority which he had. And for still another reason—the number of children in this neighbourhood of which he was said to be the father. In all houses, for many leagues around, the children were taught to reverence him, calling him “uncle,” and when he appeared they would run and, dropping

on their knees before him, cry out "*Bendición, mío.*" He would give them his blessing; then, after tweaking a nose and pinching an ear or two, he would flourish his whip over their heads to signify that he had done with them, and that they must quickly get out of his way.

These were children of the wind, as the saying is, and the desire of his heart was for a legitimate son, an Ugarte by name, who would come after him at El Ombú, as he had come after his father. But though he had married thrice, there was no son born, and no child. Some thought it a mystery that one with so many sons should yet be without a son. The mystery, friend, was only for those who fail to remember that such things are not determined by ourselves. We often say that He who is above us is too great to concern Himself with our small affairs. There are so many of us; and how shall He, seated on His throne at so great a distance, know all that passes in His dominions! But Santos was no ordinary person, and He who was greater than Santos had doubtless had His attention drawn to this man; and had considered the matter, and had said, "You shall not have your desire; for though you are a devout man, one who gives freely of his goods to the church and My poor, I am not wholly satisfied with you." And so it came to pass that he had no son and heir.

His first two wives had died, so it was said, because of his bitterness against them. I only knew the third—Doña Mericie, a silent, sad woman, who was of

less account than any servant, or any slave in the house. And I, a simple boy, what could I know of the secrets of her heart? Nothing! I only saw her pale and silent and miserable, and because her eyes followed me, I feared her, and tried always to keep out of her way. But one morning, when I came to El Ombú and went into the kitchen, I found her there alone, and before I could escape she caught me in her arms, and lifting me off my feet strained me against her breast, crying, "*Hijo de mi alma,*" and I knew not what beside; and calling God's blessing on me, she covered my face with kisses. Then all at once, hearing Santos's voice without, she dropped me and remained like a woman of stone, staring at the door with scared eyes.

She, too, died in a little while, and her disappearance made no difference in the house, and if Santos wore a black band on his arm, it was because custom demanded it and not because he mourned for her in his heart.

## II

THAT silent ghost of a woman being gone, no one could say of him that he was hard; nor could anything be said against him except that he was not a saint, in spite of his name. But, sir, we do not look for saints among strong men, who live in the saddle, and are at the head of big establishments. If there was one who was a father to the poor it was Santos; therefore he was loved by many, and only those who had done him an injury or had crossed him in any way had reason to fear and hate him. But let me now relate what I, a boy of ten, witnessed one day in the year 1808. This will show you what the man's temper was; and his courage, and the strength of his wrists.

It was his custom to pay a visit every two or three months to a monastery at a distance of half a day's journey from El Ombú.

He was greatly esteemed by the friars, and whenever he went to see them he had a led horse to carry his presents to the Brothers—a side of fat beef, a sucking-pig or two, a couple of lambs, when they were in season, a few fat turkeys and ducks, a bunch of big partridges, a brace or two of armadillos, the breast and wings of a fat ostrich; and in summer, a dozen ostriches' eggs and I know not what besides.

One evening I was at El Ombú, and was just



starting for home, when Santos saw me, and cried out, "Get off and let your horse go, Nicandro. I am going to the monastery to-morrow, and you shall ride the laden horse, and save me the trouble of leading it. You will be like a little bird perched on his back and he will not feel your few ounces' weight. You can sleep on a sheepskin in the kitchen, and get up an hour before daybreak."

The stars were still shining when we set out on our journey the next morning, in the month of June, and when we crossed the river Sanborombón at sunrise the earth was all white with hoar-frost. At noon we arrived at our destination, and were received by the friars, who embraced and kissed Santos on both cheeks, and took charge of our horses. After breakfast in the kitchen, the day being now warm and pleasant, we went and sat out of doors to sip maté and smoke, and for an hour or longer the conversation between Santos and the Brothers had been going on when, all at once, a youth appeared coming at a fast gallop towards the gate, shouting as he came, "Los Ingleses! Los Ingleses!" We all jumped up and ran to the gate, and climbing up by the posts and bars, saw at a distance of less than half a league to the east a great army of men marching in the direction of Buenos Ayres. We could see that the foremost part of the army had come to a halt on the banks of a stream which flows past the monastery and empties itself into the Plata, two leagues further east. The army was all composed of infantry, but a great many persons on horseback

could be seen following it, and these, the young man said, were neighbours who had come out to look at the English invaders; and he also said that the soldiers, on arriving at the stream, had begun to throw away their blankets, and that the people were picking them up. Santos hearing this said he would go and join the crowd, and mounting his horse and followed by me, and by two of the Brothers, who said they wished to get a few blankets for the monastery, we set out at a gallop for the stream.

Arrived at the spot, we found that the English, not satisfied with the ford, which had a very muddy bottom, had made a new crossing-place for themselves by cutting down the bank on both sides, and that numbers of blankets had been folded and laid in the bed of the stream where it was about twenty-five yards wide. Hundreds of blankets were also being thrown away, and the people were picking them up and loading their horses with them. Santos at once threw himself into the crowd and gathered about a dozen blankets, the best he could find, for the friars; then he gathered a few for himself and ordered me to fasten them on the back of my horse.

The soldiers, seeing us scrambling for the blankets, were much amused; but when one man among us cried out, "These people must be mad to throw their blankets away in cold weather—perhaps their red jackets will keep them warm when they lie down to-night" — there was one soldier who understood and could speak Spanish, and he replied, "No, sirs, we have no further need of blankets. When we next

sleep it will be in the best beds in the capitol." Then Santos shouted back, "That, sirs, will perhaps be a sleep from which some of you will never awake." That speech attracted their attention to Santos, and the soldier who had spoken before returned, "There are not many men like you in these parts, therefore what you say does not alarm us." Then they looked at the friars fastening the blankets Santos had given them on to their horses, and seeing that they wore heavy iron spurs strapped on their bare feet, they shouted with laughter, and the one who talked with us cried out, "We are sorry, good Brothers, that we have not boots as well as blankets to give you."

But our business was now done, and bidding good-bye to the friars, we set out on our return journey, Santos saying that we should be at home before midnight.

It was past the middle of the afternoon, we having ridden about six leagues, when we spied at a distance ahead a great number of mounted men scattered about over the plain, some standing still, others galloping this way or that.

"El pato! el pato!" cried Santos with excitement. "Come, boy, let us go and watch the battle while it is near, and when it is passed on we will go our way." Urging his horse to a gallop, I following, we came to where the men were struggling for the ball, and stood for a while looking on. But it was not in him to remain a mere spectator for long; never did he see a cattle-marking, or parting, or races, or a dance, or any game, and above all games el pato, but he must

have a part in it. Very soon he dismounted to throw off some of the heaviest parts of his horsegear, and ordering me to take them up on my horse and follow him, he rode in among the players.

About forty or fifty men had gathered at that spot, and were sitting quietly on their horses in a wide circle, waiting to see the result of a struggle for the pato between three men who had hold of the ball. They were strong men, well mounted, each resolved to carry off the prize from the others. Sir, when I think of that sight, and remember that the game is no longer played because of the Tyrant who forbade it, I am ready to cry out that there are no longer men on these plains where I first saw the light! How they tugged and strained and sweated, almost dragging each other out of the saddle, their trained horses leaning away, digging their hoofs into the turf, as when they resist the shock of a lassoed animal, when the lasso stiffens and the pull comes! One of the men was a big, powerful mulatto, and the bystanders, thinking the victory would be his, were only waiting to see him wrest the ball from the others to rush upon and try to deprive him of it before he could escape from the crowd.

Santos refused to stand inactive, for was there not a fourth handle to the ball to be grasped by another fighter? Spurring his horse into the group, he very soon succeeded in getting hold of the disengaged handle. A cry of resentment at this action on the part of a stranger went up from some of those who were looking on, mixed with applause at his daring

from others, while the three men who had been fighting against each other, each one for himself, now perceived that they had a common enemy. Excited as they were by the struggle, they could not but be startled at the stranger's appearance—that huge man on a big horse, so white-skinned and long-haired, with a black beard that came down over his breast, and who showed them, when he threw back his poncho, the knife that was like a sword and the big brass-barrelled pistol worn at his waist. Very soon after he joined in the fray all four men came to the earth. But they did not fall together, and the last to go down was Santos, who would not be dragged off his horse, and in the end horse and man came down on the top of the others. In coming down, two of the men had lost their hold of the ball; last of all, the big mulatto, to save himself from being crushed under the falling horse, was forced to let go, and in his rage at being beaten, he whipped out his long knife against the stranger. Santos, too quick for him, dealt him a blow on the forehead with the heavy silver handle of his whip, dropping him stunned to the ground. Of the four, Santos alone had so far escaped injury, and rising and remounting, the ball still in his hand, he rode out from among them, the crowd opening on each side to make room for him.

Now in the crowd there was one tall, imposing-looking man, wearing a white poncho, many silver ornaments, and a long knife in an embossed silver sheath; his horse, too, which was white as milk, was covered with silver trappings. This man alone raised

his voice. "Friends and comrades," he cried, "is this to be the finish? If this stranger is permitted to carry the pato away, it will not be because of his stronger wrist and better horse, but because he carries firearms. Comrades, what do you say?"

But there was no answer. They had seen the power and resolution of the man, and though they were many they preferred to let him go in peace. Then the man on a white horse, with a scowl of anger and contempt, turned from them and began following us at a distance of about fifty yards. Whenever Santos turned back to come to close quarters with him, he retired, only to turn and follow us again as soon as Santos resumed his course. In this way we rode till sunset. Santos was grave, but calm; I, being so young, was in constant terror. "Oh, uncle," I whispered, "for the love of God fire your pistol at this man and kill him, so that he may not kill us!"

Santos laughed. "Fool of a boy," he replied, "do you not know that he wants me to fire at him? He knows that I could not hit him at this distance, and that after discharging my pistol we should be equal, man to man, and knife to knife; and who knows then which would kill the other? God knows best, since He knows everything, and He has put it into my heart not to fire."

When it grew dark we rode slower, and the man then lessened the distance between us. We could hear the chink-chink of his silver trappings, and when I looked back I could see a white misty form following us like a ghost. Then, all at once, there came a noise

of hoofs and a whistling sound of something thrown, and Santos's horse plunged and reared and kicked, then stood still trembling with terror. His hind legs were entangled in the bolas which had been thrown. With a curse Santos threw himself off, and, drawing his knife, cut the thong which bound the animal's legs, and remounting we went on as before, the white figure still following us.

At length, about midnight, the Sanborombón was reached, at the ford where we had crossed in the morning, where it was about forty yards wide, and the water only high as the surcingle in the deepest parts.

"Let your heart be glad, Nicandro!" said Santos, as we went down into the water; "for our time is come now, and be careful to do as I bid you."

We crossed slowly, and coming out on the south side, Santos quietly dropped off his horse, and, speaking in a low voice, ordered me to ride slowly on with the two horses and wait for him in the road. He said that the man who followed would not see him crouching under the bank, and thinking it safe would cross over, only to receive the charge fired at a few yards' distance.

That was an anxious interval that followed, I waiting alone, scarcely daring to breathe, staring into the darkness in fear of that white figure that was like a ghost, listening for the pistol shot. My prayer to heaven was to direct the bullet in its course, so that it might go to that terrible man's heart, and we be delivered from him. But there was no shot, and no

sound except a faint chink of silver and sound of hoof-beats that came to my ears after a time, and soon ceased to be heard. The man, perhaps, had some suspicion of the other's plan and had given up the chase and gone away.

Nothing more do I remember of that journey which ended at El Ombú at cock-crow, except that at one spot Santos fastened a thong round my waist and bound me before and behind to the saddle to prevent my falling from my horse every time I went to sleep.

### III

REMEMBER, señor, that I have spoken of things that passed when I was small. The memories of that time are few and scattered, like the fragments of tiles and bricks and rusty iron which one may find half-buried among the weeds, where the house once stood. Fragments that once formed part of the building. Certain events, some faces, and some voices, I remember, but I cannot say the year. Nor can I say how many years had gone by after Doña Mericie's death, and after my journey to the monastery. Perhaps they were few, perhaps many. Invasions had come, wars with a foreigner and with the savage, and Independence, and many things had happened at a distance. He, Santos Ugarte, was older, I know,



greyer, when that great misfortune and calamity came to one whom God had created so strong, so brave, so noble. And all on account of a slave, a youth born at El Ombú, who had been preferred above the others by his master. For, as it is said, we breed crows to pick our eyes out. But I will say nothing against that poor youth, who was the cause of the disaster, for it was not wholly his fault. Part of the fault was in Santos—his indomitable temper and his violence. And perhaps, too, the time was come when He who rules over all men had said, "You have raised your voice and have ridden over others long enough. Look, Santos! I shall set My foot upon you, and you shall be like a wild pumpkin at the end of summer, when it is dryer and more brittle than an empty egg-shell."

Remember that there were slaves in those days, also that there was a law fixing every man's price, old or young, so that if any slave went, money in hand, to his master and offered him the price of his liberty, from that moment he became a free man. It mattered not that his master wished not to sell him. So just was the law.

Of his slaves Santos was accustomed to say, "These are my children, and serve because they love me, not because they are slaves; and if I were to offer his freedom to any one among them, he would refuse to take it." He saw their faces, not their hearts.

His favourite was Meliton, black but well favoured, and though but a youth, he had authority over the others, and dressed well, and rode his master's best

horses, and had horses of his own. But it was never said of him that he gained that eminence by means of flattery and a tongue cunning to frame lies. On the contrary, he was loved by all, even by those he was set above, because of his goodness of heart and a sweet and gay disposition. He was one of those who can do almost anything better than others; whatever his master wanted done, whether it was to ride a race, or break a horse, or throw a lasso, or make a bridle, or whip, or surcingle, or play on a guitar, or sing, or dance, it was Meliton, Meliton. There was no one like him.

Now this youth cherished a secret ambition in his heart, and saved, and saved his money; and at length one day he came with a handful of silver and gold to Santos, and said, "Master, here is the price of my freedom, take it and count it, and see that it is right, and let me remain at El Ombú to serve you henceforth without payment. But I shall no longer be a slave."

Santos took the money into his hand, and spoke, "It was for this then that you saved, even the money I gave you to spend and to run with, and the money you made by selling the animals I gave you—you saved it for this! Ingrate, with a heart blacker than your skin! Take back the money, and go from my presence, and never cross my path again if you wish for a long life." And with that he hurled the handful of silver and gold into the young man's face with such force, that he was cut and bruised with the coins and well-nigh stunned. He went back staggering to

his horse, and mounting, rode away, sobbing like a child, the blood running from his face.

He soon left this neighbourhood and went to live at Las Vivoras, on the Vecino river, south of Dolores, and there made good use of his freedom, buying fat animals for the market; and for a space of two years he prospered, and every man, rich or poor, was his friend. Nevertheless he was not happy, for his heart was loyal and he loved his old master, who had been a father to him, and desired above all things to be forgiven. And at length, hoping that Santos had outlived his resentment and would be pleased to see him again, he one day came to El Ombú and asked to see the master.

The old man came out of the house and greeted him jovially. "Ha, Meliton," he cried with a laugh, "you have returned in spite of my warning. Come down from your horse and let me take your hand once more."

The other, glad to think he was forgiven, alighted, and advancing, put out his hand. Santos took it in his, only to crush it with so powerful a grip that the young man cried out aloud, and blinded with tears of pain, he did not see that his master had the big brass pistol in his left hand, and did not know that his last moment had come. He fell with a bullet in his heart.

Look, señor, where I am pointing, twenty yards or so from the edge of the shadow of the ombú, do you see a dark green weed with a yellow flower on a tall stem growing on the short, dry grass? It was just

there, on the very spot where the yellow flower is, that poor Meliton fell, and was left lying, covered with blood, until noon the next day. For no person dared take up the corpse until the Alcalde had been informed of the matter and had come to inquire into it.

Santos had mounted his horse and gone away without a word, taking the road to Buenos Ayres. He had done that for which he would have to pay dearly; for a life is a life, whether the skin be black or white, and no man can slay another deliberately, in cold blood, and escape the penalty. The law is no respecter of persons, and when he who commits such a deed is a man of substance, he must expect that advocates and judges, with all those who take up his cause, will bleed him well before they procure him a pardon.

Ugarte cared nothing for that, he had been as good as his word, and the devil in his heart was satisfied. Only he would not wait at his estancia to be taken, nor would he go and give himself up to the authorities, who would then have to place him in confinement, and it would be many months before his liberation. That would be like suffocation to him; to such a man a prison is like a tomb. No, he would go to Buenos Ayres and embark for Montevideo, and from that place he would put the matter in motion, and wait there until it was all settled and he was free to return to El Ombú.

Dead Meliton was taken away and buried in consecrated ground at Chascomus. Rain fell, and washed away the red stains on the ground. In the spring, the swallows returned and built their nests under the

eaves; but Ugarte came not back, nor did any certain tidings of him reach us. It was said, I know not whether truly or not, that the advocate who defended him and the judge of first instance who had the case before him had quarrelled about the division of the reward, and both being rich, proud persons, they had allowed themselves to forget the old man waiting there month after month for his pardon, which never came to him.

Better for him if he never heard of the ruin which had fallen on El Ombú during his long exile. There was no one in authority: the slaves, left to themselves, went away, and there was no person to restrain them. As for the cattle and horses, they were blown away like thistle-down, and everyone was free to pasture his herds and flocks on the land.

The house for a time was in charge of some person placed there by the authorities, but little by little it was emptied of its contents; and at last it was abandoned, and for a long time no one could be found to live in it on account of the ghosts.

#### IV

THERE was living at that time, a few leagues from El Ombú, one Valerio de la Cueva, a poor man, whose all consisted of a small flock of three or four hundred sheep and a few horses. He had been allowed to make a small rancho, a mere hut, to shelter himself and his wife Donata and their

one child, a boy named Bruno; and to pay for the grass his few sheep consumed he assisted in the work at the estancia house. This poor man, hearing of El Ombú, where he could have house and ground for nothing, offered himself as occupant, and in time came with wife and child and his small flock, and all the furniture he possessed—a bed, two or three chairs, a pot and kettle, and perhaps a few other things. Such poverty El Ombú had not known, but all others had feared to inhabit such a place on account of its evil name, so that it was left for Valerio, who was a stranger in the district.

Tell me, señor, have you ever in your life met with a man who was perhaps poor, or even clothed in rags, and who yet, when you had looked at and conversed with him, has caused you to say: Here is one who is like no other man in the world? Perhaps on rising and going out, on some clear morning in summer, he looked at the sun when it rose, and perceived an angel sitting in it, and as he gazed, something from that being fell upon and passed into and remained with him. Such a man was Valerio. I have known no other like him.

“Come, friend Nicandro,” he would say, “let us sit down in the shade and smoke our cigarettes, and talk of our animals. Here are no politics under this old ombú, no ambitions and intrigues and animosities—no bitterness except in these green leaves. They are our laurels—the leaves of the ombú. Happy Nicandro, who never knew the life of cities! I wish that I, too, had seen the light on these quiet plains,

under a thatched roof. Once I wore fine clothes and gold ornaments, and lived in a great house where there were many servants to wait on me. But happy I have never been. Every flower I plucked changed into a nettle to sting my hand. Perhaps that maleficent one who has pursued me all my days, seeing me now so humbled and one with the poor, has left me and gone away. Yes, I am poor, and this frayed garment that covers me will I press to my lips because it does not shine with silk and gold embroidery. And this poverty which I have found will I cherish, and bequeath it as a precious thing to my child when I die. For with it is peace.”

The peace did not last long; for when misfortune has singled out a man for its prey, it will follow him to the end, and he shall not escape from it though he mount up to the clouds like the falcon, or thrust himself deep down into the earth like the armadillo.

Valerio had been two years at El Ombú when there came an Indian invasion on the southern frontier. There was no force to oppose it; the two hundred men stationed at the Guardia del Azul had been besieged by a part of the invaders in the fort, while the larger number of the savages were sweeping away the cattle and horses from the country all round. An urgent order came to the commander at Chascomus to send a contingent of forty men from the department; and I, then a young man of twenty, who had seen no service, was cited to appear at the Comandancia, in readiness to march. There I found that Valerio had also been cited, and from that

moment we were together. Two days later we were at the Azul, the Indians having retired with their booty; and when all the contingents from the various departments had come in, the commander, one Colonel Barboza, set out with about six hundred men in pursuit.

It was known that in their retreat the Indians had broken up their force into several parties, and that these had taken different directions, and it was thought that these bodies would reunite after a time, and that the larger number would return to their territory by way of Trinqué Lauquén, about seventy-five leagues west of Azul. Our Colonel's plan was to go quickly to this point and wait the arrival of the Indians. It was impossible that they, burdened with the thousands of cattle they had collected, could move fast, while we were burdened with nothing, the only animals we drove before us being our horses. These numbered about five thousand, but many were unbroken mares, to be used as food. Nothing but mare's flesh did we have to eat.

It was the depth of winter, and worse weather I have never known. In this desert I first beheld that whiteness called snow, when the rain flies like cotton-down before the wind, filling the air and whitening the whole earth. All day and every day our clothes were wet, and there was no shelter from the wind and rain at night, nor could we make fires with the soaked grass and reeds, and wood there was none, so that we were compelled to eat our mare's flesh uncooked.

Three weeks were passed in this misery, waiting



for the Indians and seeking for them, with the hills of Gaumini now before us in the south, and now on our left hand; and still no sight and no sign of the enemy. It seemed as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up. Our Colonel was in despair, and we now began to hope that he would lead us back to the Azul.

In these circumstances one of the men, who was thinly clad and had been suffering from a cough, dropped from his horse, and it was then seen that he was likely to die, and that in any case he would have to be left behind. Finding that there was no hope for him, he begged that those who were with him would remember, when they were at home again, that he had perished in the desert and that his soul was suffering in purgatory, and that they would give something to the priests to procure him ease. When asked by his officer to say who his relations were and where they lived, he replied that he had no one belonging to him. He said that he had spent many years in captivity among the Indians at the Salinas Grandes, and that on his return he had failed to find any one of his relations living in the district where he had been born. In answer to further questions, he said that he had been carried away when a small boy, that the Indians on that occasion had invaded the Christian country in the depth of winter, and on their retreat, instead of returning to their own homes, they had gone east, towards the seacoast, and had encamped on a plain by a small stream called Curumamuel, at Los Tres Arroyos, where there was

firewood and sweet water, and good grass for the cattle, and where they found many Indians, mostly women and children, who had gone thither to await their coming; and at that spot they had remained until the spring.

The poor man died that night, and we gathered stones and piled them on his body so that the foxes and caranchos should not devour him.

At break of day next morning we were on horse-back marching at a gallop toward sunrise, for our Colonel had determined to look for the Indians at that distant spot near the sea where they had hidden themselves from their pursuers so many years before. The distance was about seventy leagues, and the journey took us about nine days. And at last, in a deep valley near the sea, the enemy was discovered by our scouts, and we marched by night until we were within less than a league of their encampment, and could see their fires. We rested there for four hours, eating raw flesh and sleeping. Then every man was ordered to mount his best horse, and we were disposed in a half-moon, so that the free horses could easily be driven before us. The Colonel, sitting on his horse, addressed us: "Boys," he said, "you have suffered much, but now the victory is in our hands, and you shall not lose the reward. All the captives you take, and all the thousands of horses and cattle we succeed in recovering, shall be sold by public auction on our return, and the proceeds divided among you."

He then gave the order, and we moved quietly

on for a space of half a league, and coming to the edge of the valley saw it all black with cattle before us, and the Indians sleeping in their camp; and just when the sun arose from the sea and God's light came over the earth, with a great shout we charged upon them. In a moment the multitude of cattle, struck with panic, began rushing away, bellowing in all directions, shaking the earth beneath their hoofs. Our troop of horses, urged on by our yells, were soon in the encampment, and the savages, rushing hither and thither, trying to save themselves, were shot and speared and cut down by swords. One desire was in all our hearts, one cry on all lips—kill! kill! kill! Such a slaughter had not been known for a long time, and birds and foxes and armadillos must have grown fat on the flesh of the heathen we left for them. But we killed only the men, and few escaped; the women and children we made captive.

Two days we spent in collecting the scattered cattle and horses, numbering about ten thousand; then with our spoil we set out on our return and arrived at the Azul at the end of August. On the following day the force was broken up into the separate contingents of which it was composed, and each in its turn was sent to the Colonel's house to be paid. The Chascomus contingent was the last to go up, and on presenting ourselves, each man received two months' soldier's pay, after which Colonel Barboza came out and thanked us for our services, and ordered us to give up our arms at the fort and go back to our district, every man to his own house.

“We have spent some cold nights in the desert together, neighbour Nicandro,” said Valerio, laughing, “but we have fared well—on raw horse-flesh; and now to make it better we have received money. Why, look, with all this money I shall be able to buy a pair of new shoes for Bruno. Brave little man! I can see him toddling about among the cardoon thistles, searching for hens’ eggs for his mother, and getting his poor little feet full of thorns. If there should be any change left he shall certainly have some sugar-plums.”

But the others on coming to the fort began to complain loudly of the treatment they had received, when Valerio, rebuking them, told them to act like men and tell the Colonel that they were not satisfied, or else hold their peace.

“Will you, Valerio, be our spokesman?” they cried, and he, consenting, they all took up their arms again and followed him back to the Colonel’s house.

Barboza listened attentively to what was said and replied that our demands were just. The captives and cattle, he said, had been placed in charge of an officer appointed by the authorities and would be sold publicly in a few days. Let them now return to the fort and give up their arms, and leave Valerio with him to assist in drawing up a formal demand for their share of the spoil.

We then retired once more, giving *vivas* to our Colonel. But no sooner had we given up our arms at the fort than we were sharply ordered to saddle our horses and take our departure. I rode out with

the others, but seeing that Valerio did not overtake us I went back to look for him.

This was what had happened. Left alone in his enemy's hands, Barboza had his arms taken from him, then ordered his men to carry him out to the patio and flay him alive. The men hesitated to obey so cruel a command, and this gave Valerio time to speak. "My Colonel," he said, "you put a hard task on these poor men, and my hide when taken will be of no value to you or to them. Bid them lance me or draw a knife across my throat, and I will laud your clemency."

"You shall not lose your hide nor die," returned the Colonel, "for I admire your courage. Take him, boys, and stake him out, and give him two hundred lashes; then throw him into the road so that it may be known that his rebellious conduct has been punished."

This order was obeyed, and out upon the road he was thrown. A compassionate storekeeper belonging to the place saw him lying there insensible, the carrion-hawks attracted by his naked bleeding body hovering about him; and this good man took him and was ministering to him when I found him. He was lying, face down, on a pile of rugs, racked with pains, and all night long his sufferings were terrible; nevertheless, when morning came, he insisted on setting out at once on our journey to Chascomus. When his pain was greatest and caused him to cry out, the cry, when he saw my face, would turn to a laugh. "You are too tender-hearted for this world we live in,"

he would say. "Think nothing of this, Nicandro. I have tasted man's justice and mercy before now. Let us talk of pleasanter things. Do you know that it is the first of September to-day? Spring has come back, though we hardly notice it yet in this cold southern country. It has been winter, winter with us, and no warmth of sun or fire, and no flowers and no birds' song. But our faces are towards the north now; in a few days we shall sit again in the shade of the old ombú, all our toil and suffering over, to listen to the mangangá humming among the leaves and to the call of the yellow ventevéo. And better than all, little Bruno will come to us with his hands full of scarlet verbenas. Perhaps in a few years' time you, too, will be a father, Nicandro, and will know what it is to hear a child's prattle. Come, we have rested long enough, and have many leagues to ride!"

The leagues were sixty by the road, but something was gained by leaving it, and it was easier for Valerio when the horses trod on the turf. To gallop or to trot was impossible, and even walking I had to keep at his side to support him with my arm; for his back was all one ever-bleeding wound, and his hands were powerless, and all his joints swollen and inflamed as a result of his having been stretched out on the stakes. Five days we travelled, and day by day and night by night he grew feebler, but he would not rest; so long as the light lasted he would be on the road; and as we slowly pressed on, I supporting him, he would groan with pain and then laugh and begin

to talk of the journey's end and of the joy of seeing wife and child again.

It was afternoon on the fifth day when we arrived. The sight of the ombú, which we had had for hours before us, strongly excited him; he begged me, almost with tears, to urge the horses to a gallop, but it would have killed him, and I would not do it.

No person saw our approach, but the door stood open, and when we had walked our horses to within about twenty yards we heard Bruno's voice prattling to his mother. Then suddenly Valerio slipped from the saddle before I could jump down to assist him, and staggered on for a few paces towards the door. Running to his side I heard his cry — "Donata! Bruno! let my eyes see you! one kiss!" Only then his wife heard, and running out to us, saw him sink, and with one last gasp expire in my arms.

Strange and terrible scenes have I witnessed, but never a sadder one than this! Tell me, señor, are these things told in books — does the world know them?

Valerio was dead. He who was so brave, so generous even in his poverty, of so noble a spirit, yet so gentle; whose words were sweeter than honey to me! Of what his loss was to others—to that poor woman who was the mother of his one child, his little Bruno—I speak not. There are things about which we must be silent, or say only, turning our eyes up, Has He forgotten us! Does He know? But to me the loss was greater than all losses: for he was my friend, the man I loved above all men, who was more to

me than any other, even than Santos Ugarte, whose face I should see no more.

For he, too, was dead.

And now I have once more mentioned the name of that man, who was once so great in this district, let me, before proceeding with the history of El Ombú, tell you his end. I heard of it by chance long after he had been placed under the ground.

It was the old man's custom in that house on the other side of the Rio de la Plata where he was obliged to live to go down every day to the waterside. Long hours would he spend there, sitting on the rocks, always with his face towards Buenos Ayres. He was waiting, waiting for the pardon which would, perhaps, in God's good time, come to him from that forgetful place. He was thinking of El Ombú; for what was life to him away from it, in that strange country? And that unsatisfied desire, and perhaps remorse, had, they say, made his face terrible to look at, for it was like the face of a dead man who had died with wide-open eyes.

One day some boatmen on the beach noticed that he was seated on the rocks far out and that when the tide rose he made no movement to escape from the water. They saw him sitting waist-deep in the sea, and when they rescued him from his perilous position and brought him to the shore, he stared at them like a great white owl and talked in a strange way.

"It is very cold and very dark," he said, "and I cannot see your faces, but perhaps you know me. I am Santos Ugarte, of El Ombú. I have had a great



misfortune, friends. To-day in my anger I killed a poor youth whom I loved like a son—my poor boy Meliton! Why did he despise my warning and put himself in my way? But I will say no more about that. After killing him I rode away with the intention of going to Buenos Ayres, but on the road I repented of my deed and turned back. I said that with my own hands I would take him up and carry him in, and call my neighbours together to watch with me by his poor body. But, sirs, the night overtook me and the Sanborombón is swollen with rains, as you no doubt know, and in swimming it I lost my horse. I do not know if he was drowned. Let me have a fresh horse, friends, and show me the way to El Ombú, and God will reward you.”

In that delusion he remained till the end, a few days later, when he died. May his soul rest in peace!

## V

SEÑOR, when I am here and remember these things, I sometimes say to myself: Why, old man, do you come to this tree to sit for an hour in the shade, since there is not on all these plains a sadder or more bitter place? My answer is, To one who has lived long, there is no house and no spot of ground, overgrown with grass and weeds, where a house once stood and where men have lived, that is not equally sad. For this sadness is in us, in a memory

of other days which follows us into all places. But for the child there is no past: he is born into the world light-hearted like a bird; for him gladness is everywhere.

That is how it was with little Bruno, too young to feel the loss of a father or to remember him long. It was her great love of this child which enabled Donata to live through so terrible a calamity. She never quitted El Ombú. An embargo had been placed on the estancia so that it could not be sold, and she was not disturbed in her possession of the house. She now shared it with an old married couple, who, being poor and having a few animals, were glad of a place to live in rent free. The man, whose name was Pascual, took care of Donata's flock and the few cows and horses she owned along with his own. He was a simple, good-tempered old man, whose only fault was indolence, and a love of the bottle and of play. But that mattered little, for when he gambled he invariably lost, through not being sober, so that when he had any money it was quickly gone.

Old Pascual first put Bruno on a horse and taught him to ride after the flock, and to do a hundred things. The boy was like his father, of a beautiful countenance, with black curling hair, and eyes as lively as a bird's. It was not strange that Donata loved him as no mother ever loved a son, but as he grew up a perpetual anxiety was in her heart lest he should hear the story of his father's death and the cause of it. For she was wise in this; she knew that the most dangerous of all passions is that of revenge, since

when it enters into the heart all others, good or bad, are driven out, and all ties and interests and all the words that can be uttered are powerless to restrain a man; and the end is ruin. Many times she spoke of this to me, begging me with tears never to speak of my dead friend to Bruno, lest he should discover the truth, and that fatal rage should enter into his heart.

It had been Donata's custom, every day since Valerio's death, to take a pitcher of water, fresh from the well, and pour it out on the ground on the spot where he had sunk down and expired, without that sight of wife and child, that one kiss, for which he had cried. Who can say what caused her to do such a thing? A great grief is like a delirium, and sometimes gives us strange thoughts and makes us act like demented persons. It may have been because of the appearance of the dead face as she first saw it, dry and white as ashes, the baked black lips, the look of thirst that would give everything for a drink of cold water; and that which she had done in the days of anguish, of delirium, she had continued to do.

The spot where the water was poured each day being but a few yards from the door of the house was of a dryness and hardness of fire-baked bricks, trodden hard by the feet of I know not how many generations of men, and by hoofs of horses ridden every day to the door. But after a long time of watering a little green began to appear in the one spot; and the green was of a creeping plant with small round malva-like leaves, and little white flowers

like porcelain shirt buttons. It spread and thickened, and was like a soft green carpet about two yards long placed on that dry ground, and it was of an emerald greenness all the year round, even in the hot weather when the grass was dead and dry and the plains were in colour like a faded yellow rag.

When Bruno was a boy of fourteen I went one day to help him in making a sheepfold, and when our work was finished in the afternoon we went to the house to sip maté. Before going in, on coming to that green patch, Bruno cried out, "Have you ever seen so verdant a spot as this, Nicandro, so soft and cool a spot to lie down on when one is hot and tired?" He then threw himself down full length upon it, and, lying at ease on his back, he looked up at Donata, who came out to us, and spoke laughingly, "Ah, little mother of my soul! A thousand times have I asked you why you poured water every day on this spot and you would not tell me. Now I have found out. It was all to make me a soft cool spot to lie on when I come back tired and hot from work. Look! is it not like a soft bed with a green and white velvet coverlid; bring water now, mother mine, and pour it on my hot, dusty face."

She laughed, too, poor woman, but I could see the tears in her eyes—the tears which she was always so careful to hide from him.

All this I remember as if it had happened yesterday; I can see and hear it all—Donata's laugh and the tears in her eyes which Bruno could not see. I remember it so well because this was almost the last

time I saw her before I was compelled to go away, for my absence was long. But before I speak of that change let me tell you of something that happened about two years before at El Ombú, which brought a new happiness into that poor widow's life.

It happened that among those that had no right to be on the land, but came and settled there because there was no one to forbid them, there was a man named Sanchez, who had built himself a small rancho about half a league from the old house, and kept a flock of sheep. He was a widower with one child, a little girl named Monica. This Sanchez, although poor, was not a good man, and had no tenderness in his heart. He was a gambler, always away from his rancho, leaving the flock to be taken care of by poor little Monica. In winter it was cruel, for then the sheep travel most, and most of all on cold, rough days; and she without a dog to help her, barefooted on the thistle-grown land, often in terror at the sight of cattle, would be compelled to spend the whole day out of doors. More than once on a winter evening in bad weather I have found her trying to drive the sheep home in the face of the rain, crying with misery. It hurt me all the more because she had a pretty face: no person could fail to see its beauty, though she was in rags and her black hair in a tangle, like the mane of a horse that has been feeding among the burrs. At such times I have taken her up on my saddle and driven her flock home for her, and have said to myself: "Poor lamb without a mother, if you were mine I would seat you on the horns of the

moon; but, unhappy one! he whom you call father is without compassion.”

At length, Sanchez, finding himself without money, just when strangers from all places were coming to Chascomus to witness a great race and anxious not to lose this chance of large winnings, sold his sheep, having nothing of more value to dispose of. But instead of winning he lost, and then leaving Monica in a neighbour's house he went away, promising to return for her in a few days. But he did not return, and it was believed by everybody that he had abandoned the child.

It was then that Donata offered to take her and be a mother to the orphan, and I can say, señor, that the poor child's own mother, who was dead, could not have treated her more tenderly or loved her more. And the pretty one had now been Donata's little daughter and Bruno's playmate two years when I was called away, and I saw them not again and heard no tidings of them for a space of five years—the five longest years of my life.

## VI

I WENT away because men were wanted for the army, and I was taken. I was away, I have said, five years, and the five would have been ten, and the ten twenty, supposing that life had lasted, but for a lance wound in my thigh, which made me a

lame man for the rest of my life. That was the reason of my discharge and happy escape from that purgatory. Once back in these plains where I first saw heaven's light, I said in my heart: I can no longer spring light as a bird on to the back of an unbroken animal and laugh at his efforts to shake me off; nor can I throw a lasso on a running horse or bull and, digging my heel in the ground, pit my strength against his; nor can I ever be what I have been in any work or game on horseback or on foot; nevertheless, this lameness, and all I have lost through it, is a small price to pay for my deliverance.

But this is not the history of my life; let me remember that I speak only of those who have lived at El Ombú in my time, in the old house which no longer exists.

There had been no changes when I returned, except that those five years had made Bruno almost a man, and more than ever like his father, except that he never had that I-know-not-what something to love in the eyes which made Valerio different from all men. Donata was the same, but older. Grey hair had come to her in her affliction; now her hair which should have been black was all white—but she was more at peace, for Bruno was good to her, and as a widow's only son was exempt from military service. There was something else to make her happy. Those two, who were everything to her, could not grow up under one roof and not love; now she could look with confidence to a union between them, and there would be no separation. But even so, that old fear she had

so often spoken of to me in former days was never absent from her heart.

Bruno was now away most of the time, working as a cattle drover, his ambition being, Donata informed me, to make money so as to buy everything needed for the house.

I had been back, living in that poor rancho, half a league from El Ombú, where I first saw the light, for the best part of a year, when Bruno, who had been away with his employer buying cattle in the south, one day appeared at my place. He had not been to El Ombú, and was silent and strange in his manner, and when we were alone together I said to him: "What has happened to you, Bruno, that you have the face of a stranger and speak in an unaccustomed tone to your friend?"

He answered: "Because you, Nicandro, have treated me like a child, concealing from me that which you ought to have told me long ago, instead of leaving me to learn it by accident from a stranger."

"It has come," I said to myself, for I knew what he meant; then I spoke of his mother.

"Ah, yes," he said with bitterness, "I know now why she pours water fresh from the well every day on that spot of ground near the door. Do you, Nicandro, think that water will ever wash away that old stain and memory? A man who is a man must in such a thing obey, not a mother's wish, nor any woman, but that something which speaks in his heart."

"Let no such thought dwell in you to make you



mad," I replied. "Look, Bruno, my friend's son and my friend, leave it to God Who is above us, and Who considers and remembers all evil deeds that men do, and desires not that anyone should take the sword out of His hand."

"Who is He—this God you talk of?" he answered. "Have you seen or spoken with Him, that you tell me what His mind is in this matter? I have only this voice to tell me how a man should act in such a case," and he smote his breast; then overcome with a passion of grief he covered his face with his hands and wept.

Vainly I begged him not to lose himself, telling him what the effect of his attempt, whether he succeeded or failed, would be on Donata and on Monica—it would break those poor women's hearts. I spoke, too, of things I had witnessed in my five years' service; the cruel sentences from which there was no appeal, the torments, the horrible deaths so often inflicted. For these evils there was no remedy on earth: and he, a poor, ignorant boy, what would he do but dash himself to pieces against that tower of brass!

He replied that within that brazen tower there was a heart full of blood; and with that he went away, only asking me as a favour not to tell his mother of this visit to me.

Some ten days later she had a message from him, brought from the capitol by a traveller going to the south. Bruno sent word that he was going to Las Mulitas, a place fifty leagues west of Buenos Ayres,

to work on an estancia there, and would be absent some months.

Why had he gone thither? Because he had heard that General Barboza—for that man was now a General—owned a tract of land at that place, which the Government had given him as a reward for his services on the southern frontier; and that he had recently returned from the northern provinces to Buenos Ayres and was now staying at this estancia at Las Mulitas.

Donata knew nothing of his secret motives, but his absence filled her with anxiety; and when at length she fell ill I resolved to go in search of the poor youth and try to persuade him to return to El Ombú. But at Las Mulitas I heard that he was no longer there. All strangers had been taken for the army in the frontier department, and Bruno, in spite of his passport, had been forced to go.

When I returned to El Ombú with this sad news Donata resolved at once to go to the capitol and try to obtain his release. She was ill, and it was a long journey for her to perform on horseback, but she had friends to go with and take care of her. In the end she succeeded in seeing the President, and throwing herself on her knees before him, and with tears in her eyes, implored him to let her have her son back.

He listened to her, and gave her a paper to take to the War Office. There it was found that Bruno had been sent to El Rosario, and an order was despatched for his immediate release. But when the order reached its destination the unhappy boy had deserted.

That was the last that Donata ever heard of her son. She guessed why he had gone, and knew as well as if I had told her that he had found out the secret so long hidden from him. Still, being his mother, she would not abandon hope; she struggled to live. Never did I come into her presence but I saw in her face a question which she dared not put in words. If, it said, you have heard, if you know, when and how his life ended, tell me now before I go. But it also said, If you know, do not tell me so that I and Monica may go on hoping together to the end.

“I know, Nicandro,” she would say, “that if Bruno returns he will not be the same — the son I have lost. For in that one thing he is not like his father. Could another be like Valerio? No misfortune and no injustice could change that heart, or turn his sweetness sour. In that freshness and gaiety of temper he was like a child, and Bruno as a child was like him. My son! my son! where are you? God of my soul, grant that he may yet come to me, though his life be now darkened with some terrible passion—though his poor hands be stained with blood, so that my eyes may see him again before I go!”

But he came not, and she died without seeing him.

## VII

IF Monica, left alone in the house with old Pascual and his wife, had been disposed to listen to those who were attracted by her face she might have found a protector worthy of her. There were men of substance among those who came for her. But it mattered nothing to her whether they had land and cattle or not, or what their appearance was, and how they were dressed. Hers was a faithful heart. And she looked for Bruno's return, not with that poor half-despairing hope which had been Donata's, and had failed to keep her alive, but with a hope that sustained and made her able to support the months and years of waiting. She looked for his coming as the night-watcher for the dawn. On summer afternoons, when the heat of the day was over, she would take her sewing outside the gate and sit there by the hour, where her sight commanded the road to the north. From that side he would certainly come. On dark, rainy nights a lantern would be hung on the wall lest he, coming at a late hour, should miss the house in the dark. Glad she was not, nor lively; she was pale and thin, and those dark eyes that looked too large because of her thinness were the eyes of one who had beheld grief. But with it all there was a serenity, an air of one whose tears, held back, would all be shed at the proper time, when he returned. And he would, perhaps, come to-day, or, if not

to-day, then to-morrow, or perhaps the day after, as God willed.

Nearly three years had passed by since Donata's death when, one afternoon, I rode to El Ombú, and on approaching the house spied a saddled horse which had got loose going away at a trot. I went after it and caught and led it back, and then saw that its owner was a traveller, an old soldier, who with or without the permission of the people of the house was lying down and asleep in the shade of the ombú.

There had lately been a battle in the northern part of the province, and the defeated force had broken up, and the men, carrying their arms, had scattered themselves all over the country. This veteran was one of them.

He did not wake when I led the horse up and shouted to him. He was a man about fifty to sixty years old, grey-haired, with many scars of sword and lance wounds on his sun-blackened face and hands. His carbine was leaning against the tree a yard or two away, but he had not unbuckled his sword, and what now attracted my attention as I sat on my horse regarding him was the way in which he clutched the hilt and shook the weapon until it rattled in its scabbard. His was an agitated sleep; the sweat stood in big drops on his face, he ground his teeth and moaned, and muttered words which I could not catch.

At length, dismounting, I called to him again, then shouted in his ear, and finally shook him by the shoulder. Then he woke with a start, and struggling

up to a sitting position, and staring at me like one demented, he exclaimed, "What has happened"?

When I told him about his horse he was silent, and sitting there with eyes cast down passed his hand repeatedly across his forehead. Never in any man's face had I seen misery compared to his. "Pardon me, friend," he spoke at last. "My ears were so full of sounds you do not hear that I paid little attention to what you were saying."

"Perhaps the great heat of the day has overcome you," I said. "Or maybe you are suffering from some malady caused by an old wound received in fight."

"Yes, an incurable malady," he returned, gloomily. "Have you, friend, been in the army?"

"Five years had I served when a wound which made me lame for life delivered me from that hell."

"I have served thirty," he returned, "perhaps more. I know that I was very young when I was taken, and I remember that a woman I called mother wept to see me go. That any eyes should have shed tears for me! Shall I now in that place in the south where I was born find one who remembers my name? I look not for it! I have no one but this"—and here he touched his sword.

After an interval, he continued, "We say, friend, that in the army we can do no wrong, since all responsibility rests with those who are over us; that our most cruel and sanguinary deeds are no more a sin or crime than is the shedding of the blood of cattle or of Indians who are not Christians, and are therefore of no more account than cattle in God's sight. We

say, too, that once we have become accustomed to kill, not men only, but even those who are powerless to defend themselves—the weak and the innocent—we think nothing of it, and have no compunction nor remorse. If this be so, why does He, the One who is above, torment me before my time? Is it just? Listen: no sooner do I close my eyes than sleep brings to me that most terrible experience a man can have—to be in the midst of a conflict and powerless. The bugles call; there is a movement everywhere of masses of men, foot and horse, and every face has on it the look of one who is doomed. There is a murmur of talking all round me, the officers are shouting and waving their swords; I strive in vain to catch the word of command; I do not know what is happening; it is all confusion, a gloom of smoke and dust, a roar of guns, a great noise and shouting of the enemy charging through us. And I am helpless. I wake, and slowly the noise and terrible scene fade from my mind, only to return when sleep again overcomes me. What repose, what refreshment can I know! Sleep, they say, is a friend to everyone, and makes all equal, the rich and the poor, the guilty and the innocent; they say, too, that this forgetfulness is like a draught of cold water to the thirsty man. But what shall I say of sleep? Often with this blade would I have delivered myself from its torture but for the fear that there may be after death something even worse than this dream.”

After an interval of silence, seeing that he had recovered from his agitation, I invited him to go with

me to the house. "I see smoke issuing from the kitchen," I said; "let us go in so that you may refresh yourself with maté before resuming your journey."

We went in and found the old people boiling the kettle; and in a little while Monica came in and sat with us. Never did she greet one without that light which was like sunshine in her dark eyes; words were not needed to tell me of the gratitude and friendliness she felt toward me, for she was not one to forget the past. I remember that she looked well that day in her white dress with a red flower. Had not Bruno said that he liked to see her in white, and that a flower on her bosom or in her hair was an ornament that gave her most grace? And Bruno might arrive at any moment. But the sight of that grey-haired veteran in his soiled and frayed uniform, and with his clanking sword and his dark scarred face, greatly disturbed her. I noticed that she grew paler and could scarcely keep her eyes off his face while he talked.

While sipping his maté he told us of fights he had been in, of long marches and sufferings in desert places, and of some of the former men he had served under. Among them he, by chance, named General Barboza.

Monica, I knew, had never heard of that man, and on this account I feared not to speak of him. It had, I said, been reported, I knew not whether truthfully or not, that Barboza was dead.

"On that point I can satisfy you," he returned, "since I was serving with him when his life came to an end in the province of San Luis about two years



ago. He was at the head of nineteen hundred men when it happened, and the whole force was filled with amazement at the event. Not that they regretted his loss; on the contrary, his own followers feared and were glad to be delivered from him. He exceeded most commanders in ferocity, and was accustomed to say scoffingly to his prisoners that he would not have gunpowder wasted on them. That was not a thing to complain of, but he was capable of treating his own men as he treated a spy or a prisoner of war. Many a one have I seen put to death with a blunted knife, he, Barboza, looking on, smoking a cigarette. It was the manner of his death that startled us, for never had man been seen to perish in such a way.

“It happened on this march, about a month before the end, that a soldier named Bracamonte went one day at noon to deliver a letter from his captain to the General. Barboza was sitting in his shirt-sleeves in his tent when the letter was handed to him, but just when he put out his hand to take it the man made an attempt to stab him. The General, throwing himself back, escaped the blow, then instantly sprang like a tiger upon his assailant, and, seizing him by the wrist, wrenched the weapon out of his hand only to strike it quick as lightning into the poor fool's throat. No sooner was he down than the General, bending over him before drawing out the weapon, called to those who had run to his assistance to get him a tumbler. When, tumbler in hand, he lifted himself up and looked upon them, they say that his face was of the whiteness of iron made white in the

furnace, and that his eyes were like two flames. He was mad with rage, and cried out with a loud voice, "Thus, in the presence of the army, do I serve the wretch who thought to shed my blood!" Then with a furious gesture he threw down and shattered the reddened glass, and bade them take the dead man outside the camp and leave him stripped to the vultures.

"This ended the episode, but from that day it was noticed by those about him that a change had come over the General. If, friend, you have served with, or have even seen him, you know the man he was—tall and well-formed, blue-eyed and fair, like an Englishman, endowed with a strength, endurance and resolution that was a wonder to everyone: he was like an eagle among birds—that great bird that has no weakness and no mercy, whose cry fills all creatures with dismay, whose pleasure it is to tear his victim's flesh with his crooked talons. But now some secret malady had fallen on him which took away all his mighty strength; the colour of his face changed to sickly paleness, and he bent forward and swayed this way and that in the saddle as he rode like a drunken man, and this strange weakness increased day by day. It was said in the army that the blood of the man he had killed had poisoned him. The doctors who accompanied us in this march could not cure him, and their failure so angered him against them that they began to fear for their own safety. They now said that he could not be properly treated in camp, but must withdraw to some town where

a different system could be followed; but this he refused to do.

“Now it happened that we had an old soldier with us who was a curandero. He was a native of Santa Fé, and was famed for his cures in his own department; but having had the misfortune to kill a man, he was arrested and condemned to serve ten years in the army. This person now informed some of the officers that he would undertake to cure the General, and Barboza, hearing of it, sent for and questioned him. The curandero informed him that his malady was one which the doctors could not cure. It was a failure of the natural heat of the blood, and only by means of animal heat, not by drugs, could health be recovered. In such a grave case the usual remedy of putting the feet and legs in the body of some living animal opened for the purpose would not be sufficient. Some very large beast should be procured and the patient placed bodily in it.

“The General agreed to submit himself to this treatment; the doctors dared not interfere, and men were sent out in quest of a large animal. We were then encamped on a wide sandy plain in San Luis, and as we were without tents we were suffering much from the great heat and the dust-laden winds. But at this spot the General had grown worse, so that he could no longer sit on his horse, and here we had to wait for his improvement.

“In due time a very big bull was brought in and fastened to a stake in the middle of the camp. A space, fifty or sixty yards round, was marked out

and roped round, and ponchos hung on the rope to form a curtain so that what was being done should not be witnessed by the army. But a great curiosity and anxiety took possession of the entire force, and when the bull was thrown down and his agonising bellowings were heard, from all sides officers and men began to move toward that fatal spot. It had been noised about that the cure would be almost instantaneous, and many were prepared to greet the reappearance of the General with a loud cheer.

“Then very suddenly, almost before the bellowings had ceased, shrieks were heard from the enclosure, and in a moment, while we all stood staring and wondering, out rushed the General, stark naked, reddened with that bath of warm blood he had been in, a sword which he had hastily snatched up in his hand. Leaping over the barrier, he stood still for an instant, then catching sight of the great mass of men before him he flew at them, yelling and whirling his sword round so that it looked like a shining wheel in the sun. The men seeing that he was raving mad fled before him, and for a space of a hundred yards or more he pursued them; then that superhuman energy was ended, the sword flew from his hand, he staggered, and fell prostrate on the earth. For some minutes no one ventured to approach him, but he never stirred, and at length, when examined, was found to be dead.”

The soldier had finished his story, and though I had many questions to ask I asked none, for I saw Monica's distress, and that she had gone white even

to the lips at the terrible things the man had related. But now he had ended, and would soon depart, for the sun was getting low.

He rolled up and lighted a cigarette, and was about to rise from the bench, when he said, "One thing I forgot to mention about the soldier Bracamonte, who attempted to assassinate the General. After he had been carried out and stripped for the vultures, a paper was found sewn up in the lining of his tunic, which proved to be his passport, for it contained his right description. It said that he was a native of this department of Chascomus, so that you may have heard of him. His name was Bruno de la Cueva."

Would that he had not spoken those last words! Never, though I live to be a hundred, shall I forget that terrible scream that came from Monica's lips before she fell senseless to the floor!

As I raised her in my arms, the soldier turned and said, "She is subject to fits?"

"No," I replied, "that Bruno, of whose death we have now heard for the first time, was of this house."

"It was destiny that led me to this place," he said, "or perhaps that God who is ever against me; but you, friend, are my witness that I crossed not this threshold with a drawn weapon in my hand." And with these words he took his departure, and from that day to this I have never again beheld his face.

She opened her eyes at last, but the wings of my heart drooped when I saw them, since it was easy to see that she had lost her reason; but whether that calamity or the grief she would have known is greatest

who can say? Some have died of pure grief—did it not kill Donata in the end?—but the crazed may live many years. We sometimes think it would be better if they were dead; but not in all cases—not, señor, in this.

She lived on here with the old people, for from the first she was quiet and docile as a child. Finally an order came from a person in authority at Chascomus for those who were in the house to quit it. It was going to be pulled down for the sake of the material which was required for a building in the village. Pascual died about that time, and the widow, now old and infirm, went to live with some poor relations at Chascomus and took Monica with her. When the old woman died Monica remained with these people: she lives with them to this day. But she is free to come and go at will, and is known to all in the village as *la loca del Ombú*. They are kind to her, for her story is known to them, and God has put compassion in their hearts.

To see her you would hardly believe that she is the Monica I have told you of, whom I knew as a little one, running bare-footed after her father's flock. For she has grey hairs and wrinkles now. As you ride to Chascomus from this point you will see, on approaching the lake, a very high bank on your left hand, covered with a growth of tall fennel, hoarhound, and cardoon thistle. There on most days you will find her, sitting on the bank in the shade of the tall fennel bushes, looking across the water. She watches for the flamingos. There are many of those

great birds on the lake, and they go in flocks, and when they rise and travel across the water, flying low, their scarlet wings may be seen at a great distance. And every time she catches sight of a flock moving like a red line across the lake she cries out with delight. That is her one happiness—her life. And she is the last of all those who have lived in my time at El Ombú.

## APPENDIX

### THE ENGLISH INVASION AND THE GAME OF EL PATO

I MUST say at once that *El Ombú* is mostly a true story, although the events did not occur exactly in the order given. The incidents relating to the English invasion of June and July, 1807, is told pretty much as I had it from the old gaucho called Nicandro in the narrative. That was in the sixties. The undated notes which I made of my talks with the old man, containing numerous anecdotes of Santos Ugarte and the whole history of El Ombú, were written, I think, in 1868—the year of the great dust storm. These ancient notes are now before me, and look very strange, both as to the writing and the quality of the paper; also as to the dirtiness of the same, which makes me think that the old manuscript must have been out in that memorable storm, which, I remember, ended with rain—the rain coming down as liquid mud.

There were other old men living in that part of the country who, as boys, had witnessed the march of an English army on Buenos Ayres, and one of these confirmed the story of the blankets thrown away by the army, and of the chaff between some of the British soldiers and the natives.

I confess I had some doubts as to the truth of this blanket story when I came to read over my old notes; but in referring to the proceedings of the court-martial on Lieutenant-General Whitelocke, published in London in 1808, I find that the incident is referred to. On page 57 of the first volume occurs the following statement, made by General Gower in his evidence: “The men, particularly of Brigadier-General Lumley’s brigade, were very much exhausted, and Lieutenant-General Whitelocke, to give them a chance of getting on with tolerable rapidity, ordered all the blankets of the army to be thrown down.”

There is nothing, however, in the evidence about the



blankets having been used to make a firmer bottom for the army to cross a river, nor is the name of the river mentioned.

Another point in the old gaucho's story may strike the English reader as very strange and almost incredible; this is, that within a very few miles of the army of the hated foreign invader, during its march on the capital, where the greatest excitement prevailed and every preparation for defence was being made, a large number of men were amusing themselves at the game of *El Pato*. To those who are acquainted with the character of the gaucho there is nothing incredible in such a fact; for the gaucho is, or was, absolutely devoid of the sentiment of patriotism, and regarded all rulers, all in authority from the highest to the lowest, as his chief enemies, and the worst kind of robbers, since they robbed him not only of his goods but of his liberty.

It mattered not to him whether his country paid tribute to Spain or to England, whether a man appointed by someone at a distance as Governor or Viceroy had black or blue eyes. It was seen that when the Spanish dominion came to an end his hatred was transferred to the ruling cliques of a so-called Republic. When the gauchos attached themselves to Rosas, and assisted him to climb into power, they were under the delusion that he was one of themselves, and would give them that perfect liberty to live their own lives in their own way, which is their only desire. They found out their mistake when it was too late.

It was Rosas who abolished the game of *El Pato*, but before saying more on that point it would be best to describe the game. I have never seen an account of it in print, but for a very long period, and down to probably about 1840, it was the most popular out-door game on the Argentine pampas. Doubtless it originated there; it was certainly admirably suited to the habits and disposition of the horsemen of the plains; and unlike most out-door games it retained its original simple, rude character to the end.

*Pato* means duck; and to play the game a duck or fowl, or, as was usually the case, some larger domestic bird—turkey, gosling, or Muscovy duck—was killed and sewn up in a piece of stout raw hide, forming a somewhat shapeless ball, twice

as big as a football, and provided with four loops or handles of strong twisted raw hide made of a convenient size to be grasped by a man's hand. A great point was to have the ball and handles so strongly made that three or four powerful men could take hold and tug until they dragged each other to the ground without anything giving way.

Whenever it was resolved at any place to have a game, and someone had offered to provide the bird, and the meeting-place had been settled, notice would be sent round among the neighbours; and at the appointed time all the men and youths living within a circle of several leagues would appear on the spot, mounted on their best horses. On the appearance of the man on the ground carrying the duck the others would give chase; and by-and-by he would be overtaken, and the ball wrested from his hand; the victor in his turn would be pursued, and when overtaken there would perhaps be a scuffle or scrimmage, as in football, only the strugglers would be first on horseback before dragging each other to the earth. Occasionally when this happened a couple of hot-headed players, angry at being hurt or worsted, would draw their weapons against each other in order to find who was in the right, or to prove which was the better man. But fight or no fight, someone would get the duck and carry it away to be chased again. Leagues of ground would be gone over by the players in this way, and at last someone, luckier or better mounted than his fellows, would get the duck and successfully run the gauntlet of the people scattered about on the plain, and make good his escape. He was the victor, and it was his right to carry the bird home and have it for his dinner. This was, however, a mere fiction; the man who carried off the duck made for the nearest house, followed by all the others, and there not only the duck was cooked, but a vast amount of meat to feed the whole of the players. While the dinner was in preparation, messengers would be despatched to neighbouring houses to invite the women; and on their arrival dancing would be started and kept up all night.

To the gauchos of the great plains, who took to the back of a horse from childhood, almost as spontaneously as a parasite to the animal on which it feeds, the pato was the

game of games, and in their country as much as cricket and football and golf together to the inhabitants of this island. Nor could there have been any better game for men whose existence, or whose success in life, depended so much on their horsemanship; and whose chief glory it was to be able to stick on under difficulties, and, when sticking on was impossible, to fall off gracefully and like a cat, on their feet. To this game the people of the pampa were devoted up to a time when it came into the head of a president of the republic to have no more of it, and with a stroke of the pen it was abolished for ever.

It would take a strong man in this country to put down any out-door game to which the people are attached; and he was assuredly a very strong man who did away with El Pato in that land. If any other man who has occupied the position of head of the State at any time during the last ninety years, had attempted such a thing a universal shout of derision would have been the result, and wherever such an absurd decree had appeared pasted up on the walls and doors of churches, shops, and other public places, the gauchos would have been seen filling their mouths with water to squirt it over the despised paper. But this man was more than a president; he was that Rosas, called by his enemies the "Nero of America." Though by birth a member of a distinguished family, he was by predilection a gaucho, and early in life took to the semi-barbarous life of the plains. Among his fellows Rosas distinguished himself as a dare-devil, one who was not afraid to throw himself from the back of his own horse on to that of a wild horse in the midst of a flying herd into which he had charged. He had all the gaucho's native ferocity, his fierce hates and prejudices; and it was in fact his intimate knowledge of the people he lived with, his oneness in mind with them, that gave him his wonderful influence over them, and enabled him to carry out his ambitious schemes. But why, when he had succeeded in making himself all-powerful by means of their help, when he owed them so much, and the ties uniting him to them were so close, did he deprive them of their beloved pastime? The reason, which will sound almost ridiculous after what I have said of the man's

character, was that he considered the game too rough. It is true that it had (for him) its advantages, since it made the men of the plains hardy, daring, resourceful fighters on horseback—the kind of men he most needed for his wars; on the other hand, it caused so much injury to the players, and resulted in so many bloody fights and fierce feuds between neighbours that he considered he lost more than he gained by it.

There were not men enough in the country for his wants; even boys of twelve and fourteen were sometimes torn from the arms of their weeping mothers to be made soldiers of; he could not afford to have full-grown strong men injuring and killing each other for their own amusement. They must, like good citizens, sacrifice their pleasure for their country's sake. And at length, when his twenty years' reign was over, when people were again free to follow their own inclinations without fear of bullet and cold steel—it was generally cold steel in those days—those who had previously played the game had had roughness enough in their lives, and now only wanted rest and ease; while the young men and youths who had not taken part in El Pato nor seen it played, had never come under its fascination, and had no wish to see it revived.

**STORY OF A PIEBALD HORSE**



## STORY OF A PIEBALD HORSE

**T**HIS is all about a piebald. People there are like birds that come down in flocks, hop about chattering, gobble up their seed, then fly away, forgetting what they have swallowed. I love not to scatter grain for such as these. With you, friend, it is different. Others may laugh if they like at the old man of many stories, who puts all things into his copper memory. I can laugh, too, knowing that all things are ordered by destiny; otherwise I might sit down and cry.

The things I have seen! There was the piebald that died long ago; I could take you to the very spot where his bones used to lie bleaching in the sun. There is a nettle growing on the spot. I saw it yesterday. What important things are these to remember and talk about! Bones of a dead horse and a nettle; a young bird that falls from its nest in the night and is found dead in the morning; puffballs blown about by the wind; a little lamb left behind by the flock bleating at night amongst the thorns and thistles, where only the fox or wild dog can hear it! Small matters are these, and our lives, what are they? And the people we have known, the men and women who have spoken to us and touched us with warm hands—the bright eyes and red lips! Can we cast

these things like dead leaves on the fire? Can we lie down full of heaviness because of them, and sleep and rise in the morning without them? Ah, friend!

Let us to the story of the piebald. There was a cattle-marking at neighbour Sotelo's estancia, and out of a herd of three thousand head we had to part all the yearlings to be branded. After that, dinner and a dance. At sunrise we gathered, about thirty of us, all friends and neighbours, to do the work. Only with us came one person nobody knew. He joined us when we were on our way to the cattle; a young man, slender, well-formed, of pleasing countenance and dressed as few could dress in those days. His horse also shone with silver trappings. And what an animal! Many horses have I seen in this life, but never one with such a presence as this young stranger's piebald.

Arrived at the herd, we began to separate the young animals, the men riding in couples through the cattle, so that each calf when singled out could be driven by two horsemen, one on each side, to prevent it from doubling back. I happened to be mounted on a demon with a fiery mouth—there was no making him work, so I had to leave the parters and stand with little to do, watching the yearlings already parted, to keep them from returning to the herd.

Presently neighbour Chapaco rode up to me. He was a good-hearted man, well-spoken, half Indian and half Christian; but he also had another half, and that was devil.

“What! neighbour Lucero, are you riding on a



donkey or a goat, that you remain here doing boy's work?"

I began telling him about my horse, but he did not listen; he was looking at the parters.

"Who is that young stranger?" he asked.

"I see him to-day," I replied, "and if I see him again to-morrow then I shall have seen him twice."

"And in what country of which I have never heard did he learn cattle-parting?" said he.

"He rides," I answered, "like one presuming on a good horse. But he is safe, his fellow-worker has all the danger."

"I believe you," said Chapaco. "He charges furiously and hurls the heifer before his comrade, who has all the work to keep it from doubling, and all the danger, for at any moment his horse may go over it and fall. This our young stranger does knowingly, thinking that no one here will resent it. No, Lucero, he is presuming more on his long knife than on his good horse."

Even while we spoke, the two we were watching rode up to us. Chapaco saluted the young man, taking off his hat, and said, "Will you take me for a partner, friend?"

"Yes; why not, friend?" returned the other; and together the two rode back to the herd.

Now I shall watch them, said I to myself, to see what this Indian devil intends doing. Soon they came out of the herd driving a very small animal. Then I knew what was coming. "May your guardian angel be with you to avert a calamity, young

stranger!" I exclaimed. Whip and spur those two came towards me like men riding a race and not parting cattle. Chapaco kept close to the calf, so that he had the advantage, for his horse was well trained. At length he got a little ahead, then, quick as lightning, he forced the calf round square before the other. The piebald struck it full in the middle, and fell because it had to fall. But, Saints in Heaven! why did not the rider save himself? Those who were watching saw him throw up his feet to tread his horse's neck and leap away; nevertheless man, horse, and calf came down together. They ploughed the ground for some distance, so great had been their speed, and the man was under. When we picked him up he was senseless, the blood flowing from his mouth. Next morning, when the sun rose and God's light fell on the earth, he expired.

Of course there was no dancing that night. Some of the people, after eating, went away; others remained sitting about all night, talking in low tones, waiting for the end. A few of us were at his bedside watching his white face and closed eyes. He breathed, and that was all. When the sunlight came over the world he opened his eyes, and Sotelo asked him how he did. He took no notice, but presently his lips began to move, though they seemed to utter no sound. Sotelo bent his ear down to listen. "Where does she live?" he asked. He could not answer—he was dead.

"He seemed to be saying many things," Sotelo told us, "but I understood only this: 'Tell her to

forgive me. . . I was wrong. She loved him from the first. . . I was jealous, and hated him. . . . Tell Elaria not to grieve—Anacleto will be good to her.' Alas! my friends, where shall I find his relations to deliver this dying message to them?"

The Alcalde came that day and made a list of the dead man's possessions, and bade Sotelo take charge of them till the relations could be found. Then, calling all the people together, he bade each person cut on his whip-handle and on the sheath of his knife the mark branded on the flank of the piebald, which was in shape like a horse-shoe with a cross inside, so that it might be shown to all strangers, and made known through the country until the dead man's relations should hear of it.

When a year had gone by, the Alcalde told Sotelo that, all inquiries having failed, he could now take the piebald and the silver trappings for himself. Sotelo would not listen to this, for he was a devout man and coveted no person's property, dead or alive. The horse and things, however, still remained in his charge.

Three years later I was one afternoon sitting with Sotelo, taking maté, when his herd of dun mares were driven up. They came galloping and neighing to the corral, and ahead of them, looking like a wild horse, was the piebald, for no person ever mounted him.

"Never do I look on that horse," I remarked, "without remembering the fatal marking when its master met his death."

“Now you speak of it,” said he, “let me inform you that I am about to try a new plan. That noble piebald and all those silver trappings hanging in my room are always reproaching my conscience. Let us not forget the young stranger we put under ground. I have had many masses said for his soul’s repose, but that does not quite satisfy me. Somewhere there is a place where he is not forgotten. Hands there are, perhaps, that gather wild flowers to place them with lighted candles before the image of the Blessed Virgin; eyes there are that weep and watch for his coming. You know how many travellers and cattle-drovers going to Buenos Ayres from the south call for refreshment at the *pulperia*. I intend taking the piebald and tying him every day at the gate there. No person calling will fail to notice the horse, and some day perhaps some traveller will recognise the brand on its flank and will be able to tell us what department and what estancia it comes from.”

I did not believe anything would result from this, but said nothing, not wishing to discourage him.

Next morning the piebald was tied up at the gate of the *pulperia*, at the road-side, only to be released again when night came, and this was repeated every day for a long time. So fine an animal did not fail to attract the attention of all strangers passing that way, still several weeks went by and nothing was discovered. At length, one evening, just when the sun was setting, there appeared a troop of cattle driven by eight men. It had come a great distance, for the troop was a large one—about nine hundred

head—and they moved slowly, like cattle that had been many days on the road. Some of the men came in for refreshments; then the store-keeper noticed that one remained outside leaning on the gate.

“What is the capataz doing that he remains outside?” said one of the men.

“Evidently he has fallen in love with that piebald,” said another, “for he cannot take his eyes off it.”

At length the capataz, a young man of good presence, came in and sat down on a bench. The others were talking and laughing about the strange things they had all been doing the day before; for they had been many days and nights on the road, only nodding a little in their saddles, and at length becoming delirious from want of sleep, they had begun to act like men that are half-crazed.

“Enough of the delusions of yesterday,” said the capataz, who had been silently listening to them, “but tell me, boys, am I in the same condition to-day?”

“Surely not!” they replied. “Thanks to those horned devils being so tired and footsore, we all had some sleep last night.”

“Very well then,” said he, “now you have finished eating and drinking, go back to the troop, but before you leave look well at that piebald tied at the gate. He that is not a cattle-drover may ask, ‘How can my eyes deceive me?’ but I know that a crazy brain makes us see many strange things when the drowsy eyes can only be held open with the fingers.”

The men did as they were told, and when they had looked well at the piebald, they all shouted out,

“He has the brand of the Estancia de Silva on his flank, and no counter-brand—claim the horse, capataz, for he is yours.” And after that they rode away to the herd.

“My friend,” said the capataz to the store-keeper, “will you explain how you came possessed of this piebald horse?”

Then the other told him everything, even the dying words of the young stranger, for he knew all.

The capataz bend down his head, and covering his face shed tears. Then he said, “And you died thus, Torcuato, amongst strangers! From my heart I have forgiven you the wrong you did me. Heaven rest your soul, Torcuato; I cannot forget that we were once brothers. I, friend, am that Anacleto of whom he spoke with his last breath.”

Sotelo was then sent for, and when he arrived and the *pulperia* was closed for the night, the capataz told his story, which I will give you in his own words, for I was also present to hear him. This is what he told us:

I was born on the southern frontier. My parents died when I was very small, but Heaven had compassion on me and raised up one to shelter me in my orphanhood. Don Loreto Silva took me to his estancia on the Sarandi, a stream half a day’s journey from Tandil, towards the setting sun. He treated me like one of his own children, and I took the name of Silva. He had two other children, Torcuato, who was about the same age as myself, and his daughter, Elaria, who was younger. He was a widower when

he took charge of me, and died when I was still a youth. After his death we moved to Tandil, where we had a house close to the little town; for we were all minors, and the property had been left to be equally divided between us when we should be of age. For four years we lived happily together; then when we were of age we preferred to keep the property undivided. I proposed that we should go and live on the estancia, but Torcuato would not consent, liking the place where we were living best. Finally, not being able to persuade him, I resolved to go and attend to the estancia myself. He said that I could please myself and that he should stay where he was with Elaria. It was only when I told Elaria of these things that I knew how much I loved her. She wept and implored me not to leave her.

“Why do you shed tears, Elaria?” I said; “is it because you love me? Know, then, that I also love you with all my heart, and if you will be mine, nothing can ever make us unhappy. Do not think that my absence at the estancia will deprive me of this feeling which has ever been growing up in me.”

“I do love you, Anacleto,” she replied, “and I have also known of your love for a long time. But there is something in my heart which I cannot impart to you; only I ask you, for the love you bear me, do not leave me, and do not ask me why I say this to you.”

After this appeal I could not leave her, nor did I ask her to tell me her secret. Torcuato and I were friendly, but not as we had been before this difference. I had no evil thoughts of him; I loved him and was

with him continually; but from the moment I announced to him that I had changed my mind about going to the estancia, and was silent when he demanded the reason, there was a something in him which made it different between us. I could not open my heart to him about Elaria, and sometimes I thought that he also had a secret which he had no intention of sharing with me. This coldness did not, however, distress me very much, so great was the happiness I now experienced, knowing that I possessed Elaria's love. He was much away from the house, being fond of amusements, and he had also begun to gamble. About three months passed in this way, when one morning Torcuato, who was saddling his horse to go out, said, "Will you come with me, to-day, Anacleto?"

"I do not care to go," I answered.

"Look, Anacleto," said he; "once you were always ready to accompany me to a race or dance or cattle-marking. Why have you ceased to care for these things? Are you growing devout before your time, or does my company no longer please you?"

"It is best to tell him everything and have done with secrets," said I to myself, and so replied:

"Since you ask me, Torcuato, I will answer you frankly. It is true that I now take less pleasure than formerly in these pastimes; but you have not guessed the reason rightly."

"What then is this reason of which you speak?"

"Since you cannot guess it," I replied, "know that it is love."



“Love for whom?” he asked quickly, and turning very pale.

“Do you need ask? Elaria,” I replied.

I had scarcely uttered the name before he turned on me full of rage.

“Elaria!” he exclaimed. “Do you dare tell me of love for Elaria! But you are only a blind fool, and do not know that I am going to marry her myself.”

“Are you mad, Torcuato, to talk of marrying your sister?”

“She is no more my sister than you are my brother,” he returned. “I,” he continued, striking his breast passionately, “am the only child of my father, Loreto Silva. Elaria, whose mother died in giving her birth, was adopted by my parents. And because she is going to be my wife, I am willing that she should have a share of the property; but you, a miserable foundling, why were you lifted up so high? Was it not enough that you were clothed and fed till you came to man’s estate? Not a hand’s-breadth of the estancia land should be yours by right, and now you presume to speak of love for Elaria.”

My blood was on fire with so many insults, but I remembered all the benefits I had received from his father, and did not raise my hand against him. Without more words he left me. I then hastened to Elaria and told her what had passed.

“This,” I said, “is the secret you would not impart to me. Why, when you knew these things, was I kept in ignorance?”

“Have pity on me, Anacleto,” she replied, crying.

“Did I not see that you two were no longer friends and brothers, and this without knowing of each other’s love? I dared not open my lips to you or to him. It is always a woman’s part to suffer in silence. God intended us to be poor, Anacleto, for we were both born of poor parents, and had this property never come to us, how happy we might have been!”

“Why do you say such things, Elaria? Since we love each other, we cannot be unhappy, rich or poor.”

“Is it a little matter,” she replied, “that Torcuato must be our bitter enemy? But you do not know everything. Before Torcuato’s father died, he said he wished his son to marry me when we came of age. When he spoke about it we were sitting together by his bed.”

“And what did you say, Elaria?” I asked, full of concern.

“Torcuato promised to marry me. I only covered my face, and was silent, for I loved you best even then, though I was almost a child, and my heart was filled with grief at his words. After we came here, Torcuato reminded me of his father’s words. I answered that I did not wish to marry him, that he was only a brother to me. Then he said that we were young and he could wait until I was of another mind. This is all I have to say; but how shall we three live together any longer? I cannot bear to part from you, and every moment I tremble to think what may happen when you two are together.”

“Fear nothing,” I said. “To-morrow morning you can go to spend a week at some friend’s house

in the town; then I will speak to Torcuato, and tell him that since we cannot live in peace together we must separate. Even if he answers with insults I shall do nothing to grieve you, and if he refuses to listen to me, I shall send some person we both respect to arrange all things between us."

This satisfied her, but as evening approached she grew paler, and I knew she feared Torcuato's return. He did not, however, come back that night. Early next morning she was ready to leave. It was an easy walk to the town, but the dew was heavy on the grass, and I saddled a horse for her to ride. I had just lifted her to the saddle when Torcuato appeared. He came at great speed, and, throwing himself off his horse, advanced to us. Elaria trembled and seemed ready to sink upon the earth to hide herself like a partridge that has seen the hawk. I prepared myself for insults and perhaps violence. He never looked at me; he only spoke to her.

"Elaria," he said, "something has happened—something that obliges me to leave this house and neighbourhood at once. Remember when I am away that my father, who cherished you and enriched you with his bounty, and who also cherished and enriched this ingrate, spoke to us from his dying bed and made me promise to marry you. Think what his love was; do not forget that his last wish is sacred, and that Anacleto has acted a base, treacherous part in trying to steal you from me. He was lifted out of the mire to be my brother and equal in everything except this. He has got a third part of my inheritance—

let that satisfy him; your own heart, Elaria, will tell you that a marriage with him would be a crime before God and man. Look not for my return to-morrow nor for many days. But if you two begin to laugh at my father's dying wishes, look for me, for then I shall not delay to come back to you, Elaria, and to you, Anacleto. I have spoken."

He then mounted his horse and rode away. Very soon we learned the cause of his sudden departure. He had quarrelled over his cards and in a struggle that followed had stabbed his adversary to the heart. He had fled to escape the penalty. We did not believe that he would remain long absent; for Torcuato was very young, well off, and much liked, and this was, moreover, his first offence against the law. But time went on and he did not return, nor did any message from him reach us, and we at last concluded that he had left the country. Only now after four years have I accidentally discovered his fate through seeing his piebald horse.

After he had been absent over a year I asked Elaria to become my wife. "We cannot marry till Torcuato returns," she said. "For if we take the property that ought to have been all his, and at the same time disobey his father's dying wish, we shall be doing an evil thing. Let us take care of the property till he returns to receive it all back from us; then, Anacleto, we shall be free to marry."

I consented, for she was more to me than lands and cattle. I put the estancia in order, and leaving a trustworthy person in charge of everything I in-

vested my money in fat bullocks to resell in Buenos Ayres, and in this business I have been employed ever since. From the estancia I have taken nothing, and now it must all come back to us—his inheritance and ours. This is a bitter thing and will give Elaria great grief.

Thus ended Anacleto's story, and when he had finished speaking and still seemed greatly troubled in his mind, Sotelo said to him, "Friend, let me advise you what to do. You will now shortly be married to the woman you love and probably some day a son will be born to you. Let him be named Torcuato, and let Torcuato's inheritance be kept for him. And if God gives you no son, remember what was done for you and for the girl you are going to marry, when you were orphans and friendless, and look out for some unhappy child in the same condition, to protect and enrich him as you were enriched."

"You have spoken well," said Anacleto. "I will report your words to Elaria, and whatever she wishes done that will I do."

So ends my story, friend. The cattle-drover left us that night and we saw no more of him. Only before going he gave the piebald and the silver trappings to Sotelo. Six months after his visit, Sotelo also received a letter from him to say that his marriage with Elaria had taken place; and the letter was accompanied with a present of seven cream-coloured horses with black manes and hoofs.

**PELINO VIERA'S CONFESSION**

## PELINO VIERA'S CONFESSION

IT will be necessary to inform the reader—in all probability unacquainted with the political events of 1829 in Buenos Ayres—that the close of that year was more memorable for tumults of a revolutionary character than usual. During these disturbances the prisoners confined in the city gaol, taking advantage of the outside agitation and of the weakness of their guard, made an attempt to recover their liberty. They were not acting without precedent, and had things taken their usual course they would, no doubt, have succeeded in placing themselves beyond the oppressive tyranny of the criminal laws. Unfortunately for them they were discovered in time and fired on by the guard; several were killed or wounded, and in the end they were overpowered; not, however, before some half-dozen of them had made good their escape. Amongst the few thus favoured of fortune was Pelino Viera, a prisoner who had already been found guilty—without extenuating circumstances—of murdering his wife. Notwithstanding the unsettled condition of the country the tragedy had created a great sensation at the time, owing to the unusual circumstances attending it. Viera was a young man of good standing, and generally liked for the sweetness of his disposition; he had

married a very beautiful woman, and was believed by all who knew him to entertain the deepest affection for her. What then was the motive of the crime? The mystery remained unsolved at the trial, and the learned and eloquent Doctor of Laws who defended Viera was evidently put to great straits, since the theory he set up was characterised by the Judge of First Instance, presiding at the trial, as incredible and even absurd. It was to the effect that Viera's wife was a somnambulist; that roaming about her bedchamber she had knocked down a rapier hanging against the wall, which falling pierced her bosom; and that Viera, distracted at so sudden and awful a calamity, had been unable to give an account of what had happened, but had only raved incoherently when discovered mourning over the corpse of his bride. The accused himself would not open his lips either to confess or to deny his guilt, but appeared, while the trial lasted, like one overwhelmed by a great despair. He was accordingly condemned to be shot; those who saw him carried back to his cell knew there was not the smallest chance of a reprieve, even in a country where reprieves may often be had for the asking: for the unhappy man's relations were thousands of miles away and ignorant of his desperate situation, while his wife's family were only too anxious to see the last penalty of the law inflicted on him. Unexpectedly, when the young wife-killer imagined that only two days of life remained to him, his fellow-prisoners dragged him forth from his cell, and from that moment he vanished utterly



from sight. Concealed in his pallet he had occupied the following confession was found, written in pencil on a few sheets of the large Barcelona paper which it is customary to give out to the prisoners to make their cigarettes with. The manuscript was preserved, along with other prison curiosities, by the gaoler, and after his death, many years ago, it came by chance into my possession.

I am not going to shock the enlightened and scientific reader by expressing belief in this confession, but give, without comment, a simple translation of it. Witchcraft in England is dead and buried; and if sometimes it rises out of its grass-grown grave it returns to us under some new and pretty name, and can no longer be recognised as that maleficent something which was wont to trouble the peace of our forefathers. But in Pelino Viera's country it is, or still was in his day, a reality and a power. There, at the hour of midnight it is a common thing to be startled by peals of shrill hysterical laughter, heard far up in the sky; this is called the *witch-laughter*, and something about what is supposed to be the cause of it may be gathered from what follows.

My father came early in life to this city as agent for a commercial firm in Lisbon. In time he prospered greatly, and for over twenty years figured as one of the principal merchants of Buenos Ayres. At length he resolved to give up business and spend the remainder of his days in his own country. The very thought of going to Portugal was to me intolerable.

By birth and education I was an Argentine, and looked upon the Portuguese as a distant people about whom we knew nothing, except that they were of the same race as the Brazilians, our natural enemies. My father consented to let me remain; he had nine children and could afford to spare me; nor did my mother regard the separation as a calamity, for I was not her favourite son. Before embarking my father made generous provision for my support. Knowing that my preference was for a country life, he gave me a letter to Don Hilario Roldan, a wealthy landholder of Los Montes Grandes—a pastoral district in the southern portion of the province; and told me to go and reside with Roldan, who would be a second father to me. He also gave me to understand that a sum of money, sufficient for the purchase of an estate, would be lodged for me with his old friend.

After parting from my relations on board their ship I despatched a letter to Don Hilario, informing him of my intended visit, and then spent a few days making preparations for my country life. I sent my luggage on by the diligence, then, having provided myself with a good horse, I left Buenos Ayres, intending to journey leisurely to the Espinillo, Roldan's estate. I rode slowly across country, inquiring my way and resting every night at some village or estancia house. On the afternoon of the third day I came in sight of the Espinillo—a herdsman pointed it out to me—a blue line of trees on the distant horizon. My horse being tired when I approached my destination, I walked him slowly through the wood

of tala trees. Here the boles and lower branches had been rubbed smooth by the cattle, and there was no underwood. Finding the shade grateful and wishing to feel my feet on the ground, I dismounted and led my horse by the bridle. A great silence rested on the earth; only the distant lowing of cattle could be heard, and sometimes a wild bird broke into song near me. This quiet of nature was grateful to me; I could not have wished for a sweeter welcome. Suddenly as I walked I heard before me the shrill voices of women quarrelling: they seemed to be very angry, and some of the expressions they used were dreadful to hear. Very soon I caught sight of them. One was a withered, white-haired old woman, dressed in rags, and holding in her arms a bundle of dried sticks. The other was young, and wore a dark-green dress; her face was white with passion, and I saw her strike the old woman a blow that made her stagger and drop her bundle of sticks on the ground. At this moment they perceived me. The young woman had a grey shawl with a green fringe on her arm, and on seeing me she wrapped up her face in it, and hurried away through the trees. The other, snatching up her bundle, hobbled off in an opposite direction. When I called to her she only increased her pace, and I was left alone. I continued my walk, and presently emerging from the road I found myself before the house I sought.

Don Hilario had not visited Buenos Ayres for many years, and I did not remember him. He was a stout, elderly man, with white hair, which he wore

long, and a pleasing, open, florid countenance. He embraced me joyfully, asked me a hundred questions, and talked and laughed incessantly, so pleased was he at my visit. Later he presented me to his daughters, and I was surprised and flattered at the warmth of their welcome.

Don Hilario had a gay, lively disposition, and, remarking my white hands, asked me if I thought they could check a hot-mouthed horse, or cast a lasso on to the horns of a bull. After dinner, when we all sat under the corridor to enjoy the cool evening, I began to observe his daughters more closely. The youngest, whose name was Dolores, was a gentle-faced girl, with grey eyes and chestnut hair. Apart from her sister she would have been greatly admired. Her sister, Rosaura, was one of those women who are instantly pronounced beautiful by all who see them. Her eyes were dark and passionate, her features perfect; never had I seen anything to compare with the richness of her complexion, shaded by luxuriant masses of blue-black hair. I tried to restrain the spontaneous admiration I felt. I desired to look on her with calm indifference, or only with an interest like that felt for rare and lovely flowers by one learned in plants. If a thought of love was born in me, I regarded it as a dangerous thought, and strove to divest myself of it. Was any defence against such sweetness possible? She fascinated me. Every glance, every word, every smile drew me irresistibly to her. Yet the struggle in me would not cease. What is the reason of this unwillingness to submit?

I asked myself. The answer took the form of a painful suspicion. I remembered that scene in the tala wood, and imagined that in Rosaura I beheld that angry young woman of the green dress. In another moment I rebuked a thought so unjust. I was about to relate to her what I had witnessed. Again and again I attempted to speak of it, but though rebuked, the suspicion still lived and made me silent.

For many days these thoughts continued to disquiet me, and made me anxiously watch for the appearance of the green dress and of the shawl with green fringe. I never saw them. Days, weeks, months flew pleasantly by; I had lived an entire year at the Espinillo. Roldan treated me like a beloved son. I acted as major-domo on the estate, and the free life of the pampas grew unspeakably dear to me. I could understand why those who have once tasted it are never satisfied with any other. The artificial luxuries of cities, the excitement of politics, the delights of travel—what are these in comparison with it? The sisters were my constant companions. With them I rode, walked, sang, or conversed at all hours of the day. Dolores was my sweet sister, and I was her brother; but Rosaura—if I but touched her hand my heart was on fire; I trembled and could not speak for joy. And she was not indifferent to me. How could I fail to remark the rich colour that mantled her olive cheek, the fire that flashed from her dark eyes at my approach?

One evening Roldan hurried in full of happy excitement. "Pelino!" he cried, "I bring you great news!

The estate adjoining mine on the west side is for sale—two leagues of incomparable pasture land. The thing could not be better. The Verro—a perennial stream, remember—runs the entire length of the land. Will you now begin life for yourself? I advise you to buy, build a proper house, plant trees, and make a paradise. If your money is not sufficient, let me help you. I am rich and have few mouths to feed.”

I did as he advised. I bought the estate, built houses, and increased the stock. The care of my new establishment, which I had re-christened Santa Rosaura, occupied all my time, so that my visits to my friends became infrequent. At first I could scarcely exist apart from Rosaura; her image was before me day and night, while the craving to be with her was so intense that I lost flesh and looked pale and worn. I was therefore surprised to find this great longing quickly pass away. My mind was again serene as in the days before that great passion had disturbed me. At the same time, however, I felt that only while apart from Rosaura would this feeling of freedom which I had now recovered endure, so that I grew more and more reluctant to visit her.

I had been about four months at Santa Rosaura when Roldan came one day to visit me. After admiring all I had done he asked me how I bore my solitary life.

“Ah, there it is!” I replied. “I miss your pleasant society every hour of the day.”

The old man's face darkened, for by nature he was

proud and passionate. "And is the society of my daughters nothing to you, Pelino?" he sternly said.

"What must I say to him now?" I asked myself, and was silent.

"Pelino," he demanded, "have you nothing to answer? I have been a father to you. I am an old and wealthy man; remember that I am also a proud one. Have I not seen everything since the day that brought you to my door? You have won the heart of the daughter I idolise. I never spoke a word to you, remembering whose son you were, and that a Viera should be incapable of a dishonourable action."

The old man's just anger and my facile nature conspired to destroy me. "Oh, señor," I exclaimed, "I should indeed be the basest of men had any motive but the purest love and esteem influenced me. To possess your daughter's affections would indeed be the greatest happiness. I have loved and I love her. But has she given me her heart? On that point I have only cruel doubts."

"And are you so weak as to resign your hopes because of doubts?" asked Roldan with a touch of scorn. "Speak to her, boy, and you will know all. And should she refuse you, swear by all you hold sacred to marry her in spite of refusals. That was what I did, Pelino, and the woman I won—Heaven rest her soul!—was like her daughter Rosaura."

I clasped his hand and thanked him for the encouragement he gave me. The cloud passed from his brow, and we parted friends.

Notwithstanding all I had said I was filled with

despondency when he left me. True, I loved Rosaura, but the thought of an alliance with her was almost intolerable. Yet what could I do? From the alternative course I shrank in dismay, for how could I ever endure to be despised by Roldan, whom I loved, as the vilest of men? I saw no possible escape from the false position I was in. My mind was in a dreadful tumult, and in this condition I passed several days and nights. I tried to force myself to believe that I loved Rosaura passionately, as I had indeed loved her once, and that, were I to marry her, a great and enduring happiness would crown my life. I figured her in my mind a bride, dwelling in imagination on her perennial smile, her passionate beauty, her thousand nameless fascinations. All in vain! Only the image of the white-faced fury of the tala wood remained persistently on my mind, and my heart sank within me. At length, driven to extremity, I resolved to prove the truth of my suspicions. Never would such a fiend win me to marry her, though her beauty exceeded that of an angel! Suddenly a means of escape opened before me. I will visit Rosaura, I said, and tell her of that strange scene in the tala wood. Her confusion will betray her. I will be grieved, alarmed, amazed. I will discover by accident, as it were, in her that hateful being. Then I will not spare her, but wound her with cruel taunts; her agitation will turn to implacable rage, and our miserable affair will end in mutual insults. Roldan, ignorant of the cause of our quarrel, will be unable to blame me. Having thus carefully considered my



plans and prepared myself for the exercise of dissimulation, I went to the Espinillo.

Roldan was absent. Dolores received me; her sister, she told me, was far from well, and for some days past had kept her room. I expressed sympathy and sent a kind message. I was left alone for half an hour, and experienced the greatest agitation of mind. I was now, perhaps, about to be subjected to a terrible trial, but the happiness of my whole life depended on my resolution, and I was determined to allow no soft feelings to influence me.

At length Dolores returned supporting her sister, who advanced with feeble steps to meet me. What a change in her face—how thin and pale it was! Yet never had I seen her fairer: the pensive languor of illness, her pallor, the eyes cast down, and the shy fondness with which she regarded me, increased her beauty a thousand times. I hastened to her side and clasped her hand in mine, and could not withdraw my sight from her countenance. For a few moments she permitted me to retain her hand, then gently withdrew it. Her eyes drooped and her face became suffused with a soft indescribable loveliness. When Dolores left us I could no longer disguise my feelings, and tenderly upbraided her for having kept me in ignorance of her illness. She turned her face aside and burst into a flood of tears. I implored her to tell me the secret of her grief.

“If this is grief, Pelino,” she replied, “then it is indeed sweet to grieve. Oh, you do not know how dear you are to us all in this house. What would our

lonely lives be without your friendship? And you grew so cold towards us I thought it was about to end for ever. I knew, Pelino, I had never uttered a word, never harboured a thought you could take offence at, and feared that some cruel falsehood had come between us. Will you now always—always be our friend, Pelino?"

I replied by clasping her to my bosom, pressing a hundred burning kisses on her sweet lips, and pouring a thousand tender vows of eternal love in her ear. What supreme happiness I felt! I now looked back on my former state as madness. For what insane delusions, what lies whispered by some malignant fiend, had made me harbour cruel thoughts of this precious woman I loved, this sweetest creature Heaven had made? Never, so long as life lasted, should anything come between us again!

Not very long after that meeting we were married. For three happy months we resided in Buenos Ayres, visiting my wife's relations. Then we returned to Santa Rosaura, and I was once more occupied with my flocks and herds and the pastimes of the pampas.

Life was now doubly sweet for the presence of the woman I idolised. Never had man a more beautiful or a more devoted wife, and the readiness, nay joy, with which she resigned the luxuries and gay pastimes of the capital to accompany me to our home in the lonely pampa filled me with a pleasant surprise. Still even then my mind had not regained its calm; the delirious happiness I experienced was not a dress

for everyday wear, but a gay, embroidered garment that would soon lose its gloss.

Eight months had elapsed since my return, when, turning my eyes inward and considering my state, as those who have been disturbed in their minds are accustomed to do, I made the discovery that I was no longer happy. "Ingrate, fool, dreamer of vain dreams, what would you have?" I said to myself, striving to overcome the secret melancholy corroding my heart. Had I ceased to love my wife? She was still all my imagination had pictured: her sweet temper never knew a cloud; her rare grace and exquisite beauty had not forsaken her; the suspicion I had once harboured now seemed forgotten, or came back to me only like the remembrance of an evil dream, and yet, and yet I could not say that I loved my wife. Sometimes I thought my depression was caused by a secret malady undermining my existence, for I was now often afflicted by headache and lassitude.

Not very long after I had begun to note these symptoms, which I was careful to conceal from my wife, I woke one morning with a dull, throbbing sensation in my brain. I noticed a peculiar odour in the room which appeared to make the air so heavy that it was a labour to breathe: it was a familiar odour, but not musk, lavender, attar of roses, or any of the perfumes Rosaura was so fond of, and I could not remember what it was. For an hour I lay on my bed disinclined to rise, vainly trying to recall the name of the scent, and with a vague fear that my memory

was beginning to fail, that I was perhaps even sinking into hopeless imbecility. A few weeks later it all happened again—the late waking, the oppressive sensation, the faint familiar odour in the room. Again and again the same thing occurred. I was anxious and my health suffered, but my suspicions were now thoroughly aroused. In Rosaura's absence I searched the apartment. I found many scent-bottles, but the odour I was in quest of was not there. A small ebony silver-bound box I could not open, having no key to fit it, and I dared not break the lock, for I had now grown afraid of my wife. My evanescent passion had utterly passed away by this time; hatred had taken its place—fear and hatred, for these two ever go together. I dissembled well. I feigned illness; when she kissed me I smiled while loathing her in my heart; the folds of a serpent would have been more endurable than her arms about me, yet I affected to sleep peacefully in her bosom.

One day while out riding I dropped my whip; dismounting to pick it up I put my foot on a small dark green plant with long lance-shaped leaves and clusters of greenish-white flowers. It is a plant well known for its powerful narcotic smell and for the acrid milky juice the stem gives out when bruised.

“This is it!” I cried in exultation. “This is the mysterious perfume I have been seeking. From this little thing I will advance to great things.”

I resolved to follow the clue; but I would be secret in all I did, like a man advancing to strike a

venomous snake and fearing to rouse it before he is ready to deliver the blow.

Taking a sprig of the plant I went to an old herdsman living on my estate and asked him its name.

He shook his head. "Old Salomé, the *curandera*, knows everything," he answered. "She can tell you the virtue of every plant, cure diseases, and prophesy many things."

I replied that I was sorry she knew so much, and rode home determined to visit her.

Close to the Espinillo house there existed a group of little ranchos, tenanted by some very poor people who were charitably allowed by Roldan to live and keep a few cattle rent free on his land. In one of these huts lived Salomé, the *curandera*. I had often heard about her, for all her neighbours, not even excepting my father-in-law, professed to believe in her skill; but I had never seen her, having always felt a great contempt for these ignorant but cunning people, who give themselves mysterious airs and pretend to know so much more than their neighbours. In my trouble, however, I forgot my prejudice and hastened to consult her. On first entering her hovel, I was astonished to discover in Salomé the old woman I had seen in the tala wood on my arrival at the Espinillo. I sat down on the bleached skull of a horse—the only seat she had to offer me—and began by saying that I had long known her by fame, but now desired a more intimate acquaintance. She thanked me dryly. I spoke of medicinal herbs, and, drawing from my pocket a leaf of the strange-smelling plant

I had provided for the occasion, asked her what she called it.

"'Tis the Flor de Pesadilla," she replied, and, seeing me start, she cackled maliciously.

I tried to laugh off my nervousness. "What a pity to give a pretty flower a name so terrible!" I said. "The *night-mare flower*—only a madman could have called it that! Perhaps you can tell me why it was called by such a name?"

She answered that she did not know, then angrily added "that I came to her like one wishing to steal knowledge."

"No," I returned, "tell me, mother, all I wish to know, and I will give you this," and with that I drew from my pocket a gold doubloon.

Her eyes sparkled like fireflies at the sight. "What do you wish to know, my son?" she asked in eager tones.

I replied, "Out of this flower there comes by night an evil spirit and cruelly persecutes me. I do not wish to fly from it. Give me strength to resist it, for it drowns my senses in slumber."

The old hag became strangely excited at my words; she jumped up clapping her hands, then burst into a peal of laughter so shrill and unearthly that my blood was chilled in my veins, and the hair stood up on my head. Finally she sank down in a crouching attitude upon the floor, mumbling, and with a horrid expression of gratified malice in her eyes.

"Ah, sister mine!" I heard her mutter. "Ah, bright eyes, sweet lips, because of you I was driven out, and those who knew and obeyed me before you

were born now neglect and despise me. Insolent wretch! Fools, fools that they were! See now what you have done; something must surely come of this, something good for me. She was always bold, the pretty one, now she grows careless."

She kept on in this way for some time, occasionally uttering a little cackling laugh. I was greatly disturbed at her words; and she, too, when the excitement had worn itself out, seemed troubled in mind, and from time to time stole an anxious glance at the great yellow coin in my hand.

At length she roused herself, and taking a small wooden crucifix from the wall approached me.

"My son," she said, "I know all your afflictions, and that you are now only about to increase them. Nevertheless, I cannot reject the succour Heaven in its infinite compassion sends to one so old and feeble. Kneel, my son, and swear on this cross that whatever happens to you, you will never disclose this visit, or name my name to that infamous despiser of her betters, that accursed viper with a pretty face—alas, what am I saying? I am old—old, my son, and sometimes my mind wanders. I mean your sweet wife, your pretty angel, Rosaura; swear that she shall never know of this visit; for to you she is sweet and good and beautiful, to everyone she is good, only to me—a poor old woman—she is more bitter than the wild pumpkin, more cruel than the hungry hawk!"

I went down on my knees and took the required oath. "Go now," she said, "and return to me before sunset."

On my return to the hovel the old woman gave me a bundle of leaves, apparently just gathered and hastily dried by the fire. "Take these," she said, "and keep them where no eye can see them. Every night, before retiring, chew well and swallow two or three of them."

"Will they prevent sleep?" I asked.

"No, no," said the hag, with a little cackle as she clutched the doubloon; "they will not keep you long awake when there is nothing stirring. When you smell Pesadilla be careful to keep your eyes closed, and you will dream strange dreams."

I shuddered at her words and went home. I followed her directions, and every night after chewing the leaves felt strangely wakeful; not feverish, but with senses clear and keen. This would last for about two hours, then I would sleep quietly till morning.

Close to the head of the bed, on a small table, there was an ebony cross on which a golden Christ was suspended, and it was Rosaura's habit every night after undressing to kneel before it and perform her devotions. One night, about a fortnight after I had seen Salomé, while I lay with partially closed eyes, I noticed that Rosaura glanced frequently towards me. She rose, and moving stealthily about undressed herself, then came, as was her custom, and knelt down beside the bed. Presently she placed a hand gently on mine and whispered, "Asleep, Pelino?" Receiving no reply she raised her other hand, there was a small phial in it, and removing the stopper the room was quickly filled with the powerful Pesadilla odour.



She bent over me, placing the phial close to my nose, then poured a few clammy drops into my lips, and withdrew from the bedside uttering a great sigh of relief. The drug produced no effect on me: on the contrary, I felt intensely wakeful, and watched her slightest movement, while outwardly I was calm and apparently in a sound sleep.

Rosaura retired to a seat beside the dressing-table at some distance from the bed. She smiled to herself and appeared to be in a soft, placid frame of mind. By-and-by she opened the small ebony box I have already spoken about, and took from it a little clay pot and placed it on the table before her. Suddenly I heard a rushing noise like the sound of great wings above me; then it seemed to me as if beings of some kind had alighted on the roof; the walls shook, and I heard voices calling, "Sister! sister!" Rosaura rose and threw off her night-dress, then, taking ointment from the pot and rubbing it on the palms of her hands, she passed it rapidly over her whole body, arms, and legs, only leaving her face untouched. Instantly she became covered with a plumage of a slaty-blue colour, only on her face there were no feathers. At the same time from her shoulders sprang wings which were incessantly agitated. She hurried forth, closing the door after her; once more the walls trembled or seemed to tremble; a sound of rushing wings was heard, and, mingling with it, shrill peals of laughter; then all was still. At the last, in my amazement and horror, I had forgotten myself and stared with wide-open

eyes at her doings; but in her haste she went out without one glance at me.

Since my interview with the *curandera* the suspicion, already then in my mind, that my wife was one of those abhorred beings possessing superhuman knowledge, which they kept secret and doubtless used for evil purposes, had grown into a settled conviction. And now that I had satisfied the dangerous curiosity that had animated me, had actually seen my wife making use of her horrid occult arts, what was I to do? Not even yet was my curiosity wholly satisfied, however, and to inspire me to further action the hatred I had long nursed in secret became all at once a bitter, burning desire for vengeance on the woman who had linked with mine her accursed destiny. I was desperate now and fearless, and anxious to be up and doing. Suddenly a strange thought came to me, and springing to my feet I tore off my shirt and began to rub myself with the ointment. The mysterious effect was produced on me—I was instantly covered with dark blue feathers, and on my shoulders I felt wings. Perhaps, I thought, I am now like those abhorred beings in soul also. But the thought scarcely troubled me, for I was insane with rage. Catching up a slender rapier that hung on the wall, I sallied forth. The moon had risen, and the night was almost as bright as day. I felt strangely buoyant as I walked, and could scarcely keep my feet on the ground. I raised my pinions, and rose without apparent effort perpendicularly to a vast height in the air. I heard a shrill peal of laughter near me, then a winged

being like myself shot by me with a celerity compared with which the falcon's flight is slow. I followed, and the still night air was like a mighty rushing wind in my face. I glanced back for a moment to see the Verro, like a silver thread, far, far beneath me. Behind me in the northern sky shone the cluster of the seven stars, for we flew towards the Magellanic clouds. We passed over vast desert pampas, over broad rivers and mountain ranges of which I had never heard. My guide vanished before me, still I kept on—the same stars shining in my face. Shrill peals of laughter were occasionally heard, and dark forms were seen shooting past me. And now I noticed them sweeping downwards towards the distant earth. Beneath me lay a vast lake, and in its centre an island, its shores covered with a dense forest of tall trees; but the interior was a lofty plain, barren and desolate. To this plain the flying forms descended, I with them, still grasping the naked weapon in my hand. I alighted in the middle of a city surrounded by a wall. It was all dark and silent, and the houses were of stone and vast in size, each house standing by itself surrounded by broad stony walks. The sight of these great gloomy buildings, the work of former times, inspired my soul with awe, almost with fear, and for a short time banished the thought of Rosaura. But I did not feel astonished. From childhood I had been taught to believe in the existence of this often and vainly sought city in the wilderness, founded centuries ago by the Bishop of Placentia and his missionary colonists, but probably

no longer the habitation of Christian men. The account history gives of it, the hundred traditions I had heard, the fate of the expeditions sent out for its discovery, and the horror the Indian tribes manifest concerning it, all seemed to indicate that some powerful influence of an unearthly maleficent nature rests upon it. The very elements appear leagued together to protect it from prying curiosity, if there is any foundation for the common belief that on the approach of white men the earth trembles, the waters of the lake rise up in huge billows covering the shores with angry foam, while the sky darkens overhead, and sudden flashes of lightning reveal gigantic human forms in the clouds. The explorer turns in terror and dismay from this evil region, called by the Indians *Trapalanda*.

For a few moments I stood still in a wide silent street; but very soon I discerned a crowd of winged people hurrying towards me, talking and laughing aloud, and, to escape them, I concealed myself in the shadow of a vast arched entrance to one of the buildings. In a moment they entered after me, and passed into the interior of the building without seeing me. My courage returned, and I followed them at some distance. The passage led me quickly into a vast room, so long that it looked like a wide avenue of stone arched over. Around me all was dark and deserted, but at the further end of the room, which seemed nearly half a mile from me, there was a great light and a crowd of people. They were whirling about, apparently dancing, all the time shouting and laugh-

ing like maniacs. The group I had followed had probably already joined this crowd, for I could not see them. Walls, floor, and the high arched roof were all of black stone. There were no fires or lamps, but on the walls were painted figures of jaguars, horses speeding through clouds of dust, Indians engaged in fight with white men, serpents, whirlwinds, grassy plains on fire, with ostriches flying before the flames, and a hundred other things; the men and animals were drawn life size, and the bright colours they were painted in gave out a phosphorescent light, making them visible and shedding a dim twilight into the room. I advanced cautiously, rapier in hand, and keeping always in the centre of the floor where it was very dark, being at least ten yards from the pictured walls on either hand. At length I came on a black figure crouching on the floor before me; at the sound of my step it started up—a great gaunt man, with cavernous eyes that gleamed like will-o'-wisps, and a white beard reaching to his waist. His sole garment was a piece of guanaco hide tied round the body, and his yellow skin was drawn so closely over his bones that he looked more like a skeleton than a living being. As I approached him I noticed an iron chain on his ankle, and feeling now very bold and careless, and commiserating this sad object, I said, "Old man, what brought you here? We are comrades in misfortune; shall I give you liberty?" For a few moments he stared at me with a wild, astonished look, then bending forward till his lips almost touched my face, he murmured, "This

is hell—do you not know? How can you get out of it? Look!” and his finger pointed over my shoulder. “Poor old man, your mind is gone!” I said. He answered nothing, but dropped down on his face upon the floor again. The next moment I saw at my elbow a woman, all feathered like myself, who stood staring at me with an expression of amazement and fear in her face. As I turned she uttered a piercing yell; I raised my weapon, but she fled screaming beyond its reach. The old man lifted his head again and stared at me, then pointed towards the door by which I had entered. In another moment such a shrill and outrageous hubbub resounded from the further end of the room that, struck with sudden terror, I turned and fled. Before I reached the door a crowd of feathered women appeared before me, all staring at me with pale, furious faces; but the cries behind me were coming nearer; there was no other way of escape, and I rushed at them, striking them furiously with my rapier. I saw distinctly one woman fall before its thrust, while three or four more were borne down by the shock of my body. I passed out over them, sprang into the air, and fled. The shrill angry cries beneath me quickly died away; I was at a vast height speeding towards the cluster of the seven stars. In the homeward flight I was alone in the vast solitary sky, for not one dark winged form did I meet, nor did any sound break the deep silence. In about two hours I was again in my own district, and saw far beneath me the Verro glimmering in the moonlight.

I reached my home and re-entered my silent room, where the candle still burnt on the dressing-table just where Rosaura had left it. I now began to experience a terrible excitement, for every moment I expected the return of my wife. Cautiously I disposed everything just as she had left it. I had forgotten for a time the wings and feathers that clothed my body. Merciful heaven! what should I do to rid myself of them? I tore at the feathers with my hands, but they were deeply embedded in the flesh. Perhaps, I thought, when daylight comes they will go off of themselves. Night was wearing away; in an agony of fear I concealed myself under the bed-clothes. All my desperate courage had now left me; I was completely at Rosaura's mercy, and no doubt she would wreak some dreadful vengeance on me. In this miserable condition I lay for another hour. Still she came not, and every moment my terror and anguish increased until it was almost more than I could bear. Suddenly a sound was heard—a sound of rushing wings; a few moments later I heard the cautious footsteps of several people in the room adjoining mine. Then I heard voices whispering. "Leave me now, sisters," one said. "Yes, sister," another replied; "but remember it is late, be quick, and if it cannot be concealed say it was an accident—a dream—that he did it, anything to save yourself." Then all was silent. Slowly the door opened. A sweat of terror broke over my forehead. I closed my eyes. I was about to rise in my distraction, and throw myself at once on the devilish mercy of my wife.

I looked again and saw her standing in the room with a face like ashes, her legs trembling under her, and the blood oozing from her bosom. She staggered to a seat, gasping for breath; with trembling hands she again opened the small ebony box, and took from it a second clay pot. Taking ointment from it she rubbed herself with it. Slowly she passed her hands downward from her shoulders, and lo, the feathers withered up and disappeared, but the blood continued to flow from her wounded breast. She took up a garment lying near, and tried to staunch it. I forgot everything in the horror and fascination that possessed my soul. I had risen to a sitting position, and was staring at her with wide-open eyes when she glanced towards me. She sprang from her seat uttering a terrified shriek, then fell back with a groan upon the floor. For some time I dared not approach her, but she never stirred. I heard footsteps in the next room; then there was a knock at the door, and my servants calling. I perceived the danger of my position. I flew to the door and locked it. "Go back to bed," I cried; "your mistress has had a bad dream, that's all!" The servants retired. I quickly applied ointment from the second pot to my body, and was restored to my former state. I examined Rosaura and found that she was dead. It was a horrible death she had met; still I felt no compassion, no remorse, though convinced that my own hand had inflicted her death-wound. I dressed myself and sat down to meditate on my situation. Day had long dawned, and the sun shining in that ghastly chamber re-



mind me of the necessity of action. There at my feet lay my wife, an expression of horror and anguish still disfiguring her beautiful countenance, the blood still slowly oozing from her wounded breast. But in my heart there was now a great despair that rendered me incapable of making any resolution. What would the world say when it came to look into that blood-stained chamber? Should I fly to escape the fate of a murderer? It was late for that; moreover, my flight would proclaim me guilty at once, and I was not guilty. I should be captured and put to a death most horrible. Or would it do to tell the simple truth; to say, when interrogated, "I am guilty, yet not guilty," and then proceed to relate the marvellous circumstances? Would such a story be believed? Perhaps yes, but that would avail me nothing: the prosecuting counsel—for a trial for murder would certainly come—would say that I had a good invention, and was learned in legends and superstitions, and no judge would have the courage to acquit me.

I was still sitting, unable to decide on anything, when I heard voices eagerly talking, footsteps rapidly approaching, then a loud rap at my door. It was my father-in-law come to surprise us by an early visit. I recognised his voice, though it was full of alarm, for the servants had already told him what they had heard. I was about to rise and admit him, since further concealment was impossible, when the frail lock gave way, and the door flew wide open. Roldan stared in, horror-struck, for some moments, while loud exclamations escaped from the servants standing

behind him. "Rosaura—O my beloved daughter!" cried the old man at last, "dead—slain! In the name of God, Pelino, explain this!"

I will tell him that in a sudden fit of rage she stabbed herself, I thought; then immediately I perceived that this story would not do, for no person had ever seen Rosaura in a passion. Roldan marked my hesitation. "Assassin!" he shrieked, springing forward and seizing my arm with a firm grip. In an instant an uncontrollable rage possessed me, and all prudence was forgotten. I rose, shaking him violently from me. "Back!" I cried. "Know, miserable dotard, that this is your work! When I had escaped from your detestable daughter's wiles, who but you dragged me back to her? Accursed be the day in which I first saw you and this fiend with a beautiful mask! This is the result of your interference!" By giving vent to these frantic words I had destroyed myself, for they almost amounted to a confession of guilt. Overwhelmed with despair, I threw myself once more on my seat. Roldan fell back to the door, hurriedly despatched one of my servants to summon the Alcalde, and took measures to prevent me from escaping.

The Alcalde soon arrived; I was formally charged and sent to Buenos Ayres; the trial and sentence followed. Nothing that could be urged in my defence was omitted, but all in vain. Had I, at the proper moment, feigned a grief I did not feel, and told the story my defender afterwards invented to account for Rosaura's death, I should have been saved. But after my behaviour towards my father-in-law, when

he entered that chamber of death, nothing could avail me. That anything will now interpose between me and the fatal *banquillo* I have no hope.

Before long my family will hear of my fate, and this is a great bitterness for me: it is for them I write this narrative; when they read it they will know that I was no murderer. Accidentally I set my heel on the head of a venomous serpent, and crushed it—that was my only crime.

It is hard to die so young, but life could no longer be sweet and pleasant to me as in former days. Sometimes, lying awake at night, thinking of the great breezy plains, till I almost fancy I hear the cattle lowing far off, and the evening call of the partridge, the tears gush from my eyes. It would be sad to live far away from that sweet life I knew, to wander amongst strangers in distant lands, always haunted by the memory of that tragedy.

I have told my story to my Father Confessor, and I know from the strange look in his face that he does not altogether believe it, and thinks, perhaps, that at the last I will declare it all an invention. When I am on the bench, and the bandage is on my eyes; when the muskets are levelled at my breast, and he is forced at the last to quit my side, then he will know that I have told him the truth; for who could willingly die with the burden of a great crime on his soul?

Let him, in justice to me, write here at the end of this confession, before sending it to my unhappy father in Portugal, whether he believes that I have spoken the truth.

# NIÑO DIABLO

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**T**HE wide pampa rough with long grass; a vast level disc now growing dark, the horizon encircling it with a ring as faultless as that made by a pebble dropped into smooth water; above it the clear sky of June, wintry and pale, still showing in the west the saffron hues of the afterglow tinged with vapoury violet and grey. In the centre of the disc a large low rancho thatched with yellow rushes, a few stunted trees and cattle enclosures grouped about it; and dimly seen in the shadows, cattle and sheep reposing. At the gate stands Gregory Gorostiaga, lord of house, lands and ruminating herds, leisurely unsaddling his horse; for whatsoever Gregory does is done leisurely. Although no person is within earshot he talks much over his task, now rebuking his restive animal, and now cursing his benumbed fingers and the hard knots in his gear. A curse falls readily and not without a certain natural grace from Gregory's lips; it is the oiled feather with which he touches every difficult knot encountered in life. From time to time he glances towards the open kitchen door, from which issue the far-flaring light of the fire and familiar voices, with savoury smells of cookery that come to his nostrils like pleasant messengers.

The unsaddling over at last, the freed horse gallops away, neighing joyfully, to seek his fellows; but Gregory is not a four-footed thing to hurry himself; and so, stepping slowly and pausing frequently to look about him as if reluctant to quit the cold night air, he turns towards the house.

The spacious kitchen was lighted by two or three wicks in cups of melted fat, and by a great fire in the middle of the clay floor that cast crowds of dancing shadows on the walls and filled the whole room with grateful warmth. On the walls were fastened many deers' heads, and on their convenient prongs were hung bridles and lassos, ropes of onions and garlic, bunches of dried herbs, and various other objects. At the fire a piece of beef was roasting on a spit; and in a large pot suspended by hook and chain from the smoke-blackened central beam, boiled and bubbled an ocean of mutton broth, puffing out white clouds of steam redolent of herbs and cummin-seed. Close to the fire, skimmer in hand, sat Magdalen, Gregory's fat and florid wife, engaged in frying pies in a second smaller pot. There also, on a high, straight-backed chair, sat Ascension, her sister-in-law, a wrinkled spinster; also, in a low rush-bottomed seat, her mother-in-law, an ancient white-headed dame, staring vacantly into the flames. On the other side of the fire were Gregory's two eldest daughters, occupied just now in serving maté to their elders—that harmless bitter decoction the sipping of which fills up all vacant moments from dawn to bedtime—pretty dove-eyed girls of sixteen, both also named

Magdalen, but not after their mother nor because confusion was loved by the family for its own sake; they were twins, and born on the day sacred to Santa Magdalena. Slumbering dogs and cats were disposed about the floor, also four children. The eldest, a boy, sitting with legs outstretched before him, was cutting threads from a slip of colt's hide looped over his great toe. The two next, boy and girl, were playing a simple game called nines, once known to English children as nine men's morrice; the lines were rudely scratched on the clay floor, and the men they played with were bits of hardened clay, nine red and as many white. The youngest, a girl of five, sat on the floor nursing a kitten that purred contentedly on her lap and drowsily winked its blue eyes at the fire; and as she swayed herself from side to side she lisped out the old lullaby in her baby voice:

*A-ro-ró mi niño,  
A-ro-ró mi sol,  
A-ro-ró pedazos  
De mi corazón.*

Gregory stood on the threshold surveying this domestic scene with manifest pleasure.

"Papa mine, what have you brought me?" cried the child with the kitten.

"Brought you, interested? Stiff whiskers and cold hands to pinch your dirty little cheeks. How is your cold to-night, mother?"

"Yes, son, it is very cold to-night; we knew that before you came in," replied the old dame testily as she drew her chair a little closer to the fire.

"It is useless speaking to her," remarked Ascension. "With her to be out of temper is to be deaf."

"What has happened to put her out?" he asked.

"I can tell you, papa," cried one of the twins. "She wouldn't let me make your cigars to-day, and sat down out of doors to make them herself. It was after breakfast when the sun was warm."

"And of course she fell asleep," chimed in Ascension.

"Let me tell it, auntie!" exclaimed the other. "And she fell asleep, and in a moment Rosita's lamb came and ate up the whole of the tobacco-leaf in her lap."

"It didn't!" cried Rosita, looking up from her game. "I opened its mouth and looked with all my eyes, and there was no tobacco-leaf in it."

"That lamb! that lamb!" said Gregory slyly. "Is it to be wondered at that we are turning grey before our time — all except Rosita! Remind me to-morrow, wife, to take it to the flock; or if it has grown fat on all the tobacco-leaf, aprons and old shoes it has eaten——"

"Oh no, no, no!" screamed Rosita, starting up and throwing the game into confusion, just when her little brother had made a row and was in the act of seizing on one of her pieces in triumph.

"Hush, silly child, he will not harm your lamb," said the mother, pausing from her task and raising eyes that were tearful with the smoke of the fire and of the cigarette she held between her good-humoured lips. "And now, if these children have finished speaking of their important affairs, tell me, Gregory, what news do you bring?"



“They say,” he returned, sitting down and taking the maté-cup from his daughter’s hand, “that the invading Indians bring seven hundred lances, and that those that first opposed them were all slain. Some say they are now retreating with the cattle they have taken, while others maintain that they are waiting to fight our men.”

“Oh, my sons, my sons, what will happen to them!” cried Magdalen, bursting into tears.

“Why do you cry, wife, before God gives you cause?” returned her husband. “Are not all men born to fight the infidel? Our boys are not alone—all their friends and neighbours are with them.”

“Say not this to me, Gregory, for I am not a fool nor blind. All their friends indeed! And this very day I have seen the Niño Diablo; he galloped past the house, whistling like a partridge that knows no care. Why must my two sons be called away, while he, a youth without occupation and with no mother to cry for him, remains behind?”

“You talk folly, Magdalen,” replied her lord. “Complain that the ostrich and puma are more favoured than your sons, since no man calls on them to serve the state; but mention not the Niño, for he is freer than the wild things which Heaven has made, and fights not on this side nor on that.”

“Coward! Miserable!” murmured the incensed mother.

Whereupon one of the twins flushed scarlet, and retorted, “He is not a coward, mother!”

“And if not a coward why does he sit on the hearth

among women and old men in times like these? Grieved am I to hear a daughter of mine speak in defence of one who is a vagabond and a stealer of other men's horses!"

The girl's eyes flashed angrily, but she answered not a word.

"Hold your tongue, woman, and accuse no man of crimes," spoke Gregory. "Let every Christian take proper care of his animals; and as for the infidel's horses, he is a virtuous man that steals them. The girl speaks truth; the Niño is no coward, but he fights not with our weapons. The web of the spider is coarse and ill-made compared with the snare he spreads to entangle his prey." Then, fixing his eyes on the face of the girl who had spoken, he added: "Therefore be warned in season, my daughter, and fall not into the snare of the Niño Diablo."

Again the girl blushed and hung her head.

At this moment a clatter of hoofs, the jangling of a bell, and shouts of a traveller to the horses driven before him, came in at the open door. The dogs roused themselves, almost overturning the children in their hurry to rush out; and up rose Gregory to find out who was approaching with so much noise.

"I know, *papita*," cried one of the children. "It is Uncle Polycarp."

"You are right, child," said her father. "Cousin Polycarp always arrives at night, shouting to his animals like a troop of Indians." And with that he went out to welcome his boisterous relative.

The traveller soon arrived, spurring his horse, scared

at the light and snorting loudly, to within two yards of the door. In a few minutes the saddle was thrown off, the fore feet of the bell-mare fettered, and the horses allowed to wander away in quest of pasturage; then the two men turned into the kitchen.

A short, burly man aged about fifty, wearing a soft hat thrust far back on his head, with truculent greenish eyes beneath arched bushy eyebrows, and a thick shapeless nose surmounting a bristly moustache—such was Cousin Polycarp. From neck to feet he was covered with a blue cloth poncho, and on his heels he wore enormous silver spurs that clanked and jangled over the floor like the fetters of a convict. After greeting the women and bestowing the avuncular blessing on the children, who had clamoured for it as for some inestimable boon, he sat down, and flinging back his poncho displayed at his waist a huge silver-hilted knife and a heavy brass-barrelled horse-pistol.

“Heaven be praised for its goodness, Cousin Magdalen,” he said. “What with pies and spices your kitchen is more fragrant than a garden of flowers. That’s as it should be, for nothing but rum have I tasted this bleak day. And the boys are away fighting, Gregory tells me. Good! When the eaglets have found out their wings let them try their talons. What, Cousin Magdalen, crying for the boys! Would you have had them girls?”

“Yes, a thousand times,” she replied, drying her wet eyes on her apron.

“Ah, Magdalen, daughters can’t be always young

and sweet-tempered, like your brace of pretty partridges yonder. They grow old, Cousin Magdalen—old and ugly and spiteful; and are more bitter and worthless than the wild pumpkin. But I speak not of those who are present, for I would say nothing to offend my respected Cousin Ascension, whom may God preserve, though she never married.”

“Listen to me, Cousin Polycarp,” returned the insulted dame so pointedly alluded to. “Say nothing to me nor of me, and I will also hold my peace concerning you; for you know very well that if I were disposed to open my lips I could say a thousand things.”

“Enough, enough, you have already said them a thousand times,” he interrupted. “I know all that, cousin; let us say no more.”

“That is only what I ask,” she retorted, “for I have never loved to bandy words with you; and you know already, therefore I need not recall it to your mind, that if I am single it is not because some men whose names I could mention if I felt disposed—and they are the names not of dead but of living men—would not have been glad to marry me; but because I preferred my liberty and the goods I inherited from my father; and I see not what advantage there is in being the wife of one who is a brawler and a drunkard and spender of other people’s money, and I know not what besides.”

“There it is!” said Polycarp, appealing to the fire. “I knew that I had thrust my foot into a red ant’s nest—careless that I am! But in truth, Ascension,

it was fortunate for you in those distant days you mention that you hardened your heart against all lovers. For wives, like cattle that must be branded with their owner's mark, are first of all taught submission to their husbands; and consider, cousin, what tears! what sufferings!" And having ended thus abruptly, he planted his elbows on his knees and busied himself with the cigarette he had been trying to roll up with his cold drunken fingers for the last five minutes.

Ascension gave a nervous twitch at the red cotton kerchief on her head, and cleared her throat with a sound "sharp and short like the shrill swallow's cry," when——

"*Madre del Cielo*, how you frightened me!" screamed one of the twins, giving a great start.

The cause of this sudden outcry was discovered in the presence of a young man quietly seated on the bench at the girl's side. He had not been there a minute before, and no person had seen him enter the room—what wonder that the girl was startled! He was slender in form, and had small hands and feet, and oval olive face, smooth as a girl's except for the incipient moustache on his lip. In place of a hat he wore only a scarlet ribbon bound about his head, to keep back the glossy black hair that fell to his shoulders; and he was wrapped in a white woollen Indian poncho, while his lower limbs were cased in white colt-skin coverings, shaped like stockings to his feet, with the red tassels of his embroidered garters falling to the ankles.

“The Niño Diablo!” all cried in a breath, the children manifesting the greatest joy at his appearance. But old Gregory spoke with affected anger. “Why do you always drop on us in this treacherous way, like rain through a leaky thatch?” he exclaimed. “Keep these strange arts for your visits in the infidel country; here we are all Christians, and praise God on the threshold when we visit a neighbour’s house. And now, Niño Diablo, what news of the Indians?”

“Nothing do I know and little do I concern myself about specks on the horizon,” returned the visitor with a light laugh. And at once all the children gathered round him, for the Niño they considered to belong to them when he came, and not to their elders with their solemn talk about Indian warfare and lost horses. And now, now he would finish that wonderful story, long in the telling, of the little girl alone and lost in the great desert, and surrounded by all the wild animals met to discuss what they should do with her. It was a grand story, even mother Magdalen listened, though she pretended all the time to be thinking only of her pies—and the teller, like the grand old historians of other days, put most eloquent speeches, all made out of his own head, into the lips (and beaks) of the various actors—puma, ostrich, deer, cavy, and the rest.

In the midst of this performance supper was announced, and all gathered willingly round a dish of Magdalen’s pies, filled with minced meat, hard-boiled eggs chopped small, raisins, and plenty of spice. After the pies came roast beef; and, finally, great basins

of mutton broth fragrant with herbs and cummin-seed. The rage of hunger satisfied, each one said a prayer, the elders murmuring with bowed heads, the children on their knees uplifting shrill voices. Then followed the concluding semi-religious ceremony of the day, when each child in its turn asked a blessing of father, mother, grandmother, uncle, aunt, and not omitting the stranger within the gates, even the Niño Diablo of evil-sounding name.

The men drew forth their pouches, and began making their cigarettes, when once more the children gathered round the story-teller, their faces glowing with expectation.

“No, no,” cried their mother. “No more stories to-night—to bed, to bed!”

“Oh, mother, mother!” cried Rosita pleadingly, and struggling to free herself; for the good woman had dashed in among them to enforce obedience. “Oh, let me stay till the story ends! The reed-cat has said such things! Oh, what will they do with the poor little girl?”

“And oh, mother mine!” drowsily sobbed her little sister; “the armadillo that said—that said nothing because it had nothing to say, and the partridge that whistled and said—” and here she broke into a prolonged wail. The boys also added their voices until the hubbub was no longer to be borne, and Gregory rose up in his wrath and called on someone to lend him a big whip; only then they yielded, and still sobbing and casting many a lingering look behind, were led from the kitchen.

During this scene the Niño had been carrying on a whispered conversation with the pretty Magdalen of his choice, heedless of the uproar of which he had been the indirect cause; deaf also to the bitter remarks of Ascension concerning some people who, having no homes of their own, were fond of coming uninvited into other people's houses, only to repay the hospitality extended to them by stealing their silly daughters' affections, and teaching their children to rebel against their authority.

But the noise and confusion had served to arouse Polycarp from a drowsy fit; for, like a boa-constrictor, he had dined largely after his long fast, and dinner had made him dull; bending towards his cousin he whispered earnestly: "Who is this young stranger, Gregory?"

"In what corner of the earth have you been hiding to ask who the Niño Diablo is?" returned the other.

"Must I know the history of every cat and dog?"

"The Niño is not cat nor dog, cousin, but a man among men, like a falcon among birds. When a child of six, the Indians killed all his relations and carried him into captivity. After five years he escaped out of their hands, and, guided by sun and stars and signs on the earth, he found his way back to the Christians' country, bringing many beautiful horses stolen from his captors; also the name of Niño Diablo, first given to him by the infidel. We know him by no other."

"This is a good story; in truth I like it well—it pleases me mightily," said Polycarp. "And what more, Cousin Gregory?"



"More than I can tell, cousin. When he comes the dogs bark not—who knows why? his tread is softer than the cat's; the untamed horse is tame for him. Always in the midst of dangers, yet no harm, no scratch. Why? Because he stoops like the falcon, makes his stroke and is gone—Heaven knows where!"

"What strange things are you telling me? Wonderful! And what more, Cousin Gregory?"

"He often goes into the Indian country, and lives freely with the infidel, disguised, for they do not know him who was once their captive. They speak of the Niño Diablo to him, saying that when they catch that thief they will flay him alive. He listens to their strange stories, then leaves them, taking their finest ponchos and silver ornaments, and the flower of their horses."

"A brave youth, one after my own heart, Cousin Gregory. Heaven defend and prosper him in all his journeys into the Indian territory! Before we part I shall embrace him and offer him my friendship, which is worth something. More, tell me more, Cousin Gregory!"

"These things I tell you to put you on your guard; look well to your horses, cousin."

"What!" shouted the other, lifting himself up from his stooping posture, and staring at his relation with astonishment and kindling anger in his countenance.

The conversation had been carried on in a low tone, and the sudden loud exclamation startled them all—all except the Niño, who continued smoking and chatting pleasantly to the twins.

“Lightning and pestilence, what is this you say to me, Gregory Gorostiaga!” continued Polycarp, violently slapping his thigh and thrusting his hat farther back on his head.

“Prudence!” whispered Gregory. “Say nothing to offend the Niño, he never forgives an enemy—with horses.”

“Talk not to me of prudence!” bawled the other. “You hit me on the apple of the eye and counsel me not to cry out. What! have not I, whom men call Polycarp of the South, wrestled with tigers in the desert, and must I hold my peace because of a boy—even a boy devil? Talk of what you like, cousin, and I am a meek man—meek as a sucking babe; but touch not on my horses, for then I am a whirlwind, a conflagration, a river flooded in winter, and all wrath and destruction like an invasion of Indians! Who can stand before me? Ribs of steel are no protection! Look at my knife; do you ask why there are stains on the blade? Listen; because it has gone straight to the robber’s heart!” And with that he drew out his great knife and flourished it wildly, and made stabs and slashes at an imaginary foe suspended above the fire.

The pretty girls grew silent and pale and trembled like poplar leaves; the old grandmother rose up, and clutching at her shawl toddled hurriedly away, while Ascension uttered a snort of disdain. But the Niño still talked and smiled, blowing thin smoke-clouds from his lips, careless of that tempest of wrath gathering before him; till, seeing the other so calm, the man

of war returned his weapon to its sheath, and glancing round and lowering his voice to a conversational tone informed his hearers that his name was Polycarp, one known and feared by all men—especially in the south; that he was disposed to live in peace and amity with the entire human race, and he therefore considered it unreasonable of some men to follow him about the world asking him to kill them. “Perhaps,” he concluded, with a touch of irony, “they think I gain something by putting them to death. A mistake, good friends; I gain nothing by it! I am not a vulture, and their dead bodies can be of no use to me.”

Just after this sanguinary protest and disclaimer the Niño all at once made a gesture as if to impose silence, and turning his face towards the door, his nostrils dilating, and his eyes appearing to grow large and luminous like those of a cat.

“What do you hear, Niño?” asked Gregory.

“I hear lapwings screaming,” he replied.

“Only at a fox perhaps,” said the other. “But go to the door, Niño, and listen.”

“No need,” he returned, dropping his hand, the light of a sudden excitement passing from his face. “’Tis only a single horseman riding this way at a fast gallop.”

Polycarp got up and went to the door, saying that when a man was among robbers it behoved him to look well after his cattle. Then he came back and sat down again. “Perhaps,” he remarked, with a side glance at the Niño, “a better plan would be to watch the thief. A lie, cousin Gregory; no lapwings are

screaming; no single horseman approaching at a fast gallop. The night is serene, and earth as silent as the sepulchre."

"Prudence!" whispered Gregory again. "Ah, cousin, always playful like a kitten; when will you grow old and wise? Can you not see a sleeping snake without turning aside to stir it up with your naked foot?"

Strange to say, Polycarp made no reply. A long experience in getting up quarrels had taught him that these impassive men were, in truth, often enough like venomous snakes, quick and deadly when roused. He became secret and watchful in his manner.

All now were intently listening. Then said Gregory, "Tell us, Niño, what voices, fine as the trumpet of the smallest fly, do you hear coming from that great silence? Has the mother skunk put her little ones to sleep in their kennel and gone out to seek for the pipit's nest? Have fox and armadillo met to challenge each other to fresh trials of strength and cunning? What is the owl saying this moment to his mistress in praise of her big green eyes?"

The young man smiled slightly but answered not; and for full five minutes more all listened, then sounds of approaching hoofs became audible. Dogs began to bark, horses to snort in alarm, and Gregory rose and went forth to receive the late night-wanderer. Soon he appeared, beating the angry barking dogs off with his whip, a white-faced, wild-haired man, furiously spurring his horse like a person demented or flying from robbers.

"*Ave Maria!*" he shouted aloud; and when the answer was given in suitable pious words, the scared-looking stranger drew near, and bending down said, "Tell me, good friend, is one whom men call Niño Diablo with you; for to this house I have been directed in my search for him?"

"He is within, friend," answered Gregory. "Follow me and you shall see him with your own eyes. Only first unsaddle, so that your horse may roll before the sweat dries on him."

"How many horses have I ridden their last journey on this quest!" said the stranger, hurriedly pulling off the saddle and rugs. "But tell me one thing more; is he well—no indisposition? Has he met with no accident—a broken bone, a sprained ankle?"

"Friend," said Gregory, "I have heard that once in past times the moon met with an accident, but of the Niño no such thing has been reported to me."

With this assurance the stranger followed his host into the kitchen, made his salutation, and sat down by the fire. He was about thirty years old, a good-looking man, but his face was haggard, his eyes bloodshot, his manner restless, and he appeared like one half-crazed by some great calamity. The hospitable Magdalen placed food before him and pressed him to eat. He complied, although reluctantly, despatched his supper in a few moments, and murmured a prayer; then, glancing curiously at the two men seated near him, he addressed himself to the burly, well-armed, and dangerous-looking Polycarp.

“Friend,” he said, his agitation increasing as he spoke, “four days have I been seeking you, taking neither food nor rest, so great was my need of your assistance. You alone, after God, can help me. Help me in this strait, and half of all I possess in land and cattle and gold shall be freely given to you, and the angels above will applaud your deed!”

“Drunk or mad?” was the only reply vouchsafed to this appeal.

“Sir,” said the stranger with dignity, “I have not tasted wine these many days, nor has my great grief crazed me.”

“Then what ails the man?” said Polycarp. “Fear perhaps, for he is white in the face like one who has seen the Indians.”

“In truth I have seen them. I was one of those unfortunates who first opposed them, and most of the friends who were with me are now food for wild dogs. Where our houses stood there are only ashes and a stain of blood on the ground. Oh, friend, can you not guess why you alone were in my thoughts when this trouble came to me—why I have ridden day and night to find you?”

“Demons!” exclaimed Polycarp, “into what quagmires would this man lead me? Once for all I understand you not! Leave me in peace, strange man, or we shall quarrel.” And here he tapped his weapon significantly.

At this juncture, Gregory, who took his time about everything, thought proper to interpose. “You are mistaken, friend,” said he. “The young man sitting

on your right is the Niño Diablo, for whom you inquired a little while ago."

A look of astonishment, followed by one of intense relief, came over the stranger's face. Turning to the young man he said, "My friend, forgive me this mistake. Grief has perhaps dimmed my sight; but sometimes the iron blade and the blade of finest temper are not easily distinguished by the eye. When we try them we know which is the brute metal, and cast it aside to take up the other, and trust our life to it. The words I have spoken were meant for you, and you have heard them."

"What can I do for you, friend?" said the Niño.

"Oh, sir, the greatest service! You can restore my lost wife to me. The savages have taken her away into captivity. What can I do to save her—I who cannot make myself invisible, and fly like the wind, and compass all things?" And here he bowed his head, and covering his face gave way to overmastering grief.

"Be comforted, friend," said the other, touching him lightly on the arm. "I will restore her to you."

"Oh, friend, how shall I thank you for these words?" cried the unhappy man, seizing and pressing the Niño's hand.

"Tell me her name—describe her to me."

"Torcuata is her name—Torcuata de la Rosa. She is one finger's width taller than this young woman," indicating one of the twins who was standing. "But not dark; her cheeks are rosy—no, no, I forget, they will be pale now, whiter than the grass plumes, with

stains of dark colour under the eyes. Brown hair and blue eyes, but very deep blue. Look well, friend, lest you think them black and leave her to perish."

"Never!" remarked Gregory, shaking his head.

"Enough—you have told me enough, friend," said the Niño, rolling up a cigarette.

"Enough!" repeated the other, surprised. "But you do not know; she is my life; my life is in your hands. How can I persuade you to be with me? Cattle I have. I had gone to pay the herdsmen their wages when the Indians came unexpectedly; and my house at La Chilca, on the banks of the Langueyú, was burnt, and my wife taken away during my absence. Eight hundred head of cattle have escaped the savages, and half of them shall be yours; and half of all I possess in money and land."

"Cattle!" returned the Niño smiling, and holding a lighted stick to his cigarette. "I have enough to eat without molesting myself with the care of cattle."

"But I told you that I had other things," said the stranger full of distress.

The young man laughed, and rose from his seat.

"Listen to me," he said. "I go now to follow the Indians—to mix with them, perhaps. They are retreating slowly, burdened with much spoil. In fifteen days go to the little town of Tandil, and wait for me there. As for land, if God has given so much of it to the ostrich it is not a thing for a man to set a great value on." Then he bent down to whisper a few words in the ear of the girl at his side; and



immediately afterwards, with a simple "good-night" to the others, stepped lightly from the kitchen. By another door the girl also hurriedly left the room, to hide her tears from the watchful censoring eyes of mother and aunt.

Then the stranger, recovering from his astonishment at the abrupt ending of the conversation, started up, and crying aloud, "Stay! stay one moment—one word more!" rushed out after the young man. At some distance from the house he caught sight of the Niño, sitting motionless on his horse, as if waiting to speak to him.

"This is what I have to say to you," spoke the Niño, bending down to the other. "Go back to Langueyú, and rebuild your house, and expect me there with your wife in about thirty days. When I bade you go to the Tandil in fifteen days, I spoke only to mislead that man Polycarp, who has an evil mind. Can I ride a hundred leagues and back in fifteen days? Say no word of this to any man. And fear not. If I fail to return with your wife at the appointed time take some of that money you have offered me, and bid a priest say a mass for my soul's repose; for eye of man shall never see me again, and the brown hawks will be complaining that there is no more flesh to be picked from my bones."

During this brief colloquy, and afterwards, when Gregory and his women-folk went off to bed, leaving the stranger to sleep in his rugs beside the kitchen fire, Polycarp, who had sworn a mighty oath not to close his eyes that night, busied himself making his

horses secure. Driving them home, he tied them to the posts of the gate within twenty-five yards of the kitchen door. Then he sat down by the fire and smoked and dozed, and cursed his dry mouth and drowsy eyes that were so hard to keep open. At intervals of about fifteen minutes he would get up and go out to satisfy himself that his precious horses were still safe. At length in rising, some time after midnight, his foot kicked against some loud-sounding metal object lying beside him on the floor, which on examination, proved to be a copper bell of a peculiar shape, and curiously like the one fastened to the neck of his bell-mare. Bell in hand, he stepped to the door and put out his head, and lo! his horses were no longer at the gate! Eight horses: seven iron-grey geldings, every one of them swift and sure-footed, sound as the bell in his hand, and as like each other as seven claret-coloured eggs in the tinamu's nest; and the eighth the gentle piebald mare—the *madrina* his horses loved and would follow to the world's end, now, alas! with a thief on her back! Gone—gone!

He rushed out, uttering a succession of frantic howls and imprecations; and finally, to wind up the performance, dashed the now useless bell with all his energy against the gate, shattering it into a hundred pieces. Oh, that bell, how often and how often in how many a wayside public-house had he boasted, in his cups and when sober, of its mellow, far-reaching tone,—the sweet sound that assured him in the silent watches of the night that his beloved steeds were safe! Now he danced on the broken fragments,

digging them into the earth with his heel; now in his frenzy, he could have dug them up again to grind them to powder with his teeth!

The children turned restlessly in bed, dreaming of the lost little girl in the desert; and the stranger half awoke, muttering, "Courage, O Torcuata—let not your heart break. . . . Soul of my life, he gives you back to me—on my bosom, *rosa fresca, rosa fresca!*" Then the hands unclenched themselves again, and the muttering died away. But Gregory woke fully, and instantly divined the cause of the clamour. "Magdalen! Wife!" he said. "Listen to Polycarp; the Niño has paid him out for his insolence! Oh fool, I warned him, and he would not listen!" But Magdalen refused to wake; and so, hiding his head under the coverlet, he made the bed shake with suppressed laughter, so pleased was he at the clever trick played on his blustering cousin. All at once his laughter ceased, and out popped his head again, showing in the dim light a somewhat long and solemn face. For he had suddenly thought of his pretty daughter asleep in the adjoining room. Asleep! Wide awake, more likely, thinking of her sweet lover, brushing the dews from the hoary pampas grass in his southward flight, speeding away into the heart of the vast mysterious wilderness. Listening also to her uncle, the desperado, apostrophising the midnight stars; while with his knife he excavates two deep trenches, three yards long and intersecting each other at right angles—a sacred symbol on which he intends, when finished, to swear a most horrible vengeance.

“Perhaps,” muttered Gregory, “the Niño has still other pranks to play in this house.”

When the stranger heard next morning what had happened, he was better able to understand the Niño’s motive in giving him that caution overnight; nor was he greatly put out, but thought it better that an evil-minded man should lose his horses than that the Niño should set out badly mounted on such an adventure.

“Let me not forget,” said the robbed man, as he rode away on a horse borrowed from his cousin, “to be at the Tandil this day fortnight, with a sharp knife and a blunderbuss charged with a handful of powder and not fewer than twenty-three slugs.”

Terribly in earnest was Polycarp of the South! He was there at the appointed time, slugs and all; but the smooth-cheeked, mysterious, child-devil came not; nor, stranger still, did the scared-looking de la Rosa come clattering in to look for his lost Torcuata. At the end of the fifteenth day de la Rosa was at Languyú, seventy-five miles from the Tandil, alone in his new rancho, which had just been rebuilt with the aid of a few neighbours. Through all that night he sat alone by the fire, pondering many things. If he could only recover his lost wife, then he would bid a long farewell to that wild frontier and take her across the great sea, and to that old tree-shaded stone farm-house in Andalusia, which he had left a boy, and where his aged parents still lived, thinking no more to see their wandering son. His resolution was taken; he would sell all he possessed, all except a portion

of land in the Langueyú with the house he had just rebuilt; and to the Niño Diablo, the deliverer, he would say, "Friend, though you despise the things that others value, take this land and poor house for the sake of the girl Magdalen you love; for then perhaps her parents will no longer deny her to you."

He was still thinking of these things, when a dozen or twenty military starlings—that cheerful scarlet-breasted songster of the lonely pampas—alighted on the thatch outside, and warbling their gay, careless winter-music told him that it was day. And all day long, on foot and on horseback, his thoughts were of his lost Torcuata; and when evening once more drew near his heart was sick with suspense and longing; and climbing the ladder placed against the gable of his rancho he stood on the roof gazing westwards into the blue distance. The sun, crimson and large, sunk into the great green sea of grass, and from all the plain rose the tender fluting notes of the tinamupartridges, bird answering bird. "Oh, that I could pierce the haze with my vision," he murmured, "that I could see across a hundred leagues of level plain, and look this moment on your sweet face, Torcuata!"

And Torcuata was in truth a hundred leagues distant from him at that moment; and if the miraculous sight he wished for had been given, this was what he would have seen. A wide barren plain scantily clothed with yellow tufts of grass and thorny shrubs, and at its southern extremity, shutting out the view on that side, a low range of dune-like hills. Over this

level ground, towards the range, moves a vast herd of cattle and horses—fifteen or twenty thousand head—followed by a scattered horde of savages armed with their long lances. In a small compact body in the centre ride the captives, women and children. Just as the red orb touches the horizon the hills are passed, and lo! a wide grassy valley beyond, with flocks and herds pasturing, and scattered trees, and the blue gleam of water from a chain of small lakes! There full in sight, is the Indian settlement, the smoke rising peacefully up from the clustered huts. At the sight of home the savages burst into loud cries of joy and triumph, answered, as they drew near, with piercing screams of welcome from the village population, chiefly composed of women, children and old men.

It is past midnight; the young moon has set; the last fires are dying down; the shouts and loud noise of excited talk and laughter have ceased, and the weary warriors, after feasting on sweet mare's flesh to repletion, have fallen asleep in their huts, or lying out of doors on the ground. Only the dogs are excited still and keep up an incessant barking. Even the captive women, huddled together in one hut in the middle of the settlement, fatigued with their long rough journey, have cried themselves to sleep at last.

At length one of the sad sleepers wakes, or half wakes, dreaming that someone has called her name. How could such a thing be? Yet her own name still seems ringing in her brain, and at length, fully awake,

she finds herself intently listening. Again it sounded—"Torcuata"—a voice fine as the pipe of a mosquito, yet so sharp and distinct that it tingled in her ear. She sat up and listened again, and once more it sounded "Torcuata!" "Who speaks?" she returned in a fearful whisper. The voice, still fine and small, replied, "Come out from among the others until you touch the wall." Trembling she obeyed, creeping out from among the sleepers until she came into contact with the side of the hut. Then the voice sounded again, "Creep round the wall until you come to a small crack of light on the other side." Again she obeyed, and when she reached the line of faint light it widened quickly to an aperture, through which a shadowy arm was passed round her waist; and in a moment she was lifted up, and saw the stars above her, and at her feet dark forms of men wrapped in their ponchos lying asleep. But no one woke, no alarm was given; and in a very few minutes she was mounted, man-fashion, on a bare-backed horse, speeding swiftly over the dim plains, with the shadowy form of her mysterious deliverer some yards in advance, driving before him a score or so of horses. He had only spoken half a dozen words to her since their escape from the hut, but she knew by those words that he was taking her to Langueyú.

MARTA RIQUELME



# MARTA RIQUELME

(*From the Sepulvida MSS.*)

## I

**F**AR away from the paths of those who wander to and fro on the earth, sleeps Jujuy in the heart of this continent. It is the remotest of our provinces, and divided from the countries of the Pacific by the giant range of the Cordillera; a region of mountains and forest, torrid heats and great storms; and although in itself a country half as large as the Spanish peninsula, it possesses, as its only means of communication with the outside world, a few insignificant roads which are scarcely more than mule-paths.

The people of this region have few wants; they aspire not after progress, and have never changed their ancient manner of life. The Spanish were long in conquering them: and now, after three centuries of Christian dominion, they still speak the Quichua, and subsist in a great measure on patay, a sweet paste made from the pod of the wild algarroba tree; while they still retain as a beast of burden the llama, a gift of their old masters the Peruvian Incas.

This much is common knowledge, but of the peculiar character of the country, or of the nature of the things which happen within its borders,

nothing is known to those without; Jujuy being to them only a country lying over against the Andes, far removed from and unaffected by the progress of the world. It has pleased Providence to give me a more intimate knowledge, and this has been a sore affliction and great burden now for many years. But I have not taken up my pen to complain that all the years of my life are consumed in a region where the great spiritual enemy of mankind is still permitted to challenge the supremacy of our Master, waging an equal war against his followers: my sole object is to warn, perhaps also to comfort, others who will be my successors in this place, and who will come to the church of Yala ignorant of the means which will be used for the destruction of their souls. And if I set down anything in this narrative which might be injurious to our holy religion, owing to the darkness of our understandings and the little faith that is in us, I pray that the sin I now ignorantly commit may be forgiven me, and that this manuscript may perish miraculously unread by any person.

I was educated for the priesthood, in the city of Cordova, that famous seminary of learning and religion; and in 1838, being then in my twenty-seventh year, I was appointed priest to a small settlement in the distant province of which I have spoken. The habit of obedience, early instilled in me by my Jesuit masters, enabled me to accept this command unmurmuringly, and even with an outward show of cheerfulness. Nevertheless it filled me with grief, although I might have suspected that some such

hard fate had been designed for me, since I had been made to study the Quichua language, which is now only spoken in the Andean provinces. With secret bitter repinings I tore myself from all that made life pleasant and desirable—the society of innumerable friends, the libraries, the beautiful church where I had worshipped, and that renowned University which has shed on the troubled annals of our unhappy country whatever lustre of learning and poetry they possess.

My first impressions of Jujuy did not serve to raise my spirits. After a trying journey of four weeks' duration—the roads being difficult and the country greatly disturbed at the time—I reached the capital of the province, also called Jujuy, a town of about two thousand inhabitants. Thence I journeyed to my destination, a settlement called Yala, situated on the north-western border of the province, where the river Yala takes its rise, at the foot of that range of mountains which, branching eastwards from the Andes, divides Jujuy from Bolivia. I was wholly unprepared for the character of the place I had come to live in. Yala was a scattered village of about ninety souls—ignorant, apathetic people, chiefly Indians. To my unaccustomed sight the country appeared a rude, desolate chaos of rocks and gigantic mountains, compared with which the famous sierras of Cordova sunk into mere hillocks, and of vast gloomy forests, whose death-like stillness was broken only by the savage screams of some strange fowl, or by the hoarse thunders of a distant waterfall.

As soon as I had made myself known to the people

of the village, I set myself to acquire a knowledge of the surrounding country; but before long I began to despair of ever finding the limits of my parish in any direction. The country was wild, being only tenanted by a few widely-separated families, and like all deserts it was distasteful to me in an eminent degree; but as I would frequently be called upon to perform long journeys, I resolved to learn as much as possible of its geography. Always striving to overcome my own inclinations, which made a studious, sedentary life most congenial, I aimed at being very active; and having procured a good mule I began taking long rides every day, without a guide and with only a pocket compass to prevent me from losing myself. I could never altogether overcome my natural aversion to silent deserts, and in my long rides I avoided the thick forest and deep valleys, keeping as much as possible to the open plain.

One day having ridden about twelve or fourteen miles from Yala, I discovered a tree of noble proportions growing by itself in the open, and feeling much oppressed by the heat I alighted from my mule and stretched myself on the ground under the grateful shade. There was a continuous murmur of lecheguana—a small honey wasp—in the foliage above me, for the tree was in flower, and this soothing sound soon brought that restful feeling to my mind which insensibly leads to slumber. I was, however, still far from sleep, but reclining with eyes half closed, thinking of nothing, when suddenly, from the depths of the dense leafage above me, rang forth a shriek,

the most terrible it has ever fallen to the lot of any human being to hear. In sound it was a human cry, yet expressing a degree of agony and despair surpassing the power of any human soul to feel, and my impression was that it could only have been uttered by some tortured spirit allowed to wander for a season on the earth. Shriek after shriek, each more powerful and terrible to hear than the last, succeeded, and I sprang to my feet, the hair standing erect on my head, a profuse sweat of terror breaking out all over me. The cause of all these maddening sounds remained invisible to my eyes; and finally running to my mule I climbed hastily on to its back and never ceased flogging the poor beast all the way back to Yala.

On reaching my house I sent for one Osuna, a man of substance, able to converse in Spanish, and much respected in the village. In the evening he came to see me, and I then gave an account of the extraordinary experience I had encountered that day.

“Do not distress yourself, Father—you have only heard the Kakué,” he replied. I then learnt from him that the Kakué is a fowl frequenting the most gloomy and sequestered forests and known to everyone in the country for its terrible voice. Kakué, he also informed me, was the ancient name of the country, but the word was misspelt Jujuy by the early explorers, and this corrupted name was eventually retained. All this, which I now heard for the first time, is historical; but when he proceeded to inform me that the Kakué is a metamorphosed human being, that women and sometimes men, whose

lives have been darkened with great suffering and calamities, are changed by compassionate spirits into these lugubrious birds, I asked him somewhat contemptuously whether he, an enlightened man, believed a thing so absurd.

“There is not in all Jujuy,” he replied, “a person who disbelieves it.”

“That is a mere assertion,” cried I, “but it shows which way your mind inclines. No doubt the superstition concerning the Kakué is very ancient, and has come down to us together with the Quichua language from the aborigines. Transformations of men into animals are common in all the primitive religions of South America. Thus, the Guaranies relate that flying from a conflagration caused by the descent of the sun to the earth many people cast themselves into the river Paraguay, and were incontinently changed into capybaras and caymans; while others who took refuge in trees were blackened and scorched by the heat and became monkeys. But to go no further than the traditions of the Incas who once ruled over this region, it is related that after the first creation the entire human family, inhabiting the slopes of the Andes, were changed into crickets by a demon at enmity with man’s first creator. Throughout the continent these ancient beliefs are at present either dead or dying out; and if the Kakué legend still maintains its hold on the vulgar here it is owing to the isolated position of the country, hemmed in by vast mountains and having no intercourse with neighbouring states.”

Perceiving that my arguments had entirely failed to produce any effect I began to lose my temper, and demanded whether he, a Christian, dared to profess belief in a fable born of the corrupt imagination of the heathen.

He shrugged his shoulders and replied, "I have only stated what we, in Jujuy, know to be a fact. What is, is; and if you talk until to-morrow you cannot make it different, although you may prove yourself a very learned person."

His answer produced a strange effect on me. For the first time in my life I experienced the sensation of anger in all its power. Rising to my feet I paced the floor excitedly, and using many gestures, smiting the table with my hands and shaking my clenched fist close to his face in a threatening manner, and with a violence of language unbecoming in a follower of Christ, I denounced the degrading ignorance and heathenish condition of mind of the people I had come to live with; and more particularly of the person before me, who had some pretensions to education and should have been free from the gross delusions of the vulgar. While addressing him in this tone he sat smoking a cigarette, blowing rings from his lips and placidly watching them rise towards the ceiling, and with his studied supercilious indifference aggravated my rage to such a degree that I could scarcely restrain myself from flying at his throat or striking him to the earth with one of the cane-bottomed chairs in the room.

As soon as he left me, however, I was overwhelmed

with remorse at having behaved in a manner so unseemly. I spent the night in penitent tears and prayers, and resolved in future to keep a strict watch over myself, now that the secret enemy of my soul had revealed itself to me. Nor did I make this resolution a moment too soon. I had hitherto regarded myself as a person of a somewhat mild and placid disposition; the sudden change to new influences, and, perhaps also, the secret disgust I felt at my lot, had quickly developed my true character, which now became impatient to a degree and prone to sudden violent outbursts of passion during which I had little control over my tongue. The perpetual watch over myself and struggle against my evil nature which had now become necessary was the cause of but half my trouble. I discovered that my parishioners, with scarcely an exception, possessed that dull apathetic temper of mind concerning spiritual things, which had so greatly exasperated me in the man Osuna, and which obstructed all my efforts to benefit them. These people, or rather their ancestors centuries ago, had accepted Christianity, but it had never properly filtered down into their hearts. It was on the surface still; and if their half-heathen minds were deeply stirred it was not by the story of the Passion of our Lord, but by some superstitious belief inherited from their progenitors. During all the years I have spent in Yala I never said a mass, never preached a sermon, never attempted to speak of the consolations of faith, without having the thought thrust on to me that my words were useless, that I was watering the rock



where no seed could germinate, and wasting my life in vain efforts to impart religion to souls that were proof against it. Often have I been reminded of our holy and learned Father Guevara's words, when he complains of the difficulties encountered by the earlier Jesuit missionaries. He relates how one endeavoured to impress the Chiriguanos with the danger they incurred by refusing baptism, picturing to them their future condition when they would be condemned to everlasting fire. To which they only replied that they were not disturbed by what he told them, but were, on the contrary, greatly pleased to hear that the flames of the future would be unquenchable, for that would save them infinite trouble, and if they found the fire too hot they would remove themselves to a proper distance from it. So hard it was for their heathen intellects to comprehend the solemn doctrines of our faith!

## II

My knowledge of the Quichua language, acquired solely by the study of the vocabularies, was at first of little advantage to me. I found myself unable to converse on familiar topics with the people of Yala; and this was a great difficulty in my way, and a cause of distress for more reasons than one. I was unprovided with books, or other means of profit and recreation, and therefore

eagerly sought out the few people in the place able to converse in Spanish, for I have always been fond of social intercourse. There were only four: one very old man, who died shortly after my arrival; another was Osuna, a man for whom I had conceived an unconquerable aversion; the other two were women, the widow Riquelme and her daughter. About this girl I must speak at some length, since it is with her fortunes that this narrative is chiefly concerned. The widow Riquelme was poor, having only a house in Yala, but with a garden sufficiently large to grow a plentiful provision of fruit and vegetables, and to feed a few goats, so that these women had enough to live on, without ostentation, from their plot of ground. They were of pure Spanish blood; the mother was prematurely old and faded; Marta, who was a little over fifteen when I arrived at Yala, was the loveliest being I had ever beheld; though in this matter my opinion may be biased, for I only saw her side by side with the dark-skinned coarse-haired Indian women, and compared with their faces of ignoble type Marta's was like that of an angel. Her features were regular; her skin white, but with that pale darkness in it seen in some whose families have lived for generations in tropical countries. Her eyes, shaded by long lashes, were of that violet tint seen sometimes in people of Spanish blood—eyes which appear black until looked at closely. Her hair was, however, the crown of her beauty and chief glory, for it was of great length and a dark shining gold colour—a thing wonderful to see!

The society of these two women, who were full of sympathy and sweetness, promised to be a great boon to me, and I was often with them; but very soon I discovered that, on the contrary, it was only about to add a fresh bitterness to my existence. The Christian affection I felt for this beautiful child insensibly degenerated into a mundane passion of such overmastering strength that all my efforts to pluck it out of my heart proved ineffectual. I cannot describe my unhappy condition during the long months when I vainly wrestled with this sinful emotion, and when I often thought in the bitterness of my heart that my God had forsaken me. The fear that the time would come when my feelings would betray themselves increased on me until at length, to avoid so great an evil, I was compelled to cease visiting the only house in Yala where it was a pleasure for me to enter. What had I done to be thus cruelly persecuted by Satan? was the constant cry of my soul. Now I know that this temptation was only a part of that long and desperate struggle in which the servants of the prince of the power of the air had engaged to overthrow me.

Not for five years did this conflict with myself cease to be a constant danger—a period which seemed to my mind not less than half a century. Nevertheless, knowing that idleness is the parent of evil, I was incessantly occupied; for when there was nothing to call me abroad, I laboured with my pen at home, filling in this way many volumes, which in the end may serve to throw some light on the great historical

question of the Incas' cis-Andine dominion, and its effect on the conquered nations.

When Marta was twenty years old it became known in Yala that she had promised her hand in marriage to one Cosme Luna, and of this person a few words must be said. Like many young men, possessing no property or occupation, and having no disposition to work, he was a confirmed gambler, spending all his time going about from town to town to attend horse-races and cock-fights. I had for a long time regarded him as an abominable pest in Yala, a wretch possessing a hundred vices under a pleasing exterior, and not one redeeming virtue, and it was therefore with the deepest pain that I heard of his success with Marta. The widow, who was naturally disappointed at her daughter's choice, came to me with tears and complaints, begging me to assist her in persuading her beloved child to break off an engagement which promised only to make her unhappy for life. But with that secret feeling in my heart, ever striving to drag me down to my ruin, I dared not help her, albeit I would gladly have given my right hand to save Marta from the calamity of marrying such a man.

The tempest which these tidings had raised in my heart never abated while the preparations for the marriage were going on. I was forced now to abandon my work, for I was incapable of thought; nor did all my religious exercises avail to banish for one moment the strange, sullen rage which had taken complete possession of me. Night after night I would

rise from my bed and pace the floor of my room for hours, vainly trying to shut out the promptings of some fiend perpetually urging me to take some desperate course against this young man. A thousand schemes for his destruction suggested themselves to my mind, and when I had resolutely dismissed them all and prayed that my sinful temper might be forgiven, I would rise from my knees still cursing him a thousand times more than ever.

In the meantime, Marta herself saw nothing wrong in Cosme, for love had blinded her. He was young, good-looking, could play on the guitar and sing, and was master of that easy, playful tone in conversation which is always pleasing to women. Moreover, he dressed well and was generous with his money, with which he was apparently well provided.

In due time they were married, and Cosme, having no house of his own, came to live with his mother-in-law in Yala. Then, at length, what I had foreseen also happened. He ran out of money, and his new relations had nothing he could lay his hands on to sell. He was too proud to gamble for coppers, and the poor people of Yala had no silver to risk; he could not or would not work, and the vacant life he was living began to grow wearisome. Once more he took to his old courses, and it soon grew to be a common thing for him to be absent from home for a month or six weeks at a time. Marta looked unhappy, but would not complain or listen to a word against Cosme; for whenever he returned to Yala then his wife's great beauty was like a new thing

to him, bringing him to her feet, and making him again for a brief season her devoted lover and slave.

She at length became a mother. For her sake I was glad; for now with her infant boy to occupy her mind Cosme's neglect would seem more endurable. He was away when the child was born; he had gone, it was reported, into Catamarca, and for three months nothing was heard of him. This was a season of political troubles, and men being required to recruit the forces, all persons found wandering about the country not engaged in any lawful occupation were taken for military service. And this had happened to Cosme. A letter from him reached Marta at last, informing her that he had been carried away to San Luis, and asking her to send him two hundred pesos, as with that amount he would be able to purchase his release. But it was impossible for her to raise the money; nor could she leave Yala to go to him, for her mother's strength was now rapidly failing, and Marta could not abandon her to the care of strangers. All this she was obliged to tell Cosme in the letter she wrote to him, and which perhaps never reached his hands, for no reply to it ever came.

At length, the widow Riquelme died; then Marta sold the house and garden and all she possessed, and taking her child with her, went out to seek her husband. Travelling first to the town of Jujuy, she there, with other women, attached herself to a convoy about to start on a journey to the southern provinces. Several months went by, and then came the disastrous tidings to Yala that the convoy had

been surprised by Indians in a lonely place and all the people slain.

I will not here dwell on the anguish of mind I endured on learning Marta's sad end: for I tried hard to believe that her troubled life was indeed over, although I was often assured by my neighbours that the Indians invariably spare the women and children.

Every blow dealt by a cruel destiny against this most unhappy woman had pierced my heart; and during the years that followed, and when the villagers had long ceased to speak of her, often in the dead of the night I rose and sought the house where she had lived, and walking under the trees in that garden where I had so often held intercourse with her, indulged a grief which time seemed powerless to mitigate.

### III

MARTA was not dead; but what happened to her after her departure from Yala was this. When the convoy with which she journeyed was attacked the men only were slain, while the women and children were carried away into captivity. When the victors divided the spoil among themselves, the child, which even in that long painful journey into the desert, with the prospect of a life of cruel slavery before her, had been a comfort to Marta, was taken forcibly from her arms to

be conveyed to some distant place, and from that moment she utterly lost sight of it. She herself was bought by an Indian able to pay for a pretty white captive, and who presently made her his wife. She, a Christian, the wife of a man loved only too well, could not endure this horrible fate which had overtaken her. She was also mad with grief at the loss of her child, and stealing out one dark stormy night she fled from the Indian settlement. For several days and nights she wandered about the desert, suffering every hardship and in constant fear of jaguars, and was at length found by the savages in a half-starved condition and unable longer to fly from them. Her owner, when she was restored to him, had no mercy on her: he bound her to a tree growing beside his hovel, and there every day he cruelly scourged her naked flesh to satisfy his barbarous resentment, until she was ready to perish with excessive suffering. He also cut off her hair, and braiding it into a belt wore it always round his waist—a golden trophy which doubtless won him great honour and distinction amongst his fellow-savages. When he had by these means utterly broken her spirit and reduced her to the last condition of weakness, he released her from the tree, but at the same time fastened a log of wood to her ankle, so that only with great labour, and drawing herself along with the aid of her hands, could she perform the daily tasks her master imposed on her. Only after a whole year of captivity, and when she had given birth to a child, was the punishment over and her foot released from the log. The natural



affection which she felt for this child of a father so cruel was now poor Marta's only comfort. In this hard servitude five years of her miserable existence were consumed; and only those who know the stern, sullen, pitiless character of the Indian can imagine what this period was for Marta, without sympathy from her fellow-creatures, with no hope and no pleasure beyond the pleasure of loving and caressing her own infant savages. Of these she was now the mother of three.

When her youngest was not many months old, Marta had one day wandered some distance in search of sticks for firewood, when a woman, one of her fellow-captives from Jujuy, came running to her, for she had been watching for an opportunity of speaking with Marta. It happened that this woman had succeeded in persuading her Indian husband to take her back to her home in the Christian country, and she had at the same time won his consent to take Marta with them, having conceived a great affection for her. The prospect of escape filled poor Marta's heart with joy, but when she was told that her children could on no account be taken, then a cruel struggle commenced in her breast. Bitterly she pleaded for permission to take her babes, and at last overcome by her importunity her fellow-captive consented to her taking the youngest of the three; though this concession was made very reluctantly.

In a short time the day appointed for the flight arrived, and Marta carrying her infant met her friends in the wood. They were quickly mounted,

and the journey began which was to last for many days, and during which they were to suffer much from hunger, thirst and fatigue. One dark night as they journeyed through a hilly and wooded country, Marta being overcome with fatigue so that she could scarcely keep her seat, the Indian with affected kindness relieved her of the child she always carried in her arms. An hour passed, and then pressing forward to his side and asking for her child she was told that it had been dropped into a deep, swift stream over which they had swum their horses some time before. Of what happened after that she was unable to give any very clear account. She only dimly remembered that through many days of scorching heat and many nights of weary travel she was always piteously pleading for her lost child—always seeming to hear it crying to her to save it from destruction. The long journey ended at last. She was left by the others at the first Christian settlement they reached, after which travelling slowly from village to village she made her way to Yala. Her old neighbours and friends did not know her at first, but when they were at length convinced that it was indeed Marta Riquelme that stood before them she was welcomed like one returned from the grave. I heard of her arrival, and hastening forth to greet her found her seated before a neighbour's house already surrounded by half the people of the village.

Was this woman indeed Marta, once the pride of Yala! It was hard to believe it, so darkened with the burning suns and winds of years was her face,

once so fair; so wasted and furrowed with grief and the many hardships she had undergone! Her figure, worn almost to a skeleton, was clothed with ragged garments, while her head, bowed down with sorrow and despair, was divested of that golden crown which had been her chief ornament. Seeing me arrive she cast herself on her knees before me and taking my hand in hers covered it with tears and kisses. The grief I felt at the sight of her forlorn condition mingled with joy for her deliverance from death and captivity overcame me; I was shaken like a reed in the wind, and covering my face with my robe I sobbed aloud in the presence of all the people.

## IV

EVERYTHING that charity could dictate was done to alleviate her misery. A merciful woman of Yala received her into her house and provided her with decent garments. But for a time nothing served to raise her desponding spirits; she still grieved for her lost babe, and seemed ever in fancy listening to its piteous cries for help. When assured that Cosme would return in due time, that alone gave her comfort. She believed what they told her, for it agreed with her wish, and by degrees the effects of her terrible experience began to wear off, giving place to a feeling of feverish impatience with which she looked forward to her husband's

return. With this feeling, which I did all I could to encourage, perceiving it to be the only remedy against despair, came also a new anxiety about her personal appearance. She grew careful in her dress, and made the most of her short and sunburnt hair. Beauty she could never recover; but she possessed good features which could not be altered; her eyes also retained their violet colour, and hope brought back to her something of the vanished expression of other years.

At length, when she had been with us over a year, one day there came a report that Cosme had arrived, that he had been seen in Yala, and had alighted at Andrada's door—the store in the main road. She heard it and rose up with a great cry of joy. He had come to her at last—he would comfort her! She could not wait for his arrival: what wonder! Hurrying forth she flew like the wind through the village, and in a few moments stood on Andrada's threshold, panting from her race, her cheeks glowing, all the hope and life and fire of her girlhood rushing back to her heart. There she beheld Cosme, changed but little, surrounded by his old companions, listening in silence and with a dismayed countenance to the story of Marta's sufferings in the great desert, of her escape and return to Yala, where she had been received like one come back from the sepulchre. Presently they caught sight of her standing there. "Here is Marta herself arrived in good time," they cried. "Behold your wife!"

He shook himself from them with a strange laugh.

“What, that woman my wife—Marta Riquelme!” he replied. “No, no, my friends, be not deceived; Marta perished long ago in the desert, where I have been to seek for her. Of her death I have no doubt; let me pass.”

He pushed by her, left her standing there motionless as a statue, unable to utter a word, and was quickly on his horse riding away from Yala.

Then suddenly she recovered possession of her faculties, and with a cry of anguish hurried after him, imploring him to return to her; but finding that he would not listen to her she was overcome with despair and fell upon the earth insensible. She was taken up by the people who had followed her out and carried back into the house. Unhappily she was not dead, and when she recovered consciousness it was pitiful to hear the excuses she invented for the remorseless wretch who had abandoned her. She was altered, she said, greatly altered — it was not strange that Cosme had refused to believe that she could be the Marta of six years ago! In her heart she knew that nobody was deceived: to all Yala it was patent that she had been deserted. She could not endure it, and when she met people in the street she lowered her eyes and passed on, pretending not to see them. Most of her time was spent indoors, and there she would sit for hours without speaking or stirring, her cheeks resting on her hands, her eyes fixed on vacancy. My heart bled for her; morning and evening I remembered her in my prayers; by every argument I sought to cheer her drooping spirit, even telling

her that the beauty and freshness of her youth would return to her in time, and that her husband would repent and come back to her.

These efforts were fruitless. Before many days she disappeared from Yala, and though diligent search was made in the adjacent mountains she could not be found. Knowing how empty and desolate her life had been, deprived of every object of affection, I formed the opinion that she had gone back to the desert to seek the tribe where she had been a captive in the hope of once more seeing her lost children. At length, when all expectation of ever seeing her again had been abandoned, a person named Montero came to me with tidings of her. He was a poor man, a charcoal-burner, and lived with his wife and children in the forest about two hours' journey from Yala, at a distance from any other habitation. Finding Marta wandering lost in the woods he had taken her to his rancho, and she had been pleased to find this shelter, away from the people of Yala who knew her history; and it was at Marta's own request that this good man had ridden to the village to inform me of her safety. I was greatly relieved to hear all this, and thought that Marta had acted wisely in escaping from the villagers, who were always pointing her out and repeating her wonderful history. In that sequestered spot where she had taken refuge, removed from sad associations and gossiping tongues, the wounds in her heart would perhaps gradually heal and peace return to her perturbed spirit.

Before many weeks had elapsed, however, Montero's

wife came to me with a very sad account of Marta. She had grown day by day more silent and solitary in her habits, spending most of her time in some secluded spot among the trees, where she would sit motionless, brooding over her memories for hours at a time. Nor was this the worst. Occasionally she would make an effort to assist in the household work, preparing the patay or maize for the supper, or going out with Montero's wife to gather firewood in the forest. But suddenly, in the middle of her task, she would drop her bundle of sticks and, casting herself on the earth, break forth into the most heart-rending cries and lamentations, loudly exclaiming that God had unjustly persecuted her, that He was a being filled with malevolence, and speaking many things against Him very dreadful to hear. Deeply distressed at these tidings I called for my mule and accompanied the poor woman back to her own house; but when we arrived there Marta could nowhere be found.

Most willingly would I have remained to see her, and try once more to win her back from these desponding moods, but I was compelled to return to Yala. For it happened that a fever epidemic had recently broken out and spread over the country, so that hardly a day passed without its long journey to perform and deathbed to attend. Often during those days, worn out with fatigue and want of sleep, I would dismount from my mule and rest for a season against a rock or tree, wishing for death to come and release me from so sad an existence.

When I left Montero's house I charged him to send me news of Marta as soon as they should find her; but for several days I heard nothing. At length word came that they had discovered her hiding-place in the forest, but could not induce her to leave it, or even to speak to them; and they implored me to go to them, for they were greatly troubled at her state, and knew not what to do.

Once more I went out to seek her; and this was the saddest journey of all, for even the elements were charged with unusual gloom, as if to prepare my mind for some unimaginable calamity. Rain, accompanied by terrific thunder and lightning, had been falling in torrents for several days, so that the country was all but impassable: the swollen streams roared between the hills, dragging down rocks and trees, and threatening, whenever we were compelled to ford them, to carry us away to destruction. The rain had ceased, but the whole sky was covered by a dark motionless cloud, unpierced by a single ray of sunshine. The mountains, wrapped in blue vapours, loomed before us, vast and desolate; and the trees, in that still, thick atmosphere, were like figures of trees hewn out of solid ink-black rock and set up in some shadowy subterranean region to mock its inhabitants with an imitation of the upper world.

At length we reached Montero's hut, and, followed by all the family, went to look for Marta. The place where she had concealed herself was in a dense wood half a league from the house, and the ascent to it being steep and difficult Montero was compelled to



walk before, leading my mule by the bridle. At length we came to the spot where they had discovered her, and there, in the shadow of the woods, we found Marta still in the same place, seated on the trunk of a fallen tree, which was sodden with the rain and half buried under great creepers and masses of dead and rotting foliage. She was in a crouching attitude, her feet gathered under her garments, which were now torn to rags and fouled with clay; her elbows were planted on her drawn-up knees, and her long bony fingers thrust into her hair, which fell in tangled disorder over her face. To this pitiable condition had she been brought by great and unmerited sufferings.

Seeing her, a cry of compassion escaped my lips, and casting myself off my mule I advanced towards her. As I approached she raised her eyes to mine, and then I stood still, transfixed with amazement and horror at what I saw; for they were no longer those soft violet orbs which had retained until recently their sweet pathetic expression; now they were round and wild-looking, opened to thrice their ordinary size, and filled with a lurid yellow fire, giving them a resemblance to the eyes of some hunted savage animal.

“Great God, she has lost her reason!” I cried; then falling on my knees I disengaged the crucifix from my neck with trembling hands, and endeavoured to hold it up before her sight. This movement appeared to infuriate her; the insane, desolate eyes, from which all human expression had vanished, became like two burning balls, which seemed to shoot out sparks of fire; her short hair rose up until it stood

like an immense crest on her head; and suddenly bringing down her skeleton-like hands she thrust the crucifix violently from her, uttering at the same time a succession of moans and cries that pierced my heart with pain to hear. And presently flinging up her arms, she burst forth into shrieks so terrible in the depth of agony they expressed that overcome by the sound I sank upon the earth and hid my face. The others, who were close behind me, did likewise, for no human soul could endure those cries, the remembrance of which, even now after many years, causes the blood to run cold in my veins.

“The Kakué! The Kakué!” exclaimed Montero, who was close behind me.

Recalled to myself by these words I raised my eyes only to discover that Marta was no longer before me. For even in that moment, when those terrible cries were ringing through my heart, waking the echoes of the mountain solitudes, the awful change had come, and she had looked her last with human eyes on earth and on man! In another form—that strange form of the Kakué—she had fled out of our sight for ever to hide in those gloomy woods which were henceforth to be her dwelling-place. And I—most miserable of men, what had I done that all my prayers and strivings had been thus frustrated, that out of my very hands the spirit of the power of darkness had thus been permitted to wrest this unhappy soul from me!

I rose up trembling from the earth, the tears pouring unchecked down my cheeks, while the mem-

bers of Montero's family gathered round me and clung to my garments. Night closed on us, black as despair and death, and with the greatest difficulty we made our way back through the woods. But I would not remain at the rancho; at the risk of my life I returned to Yala, and all through that dark solitary ride I was incessantly crying out to God to have mercy on me. Towards midnight I reached the village in safety, but the horror with which that unheard-of tragedy infected me, the fears and the doubts which dared not yet shape themselves into words, remained in my breast to torture me. For days I could neither eat nor sleep. I was reduced to a skeleton and my hair began to turn white before its time. Being now incapable of performing my duties, and believing that death was approaching, I yearned once more for the city of my birth. I escaped at length from Yala, and with great difficulty reached the town of Jujuy, and from thence by slow stages I journeyed back to Cordova.

## V

“ONCE more do I behold thee, O Cordova, beautiful to my eyes as the new Jerusalem coming down from Heaven to those who have witnessed the resurrection! Here, where my life began, may I now be allowed to lie down in peace, like a tired child that falls asleep on its mother's breast.”

Thus did I apostrophise my natal city, when,

looking from the height above, I at last saw it before me, girdled with purple hills and bright with the sunshine, the white towers of the many churches springing out of the green mist of groves and gardens.

Nevertheless Providence ordained that in Cordova I was to find life and not death. Surrounded by old beloved friends, worshipping in the old church I knew so well, health returned to me, and I was like one who rises after a night of evil dreams and goes forth to feel the sunshine and fresh wind on his face. I told the strange story of Marta to one person only; this was Father Irala, a learned and discreet man of great piety, and one high in authority in the church at Cordova. I was astonished that he was able to listen calmly to the things I related; he spoke some consoling words, but made no attempt then or afterwards to throw any light on the mystery. In Cordova a great cloud seemed to be lifted from my mind which left my faith unimpaired; I was once more cheerful and happy — happier than I had ever been since leaving it. Three months went by; then Irala told me one day that it was time for me to return to Yala, for my health being restored there was nothing to keep me longer from my flock.

O that flock, that flock, in which for me there had been only one precious lamb!

I was greatly disquieted; all those nameless doubts and fears which had left me now seemed returning; I begged him to spare me, to send some younger man, ignorant of the matters I had imparted to him, to take my place. He replied that for the very reason

that I was acquainted with those matters I was the only fit person to go to Yala. Then in my agitation I unburdened my heart to him. I spoke of that heathenish apathy of the people I had struggled in vain to overcome, of the temptations I had encountered—the passion of anger and earthly love, the impulse to commit some terrible crime. Then had come the tragedy of Marta Riquelme, and the spiritual world had seemed to resolve itself into a chaos where Christ was powerless to save; in my misery and despair my reason had almost forsaken me and I had fled from the country. In Cordova hope had revived, my prayers had brought an immediate response, and the Author of salvation seemed to be near to me. Here in Cordova, I said in conclusion, was life, but in the soul-destroying atmosphere of Yala death eternal.

“Brother Sepulvida,” he answered, “we know all your sufferings and suffer with you; nevertheless you must return to Yala. Though there in the enemy’s country, in the midst of the fight, when hard pressed and wounded, you have perhaps doubted God’s omnipotence, He calls you to the front again, where He will be with you and fight at your side. It is for you, not for us, to find the solution of those mysteries which have troubled you; and that you have already come near to the solution your own words seem to show. Remember that we are here not for our own pleasure, but to do our Master’s work; that the highest reward will not be for those who sit in the cool shade, book in hand, but for the toilers

in the field who are suffering the burden and heat of the day. Return to Yala and be of good heart, and in due time all things will be made clear to your understanding.”

These words gave me some comfort, and meditating much on them I took my departure from Cordova, and in due time arrived at my destination.

I had, on quitting Yala, forbidden Montero and his wife to speak of the manner of Marta's disappearance, believing that it would be better for my people to remain in ignorance of such a matter; but now, when going about in the village on my return I found that it was known to everyone. That “Marta had become a Kakué,” was mentioned on all sides; yet it did not affect them with astonishment and dismay that this should be so, it was merely an event for idle women to chatter about, like Quiteria's elopement or Maxima's quarrel with her mother-in-law.

It was now the hottest season of the year, when it was impossible to be very active, or much out of doors. During those days the feeling of despondence began again to weigh heavily on my heart. I pondered on Irala's words, and prayed continually, but the illumination he had prophesied came not. When I preached, my voice was like the buzzing of summer flies to the people: they came or sat or knelt on the floor of the church, and heard me with stolid unmoved countenances, then went forth again unchanged in heart. After the morning mass I would return to my house, and, sitting alone in my room, pass the sultry hours, immersed in melancholy thoughts, having

no inclination to work. At such times the image of Marta, in all the beauty of her girlhood, crowned with her shining golden hair, would rise before me, until the tears gathering in my eyes would trickle through my fingers. Then too I often recalled that terrible scene in the wood—the crouching figure in its sordid rags, the glaring furious eyes,—again those piercing shrieks seemed to ring through me, and fill the dark mountain's forest with echoes, and I would start up half maddened with the sensations of horror renewed within me.

And one day, while sitting in my room, with these memories for only company, all at once a voice in my soul told me that the end was approaching, that the crisis was come, and that to whichever side I fell, there I should remain through all eternity. I rose up from my seat staring straight before me, like one who sees an assassin enter his apartment dagger in hand and who nerves himself for the coming struggle. Instantly all my doubts, my fears, my unshapen thoughts found expression, and with a million tongues shrieked out in my soul against my Redeemer. I called aloud on Him to save me, but He came not; and the spirits of darkness, enraged at my long resistance, had violently seized on my soul, and were dragging it down to perdition. I reached forth my hands and took hold of the crucifix standing near me, and clung to it as a drowning mariner does to a floating spar. "Cast it down!" cried out a hundred devils in my ear. "Trample under foot this symbol of a slavery which has darkened your life and made

earth a hell! He that died on the cross is powerless now; miserably do they perish who put their trust in Him! Remember Marta Riquelme, and save yourself from her fate while there is time."

My hands relaxed their hold on the cross, and falling on the stones, I cried aloud to the Lord to slay me and take my soul, for by death only could I escape from that great crime my enemies were urging me to commit.

Scarcely had I pronounced these words before I felt that the fiends had left me, like ravening wolves scared from their quarry. I rose up and washed the blood from my bruised forehead, and praised God; for now there was a great calm in my heart, and I knew that He who died to save the world was with me, and that His grace had enabled me to conquer and deliver my own soul from perdition.

From that time I began to see the meaning of Irala's words, that it was for me and not for him to find the solution of the mysteries which had troubled me, and that I had already come near to finding it. I also saw the reason of that sullen resistance to religion in the minds of the people of Yala; of the temptations which had assailed me—the strange tempests of anger and the carnal passions, never experienced elsewhere, and which had blown upon my heart like hot blighting winds; and even of all the events of Marta Riquelme's tragic life; for all these things had been ordered with devilish cunning to drive my soul into rebellion. I no longer dwelt persistently on that isolated event of her trans-



formation, for now the whole action of that tremendous warfare in which the powers of darkness are arrayed against the messengers of the Gospel began to unfold itself before me.

In thought I went back to the time, centuries ago, when as yet not one ray of heavenly light had fallen upon this continent; when men bowed down in worship to gods, which they called in their several languages Pachacamac, Viracocho, and many others; names which being translated mean, The All-powerful, Ruler of Men, The Strong Comer, Lord of the Dead, The Avenger. These were not mythical beings; they were mighty spiritual entities, differing from each other in character, some taking delight in wars and destruction, while others regarded their human worshippers with tolerant and even kindly feelings. And because of this belief in powerful benevolent beings some learned Christian writers have held that the aborigines possessed a knowledge of the true God, albeit obscured by many false notions. This is a manifest error; for if in the material world light and darkness cannot mingle, much less can the Supreme Ruler stoop to share His sovereignty with Belial and Moloch, or in this continent, with Soychú, Tupa, and Viracocho: but all these demons, great and small, known by various names, were angels of darkness who had divided amongst themselves this new world and the nations dwelling in it. Nor need we be astonished at finding here resemblance to the true religion—majestic and graceful touches suggesting the Divine Artist; for Satan himself is clothed as an angel

of light, and scruples not to borrow the things invented by the Divine Intelligence. These spirits possessed unlimited power and authority; their service was the one great business of all men's lives; individual character and natural feelings were crushed out by an implacable despotism, and no person dreamed of disobedience to their decrees, interpreted by their high priests; but all men were engaged in raising colossal temples, enriched with gold and precious stones, to their honour, and priests and virgins in tens of thousands conducted their worship with a pomp and magnificence surpassing those of ancient Egypt or Babylon. Nor can we doubt that these beings often made use of their power to suspend the order of nature, transforming men into birds and beasts, causing the trembling of the earth which ruins whole cities, and performing many other stupendous miracles to demonstrate their authority or satisfy their malignant natures. The time came when it pleased the Ruler of the world to overthrow this evil empire, using for that end the ancient, feeble instruments despised of men, the missionary priests, and chiefly those of the often persecuted Brotherhood founded by Loyola, whose zeal and holiness have always been an offence to the proud and carnal-minded. Country after country, tribe after tribe, the old gods were deprived of their kingdom, fighting always with all their weapons to keep back the tide of conquest. And at length, defeated at all points, and like an army fighting in defence of its territory, and gradually retiring before the invader to con-

centrate itself in some apparently inaccessible region and there stubbornly resist to the end; so have all the old gods and demons retired into this secluded country, where, if they cannot keep out the seeds of truth, they have at least succeeded in rendering the soil it falls upon barren as stone. Nor does it seem altogether strange that these once potent beings should be satisfied to remain in comparative obscurity and inaction when the entire globe is open to them, offering fields worthy of their evil ambition. For great as their power and intelligence must be they are, nevertheless, finite beings, possessing, like man, individual characteristics, capabilities and limitations; and after reigning where they have lost a continent, they may possibly be unfit or unwilling to serve elsewhere. For we know that even in the strong places of Christianity there are spirits enough for the evil work of leading men astray; whole nations are given up to damnable heresies, and all religion is trodden under foot by many whose portion will be where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.

From the moment of my last struggle, when this revelation began to dawn upon my mind, I have been safe from their persecutions. No angry passions, no sinful motions, no doubts and despondence disturb the peace of my soul. I was filled with fresh zeal, and in the pulpit felt that it was not my voice, but the voice of some mighty spirit speaking with my lips and preaching to the people with an eloquence of which I was not capable. So far, however, it has been powerless to win their souls. The old gods, although

no longer worshipped openly, are their gods still, and could a new Tupac Amarū arise to pluck down the symbols of Christianity, and proclaim once more the Empire of the Sun, men would everywhere bow down to worship his rising beams and joyfully rebuild temples to the Lightning and the Rainbow.

Although the lost spirits cannot harm they are always near me, watching all my movements, ever striving to frustrate my designs. Nor am I unmindful of their presence. Even here, sitting in my study and looking out on the mountains, rising like stupendous stairs towards heaven and losing their summits in the gathering clouds, I seem to discern the awful shadowy form of Pachacamac, supreme among the old gods. Though his temples are in ruins, where the Pharaohs of the Andes and their millions of slaves worshipped him for a thousand years, he is awful still in his majesty and wrath that plays like lightning on his furrowed brows, kindling his stern countenance, and the beard which rolls downward like an immense white cloud to his knees. Around him gather other tremendous forms in their cloudy vestments — the Strong-comer, the Lord of the Dead, the Avenger, the Ruler of men, and many others whose names were once mighty throughout the continent. They have met to take counsel together; I hear their voices in the thunder hoarsely rolling from the hills, and in the wind stirring the forest before the coming tempest. Their faces are towards me, they are pointing to me with their cloudy hands, they are speaking of me—even of me, an old, feeble, worn-out man! But I do

not quail before them; my soul is firm though my flesh is weak; though my knees tremble while I gaze, I dare look forward even to win another victory over them before I depart.

Day and night I pray for that soul still wandering lost in the great wilderness; and no voice rebukes my hope or tells me that my prayer is unlawful. I strain my eyes gazing out towards the forest; but I know not whether Marta Riquelme will return to me with the tidings of her salvation in a dream of the night, or clothed in the garments of the flesh, in the full light of day. For her salvation I wait, and when I have seen it I shall be ready to depart; for as the traveller, whose lips are baked with hot winds, and who thirsts for a cooling draught and swallows sand, strains his eyeballs to see the end of his journey in some great desert, so do I look forward to the goal of this life, when I shall go to Thee, O my Master, and be at rest!

RALPH HERNE

*"Desolate and overgrown with grass"*

# RALPH HERNE

## CHAPTER I

### THE PICTURE: A PREAMBLE

MY morning paper contained among its editorial notes a highly eulogistic notice of an oil painting by a young native artist entitled "An Episode of the Epidemic." Viewed simply as a work of art, the paper said, it far surpassed the best productions by native artists hitherto exhibited, and gave rise to the pleasing hope that a new and powerful genius had at length arisen in their midst, who by his works would remove for ever the reproach that this most cultured city of South America had pens but no pencils. Apart from this, the picture had a strange fascination for those who had passed through and had been witnesses of the recent calamitous period, vividly recalling to their minds the terrible scenes with which they had been so familiar. Everybody, the writer said, was running to see it; for it had just been placed on exhibition in the Calle Diamante, one of the principal streets of Buenos Ayres.

My curiosity having been excited by this paragraph, and my time being my own that morning, I went after breakfast to look at the picture, and on



entering the room in the Calle Diamante found it already filled with a great crowd of people, chiefly of the upper ranks of society. The picture, painted on a canvas about eight feet by six feet in size, was hung at the upper end of the long room, down the middle of which a red rope had been stretched, and visitors were made to advance to the picture on one side of this line, and to retire, when leaving, on the other, so that no one could make his way to a good place at once, but had to wait patiently, advancing very slowly, until he reached the front. As I stood there, or moved up by inches in the compact crowd, with abundance of time to look about me, I could not help asking myself what a perfect stranger there, ignorant of recent events in that city, would most likely think of the scene the room presented.

He would soon come to the conclusion, I imagined, that no mere picture, whatever its subject and however great its merits might be—even a Last Judgment by a genius equal to that of Michael Angelo—could alone account for the strange appearance exhibited by the people in that crowd, their profound silence, their pale faces full of sad memories, and strangest thing of all, the mourning garments which everyone seemed to be wearing.

At length, in about twenty minutes' time, I arrived at the front, and placing my back firmly against a projecting angle of the wall, I fixed my eyes on the picture on which all the people near me were also silently gazing. On the canvas was represented the interior of a room in some very poor locality in the

town; the stained walls, low dusty ceiling, tiled floor, mean and scanty furniture, being depicted with a fidelity comparable to that of the old Flemish masters. Two or three gentlemen were standing at the door, which had just been thrown open, letting in a flood of noonday sunshine, strangely lighting with its hot, white searching glare the ghastly scene within. On one side stood a rude wooden cot or bedstead, with a man lying on it dead, his plague-blackened face distorted with its last look of agony, while his stiffened fingers still retained their grip on the coverlid. Near the bed on the tiled floor, and only partially dressed, lay the dead wife, her black hair spread on the dusty tiles, her skin grey as ashes and her lips burnt black with the fire of pestilence, but an expression almost peaceful on her young and comely face. Seated on the floor at her side was her babe, its bright eyes, unconscious of death, looking up startled at the sudden intrusion of sunlight and strange voices.

It was certainly a powerful picture; and although it is easy enough for one who is not an artist to err in a matter of this kind, it is my belief that at our Royal Academy it would have been judged worthy of a place on the line; and that even among the many meritorious works exhibited there every spring it would have attracted an unusual amount of attention.

When I had looked long enough to satisfy myself I became interested in watching the crowd of absorbed faces around me. And presently, in the very front row, I noticed a young man who stood gazing at the picture with the look in his face which one could see

on almost every countenance there, only in him it was more eloquent, and seemed like the expression of a person placed before a faithful representation of some terrible scene he had recently witnessed, which had deeply stirred his soul. At his side, with a hand resting on his arm, stood an extremely beautiful young lady; and while I watched her face I distinctly saw a large tear slowly gather in her eye and fall, and then presently another tear gathered, while she herself remained perfectly unconscious of them. Her companion, however, noticed it, and bending down he whispered a word in her ear, then led her away down the other side of the room. I was glad that they had not detected me watching them, for I knew them intimately, and was even acquainted with all the chief incidents of their lives during that period of gloom and horror through which the city had lately passed.

This is a story worth narrating: the evil fortune which overtook this young stranger in a strange land—his love and his loss, and the tender womanly compassion that in the end saved and purified him; the sublime courage and devotion with which he strove against an evil more powerful than man: these things cast a rainbow hue of romance over the death-like gloom which for long months encompassed him, and from which he had so happily escaped.

## CHAPTER II

### THOUSANDS OF MILES FROM HOME

**S**UCCESS in almost any calling in England, unless the aspirant happens to be endowed with energies and talents almost superhuman, depends in a great measure on the possession of money. The unhappy man who applies for a situation, for which he knows that he is properly qualified, is met at the first step by a demand for five hundred pounds, which he is required to deposit with his employers as a guarantee. He may be a very able person, and intensely willing to work, for perhaps starvation is staring him in the face, but unless he can produce five hundred sovereigns from his pockets his qualifications and his willingness go for nothing. From this grievous rule even those who have acquired professions at a very heavy cost to themselves or their friends are not exempt; they must go forth into the world amply provided with funds, otherwise their marks of distinction will not count for much. If they kick at this, and, unable to endure a position almost menial, endeavour by sheer energy to force their way to the front, they soon discover that they are too heavily handicapped; time-honoured usage, which is a species of destiny, proves too strong for them in the end, and, in disgust, they resign themselves to the inevitable,

or else go abroad. Ralph Herne chose the latter alternative. It is a leap in the dark open to everyone; many take it from motives of courage, others of cowardice, but in every case there is this to recommend it, that it gives to a man a certain prestige in the eyes of his fellow-creatures. It is also, no doubt, in many cases an advantage to a young man to feel that out there he is alone in the world, to know that there is no retreat, that he must conquer or fall to rise no more.

His mother died in giving him birth, and a little later, by the death of his father, who was only a poor curate in a country village, he was left desolate at a very tender age. Fortunately, he had an uncle in London who took charge of him—a married man, but without children of his own—he was a clerk in the city, and lived in a small house in Camden Town, where he was able to exist in tolerable comfort on his salary of £350 a year. He was very good to Ralph, and had him educated at the University College; and finding that as he grew up he developed a very strong inclination for the medical profession, he very generously, and not without sacrificing some of his personal comforts, enabled him to follow the bent of his mind. Ralph worked hard at his studies, having an absorbing love for his chosen science, and in due time he honourably passed the examination at the Royal College of Surgeons and the London University which enabled him to practise the healing art.

When he went home, flushed with triumph, his uncle, after warmly congratulating him, announced

that he could do no more for him; that, having given him a profession, he now expected him to make his own way in the world. Ralph was only too eager to begin. He felt like the young author who had just finished writing his first book, and fancies that he has only got to walk in to the nearest publisher's office with his manuscript to reap the reward of his important labours. As a beginning, he became assistant to a practitioner in a small town in Herefordshire; but in less than six months he was back again in London.

"Uncle," he said, "I have come to the conclusion that I can do nothing in England. It's clear that I can't get a practice ready made, without money, any more than you can have a joint of beef for dinner without paying the butcher for it. And to make a practice for myself, that is, to go and carve a big slice out of another man's loaf, for which he has already paid a thousand pounds and finds it scarcely enough to feed him, would be considered a beastly mean trick. And so it is. I know that if I had a practice and some fellow came and settled alongside of me, and stuck up a brass plate on his door with 'Mr. Jones, surgeon,' on it, I should set him down as a pickpocket and a cad, and my toes would tingle to kick him. I don't want to begin life with a reputation of that kind to live down. As for being clever, and making people run after you, that's all rubbish: I might as well try to draw rocks and trees after me by playing on a fiddle or banjo. Those who want cleverness go to Harley Street for it; and your

Harley Street man has had to do a lot of work and spend a lot of money before he gets there. The only way to make people follow you—in England I mean, of course—is to drop sovereigns on the pavement as you walk along. For, you must know, there's an unwritten law about these things which can't be abolished by Act of Parliament, like the purchase system in the army. I must go abroad; there's no help for it, and I've heard that a good dodge is to get a place as a medical man on board of one of the big ocean steamers. The pay is wretched—about enough for 'bacca and drinks, I fancy, but one can see foreign parts; and what I want is to take a sort of bird's-eye view of the globe and finally to pitch upon some spot where a fortune's to be made."

His relation, who was very fond of Ralph, and very proud of his attainments, and always treated him more like a younger brother than a nephew, did not like the thought of losing sight of him, and spoke hotly against his leaving England.

Ralph got up and, deliberately taking a hair in his uncle's whisker between his finger and thumb, plucked it out.

"I say, dash it, Ralph, that hurts," exclaimed the other. "What do you mean by plucking out my hair like that?"

"What's this—do you see?" returned Ralph, holding up the hair close to his uncle's eyes.

"A hair, confound it!" he answered, rubbing his cheek. "I know it's white, but if you are going to pull out all my white hairs—well!"

“Well, uncle, that’s just what you have got to consider—white hairs. You’ve had me to keep, and clothe, and educate all these years out of your wretched screw, and I don’t believe you’ve put by a penny for the old age that’s coming to you—though not just yet. I can’t forget these things myself, and it’s for both our sakes that I intend leaving England, and if I ever prosper, dear old boy, you shall not regret all you have done for me.”

The resolution to leave England had not cost Ralph a single pang; on the contrary he looked forward eagerly to the day when he should bid his home a long farewell. From his boyhood upwards he had always felt the pinch of poverty. He could never afford to dress quite as well as his friends; he seldom had any pocket-money to spend, and so, instead of enjoying himself like others when the time for relaxation came, he was forced to busy himself at home with his books. Or when hungry for amusement and not able to spare even a florin for a seat in the pit of some theatre, he would roam about for hours by himself watching the weird ever-shifting panorama of the night-life of the streets. All the great avenues through which the life of London flows unceasingly were as familiar to him as Oxford Street, “that stony-hearted step-mother,” was to De Quincey. But that was not sufficient to satisfy the craving for pleasure of a young man with an active mind and strong social instincts. He had not one morbid thought; yet sometimes the enforced solitariness of his life made him feel sad.



In winter he played football, and in summer his spare shillings went for boat-hire on the river; but his greatest pleasure was in cricket, for in that game he excelled. His prowess in the field won him many friends, and some were only too anxious to have him in their homes during the holiday time, for the man who is skilful with bat or ball has something angelic in him, which makes him much sought after. But his angelic qualities were of little advantage to Ralph, for there was always the miserable want of money to prevent him from accepting these seductive invitations; and so when his companions of the lecture-room scattered abroad over merry England, he, poor fellow, accompanied his uncle and aunt on a modest trip to some inexpensive seaside place. Only those who have to think not once but many times before parting with half a sovereign, or even with half a crown, can know how galling it is to a young man at a period when pleasure is like the breath of life to him, to have to abstain from things which others about him freely enjoy, and which are almost, but never quite, within his reach. It is more maddening than to the hungry outcast in the bleak street to stand before warmth and light, and tempting dishes separated from him by a thin plate of glass. For this one it is better to close his eyes or to go away into the cold and dark; and to Ralph also it seemed best to remove himself from the sight of that sweet life from which he alone seemed to be excluded, and he therefore waited impatiently for the moment when he should say good-bye to England.

After two months' waiting he got the offer of a berth as doctor on one of the Royal Mail steamers running to South American ports. This was not exactly what he had wanted, for he had desired first of all to see India and the colonies; but he was tired of waiting, and so, in due time, he took his departure for that great continent, which seems as far off and as little known to strangers at home as the Andaman Islands, or the Seychelles which produce *bêche-de-mer* or sea cucumber — that being pretty well all we know about them.

After a voyage of thirty days, during which some intermediate ports were touched at, he arrived at Buenos Ayres, which is far removed from the ocean, and can yet hardly be called an inland city, so vast and sea-like is the river on whose shore it stands. He had expected to find a sleepy sub-tropical Spanish town with people wearing the broadest of broad Panama hats, and smoking cigarettes, and lounging languidly about, as they invariably do in pictures of South American life. But he found instead a city of vast dimensions with all the streets adjoining the water filled with continuous streams of hurrying people, dressed very much as Londoners, and with the same rapt expression of devotion to business illuminating their countenances. The noise was simply deafening. The thunder of heavily-laden vans over the rough pavement of granite cubes, the perpetual jingling of innumerable tram-cars, ear-splitting cries from newsboys, and a thousand other sounds, made it a perfect pandemonium, compared

with which the heart of London seems peaceful and quiet as a country village. He was past the age when noise is loved (according to the philosophers) for its own sake, but he had strong nerves, and all this unexpected stir and racket exhilarated him and filled him with very splendid ideas about the possibilities of the place. And at any moment, by stepping into a tram-car, he could have himself swiftly carried away, out of all this hurly-burly into quiet suburban lanes, with houses embosomed in vines and orange trees, standing in the middle of large gardens. There, too, were broad, green parks and groves of towering eucalyptus, acacia and paradise trees, the last with graceful feathery foliage, and pale, lilac - coloured blossoms filling the warm air with delicate unfamiliar fragrance. Another thing he greatly wondered at in that Spanish-speaking land, so many thousands of miles from home, was the number of English people in it. There were churches, schools, newspapers, a club, a hospital and other things, all English; so that it seemed almost like one of the colonies to him, only with the difference in its favour that he was welcomed with as much warmth by everyone, and made as much of, as if visitors from the mother country were few and far between. The climate was delightful—the name says so—"simply perfect" he was told by a resident he conversed with; and yet—strange contradiction!—there was a great deal of illness in the town, it was in fact a doctor's paradise, and Ralph at once determined to make it his home.

On stating his wishes to the captain of the steamer,

he was told that he could leave the ship if he wished to do so: and, delighted at his easy release, Ralph engaged apartments in the town, not far from the passengers' pier, which ran out a vast distance in the river—a river which no eye could see across; and then quickly transferred his luggage to his new temporary abode. His whole fortune consisted of £150 in cash, his uncle's last parting gift which he had accepted with some reluctance, assuring his kind relation that he would not be asked to make any further sacrifices and promising to return the money at some future time.

To Ralph a prosperous future now seemed certain; he had only to put forth his hands to pluck the golden fruitage, and he forthwith set about preparing himself for the performance of this pleasing task. He knew that he had to appear before the Medical Department, or whatever it called itself, to pass an examination of some description before he could practise in Buenos Ayres; but this gave him very little concern. He had satisfied the London University, and only the time and expense involved had prevented him from taking his degree; what more could South America ask? All he wanted to know was how to get through these necessary but tiresome formalities with as little delay as possible, and at once he thought of Dr. Temple, an old resident in Buenos Ayres, who had been very friendly to Ralph on his first arrival, warmly inviting him to his house in the Calle de Marte. To this gentleman Ralph resolved to repair for counsel and instruction.

## CHAPTER III

### IRIS APPEARS IN THE CLOUDS

**D**R. TEMPLE was fortunately disengaged, and received his young visitor with even more than the genial urbanity he used toward all people which had made him one of the most popular men in the town. Though he had a large and lucrative practice to fill most of his time, and was, moreover, devoted to science, he was one of those who had all their lives a strong predilection for the society of young men, and will even go out of their way to seek it. He was accustomed to say of men many years his juniors, as the fiery Lord Derby once said of his son — that they were too old for him. In Ralph Herne, with whom he had already conversed once or twice, he had discovered a young man after his own heart, one with that natural buoyant disposition which gives a keen zest to the most common pleasures of life, yet coupled with a mind eager after knowledge, and ever restlessly beating against the barriers which Nature sets up in vain, to keep her mysteries sacred from man's intrusive intellect.

Finding in Dr. Temple so friendly and sympathetic a listener, he was soon persuaded to tell briefly the whole story of his life and aspirations, and even mentioned the exact amount of the almost ridiculously

small sum with which he intended to set up in practice in the town.

"You have been a little too sanguine," said the other with a kind smile. "I can assure you that you will find the examination a very stiff one indeed, as you have no personal friends among the examiners, and your London diplomas will be simply ignored. Furthermore, you must be very well up in Spanish, for the searching *viva voce* examination in that language."

"Surely I can have a friend to translate for me?" said Ralph.

"No, unfortunately, you can't. Are you studying Spanish now?"

"I have not begun yet. I did not know all this," he answered sadly, feeling that a douche of very cold water indeed had fallen on him.

"You need not despair. What others have done I presume you can do; but I must tell you frankly that the next ten or twelve months will try your mettle. Don't spend your money — it is scarcely enough; and if you cannot draw on anyone at home, you must manage to live without spending your little capital. Go to work studying Spanish; and in the meantime I will look about to see what there is for you to do. I may possibly be able to find a place as assistant for you, where, if there is no pay attached to it, you will be saved the expense of board and lodging until you can start on your own account. If you can do this, Mr. Herne, I see no reason why you should not be in practice for yourself in about

sixteen or eighteen months' time, and then, if you do not rapidly rise in your profession I am a very bad prophet."

Ralph expressed his thanks, trying hard to shake off the depression caused by the sudden descent of this cloud on his prospects, then rose to take his leave.

"Don't go yet," said Dr. Temple, rising, "I must introduce you to my daughters. They will just be having their afternoon tea now, I think. I always run in at this hour if I can to have a cup with them."

He then led the way into a spacious and charmingly cool sitting-room, with doors and windows opening on to the paved patio, or court-yard, shaded with grape vines.

Dr. Temple was a widower, and his mother, now over eighty years old, kept house for him; for notwithstanding her great age, she was still active and young in spirit, like her son. They found her seated at the tea-table, and her sweet, motherly manner and gentle face, made beautiful by its crown of silver hair, produced a strange feeling in Ralph of being in his own home once more—not that London house he remembered so well, and where he had lived from childhood, but an infinitely dearer, unremembered home in some previous state of existence, where he had lived with, and been loved by, a mother. There were two daughters. Norah, the eldest, who was about twenty-four years old, had dark eyes and hair, and regular features; and there was a formality in her manner towards strangers which gave the im-

pression of primness, or even coldness, to those who only knew her slightly. Her sister Lettice had a very different kind of beauty; she was four or five years younger than her sister, girlish still in her slim figure, and in manner very animated and full of gay spirits, like her father. She was generally allowed to be the most beautiful English girl in the town, but her beauty was of that kind which is quite indescribable, depending less on regularity of feature than on colour and that enchanting variability of expression which often reminds one of the surface of a calm sea lit by slanting rays, so many and so beautiful are its changes. She had not the artist's regular rose-bud mouth; her mouth could almost be called large, and a warm climate had imparted a rich hue to her fair English skin. Her nose, when she looked in the glass, seemed perfectly straight to herself; but her father always maintained that it was slightly "tip-tilted," and this always remained a moot question. Her hair was of a very bright chestnut brown and so wavy and inclined to curl that many individual hairs were always getting loose from their confinement, and these refractory threads looked so golden bright that she was often supposed to have golden hair. Sometimes when she could not succeed in making her tresses rest neatly, she would in her impatience violently rub them with her hands; and the result of this action would be the liberation of so many hairs that they would form a kind of shining halo round her head, and then no one could deny that Lettice had golden hair. Her eyes were, however, her chief



glory; they were grey in colour, but a changeable grey, often with a green light passing over them, like that sometimes seen on water when a thin cloud floats across the sun. They were full of sweet meaning, merry and sad by turns; laughter played over them, and tears seemed near them—sunny, showery April eyes.

So charmed was Ralph with this lovely, gifted girl that he quickly succeeded in forgetting all about his recent disappointment. She was very gracious in her manner to him, and when Dr. Temple left them after drinking his tea he gladly accepted her invitation to sit under the shady vine in the patio. The cool air there was laden with the perfume of rose and jasmine, while large flowering shrubs were massed all round the walls—pelargoniums, hydrangeas, azaleas, and several other species lavish of brilliant-coloured blossoms.

The hours flew by all too quickly in conversation with her, for Miss Temple had left them to pay a visit, and when they were over, Ralph felt that those had been the happiest moments of his life. But he was ashamed to think that his first call had extended to such an unconscionable length, and he made a somewhat confused apology.

Lettice laughed. "I am so glad you came to see us, Mr. Herne," she replied. "You have been so long in Buenos Ayres, and we had heard so much about you, that we came to look on you as an old acquaintance, and began to wonder why you neglected us so. And then we are very deeply in your

debt for retrieving the long-tarnished honours of Buenos Ayres on the cricket-field."

"You are making a great deal of fun of me," said Ralph, at the same time colouring with pleasure.

"Oh no, indeed. We were there, Mr. Herne, in the park, that day, and I never felt more excited in my life. I don't know whether English girls are very fond of cricket or not, for you know I have never been to England, but I simply adore it. And I was so proud and glad that we defeated the country clean this time! They were getting so bumptious over their victories. Besides I had some heavy bets on; for Charlie—Mr. Wendover, I mean—told me that with your bowling we should be sure to win this year; so I have to thank you for all the money I won."

"I daresay the other side were glad to pay," returned Ralph, trying to say something complimentary.

"They were not, indeed," said Lettice, laughing. "I'm really afraid to tell you how much I won for fear you should set me down as a shocking gambler—for that is what Norah and papa call me. But if you hear from anyone else, please remember that we think and bet in dollars, not in pounds, and a dollar with us means—just twopence. I really think I ought to buy you a gold watch with my winnings."

Never had Ralph's achievement with the cricket-ball filled him with such emotions of triumph and joy as now, not even when he had distinguished himself at Lord's before a large gathering of fashionable London society. To cricket, we have seen, he had always been devoted, and in his time the Hospitals

had not produced a better bowler. Immediately after his arrival in Buenos Ayres he had taken part in a match between the officers of the English steamers in the port and an eleven of the cricket club of the town. They had not been accustomed to see such playing as Herne's, and when it became known that he had left the Royal Mail service to become a resident of the town, he was made a member of the club, and secured for the approaching annual match, between Town and Country. It resulted in a very brilliant victory for Buenos Ayres, the first in several years. The ringing English cheers given him in such novel circumstances under that far-off southern sky sounded pleasant enough at the time; but Ralph was accustomed to applause on the cricket field, and he also thought meanly of Buenos Ayrean play—both Town and Country; but now that Lettice had recalled this victory and thanked and praised him for it with her sweet lips, he looked back on the game as the greatest achievement of his life.

After leaving her, he tried very hard to think seriously of his sobered prospects; he could think of nothing but beautiful Lettice Temple. The sweet sickness of love had fastened itself on his soul; and, as is natural in a person in that condition, his only wish and perpetual craving was for larger draughts of that seductive poison of which he had by no means had enough. He was smitten with love, and he knew it, although he had never experienced the feeling like this before; so infinitely precious was his malady to him that he looked with a kind of compassion not

unmixed with contempt on other men, who could not, he imagined, experience an emotion quite like his. That pang in his heart was better than fortune or fame, and it was hard for him to bring down his mind to so trivial a matter as his sobered prospects. And besides, were they really sobered? After all, what difference would a few months make to him? The golden fruitage destined by fate for his hand would be gathered by no other. A bright future had been prophesied for him by Dr. Temple, who was not one likely to make a mistake about a matter relating to his own profession. And lovely Lettice had been so gracious to him, and had warmly invited him to visit them frequently in that delightful house, with its court-yard shaded with old vines; his months of probation, with her society to sweeten his leisure hours, would fly away like a dream. It was plain that she liked him, and might he not hope that this friendly feeling would in time develop to one warmer and infinitely more precious? Like every young man, he had his visions of glory and eternal happiness; let us see whether he was able to make them real or, like unhappy Alnaschar, ruined everything by his own impatience and folly. The kindly interest Dr. Temple had taken in him quickly bore fruit, and before many days Ralph had been received as assistant in Dr. Conabree's house.

This gentleman was a bachelor, and in a very comfortable position. He had grown old in Buenos Ayres, and was excessively fussy and pompous in manner, did not believe much in science, and spoke

with undisguised contempt of medical journals, and new treatments for old diseases. His practice lay principally among the Spanish, who are believers in the old school of medicine, and the wisdom of the ancients generally, and he had fallen into the singular habit of mixing languages when talking in English. "Don't pin your faith to books, *mi amigo*," he would say to Ralph. "Fifty years of practice is worth more than *cincuenta mil* of them. *El papel sufre todo*, say the *hijos del país*, and that is a very good *dicho*. My advice to you is experience, with a certain amount of *sentido común*, and throw all your *libros al demonio*."

His own reading was confined to the morning paper, and he seemed to think the political rubbish it contained the most important matter in the world. Notwithstanding these little drawbacks, it was not impossible to live on pleasant terms with him, while his astounding ignorance of the science of medicine, as Ralph understood it, was a source of constant amusement to his assistant.

The next three months were extremely happy ones for Ralph. He was well occupied studying Spanish and getting "experience"; while his evenings were not unfrequently spent with his new friends at the Calle de Marte, where Dr. Temple always appeared glad to see him. A great many visitors went to the house, and some of these, like himself, appeared to be warm admirers of Lettice Temple. But though she liked young men's society very much, making no concealment about it, she was not a coquette, and no preference for any one of her numerous followers

could be detected in her manner by even the most jealous watchful eye. She appeared to be more intimate with Charlie Wendover than with the others, always calling him by his Christian name; but then Wendover had been intimate with the Temple girls from childhood. His father, a wealthy landlord, had sent him to be educated in England, and during his ten years of school life in the old country he had become a thorough Englishman. Of the vast quantities of knowledge on all subjects poured into him at home he had retained nothing, for Wendover possessed one of those minds that are impervious to knowledge; or, perhaps it would be more correct to say, so open to receive it, that imparting it to them is like pouring water into a sieve. He had not become learned, but he had developed an enthusiastic love for the noble game of cricket, which he played very well, and he had infused fresh life into the Buenos Ayres C.C. on his return from England. His old intimacy with the Temples had very naturally been renewed, and to Herne it seemed that he was more like a brother than a lover in the house.

## CHAPTER IV

### QUINCES AND PASSION FLOWERS

IT was at the end of March, and the autumn weather was still very warm and bright with much of summer in it, when a day's pleasuring on the river, with a picnic on one of the numerous pretty little islands with which it is jewelled above Buenos Ayres, was arranged by a number of young English people of the town. Ralph was asked by the Miss Temples to go in their boat, and was of course only too glad to accept the invitation.

On the appointed day they were favoured with perfect weather, and the party, numbering about thirty in all, proceeded by train to the little port of El Tigre, eighteen miles north of the city. There they engaged boats, and embarked with the hampers, and after two or three hours' labour with the oars rowing against the current, they arrived at a spot on the river studded with small, beautifully-wooded islands, and finally landed on one containing thirty or forty acres of ground, overgrown with a plantation, or rather a wild forest, of old quince trees, every tree laden with great golden fully-ripe quinces, so that the whole air was fragrant with the sweet pungent smell of the fruit. Ralph had already met with

one keen disappointment that morning; on stepping into his boat he found that Wendover had been a little beforehand with him and had secured the seat next to Lettice, to which he had hopefully been looking forward himself. When they disembarked, most of the young people began to scatter about, eager to explore the little wilderness, and Ralph, noticing that Wendover was busily employed getting out the hampers from his boat, hurried away after the Temples thinking that his opportunity had now come. Finding Lettice among the trees hunting for a sweet quince to bite, he proposed that they should take a stroll together about the island.

“Oh, thank you, Mr. Herne, but I promised to wait for Charlie; he knows this place and is going to take me where we can get some passion-flower fruit. But poor Norah has no one just now to protect her from spiders and jaguars, so perhaps you will look after her.” Ralph expressed himself delighted, and hurried off in search of Miss Temple, secretly angry in his heart, however, that “heavy old Wendover,” as he called his friend, was having it all his own way.

Miss Temple was glad to have a guide and protector, being much troubled with fear of snakes and caterpillars—not “spiders and jaguars” as her satirical sister had said; but when Ralph came to her, a curious little smile flitted across her quiet face. He had not come to her, she knew, before going first to someone else; but she liked him very much, and tried to make him forget his disappointment. Strolling



sedately along, without meeting any of their friends, they presently came to higher ground in the middle of the island, where the trees, quince and acacia, were wider apart, and the carpet of dry grass made it a pleasant resting-place. Here they sat together for an hour or so, keeping up a desultory and not very lively conversation. It was a sweet sequestered spot, with only the occasional song, or prolonged call-note, of the bien-te-veo tyrant-bird and the drowsy humming of the large carpenter bees for sound. They were under a thorn tree, half covered with a scarlet flowering creeper, and round it a dozen or twenty large red butterflies were slowly sailing or pursuing each other, like swallows round the tower of a church. But all this beauty and peace of Nature was thrown away on Ralph; his mind was away with Lettice, and the more he thought of her the more exasperated did he grow. He was not jealous—he could not be jealous of “heavy old Wendover,” for it was simply impossible to believe that such a bright spiritual being as she could really love a fellow without six ideas in his brain, and with nothing but a good-natured handsome face to recommend him. He had a fortune of course, but then Lettice was above such considerations as that. No, he was not in the least jealous, but it was excessively irritating to be kept from her side all day.

Presently a little bird, a kind of tanager, flew to a perch within a dozen yards of where they sat, and began to peer curiously at them. Its whole plumage was of a bright glossy cornflower blue, only on its

head there was a cap of silvery-white feathers, and a crimson spot like a ruby on the forehead.

“Just look, Mr. Herne! Did you ever see such a lovely little bird?” exclaimed Miss Temple.

Ralph agreed with her that it was a pretty bird, but did not seem very enthusiastic in his admiration. It soon flew away, after which they dropped into a rather long interval of silence. Then a second little bird paid them a brief visit, a bush-shrike, modest in colour, with a white bosom barred with chestnut. It perched on a twig near them, and gave utterance to a long note in which it seemed to imitate the sound produced by wringing water from a wet cloth.

Miss Temple laughed. “Did you ever hear such a strange and funny note from a bird?” she asked. “It *was* strange and very amusing,” said Ralph, staring gloomily at the twig, from which the singular vocalist had already vanished. Miss Temple looked at him, and the little smile flitted once more over her face. Just then they heard a pistol shot, fired to warn the strollers that luncheon was ready, and Ralph started up with alacrity to conduct his companion back to the landing-place, where they found the cloth spread on the green sward near the water. The others all soon came trooping in, eager to display their treasures, and to recount the adventures they had met. The entomologist of the party, a priggish young schoolmaster, was the hero of the hour. He had discovered a nest, “twice as big as a man’s head,” of the small paper-making honey-wasp, the *lecheguana*; and had examined it minutely and closely, “in order

to observe the economy of those highly-interesting little social insects." The interesting little insects, flattered at his attention, had returned the compliment by inflicting sundry stings on his nose and forehead; and to these marks of distinction—a constellation of rose-coloured blotches—he proudly called the attention of his less favoured fellow-explorers. Ralph alone had no trophies to exhibit and no adventures to relate. Lettice was seated on the grass, nearly opposite to him, still alongside of that confounded Wendover, who appeared to imagine that she belonged exclusively to him, and he could not take his eyes from her. She had been revelling among the wild passion flowers, and seemed to have caught from contact something of their strange mysterious beauty. She was decorated with flowers; her straw hat was dressed with them, and about her neck, bosom, and waist she had wound the long twine-like stem covered at the same time with palmate leaves, curling tendrils, brilliant golden-yellow fruit, and great white and blue starry blossoms. She looked more like some immortal nymph of the woods, the genius of that lovely island perhaps, than a mere human creature. Ralph was intoxicated with her loveliness; but as he sat there, vainly trying to catch the words she addressed to those near her, neglecting his food, and imprudently consuming glass after glass of hock, he was in danger of being overtaken by another and grosser form of intoxication. When luncheon was at length over, the ladies drifted away again to the shade of the adjacent trees, most of them still attended

by their cavaliers. Lettice went and seated herself not far off, on the grass, to arrange her flowers, still accompanied by her faithful swain, who, briar-pipe in mouth, stretched himself out at her side, with an exasperating expression of drowsy contentment on his open countenance. Ralph with a few others remained—the lover with those who were not in love—rage in his heart and a rather formidable array of empty wine bottles in his neighbourhood. Presently someone proposed that they should carry back a supply of quinces in the boats, sufficient for each member of the party to take home five or six dozen with him. “Baked in the oven and eaten with sugar they are simply delicious,” he affirmed. This was agreed to by all, and immediately most of the men began gathering the finest quinces they could select and bringing them down in loads to the water’s edge. Now the island was private property, but the owner happened to be away on a neighbouring island close by, where he lived. He had been a close observer of the doings of the picnickers, and had not proposed to interfere with their pleasure until he remarked that they were helping themselves rather too liberally to his fruit, which he sold for preserves to the fruiterers in the town. He now jumped into his boat, and began to row across the channel dividing the two islands, which was five or six hundred yards across. He was an old man, with a white beard and shining bald head, for he wore no hat, and as he approached, his angry gestures and excited screeching brought the fruit-gatherers to the water-side. Suddenly

Wendover, who had up till now been merely an amused spectator, sprang to his feet. "I say" he shouted, "let us prevent the old boy from landing," and down he ran to the water-side and placed himself over a pile of quinces. The others followed his example, glad to take part in the fun, and when the ancient boatman came near enough, he was received with a shower of quinces, hurled with such vigour and good aim that he was in considerable danger of being knocked senseless in his boat. While this fight was going on, amidst cheers and shouts of laughter from the shore, and yells and other demonstrations of rage from the courageous old man, who still vainly struggled to effect a landing, Ralph quietly, but with slightly unsteady steps, went and sat down by Lettice. His opportunity had come at last; and she seemed so pleased—relieved, he fancied—to have him there! How tired she must have grown of having old Wendover's company and of the things "easy to understand" he talked about! The joy he experienced at being alone with her, the sudden reaction from that troubled, resentful mood he had been in, the wine he had drunk, now combined to carry him beyond himself.

"Lettice—may I call you Lettice?" he said—"how those passion flowers become you! And I have been also wearing them all day long—wearing them in my heart, I mean. Is it late in the year for my flowers, Lettice? Will there be no sunshine to ripen them into fruit, like those you have there—ruby-hearted, with a rind of fiery gold! But how much

more beautiful and sweeter to the taste than the flowers and fruit you are wearing! Lettice—dearest Lettice, will you not let me hope that there will be sunshine?”

Her face, bright as the day a moment before, had suddenly clouded. “Mr. Herne!” she interrupted, turning her eyes full on him, “you are saying too much. I did not understand you, or I should have checked you sooner. What reason have I given you to speak to me in this way?”

Instantly he was sobered. His exaltation of mind forsook him, and he cast his eyes down, his heart filled with a sudden bitter sense of defeat and humiliation.

“None whatever,” he replied, in a strangely altered voice. “It was only my blind, mad presumption that led me to hope—to say such things to you.”

“No, don’t say that, Mr. Herne,” she answered, placing her hand on his. “It was only a little mistake we must now forget all about. Let us be as we were before, and friends always.”

At that moment triumphant shouts and laughter from the shore told that the contest was over, that the old man, unable to land, had been driven off. Ralph, gazing after his retreating form—for he had risen now with Lettice—experienced a strange feeling of compassion and sympathy for the old man in his defeat. Yet he wondered at it, for even if all those plundered quinces had been of the purest gold, with precious stones for seeds, how small would the loss

of them have been to the beaten old man compared with his own great loss!

Slowly, and without speaking more, they went down together to where the others were engaged stowing away the fruit and hampers in the boats, and before long the little fleet was on its way, swiftly gliding down stream with the current.

## CHAPTER V

### DESPONDENCY CORRECTED

**H**ERNE did not recover his spirits on the return journey, and when he went to bed that night he could not sleep, but lay for hours thinking of the unspeakable folly he had been guilty of in rushing into such a premature declaration of love. No doubt he had disgusted her, he thought, and for ever destroyed all chance of winning her. For he could not lay the flattering unction to his soul that he had not proposed to her and been rejected. He had been a fool—mad—drunk perhaps, but such an insane delusion as that would be he could not cherish. She had understood his metaphors and his meaning as well as if he had gone down on his knees in the good old-fashioned way and made a formal offer of his heart and hand in plain matter-of-fact language. She had rejected him and there was an end of the matter; and she had been so much to him, and the hope that she would one day be all he wished had given such a savour to his life that the end was exceeding bitter. And what would Dr. Temple's opinion be when he came to hear of the matter? Doubtless it would be, that the needy adventurer he had so generously assisted by thus prematurely snatching at his daughter's affections had proved himself utterly unworthy of the friendship shown to



him. This thought so preyed on Ralph's mind and proved so intolerable that long before daylight he got up, and, lighting his reading-lamp, sat down to compose a letter to the friend whose kindness he had abused. He did not attempt to extenuate his fault; he acknowledged it with bitter self-blame, and related how, in a moment of excitement, he had forgotten all prudent considerations, and had declared the passion he had secretly cherished in his heart. It was very galling to have to write such a letter, but it relieved his mind somewhat, and early in the morning it was sent to Dr. Temple by a messenger. In the course of the day he received a reply in which the doctor said: "I am quite of your opinion that you made a serious mistake yesterday; at the same time, I believe you have taken the most effectual, perhaps the only way of remedying it. But for your letter, I should most probably have remained in complete ignorance of the whole affair, for my daughter had preserved silence, and when I questioned her she expressed surprise, and even regret, that you had thought it necessary to speak about it. For my part, I think your letter does credit to your honourable feelings. We must, my dear young friend, all make mistakes in life, just as we must all swallow a peck of dirt before we die; but it would be unwise to brood over them or to remember them too long. I therefore hope that what has happened will now be left behind, and that you will not commit the second mistake of imagining that our friendship cannot survive so slight a shock, and of keeping aloof from us. My

daughter's account of what happened agrees with your own, and I can make any allowance for a young man placed as you were; for I still, I am glad to be able to say, feel myself a young man in spirit, although when you come to be in consultation with me some day, you will, perhaps, set me down as a very old one." This letter was balm to Ralph's wounded spirit, for such sweet reasonableness is seldom experienced by a penniless young man from the father of the beautiful girl whom he had aspired to win. Nevertheless, he could not overcome his mortification so far as to resume his visits at the pleasant house in Calle de Marte, nor could he altogether disguise the secret melancholy that preyed on him from his most intimate friends. He was very assiduous in his duties as an assistant and in his studies, but he gave up visiting, feeling that he could not very well go to other houses, where the Temples also visited, while absenting himself from their house. Wendover, his greatest friend, who went very frequently to see him, noticed this change in him, but was, of course, ignorant of its cause. One evening when he had come in to spend an hour with Ralph, he said, "Herne, I can't help remarking that you are not quite in your usual spirits. You've been bothered about something, I daresay. Don't think I'm asking you to tell me anything you'd prefer keeping to yourself; but I say, old man, if it's only a money trouble, you ought to know that I'd be only too glad to help you, and I wish you'd let me."

Ralph felt this kindness so keenly that, after a

little hesitation, he was tempted to unburden his mind, and told his friend the cause of his dejection, which was not one that money could help.

"My dear fellow," said the other, "why in the name of goodness didn't you tell me of this fancy for Lettice before? If you had confided in me, that affair at the island would not have taken place, for I would have told you that she was already engaged to me."

"Engaged to you!" exclaimed Ralph, staring at him.

"Yes, why not engaged to me?" returned Wendover, somewhat hurt at his friend's incredulous and astonished tone. "That is to say, she has promised not to engage herself to any other person for a year; then she will give me a definite answer. You see it happened in this way: she—I mean I—but never mind, I don't need to go into all that, only it's just as I have said!"

"Then you are not engaged to her, or she to you rather!" exclaimed Ralph, with a ring of returning hope in his voice.

"Herne," said his friend, after a pause of some moments and with a cloud of trouble on his face, "do you actually mean to try to cut me out in spite of what you have just told me and—and of our friendship?"

Ralph did not answer at once; he sat staring at the floor while a struggle went on in his breast. At length he replied in a saddened tone: "No, Charlie, I have no such intention. My chances were poor enough, anyway, and I was mad to put them to

the touch. That ends the matter, and I must resign all hopes of winning her. You know that I have not been to the house since the picnic, and I am not likely to become a visitor there again, so that I at any rate shall not be in your way." He was about to conclude with a wish that his friend's wooing would end more fortunately than his own, but the words stuck in his throat. They were not needed, however; Wendover seized his hand and gave it a grip expressive of relief, gratitude and various friendly feelings, but very hard to endure.

When alone again he sat down to meditate on the situation. The result of his friend's visit was a deeper dejection than ever. Hitherto he had been accustomed to regard himself as an exceptionally clever young man who would not meet with much difficulty in becoming possessed of anything he might chance to set his heart on in his passage through life. The affection he had felt for his friend had an element of condescension in it; and now heavy old Wendover had triumphed all along the line! All this seemed very strange and bitter. He had made a mighty fool of himself at that unfortunate picnic, of course, but his offence—never an unpardonable one in a lady's eyes—had been forgiven. The Temples still regarded him with the most friendly feelings; his confidence in himself had received a rude shock, but hope had not been slain after all. Why had he now deliberately sacrificed that precious hope on the altar of a friendship which was not very much to him? Had he not in this act fallen into another mistake far more

disastrous to his happiness than that mistake on the island? He groaned aloud, and dropped his head on the table; for a whole hour he continued in that desponding attitude, but when he lifted his face again there was a smile on his lips.

“Eternal Hope! when yonder spheres sublime——” he began, then suddenly checked himself. “No, I can’t quote Campbell now,” he continued. “I have outgrown my boyish taste for that high-flown kind of stuff. But at some future time, when months, perhaps years, have gone by, when the golden prize has slipped from Wendover’s hands, then I shall say, ‘Now my long weary forever is over,’ and I shall again tell her that the passion flowers have not yet withered in my heart, but are ever waiting, pale and sorrowful, for the sunshine that shall turn them into golden ruby-hearted fruit.”

Winter came apace, not with frost and snow and blighting east wind, like the winters of the Old World in the far north, but yet cold enough to remind one that Buenos Ayres was a good many degrees removed from the equator; and through the chilly months of June, July and August, Ralph, keeping bravely on his way, with his eyes fixed on the goal, never once went near Lettice. During all these months he did not see her more than half a dozen times, and that was only at the English church, when, by chance, on coming out they happened to be near together. And on each occasion she turned on him a look half inquiring and half reproachful, and for days and weeks afterwards that momentary expression of her

eyes would return to him and haunt his memory. September came at last, when Ralph was to go before the Medical Department. The spring had thus far been sultry and excessively unhealthy in the city, but the day on which Ralph was to go for his examination was a very bright and beautiful one. Dr. Conabree stood in the breakfast-room chatting pleasantly with him.

“I must, *de algún modo*, manage to-day without you, I suppose,” he said, “and there are so many *pacientes* just now that I must run away soon. You have dropped down here at a fortunate time, fortunate *quiero decir* for doctors. Ah, *mi amigo* Herne, when I first came here thirty-five years ago, this town was a quiet, healthy *pueblito*; no politics, speculation, luxury—things to make a man die *antes de su tiempo*. You are lucky, lucky; the harvest is ready *como dice la Biblia*, and all you have got to do is to put in your—your *hoz* to reap a fortune!”

“Do you know what I think, Dr. Conabree?” said Ralph. “This immense, over-crowded town, built on a level plain, without even the faintest apology for a drainage system and with no proper water supply, is soon destined to be visited by an epidemic of some kind that will decimate the population—a visitation far more terrible even than the Great Plague of London.”

Dr. Conabree laughed. “Where would we be then?” he said. “We are too busy as it is now. You are young, Herne, and your imagination flies away *á las nubes* with you. I know it all, *porque yo también he*

*sido joven.* And now good morning — *y vaya con Dios.*” And after warmly shaking hands with his assistant, he bustled away.

Ralph went out with a firm, elastic step and a proud light in his eye—such a light as had often shone there when he had stepped on to the green springy turf at Lord’s or the Oval before thousands of spectators. He was going forth to fight for a nobler prize now. He would prove to Dr. Temple that the “stiff” examination of Buenos Ayres was not so very stiff to Ralph Herne; and then, that matter being disposed of, he would be, at last, on the threshold of that mysterious future towards which he had long been looking—that world of glorious possibilities, divine shadows and forms of mist that would one day be realities, and divinest of all, a form that turned to him grey eyes, ever with a questioning, reproachful look in them.

## CHAPTER VI

“FACILIS DESCENSUS AVERNI”

**T**HREE months had passed since Ralph had gone forth so confidently on that September morning. It was an hour past noon—the hottest hour of an exceptionally hot day — when, miles away from the noise and bustle of the streets, he was seated on a bench under a clump of willow trees at the northern extremity of the park called Palermo. The seat was not far from a carriage drive, but no person besides Ralph was in sight. It was far too sultry just then for anyone to be abroad. The air danced and quivered with a silvery glitter before his eyes; but the leaves of the trees were motionless, and the only sounds heard were the drowsy hum of the carpenter bee in the foliage overhead, the occasional querulous calls of a young bird waiting for the parent birds to bring it food, and, far away in a dusty roadside hedge, the stridulous harping of a cicada—sounds which only served to make the noon-day silence of Nature seem more profound and impressive. To that sequestered spot at that hot hour he had come to think; and from his appearance it could have been easily guessed that his thoughts were gloomy in the extreme. His dress was dusty and disordered, while in his colourless haggard face, set lips and eyes closed, though not in sleep, could



plainly be seen the desolate beaten man who has begun to look upon self-destruction as the only way of escape from shame and misery. In three short months he had travelled very far on the downward path—*Facilis descensus Averni!* Even now he was pondering on the truth of those ancient words. The decline had commenced very shortly after we last saw him; for he had failed utterly—in the judgment of his examiners—and he could not practise in Buenos Ayres. And his failure had fallen on him like a stunning blow. Everything had depended on the diploma. He had no more money to carry him over another year, yet that was what he thought least about. In spite of having resigned Lettice with his lips, in his secret heart he had continued to hope that she would one day be his. She had not bound herself irrevocably to Wendover; what was there then to prevent him from hoping, now when he was about to be received into her father's profession, in which no doubt he would in time distinguish himself? But the career and position which would justify him in going to Lettice again had now faded away once more into the dim and distant future, for he had failed and could hope no longer. He could not hide his depression from his friends, and they made the usual comforting comments suitable on the occasion. "They are a set of *estupidos*," said Dr. Conabree. "Take it *con calma*, and go up again in a year; they will not plough you a second time. They are jealous of the English, *porque somos mejores que ellos*, and when they have a chance they are down on

us. *No importa*, Herne, keep up your spirits." But in spite of his ostentatious sympathy, the old man was not now as kind and considerate as he had been. He was a little jealous of his assistant, with his modern ideas and new-fangled methods, and Herne suspected that he privately rejoiced over his defeat. He became irritable too, and one day when he went as far as to say that he was not going to be dictated to by a mere boy "with his science, *y qué sé yo*," Ralph in a temper left him, and so there was an end to that connection. He could not go again for advice and assistance to Dr. Temple, so that now, for the first time in his life, he felt utterly alone in the world, and did not know where to turn for comfort. Wendover still stuck to him—"like a leech" he sometimes bitterly said; but his friend's clumsy condolences were almost hateful to him. It seemed a little too much for human nature that these two, in love with the same woman, should continue on the old footing of intimate loving friends. Ralph began to have some bitter thoughts about Wendover, suspecting that he was not displeased at the turn things had taken, and he consequently kept out of his way as much as possible. Locking himself up alone in his rooms, he would sit for hours brooding over the great injustice which had been done him; and finally his thoughts would always wander to that pleasant house in Calle de Marte, where the other was always a welcome guest. For Wendover had money and prospects; Ralph had nothing, or at any rate only brains, and brains it appeared were not much valued in Buenos

Ayres. His friend was a good fellow, no doubt, handsome, ruddy-faced, well-formed—quite an athlete, in fact, and extremely popular with everybody. Of course Lettice would marry him; as Mrs. Wendover she would have anything a woman wants—a fine house, carriage, box at the opera—what would it matter about the rest? “Finer thoughts” could not pay for fashionable dresses and jewellery. They were all alike, the shallow-hearted sex—Lettice was no exception. So thought Ralph, grown cynical all at once. With such thoughts for only company, the solitude of his apartments grew intolerable to him; society of some kind became necessary, and he had not to go far to seek it. Close by his lodgings there was a hotel where several Englishmen were accustomed to meet every evening in the billiard room; all more or less agreeable fellows, who had seen a great deal of life; a few of them gentlemen by birth, but for some mysterious reason under a cloud. Ralph was slightly acquainted with some of them, having met them on the cricket ground and other places, but never in the private houses where he visited. The society of these new friends was a solace to him; a game at pool would last half the evening and interested him so much that it made him forget his trouble. Besides, he soon found out that he was a very great favourite with them; they looked up to him as to a kind of hero. Such bowling as Ralph’s they said had never been seen in South America, at all events south of the equator, Demerara being a land they knew little about. It was no wonder that Buenos Ayres

duffers were envious of him; and Ralph continued to meet them every evening, spending his days meanwhile in listless inaction.

Before very long he fell into the habit of going to their rooms to play cards after closing-time at the hotel, and, being a skilful whist player, he was often a winner. When fortune smiled on him he was much elated, for he was a very young, unseasoned gambler; but when he lost he became excited and angry, for he could not help remembering that between him and absolute destitution there was now only a small fast-diminishing fund. As a rule they played until three or four o'clock in the morning, sometimes to a much later hour, and Ralph was frequently seen and recognised by those who went early to business, returning to his rooms looking pale and haggard and walking somewhat unsteadily. He had long ceased visiting his friends, but for some time he was not aware that his changed manner of life was known in every English home where he had been made welcome. It was a big town, but he could not hide himself and his habits in it. The knowledge came to him at last. Formerly, when out walking he had always got a smile, or wave of the hand, from a passing acquaintance, and friends were always stopping him to shake hands and speak a few words. Now all this was changed. Every day he saw and recognised people he had met, but somehow they never saw him; they would pass him by, looking straight before them; and at last Ralph began to understand that he was a marked man, and that all

those of his circle who were worth knowing had dropped him. This made him savage. In London, a young man can always do as he pleases, and no person presumes to cast a stone at him. What right had these upstarts—many of them only tradesmen after all, who would not have had him as a visitor in London—to elevate their eyebrows and pass him by because he preferred to live in his own fashion? His anger made no difference; the little English community in the town was not London, but had its own customs, and had set up a Mother Grundy of its own not quite like the original. He had deliberately chosen a set of shady people to associate with, and so, with a few expressions of regret for his weakness, or of contempt for his folly, respectable people resolved to drop him.

Dr. Temple felt the unhappy change in his young friend most keenly, but when asked by his daughters to do something, he refused to interfere. "If a man is such a lunatic as to refuse to swim when he knows how, there is no hope for him," he said, "he must sink; it would be only a waste of energy to throw him a rope."

"Oh, papa, that is not like you!" Lettice had replied. "You are always so kind to everyone; how can you say such a cruel thing?"

"Do you wish to know the philosophy of it, my girl?" he returned. "Well, then, take the case of a young spendthrift who goes to the dogs as fast as he can, and at last is thrown into prison. His friends say, 'Ah, poor fellow; so good, nobody's enemy but

his own. What a pity; if a sovereign or two could get him out,' and so on, and so on. His father only says, 'Serve him right, the ungrateful young scamp. Not a penny from me; let him rot!' His father, you see, has loved him and done much for him; and if I had never cared much about this young man I should have spoken differently."

"But, papa," she still pleaded, "this is not a question of giving money, but only kind words; a little timely advice from you——"

"Tush, child!" he answered. "Have I not used words, kind encouraging words, both spoken and written? I cast my pearls before him, knowing him to be no swine, and yet he has trampled them under-foot. Think no more about him, Lettice."

And so their sad conversation ended, and the subject was not again mentioned.

One evening Ralph had a grand quarrel. He had won a considerable sum at whist, his favourite game, but was afterwards induced to play at loo. In a very short time he lost everything, not only his winnings of the evening, but all the money he possessed in the world. The largest winner was a person named Saffery, a man who had begun life as a solicitor in England, and had been struck off the rolls for fraudulent practices. This was known to his associates, including Ralph, but it made no difference to them. He was a keen gambler, and had resented Ralph's previous luck, and now in his moment of triumph he could not help taunting his opponent. Herne, excited by drink, and secretly enraged at having

lost, retorted with an allusion to Saffery's antecedents. The other answered with a blow. Herne, roused to a perfect frenzy of passion, rushed on him, but was balked of his revenge, being held back by the others present, while Saffery pocketed his winnings and made his escape. Ralph went home that night in a dire rage, vowing that he would thrash the scoundrelly card-sharper to within an inch of his life, and then—and then he would quit the town forever, and perhaps go away to the frontier and enlist as a soldier to fight the Indians.

Next morning he was lying awake in bed, still raging in his heart, and mentally braying his adversary in a mortar, when one of his gambling friends dropped in to see him.

"I've just been to the Central Station," he said, "and whom do you think I met there? Saffery, by Jove, off to the provinces. He made his pile last night, and I fancy he's rather afraid of you, and so he has skedaddled. Are you coming round this evening, old man?"

"I'll think about it when the time comes," replied Herne; and then his visitor left him.

Presently he got up and dressed himself, and without taking any refreshment, he went down to the water-side, anxious to escape from the streets and the hateful sight of his fellow-creatures. Keeping on the sands, he walked on and on, unmindful of the burning sun overhead, until the city was left far behind, and finally going into the park, he sat down under the willows. Sitting there alone, on that hot

December day, his thoughts were more bitter than wormwood and gall. His little capital was all spent now, and that larger capital of hope, that resolute spirit which had brought him so far from home, and the numerous friends he had won—all were lost, thrown away forever, in a few weeks of miserable madness! Now he was, in very truth, a stranger in a strange land, crushed to the earth; and his only wish was to hide himself away from the sight of his fellow-men, to escape from that bitter sense of defeat and humiliation which tortured him and urged him more and more importunately to take some desperate irrevocable step.

Hour after hour went by; the carpenter bee still hummed its monotonous song; the sun declined, and the shadow of the trees grew long behind him, then a soft tempering breeze came up from the river and whispered in the foliage, while he still sat there motionless, unable to form any decision, thinking his bitter vain thoughts. Carriages filled with gaily-dressed ladies began to drive past more and more frequently, and occasionally a party of riders galloped by; but he took no notice of the people, they passed him by like shadows, and he did not even know that he had sat there for several hours and that the fashionable hour for driving had filled the park with people. At length a group of riders came by, cantering over the ground about fifty yards from his seat; looking at them in a dazed unheeding way, he saw one, a lady, drop behind the others, and turn her horse towards him. A gentleman in the party then turned



and joined her, but after a few moments he left her alone, and rejoined the others, while she slowly came up to within a few yards of the spot where he sat.

“Mr. Herne, will you come to me! I want to speak to you,” he heard her say.

It was Lettice Temple! He stared at her with dimmed eyes, astonished that she should speak to him there in that public place. Her face seemed to him like the face of a goddess, so bright did it look in its loveliness, smiling at him, yet with a great sorrow and compassion in it. He rose from his seat, and for a few moments his head swam so that he had to catch at the bench to hold himself upright, so long had he sat there fasting and motionless in the great heat. But recovering presently, he went to her.

When he took the hand she offered him, he felt it tremble in his, then looking up into her face he noticed that it had become deadly pale.

“What is it you wish to say to me, Miss Lettice?” he asked.

“Oh! Mr. Herne, I felt brave enough for anything a minute ago, but now the fear that you will be angry with me is making me a coward.”

“Angry with you, Miss Lettice!” and he looked up with a very sad smile.

“Mr. Herne,” she said, reassured by his looks, and bending down towards him, “tell me, have you no mother, no sisters——”

“No, thank God, I have nobody,” he replied.

“Oh! please don’t say that; you have a friend at least.”

“Wendover? Oh! yes, I have a friend,” and Ralph here uttered a little joyless laugh.

“No, no, I didn’t mean Charlie—I didn’t mean any man,” she returned quickly, the bright crimson suffusing her face. “Do you not regard me as your friend? Oh! Mr. Herne—Ralph—let me call you Ralph—for my sake can you not—can you not——?” But here the tears rushed to her eyes and she ceased speaking.

“For your sake, can I not do what? Lettice, I could die for you,” he returned.

“And not live?”

“Yes, and live. You are brave to come and speak to me here, Lettice, and—I can’t do less than spare you the pain of saying what you came to say to me. Listen to this, Lettice; if I promise you to live a new life from this moment, to strive always to be worthy of your friendship, will you trust me and have faith in me always, even to the end, whatever others may say or think of me—however poor and unfortunate I maybe?”

“Yes, Ralph, I will believe in you and have faith in you always—always. Oh! I thank God that I saw you here to-day and came to speak to you; for now you have promised, and I know, Ralph, that you will keep that word—till you die.”

And then, when he had taken her hand and looked up once more into her beautiful face, wet with tears, she left him and cantered away to rejoin her companions. He stood gazing after her until she was lost to sight, then, leaving the park on the east side, he retraced his way to the city along the sands.

## CHAPTER VII

### AN EVENING ON THE PIER

**R**ALPH walked very slowly and revolving many things in his mind, so that he did not reach his apartments until the bright brief summer twilight was changing to darkness; then when he had appeased the cravings of hunger, he threw himself on his bed and fell into a deep, prolonged sleep. Next morning he remembered, on waking, that all his money was gone, and so, with a few valuable articles he possessed, including his watch and chain and a seal ring left to him by his father, he set forth in search of that last refuge of the impecunious, the Monte de Piedad of Buenos Ayres, and was there accommodated with a roll of very limp and dusty-looking provincial bank-notes—each one hundred dollar note worth just sixteen shillings. After breakfasting cheaply at a small French restaurant, he returned to his room and passed the day in reading and putting his things in order, not yet able to decide on his future course of action. His gambling friend of the day before called again to “look him up,” but Ralph quickly got rid of him. Finally he dressed with care and went to get some dinner; and afterwards, taking his pipe and a book, strolled on to

the pier, where it was always cool and pleasant in the evening.

All day long he had felt a strange and novel sensation in his heart, a consciousness that he had been acting with unspeakable folly, so that the past three months now appeared to him like a repulsive dream; and yet he was almost glad that he had so acted, so inexpressibly sweet was the remembrance of the tears shed for him, and of the words of sympathy and trust spoken to him by the girl he loved so ardently. He knew that she could not be his; and it is undoubtedly the case that to most men an offer of friendship from the person they wish to marry seems like the veriest mockery; but to Ralph it was not so, her friendship was to him now the most precious thing in the world, and the thought of it filled his heart with a wonderful happiness.

He sat down on one of the benches and opened his book, but he read little, for his thoughts were still away in the park, and before his mind's eye still came the image of Lettice bending down to speak those brave, sweet words that had saved him.

Presently he saw Frank Barry, a young fellow he knew, or rather whom he had known in better days, come walking by. Barry cast down his eyes, and was passing on without a sign of recognition; then he gave a sidelong glance at Ralph, and finally, altering his mind, came up and shook hands with him.

"You've been out of town, I suppose; haven't seen you for an age," said Barry, speaking in a somewhat nervous, uncomfortable way.

“I fancy you have, though,” returned Ralph, “at all events, I’ve seen you about several times lately.”

“Have you?” said the other. “I’m an awful duffer for passing people without knowing them. Sort of absent-mindedness, I suppose.”

Ralph laughed. “The fact is,” he answered, “I’ve been making an ass of myself for some time past—sowing my wild oats, or something. But you needn’t be afraid to give me a nod now, Barry, I’m in my right mind again, and if in the future you ever see me in any other mind, you may safely say that miracles have not ceased.”

Barry could only look at him, he was not a ready or fluent speaker, and did not know what to say suitable for the occasion. Then he took off his hat and let the wind blow on his forehead, which was exceedingly white, and contrasted strangely with his very brown face—brown as a berry, his punning friends were always telling him. At last he found his speech and began in a hesitating way, “I say, Herne, if you knew what an awful fix we’re in just now; and what we’re to do to get out of it I don’t know. You didn’t mean, I suppose, when you said all that, that you wouldn’t mind just playing once for us as an awful favour? Dowling’s got his leg broken by a fall from his horse—bother him! though I pity him very much, and all that, of course; but he might have taken more care of himself all the same. And now we haven’t a decent bowler; and you know, Herne, what you did for us before, and if you’re

going to turn over a new leaf and that sort of thing, I wonder whether you'd mind, just for once, as an awful favour, to help us out of this—this——”

“Confound it, Barry, what a long time you are beating about the bush!” exclaimed Ralph with a laugh. “If you really wish me to play in the park next week, and the other fellows are agreeable, I'll do it gladly.”

“You don't mean it!” ejaculated Barry, jumping up from his seat and seizing both of Ralph's hands, to the astonishment of two dignified old native gentlemen who had just sat down beside them. “By Jove, old fellow, you are in your right mind now! Do you mind my leaving you at once? It seems awfully ungrateful, I know, but I must telegraph to the other fellows, as it's too late to catch them in town now. Won't we give the other side a licking next week! They thought they'd have it all their own way as old Dowling was out of it. Good-bye, Herne, a million thanks for your goodness.”

And then, after nearly crushing Ralph's fingers, the enthusiastic cricketer rushed back to the city.

Left alone again, Ralph turned to his book; but the pier was now thronged with weary city people coming out to inhale the fresh river breeze, and he did not fail to notice an acquaintance here and there in the crowd. These all passed him by; but presently two young fellows came along who had just met Barry, wildly tearing along to the telegraph office, and he had stopped to inform them, in a few scarcely coherent sentences, that Herne, the champion bowler,

had turned over a new leaf, and was going to play in the B. A. eleven the following week.

These two now came up to Ralph to renew their acquaintance with him. And he was very glad to have them there to talk to. Since the lifting of that great cloud from his life the strange gladness that had come to him exhilarated his fancy like wine. His thoughts flew away from the dull volume before him, and he experienced the inspiration which comes on occasions to the gifted talker as well as to the poet. His friends were soon under the spell of his bright fancy and fluent speech, and those three seemed to be having such a pleasant time together that, by-and-by, others joined them. They had walked on unnoticing a short time ago, but now, seeing their friends freely conversing and merrily laughing with him, they remembered how much they had formerly enjoyed Herne's amusing prattle, and laid aside their scruples. Before that little conclave on the pier broke up, the short twilight had changed to darkness, the stars were out, and the thousand lamps of the city were shining over the water, while domes and spires and roofs were painted in black silhouette against the bright, amber-coloured western sky.

When they had, at length, all left him, not however before some of his newly-recovered friends had tried to take him away with them, Ralph, resting his arms on the balustrade, looked out northwards over the water. His eyes wandered along the shore, with its dark cliff overgrown with trees, until they came to a spot where they rested. There, hard by that

bend in the heavy line of foliage, was the spot where Lettice riding in the park had found him, and in full sight of all those fashionable people driving past, had talked with him—a lost miserable wretch abandoned by all men. “Ah! sweet saviour,” he murmured, “already your magic has begun to work! I am poor, very poor, now, alone in this strange land, and unable even to sit down to a game of cards in the hope of winning a meal; but never, never will that sacred promise be broken, Lettice. Never, never will the sweet image of your tearful face in the park fade out of my mind—*till I die, till I die.*”



## CHAPTER VIII

### BRITTLE FRIENDSHIP

**T**HE cricket match, at which there was a very large attendance, resulted, as Barry had prophesied, in a great victory for his side. Against Wendover's batting and Herne's miraculous bowling no country eleven stood a chance. Wendover received great applause, but the ovation given to Herne at the conclusion of the game expressed something more than the mere pleasure the spectators had taken in seeing his excellent play. Several carriages of natives had drawn up near the field, and the game was watched by the occupants with some interest, although to this day cricket is a profound mystery to the Spanish-American mind; what most puzzled these impartial lookers-on was the enthusiastic reception accorded to Herne on all sides on that Saturday afternoon. His first appearance had caused a good deal of surprise, and was much commented on by those who knew him. "Didn't they say that young Herne had gone to the bad altogether?" was asked on all sides; but when playing began it was soon seen that he was clothed (in flannels) and in his right mind once more; and on this trying occasion he certainly showed no falling off in his play.

Wendover, who had seen him frequently during his degenerate days, could not contain his astonishment at the sudden wonderful change he noticed in him. This was not the reckless, cynical and somewhat disreputable-looking Herne of the past few weeks, whose decline he had lamented, but the bright, hopeful, healthy-souled friend of six months ago. Wondering at it, he tried to get Ralph to go with him to see some of their friends who were on the field, thinking, perhaps, to assist in his efforts to recover his lost ground. But Ralph had seen the Miss Temples among the groups of gaily-dressed ladies there, and much as he wished to speak to Lettice, he remembered that he was here only to play cricket, that he was out of society now, and had done nothing yet to wipe out the miserable past; also that Wendover's jealous eyes would be on them during the interview, and he shrank from the meeting. Hungering still for a sight of those sweet eyes that had watched him for half the day with such a keen interest, such glad hope in them, he left the park and went back with some of the other players to the city.

Next morning Wendover met him on the steps of the English church as they came out, and, taking his arm, walked home with him.

"I say, Herne, what are you going to do now?" he asked. "Fight on for another year in the town, I suppose, and then go up again?"

"No, I'm afraid the assistant business is played out, here at any rate, since old Conabree has turned against me. I have no money to live on in town, so I must

just go away to the country, a good way out, where one doesn't pay for food. I must rough it for a year at least, I suppose, and then come back to town wearing a poncho and cow-hide boots to have another try."

"I have something better than that to propose to you," said Wendover. "I am just arranging to go for a six weeks' trip up the country to Fraile Muerto—a nice little place. I've been corresponding with some of the English fellows I know there, and they all say that there's a splendid opening for a young doctor—"

"Who isn't allowed to practise," laughed Herne.

"Who is allowed to practise. Your London diploma will be good there, for it's in another province, where they have different laws, and are not quite so grand and exclusive and—and exigent as these Buenos Ayres fellows. Make up your mind, Herne, and we'll go together. A friend of mine will house you for a time, until you start a house of your own."

"I shall be a poor doctor to begin," said Ralph, ruefully.

"Your poverty will vanish like smoke when you have been there a month. The natives have all got something the matter with them, and they will go any distance to get an English doctor, and you can charge them just what you like. I believe the best dodge is to tell your patient to pay just what he likes, and then he gives you ten times as much as your fee."

"I suppose that all I have to do," said Ralph, "is to hoist a big red flag with 'English Doctor' written on it, and at once all the inhabitants will

mount their horses and come galloping in, with saddlebags full of silver dollars, to pay for saline draughts or for having their bullets extracted."

"Quite so—that's just what will happen," said Wendover with an amused laugh.

But even allowing for a little exaggeration on his friend's part, the opening seemed to Herne a fairly good one, and eventually he agreed to go to Fraile Muerto. The day of their departure was fixed, and it was arranged to go by rail to a small port some miles up the river, thence by steamer to the town of Rosario, after which they would again proceed by the Central Argentine Railway to their destination.

The day on which they were to leave arrived, and early in the morning the two friends breakfasted at Wendover's rooms. Their luggage had already been sent to the Central Station where they were to take their train, and having still an hour to spare after breakfast, they lit their cigars and settled down to read the morning papers.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shouted Wendover. "Oh! I say, Herne, here's an awfully good thing in the police news. Just let me tell it to you. A young French naval officer, on shore yesterday, on the loose, passed an old fat padre on the street and snatched off his shovel hat and put it on his own head. A crowd of about a thousand people collected round him, some trying to capture the hat, others cheering the officer—most ridiculous thing I ever read! At last the policemen—about fifteen of them, the paper says—but I say, old fellow, you ain't listening. What

the dickens is the matter, Herne, that you sit there staring like a ghost?"

"This is the matter," said the other, starting to his feet, still holding the paper, "I can't go with you. Yellow fever has broken out; there is a circumstantial report of an undoubted case in the paper, and here in Buenos Ayres I must remain."

"Yellow fever—nonsense! What do you mean?" He took his friend's paper and glanced at it. "Bosh!" he exclaimed. "They always get up a scare every time the fruit season comes round. Some wretched old woman has the stomach-ache, and that's quite enough for the papers to get up a sensation about. Don't you know, Herne, that there are just twenty-seven daily papers in Buenos Ayres, and they can only exist by keeping the people half crazy with excitement about something or other! I suppose no one spends less than about a shilling a day in English money for papers, and that's how they are kept going!"

Herne laughed. "I daresay you are right about the papers," he replied. "But I have studied the subject of yellow fever a great deal, and you must let me know a little about it. Here is a thorough report, drawn up and signed by three of the first physicians in Buenos Ayres, of an undoubted case of yellow fever. The person who took it was in perfect health, yet he died in about twelve hours. You must go alone, Wendover, for out of Buenos Ayres I do not move one step."

"You medical fellows remind me of that what-

d'ye-call-it in mythology, or the Arabian Nights, or something, that was always sniffing at death as if it smelt like violets," replied the other with a laugh. "Or perhaps I'm thinking of Scripture, where it speaks about the vultures coming together where the carcase is."

"I'm sure I can't guess what you are thinking of, for you certainly seem to have got somewhat mixed," replied Herne. "But you might be a little more polite, and call us eagles. If you ever happen to be doubled up with yellow fever, old man, you will be glad to get as many vultures, as you call them, about you as you can muster."

"But you are not in earnest, Herne? You really don't mean to say that at the very last moment, when everything has been arranged, you are going to back out of this journey?"

"That is precisely what I do mean, Wendover. It takes you an unconscionable time to understand a very simple thing."

"Then I suppose you do mean it," said the other, losing his temper, "and all I can say is, that I think you are treating me very shabbily."

"I don't see that at all," returned Ralph, quietly. "In a case like this I don't think your personal wishes ought to weigh one grain of dust in the balance."

"They don't weigh that to you, Herne, I know."

"Confound it, Wendover, what would you have me do—run away to Fraile Muerto with you when yellow fever has just broken out here?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I want you to do. As for yellow fever, that's all rot and nonsense; the same old cry is raised every summer."

"Call it rot and nonsense, if you like; once for all I tell you plainly that here I stay, and wild horses could not draw me out of town."

"Then," said Wendover, angrily, "there's an end of the discussion. I've arranged to go, and I must go alone, and a pretty fool I'll look to the people I've written to, and who are prepared to receive you. The yellow fever is a very nice excuse, and has just come in the nick of time, but I daresay I can guess pretty well what your motive for staying is."

"Will you be so kind as to explain your meaning?" said Ralph, turning white with the anger he was trying to keep down.

"No, I shall not, the subject is finished with," said Wendover, throwing himself back in his chair and thrusting his hands into his trousers-pockets.

"That's a cowardly line to take," said Ralph.

Wendover rose again to his feet. "I am not a coward, Herne, and I shall not suffer you or any other man to call me one."

"I have no doubt that you have plenty of physical power, Wendover, but that is not everything; and if you are afraid to explain the insinuations you made just now, I shall still consider you a coward."

"If you look at it in that way I shall explain," said Wendover, with an angry gleam in his eyes. "I meant that I believe the yellow fever is a mere pretext, and that your real motive is Lettice Temple.

You think you will stand a better chance with her when I am out of the way."

"How dare you say such a thing?" exclaimed Herne; "when I told you that I have no hope, that I have resigned all hopes of winning her, and when you know perfectly well that I have not been to the Temples' since the picnic, months ago."

"If I hadn't some grounds for saying it, you wouldn't fly into such a rage about it."

"Grounds for saying it! Look here, Wendover, if you are going to talk to me in that strain our friendship will quickly come to an end for ever."

"Let it come to an end then! The sooner the better. A friend one can't trust is worse than no friend. You have not been to her house, I know, but you were seen talking to her at the Palmero the week before the cricket match."

"Oh, then that casual meeting in the park aroused your jealous suspicions," said Ralph, bitterly. "This was then your motive in trying so anxiously to drag me away with you. You were afraid of leaving me here."

"No, I am not afraid," retorted the other, stung to the quick. "Afraid of a fellow who has disgraced himself as you have done, and made himself the talk of Buenos Ayres! No, Herne, stay where you are, and do your level best; I am not afraid of you."

Ralph sprang to his feet with clenched fists, but instantly, even when he was about to repay the last insult with a blow, he remembered Lettice and the promise he had made to her, and turning on his heel, he quitted the room without a word and left the house.



## CHAPTER IX

### RALPH'S REVENGE

**T**RUE to his word, Wendover went away on his journey alone, with anger in his heart, and the last person he saw at the Central Station, when he had settled himself in his carriage, was Herne, no longer his friend, claiming his luggage on the platform. During the next few days the newspapers raised a tremendous outcry against the local authorities for having allowed yellow fever to get into the town, and suggested innumerable preventive measures. But on this occasion the "watch-dogs of civilisation" began to bark too late, although their barking made a great stir and commotion. The municipality and police developed a sudden extraordinary activity. In the lower quarters of the town there were house-to-house visits of inspection; streets were swept at daybreak every morning, and there was a general order for all houses to be white-washed *on the outside*; and so extremely alert were the guardians of the public health, that if a cabbage stalk or a potato dropped from a passing greengrocer's cart the unlucky driver was immediately haled before a magistrate and fined twenty dollars or sent to gaol for the new crime of "disseminating the elements

of pestilence in the public streets." These precautionary measures proved of no avail; every morning and evening the twenty-seven daily papers which Buenos Ayres boasted at that date contained full and graphic reports of fresh fatal cases, and a wild attempt made by the authorities to hush the matter up, in order to prevent a panic, had to be abandoned. The cry that yellow fever was in the city was too loud and persistent to be disregarded; the idle pleasure-seekers quickly took to flight, the wealthy and well-to-do followed; departing trains were crowded, family carriages, vans and carts of all descriptions laden with families carrying furniture with them were seen pouring out of town in all directions.

Through all these days of hurry, fear and intense excitement Ralph had not been idle. He was once more anxiously considering ways and means, for the money he had raised at the Monte de Piedad was fast diminishing. His wardrobe, however, was an extensive one, and he also had a great many books and some valuable surgical instruments, besides numerous little souvenirs which were worth something. With the exception of only the necessary clothing and half a dozen volumes he quickly disposed of these possessions, realising about one hundred and thirty silver dollars. He then migrated to the southern part of the town with his remaining portmanteau, and in one of the most crowded and unwholesome streets he succeeded in hiring a small, empty room on a first floor. At the cost of about five to six shillings he provided himself with a second-hand

canvas cot, a straw pallet, and a rush-bottom chair; that, he thought, was all the furniture he required.

When he had driven nails into the discoloured walls to hang his few garments on, he sat down to survey his den, and pronounced it comfortable enough, although he could not agree with his landlady that her house was a *palacio*. Presently he got out a work on yellow fever, his favourite subject of study now, lit his pipe, and threw himself on his cot to read. Before very long he started up again. "By Jove, what a brilliant idea! I'll have my revenge on that confounded Medical Department. I'll write to the President and give him a piece of my mind; for I don't suppose that I shall ever go up to be examined again, so it doesn't matter how much I offend their dignities."

He was soon engaged inditing his letter, ransacking his brains for terms that would convey the sting of a just indignation, with perhaps something of scorn, yet not too strong; for he half thought that a full and free expression of his feelings in the matter might have the undesirable effect of landing him in a police-cell.

"Sir President," ran Herne's extraordinary epistle, "I have now been in this city sixteen months, and during that time I have exhausted all the funds I brought with me from England. When I presented myself at the Department of which you are the head, four months ago, my London diplomas were ignored, and my examination proved that the professional knowledge I possess, which would have entitled me

to practise the healing art in almost any other civilised city on the globe, was not sufficient for Buenos Ayres. You, sir, closed the door against me, and I must for the present bid adieu to all hopes of bettering my own fortunes; but, happily, it is not in your power to prevent me from using my knowledge for the benefit of the poor, and it is to inform you what I have done, and what I propose doing, that I write this letter.

“Yellow fever has broken out in this city; and the cry has already been raised that many men on whom your Department has conferred the title of Doctor of Medicine, and who have enriched themselves in times that were free from danger, are now deserting Buenos Ayres in its hour of need. This epidemic, sir, gives me the opportunity of following the profession to which I have dedicated my life; although I am now compelled to practise it without benefit to myself. In pursuit of my object I have settled in this poor and overcrowded locality, where I confidently believe the epidemic will speedily assume its worst aspect. I have engaged a single unfurnished room to live in, and have sold my books, instruments and other possessions to provide myself with means to purchase bread for myself, and drugs for my patients. It is unlawful for me to call myself a doctor, or receive a fee, but I shall industriously go from house to house in this poor neighbourhood, to inform the people that I am ready to attend them gratis, also to supply them with drugs, as far as my means allow, and to anyone who may question my capacity

and right to do these things, I shall exhibit my London diplomas to prove to them that I am no impostor.”

Concluding with the usual formal compliments he signed his letter, “Rodolpho Herne, L.R.C.P., London.”

Three days later he was lying, pipe in mouth, on his canvas cot with his book on yellow fever open before him, propped against his drawn-up knees, when he heard a loud voice in the hall below asking for “*el Doctor Herne*.”

Ralph jumped up, surprised and a little alarmed, and went to the door to listen.

“No, no, señora,” the visitor was saying in a loud voice to the landlady, “I can’t allow you to have it, I must see *el doctor* himself and deliver this document into his own proper hands.”

Ralph ran down to the passage and there found a majestic-looking personage in a black suit with brass buttons, holding a large envelope in his hand. When he had been told that the young man standing before him was *el doctor*, he delivered the paper with a flourish and took his departure. It was from the Medical Department and addressed, “Al Señor Doctor Herné.” With palpitating heart Ralph tore open the cover, and there—more beautiful than rubies and diamonds to his sight—was the coveted diploma, with all its bright seals and wonderful signatures!

“At last! At last!” he exclaimed, rapturously kissing the document, and pacing excitedly about his room. But stay, a letter! What had the glorious head of the Medical Department that thus heaped

coals of fire on his head to say? The letter was from the secretary, and commenced by mildly censuring the tone of Ralph's epistle. It then went on to say that his failure was no doubt owing to an imperfect mastery over the language of the country, but, in the present exceptional circumstances, that the matter would be overlooked, and the diploma given him. As for drugs, it would be unnecessary for him to purchase any, as he would receive a sufficient supply from the municipality, and he might also count on receiving pecuniary aid from the local authorities in his good work. His gentle and courteous correspondent concluded with the hope that he would escape infection, and that his courage and philanthropy would prove a blessing to the poor people of the neighbourhood.

After reading this letter—so kind a letter in answer to one so bitter—he felt that he could embrace the whole of the Medical Department, so overjoyed was he at this realisation of the long-deferred wish of his heart.

“Dr. Herne, Dr. Ralph Herne!” he repeated a dozen times. “*El doctor*—el Señor Doctor Rodolfo Herné—oh, glorious! Here a fellow advances by leaps and bounds; and in slow old England I might have hung out my sign in Harley Street, and died of old age a miserable *Mister* Herne. Mister! Mister! how I despise you! Begone for ever, wretched meaningless title! Make way for your betters! Ah, if you could only take a corporeal form so that I might kick you downstairs! Welcome, most noble,

grave and reverend title of doctor; and let all men henceforth and for ever address me as Doctor Herne!"

Ralph was certainly not conducting himself with a dignity suitable to the occasion; but he was a very young man, albeit a doctor; and now seeing that iron barrier which had been set up before him months ago suddenly swept away, and a glorious prospect of work and achievements opening before him, he could not contain his overflowing joy.

In order to soothe his tremendous excitement he lit his pipe; then seeing his dumb-bells lying on the floor—he had tried unsuccessfully to sell them—he snatched them up and began swinging them violently about and was presently half choked with the smoke.

"I can't stand this—I must go and tell somebody," he said, putting on his hat and rushing out of the house. "Let me find someone who will crush my fingers with a powerful grip and drag my arm out of its socket. Frank Barry, the very man I want," and off he went in search of his warm-hearted friend.

But alas! Frank was far away in the country on some frolic, making himself browner than ever. Then Herne thought he would go and tell Dr. Temple of his great good fortune, for then Lettice would hear of it, and she would know that he was keeping the promise he had made to her. When he reached Calle de Marte he began to walk slowly, then slower still until his walk degenerated into a crawl and at last he stopped.

"No, I can't go," he said. "If that thick-headed

Wendover wasn't so much in my mind I could fly there, as to my own home, and tell them and listen gladly to their congratulations. No. I must stay away still." And so with a grave face and a quieter tread, he walked homeward again through the long, straight, narrow streets, where there was no shade from the intolerable noonday sun, and no shelter from the fiery north wind that blurred the hard straight outlines of the white houses with clouds of yellow dust. Noticing an ironmonger's shop, he stepped in and ordered a brass plate with his name—Dr. Herne—engraved on it. And on that day he also ordered a red lamp to be placed above the front door; and when lamp and plate were both up he went out into the middle of the squalid street and stood gazing at them, feeling so proud and happy that he failed to notice a dozen ragged urchins collecting round him.



## CHAPTER X

### A PESTILENCE-STRICKEN CITY

**W**HEN Ralph first astonished the dwellers in that grimy street by exhibiting a bright brass plate on the greasy, paintless front door, and a ruby-coloured lamp above it, not one case of yellow fever had yet occurred in the neighbourhood. The better districts situated in the northern and western parts of the city had been first invaded. Very soon, however, it was seen that he had made no mistaken forecast; the poor and over-crowded quarter did not enjoy its immunity long, and when the pestilence gradually spread itself, like leprous spots on the skin of its victim, until the whole city was covered, here it assumed its most malignant character, as if the King of Terrors had finally elected to set up his throne at that spot. The locality leaped into fame at once; all those who were afraid of losing their lives avoiding it as they would have avoided going down into a valley filled with poisonous gases; while others, chiefly young men of good birth who had enrolled themselves in the newly-formed Sanitary Commission, and who from the first outbreak of the epidemic had begun to display a sublime courage and devotion in aiding the sufferers, flocked thither, just as soldiers in action fly to the point where the battle

rages hottest. As for arresting the progress of the epidemic, they might, to use a very old simile, just as well have attempted to dam the Nile with bulrushes. People dropped down, writhed for a few hours in unspeakable agonies, then died, and no power could save them from dying. Such a condition of things had perhaps never been known, for it seemed that no pestilence comparable in deadly virulence to this had ever fallen on any city ancient or modern. Men were seen rushing about the streets apparently insane with terror. The municipality exhausted all its futile measures of prevention, using disinfectants to such an extent that the atmosphere became stifling with the smells of carbolic acid and chloride of lime; while the slightest breeze blew up a cloud of minute, white, lime-dust particles that blinded the eyes and choked the lungs. Every measure seemed only to have the effect of aggravating the evil; and the quickness with which the attacked were killed made yellow fever and sudden death seem like the same thing in this unhappy locality. In the streets men were seen to stagger as they walked, fall upon the pavement, and expire with delirious shrieks before they could be removed. Day and night, at all hours, the heavy rumbling carts in which the dead were carried away in loads were heard, and the prolonged dreary cries of the drivers announcing their approach—that desolate cry, “Bring out your dead!” so long unheard in Europe! In a pestilence-stricken city extremes meet in a wonderful way; those who, fearless of death, set themselves to do

the work that is to be done, are invariably the noblest spirits among men, while their assistants are frequently the most degraded. Those who performed the loathsome task of removing the dead were in most cases abandoned wretches, steeped in every crime and vileness, and as they went their rounds they would be heard brawling and shouting their drunken songs along the streets, or mimicking the long discordant cries of the dustman in a spirit of ghastly facetiousness.

And in the very centre of this hell on earth laboured Ralph, his brand-new title of doctor, his brass plate and ruby-coloured lamp—the toys which had amused his fancy a few weeks ago—completely forgotten; half his waking hours spent with the dying; besieged night and day with crowds of weeping, terror-stricken suppliants, literally dragged from house to house only to gaze on faces distorted with horrible agony and black with the seal of death, and to hear piteous cries for relief, which he was in most cases powerless to impart. Yet not for an instant did he quail before that irresistible tide of desolation and death. “I cannot save them,” he said, “but I can die with them. It will be the right death for a doctor to die, and I shall not feel it much more than the soldier who falls in the fight. And she will know—Lettice will know that I have kept my word.”

Before long, in obedience to the wish of the authorities, he removed from his narrow quarters to a neighbouring street and into a large house left vacant by the death or flight of all its inmates; and here

a few brave spirits began to gather round him to aid him in his work. But he could get scarcely any rest, day or night; how often he had wished for "plenty to do," and now his work overwhelmed him, and it was a continual torment to think that he could not attend to all who were calling for aid. It was a daily experience to hurry to the house of some fresh victim, only to be told at the door that he had come too late, that the patient was dead. At all hours his passage was thronged with poor people; and scarcely a day passed without some unhappy wretch, seized suddenly while walking in the street, rushing in to him for help, crying out with terror as if pursued by fiends, often enough to expire on his hands in spite of all his efforts.

One day, about the middle of February, he had gone up to his bedroom for a short rest, leaving word with the attendants that no person was to enter his room or call him for half an hour. In spite of the injunction, he soon became conscious of a tall form coming into his darkened apartment just as he was sinking into a doze. The intruder was Dr. Temple, looking extremely pale and haggard. His mother had died of cholera only the day before, and he was on his way home after burying her, and had called to see how his young friend was getting on.

"Ah, Dr. Temple," cried Ralph, starting up from his bed and seizing his visitor's hand. "I heard of your loss this morning, and I wish I could have gone with you to-day."

"The dying are of more consideration than the

dead," said Dr. Temple. "But I am glad for another reason that no person who ever saw my poor old mother alive was with me to-day. I was fairly sickened at the state of things in that hideous charnel-house where I had to bury her. I was not permitted to take her elsewhere—rich and poor, good and bad, they must lie together now. I was only allowed to mark the coffin and the spot where it was put, so as to have it removed at some future time if I am spared. There were hundreds of coffins piled up above the ground, for some of the men who do the work died yesterday, it seems, and they are short of hands. Ah, it was horrible, horrible, those huge trenches into which they are all thrown together! Herne, are we all going to die, do you think? When I heard downstairs that you had gone to rest and were not to be disturbed, my heart sank in me; and I determined to steal softly in and take a look at you to satisfy myself that it was not so. You predicted this epidemic, you know, perhaps you can tell us what the end is to be."

Ralph smiled. "It would be pretty safe to predict that I shall not escape, whoever else does," he said. "I cannot hope it. Whether I am to die and be flung into a pit along with my patients, or be one of the fortunate few who recover, is beyond my prophetic power to say."

"I suppose now that if I were to advise you to be hopeful and keep up your spirits, you would set me down as a second Conabree. By the way, he died yesterday—did you know? Ten hours ill."

“No, I had not heard. I’m glad he didn’t run away like so many better men. Let us forget that he was a fool all his life long, and remember only the end—that he died like a doctor. As to keeping up my spirits, I really don’t think you need to trouble about that. I’m not unhappy, even when going about among people who are dying like flies, death staring me in the face, so to speak. I’m just a little puzzled at my own cheerfulness, since this life which threatens to be so frightfully short may be the only one I shall ever know. I don’t know and, strangely enough, I don’t care. Is it recklessness—the Methodists’ hardened heart? I can’t think so. Somehow it seems to me when I set myself to think of it, that something outside of myself sustains me. Providence I don’t believe in, yet for all I know to the contrary it may be God. If He exists and is everywhere, I know Him only as He appears in and through material things. In a tree, for instance, a cloud, a bird, a star, and above all in a man. Perhaps He shines brightest in some woman I have had the unutterable happiness to know. Some divine woman.”

Silence followed; then Dr. Temple with a sigh replied: “I think I have that feeling too; but you, Herne, are of the new generation and have the courage to speak the things which we older men, trained in a more formal school, are accustomed to keep locked up in our hearts.”

Then, after an interval, he added: “Before I go you must promise me one thing. You have some trusty people about you now; let them understand that if

you are struck down I am to be informed at once. You must remember that I haven't been so very unsuccessful in my peculiar treatment of bad cases—a judicious mixture of ice and fire, for which the scoffers have invented the name of 'the Temple pick-me-up.' But I daresay you youngsters think me a sad old fogey."

"You could never be that if you lived a thousand years," said Ralph. "You refresh yourself too frequently at the fount of science, the only fountain of everlasting youth man has discovered on this or any other continent."

"Let me roll that sweet morsel under my tongue," said Dr. Temple. "I shall miss your flattery badly if you die, Herne. My taste for that sort of thing grows on me as I get old. Have I your promise?"

"No! Not until I have yours that you will save your daughters' lives by sending them away from Buenos Ayres at once."

"I can't do it," said Dr. Temple piteously, sitting down again after he had risen to go. "Are not their lives more to me than my own life? Without them I should sink into the grave a miserable, broken-hearted old man. They know that as well as I know it myself; yet they will not move a step; wild horses could not drag them from me, and if I were to take them away they would despise me in their hearts."

"Of course they would," said Ralph. "And if that is the only alternative, let us all stand together and look Death calmly in the face. It has, compared with Dishonour's, a pleasant, comely face."

“It is a continual torture to me to know the danger they are in,” continued Dr. Temple. “But the devotion of those two girls is sublime to see, their overflowing compassion of heart, coupled with their great serenity of mind. You do not know what a deep interest they take in your work, Herne. When I go home now and tell them that I have been with you, that you keep a clear spirit untouched by even a shadow of the degrading fear that unnerves so many good men, and drives the weak-minded mad and kills them before their time, this will be to them glad tidings of great joy.”

Ralph turned his face aside.

“Never hide your face from me, my dear young friend,” said Dr. Temple. “In a time like this a man can shed a tear without feeling ashamed. I have shed a few I know, although it is scarcely natural at my time of life. Have I your promise, Herne?”

“Yes,” replied Ralph, and they shook hands; and when his visitor had gone from the room Ralph prepared to follow, for he could now hear many voices in the passage anxiously asking for him.



## CHAPTER XI

### BORNE DOWN IN THE FIGHT

THE moment feared by Dr. Temple, to which Ralph had looked forward with a singular calm which seemed almost like fatalism, was not long in coming. Nerves of brass could not have withstood the constant strain to which he had subjected himself. After the conversation related in the preceding chapter, the pestilence still continued to increase daily in virulence, and at last Ralph became convinced in his own mind that it was now only a matter of hours with him, or, at most, of a very few days; and the effect of this belief was to make him more reckless and unsparing of his powers than ever. Day and night he was at everybody's call: in the morning he would undress for a cold bath, but at no other time, the little sleep he got being usually in a chair as he sat by night at the bedside of some sufferer. His food he frequently took standing, or even as he hurried along the streets. To all remonstrances he carelessly replied that it was too late in the day for him to begin to take care of himself, that the seeds of the malady were in him, and that all that remained for him to do was to crowd as much work as possible in the short time left to him. He was like a soldier who, having charged

furiously into the enemy's ranks, and finding himself hemmed in on every side, resolves to die fighting hard. At length he was one day brought in from the street: he had struggled bravely on for some distance, but at length the maddening cramps, which seemed to be tearing the nerves from his flesh, overcame him, and he sank down, as so many had done before, on the pavement. The news of his illness was immediately sent to the authorities, and measures were taken to prevent the work Herne had so strangely originated from falling to the ground. His residence had now for some time been recognised as one of the most important and efficient centres for those who were engaged in the great work of fighting the pestilence. His dauntless courage in planting himself in that spot where the yellow fever had taken its strongest hold had quickly brought him aid of all kinds, both from private individuals and from the municipality; then a few men and women in the neighbourhood, recovering from their first amazement and terror, and fired by his example, had joined him in his work. To the house into which he had removed two other adjoining houses were added, and his establishment had finally developed into a dispensary, training school and even hospital all in one, with a staff of voluntary assistant nurses and messengers numbering about thirty souls. Before Herne had been ill three hours a successor to continue his work had been appointed, and several of the ablest physicians of the town had been sent to his bedside. Dr. Temple was perhaps the first to arrive, and his

visits were frequent during the night and the following day. His daughters noticed that he seemed more depressed and anxious than usual, although he tried hard to maintain his customary manner; but when questioned he merely replied that he was anxious on their account, as there was no sign of an abatement in the epidemic.

The sisters were sitting in the dining-room after a rather late breakfast, Lettice doing some needlework, while Norah scanned the morning paper, occasionally reading out little items of news. In most cases the items she read related to the illness or death of some public person, or of someone they knew personally. Suddenly in the midst of a paragraph she had begun to read she stopped and turned very pale.

"What is it, Norah, dear?" said her sister with some alarm, rising hastily and going to her side.

"Nothing," answered Norah, trying to recover her composure, but at the same time covering a portion of the paper with her hand.

"It is something in the paper, I am sure!" said Lettice. "Let me read it, Norah. We must bear everything together. You will only make it worse by trying to hide anything from me. Give me the paper, Norah."

"Oh, Lettice," exclaimed her sister despairingly; "*he* is down with the yellow fever, the paper says, and he cannot recover."

Lettice gave one hasty look at the paper. "Ah, poor Ralph!" she exclaimed, and dropping it on the floor burst into a flood of tears.

“Oh, Lettice, my darling sister, why—why did you make me show it to you? I was sure—I knew long ago that you loved him, Lettice, and not the other.”

“Norah, how can you say such a thing?” she returned, but with her tearful face still averted.

“Then why do you cry so, my darling? So many have died, Lettice—so many of our friends, oh, so many!”

“Shall I tell you why, Norah?” she answered, sitting down by her sister, and restraining her sobs. “When I tell you, you will not wonder at it. Ralph—poor Ralph, was so broken-hearted at his failure, so hopeless, so friendless among strangers; don’t you remember how everyone said he had gone to the bad, Norah? And perhaps I was partly the cause of his troubles, for you know now—how fond he was of me, and how it all ended. Then I saw him that day in the park at Palermo—poor fellow, looking so sad there by himself, like a man who has made a shipwreck of his life, and is in despair—perhaps going to destroy himself. I did not tell you what happened, but it grieved me so that I went and talked to him, and I cried—I couldn’t help it—when I asked him if he had no sisters or mother. And when he said he had no one in the world—no woman—I answered that he had me, for was not I his friend? I knew that it was a bold thing for a girl to say; but I was sure that he would not mistake my meaning, and I did so wish to do something, to say something to save him. He said he could die for me, but men always say that, and I asked him not to die, but to live for

my sake. Then, Norah, he gave me his word that he would lead a new life; that he would strive always, always for my sake, to be worthy of my friendship. It was I who saved him, Norah, and he did so nobly keep the promise he had made me! Oh, is it not worse for me than for another to see him struck down, now, when his name is on everybody's lips—now, when everyone can see what I saw before when they despised him. Is it strange that I cry—do you think it strange, Norah? And I have never spoken to him since that day. You thought it shame that kept him away, but it was not that. He knew how much I felt for him, how glad I was at the change in him, and he did not wish me to imagine that—but I can't explain everything; you must understand what I mean, Norah. Oh, if I could go to him and tell him all I think and feel!”

“You cannot do that, Lettice!”

“No, I cannot do that. They die, like poor grand-mamma, and know no one. Good or bad they all die alike, and have no peace in death — only delirium and torment. Oh, it is horrible, horrible to think of it!” And, covering her face with her hands, she again wept unrestrainedly.

And while they sat there, one weeping inconsolably, the other vainly endeavouring to console, Dr. Temple, who had been out since early in the morning, came in, and divined at once from their pale, grief-stricken faces that they knew of Ralph's illness. But when they looked up at him they saw a great joy in his face, which seemed to make it shine like the face of

an angel; and Lettice, starting up with a sobbing cry and an anxious, questioning look in her face, went to him.

“Yes, my darling child, he still lives,” said her father, before any question had been spoken, and taking her in his arms. “It is a miracle, I think; for what would all the doctors in Christendom do with such a hopeless case as Herne’s appeared to be? He is safe now, I verily believe, but so weak and shattered that his work is over for the present. There will be no more fighting the yellow fever for him, unless this horrible epidemic is going to remain permanently with us. Poor fellow, he has had a terrible time of it!”

Lettice, escaping from his arms, hurried from the room without speaking, and her father, deeply as he had felt about Herne himself, was somewhat surprised at the strength of the emotion she betrayed.

Then Norah, fearing that he would misinterpret it, as she had done, at once imparted to him all that her sister had just told her.

“By heaven, Norah, she is the noblest girl that ever breathed!” exclaimed her father enthusiastically. “And Herne has certainly shown himself worthy of her friendship; she is a girl any man might be proud to worship, and I can understand the feeling he shows when I speak of her to him. What puzzles me is her engagement, or whatever it is—I am not clever enough to understand all your fine distinctions—with Wendover. What she saw in him I can’t imagine.”

“She will never marry without your approval, papa,” said Norah softly.

“If you imagine that I am going to get husbands for you, Norah, you will never marry — neither of you. That is a matter out of my province, as you have been taught all along; and when you once settle who your husband is to be, your choice shall have my approval. If Lettice thinks proper to marry Wendover I shall always regard him as a son and love him for her sake, although it must be confessed that he is not a brilliant young man.”

From that day, to the amazement of everyone who had stood by his side and witnessed his struggle with death, began Ralph's recovery. It was slow at first, but there was, happily, no relapse. The doctors wondered at it, and could only say, as Dr. Temple had said, that it was like a miracle.

But cases like Ralph's were not infrequent, however difficult or impossible to explain they may seem. Men in perfect health, who kept up their strength for the struggle by temperance in all things, carefully avoiding all exposure, and never lifting a finger to aid the sufferers, lest they should spoil their own chances of escape, were struck down, and science was powerless to save them; while others who, like Ralph, wore themselves out with excessive labours, courting death every day and every hour, and taking no thought for themselves, recovered from that terrible, mysterious malady, which mocked all men's efforts either to arrest its progress or to understand its nature.

## CHAPTER XII

“DESOLATE AND OVERGROWN WITH GRASS”

**A**BOUT a fortnight after the events narrated in the last chapter, one bright sunshiny afternoon Dr. Temple's daughters were standing on the pavement before their house. Even in normal times the street was an exceptionally quiet one, but now, with most of its houses empty, it seemed as lonely as some secluded country lane. Occasionally a person passed, hurrying by with wan, grief-struck face; or else slowly dragging his feeble limbs—an emaciated convalescent with pale hollow cheeks and discoloured skin. A few heavy autumnal showers had lately fallen, and the broad flag-stones of the pavement looked bright and clean, as if they had been scrubbed. But in the streets a strange thing was witnessed. Grass had begun to grow, and look where one would, green, tender blades were seen shooting up in the lines between the small square blocks of granite; while near the footway, not only grass was growing, but also a small creeping herb, with round leaves, bearing a diminutive white flower resembling a daisy; and this herb had spread itself quite over the stones, so that in many places it was possible to walk on a soft carpet of green.

Presently the girls became interested in watching



a large cart or van slowly moving up the street towards them, while twenty yards in advance of it a man walked, bawling out his wares in a very loud voice, but what he cried they could not make out. Once or twice the cart stopped, whereupon the crier went back to assist the driver to take down some large heavy object, and deliver it at a door.

“What can it be!” said Norah.

“Wood,” exclaimed Lettice, with confidence, “I can see it now quite plainly. They are selling it in large logs, and we might buy one and have it cut up at the back for winter—if we live till then!”

“You are quite mistaken, Lettice,” said her sister. “The cart is laden with carcasses of fresh-killed sheep. Whenever the markets are over-stocked they come round, and they sell a whole sheep for less than we pay for a leg at the butcher’s. When they come here I’ll call cook to buy one.”

“What can you do with a whole sheep, Norah?—how hungry you must feel!”

“We can take a leg and the neck for ourselves, and give the rest away to some poor family. Have you got your purse?”

The cart had now stopped at a corner some fifty yards away, and the crier, seeing them standing there, came up to them and touched his hat.

“Are you selling fresh mutton?” asked Norah.

“No, señorita,” he replied, with a grin, “I am selling coffins; do you require one?”

She shook her head, and looked horrified; but Lettice, whose sense of the ludicrous was very keen,

could not suppress a little explosion of laughter. It was a contagious laugh, and the man, also laughing, walked away; the cart turned the corner and was gone.

Then Norah, although naturally of a sedate disposition, and even while rebuking her sister's levity, also began to laugh. Their mirth, which they were trying not very successfully to overcome, had prevented them from hearing footsteps approaching from the opposite side.

"Why, girls, what's all this merriment about?" cried their father; and turning quickly they saw another person with him, leaning on his arm—a young man thin as a skeleton, and with a strangely shrunken yellow face.

For a few moments they stared silently at him, then Lettice, with a glad exclamation, sprang forward to welcome him. "Oh, Ralph, at last you have come to see us! Ah, how much you have gone through since we last met!" And when she took his hand her bright eyes were dim with ready tears.

"I found him, not very far from here, trying his legs," said Dr. Temple. "They are rather shaky legs just now, and knowing that he would be powerless to resist, I pounced on him like a hawk on a chicken, and bore him off home with me."

"I'm very glad you did," answered Ralph, "for I have heard the sound of human laughter again. I had almost forgotten that we possessed such a faculty."

Norah at once told them about their mistake, and Ralph laughed when he heard it, but Dr. Temple looked grave.

"I was sure that you would be shocked, papa," said Norah.

"Shocked! Not in the least; on the contrary I am very glad that you are able to laugh. But this about the coffins looks bad. I did not know they were being hawked about the street."

"It's a sign of nothing except that some shrewd fellow has got a lot of old planking which he is trying to dispose of in this way," said Ralph. "The returns for the last two days show a falling off in deaths."

"Yes, I was so glad to hear it," said Lettice. "But, Ralph, what have you got in your hand?"

"What has he got!" exclaimed Dr. Temple, recovering his gay spirit, and speaking with affected scorn. "Why, child, grass and flowers, don't you see? I found him botanising in the streets not far off. He says that the poor children in his part of the town cut grass in the streets for their guinea-pigs. I fancy, however, that the flora of our district is the richest, in variety of species at all events."

"Let me take a little bunch of your green stuff," said Lettice, selecting a few green blades and sprays of small leaves and flowers, then fastening the curious little posy in the bosom of her dress. "Papa," she continued, with a laugh, "we can't go to the country this summer, but the country is coming to us, you see. Is not that what Mohammed said?"

"Yes, Lettice, something like that," said her father.

"Do you know what I have seen to-day while rambling about the streets—botanising as you call it? Butterflies. I counted no less than thirty-seven

during my walk, and they were all the common red Vanessa, so like our English Painted Lady."

"I wonder if the Painted Lady fluttered about the streets of London at the end of the Great Plague," said Norah.

"Oh, dear, I wish we could see the end of our great plague!" sighed Lettice.

"I suppose yellow fever doesn't attack insect life," said Dr. Temple. "But it has killed all our sparrows, I know. I've heard of birds leaving cities in seasons of pestilence, but here they have been found dead everywhere. Buenos Ayres has lost its little orange-coloured pet, and its shrill merry trills will probably be heard no more for some years. Perhaps that sooty little ruffian, the London sparrow, would have lived it out."

"That is a pretty thought of yours, Lettice, about the country coming to us," said Ralph. "It is always so, always because in old Mother Nature there is no change nor shadow of turning. Whenever men have gone away from her and have sinned against her ordinances, she has come to them. How terrible her coming seems—how cruel we think her! But she is not really cruel; these tender green blades and little white flowers that I kissed when gathering,"—here Lettice dropped her eyes and blushed a little—"these bring us a sweet message of peace and forgiveness from her. She loves and cares for her children, and her anger does not endure for ever."

"Herne, I fancy our good chaplain would shake his head at the use you are making of scriptural

phraseology; but I like your sermon very well and think you deserve a cup of tea after it."

"Papa, tea will be ready presently," said Lettice, "but Ralph has not finished yet. I suggested the text, remember, and you must not cut him so short."

"Proceed then, O philosopher," said Dr. Temple, folding his arms.

Ralph laughed. "I suppose that when a man comes back from the grave, as it were, with the grave-clothes still hanging about him, he likes to hear himself talk. His commonplaces sound very fine in his own ears, and he expects others to look on him as a kind of prophet."

"But you must tell us more about the grass," said Lettice.

"When I gathered it to-day," he continued, "I thought of that passage of Raleigh's about the mind of man having two ports, 'one always peopled with the entrance of manifold vanities, the other desolate and overgrown with grass, by which enter our charities and divine contemplations.' That is a pretty image of the port desolate and overgrown with grass; and rambling on through the silent, forsaken, sunlit streets, that were so busy and full of life a little while ago, I felt a strange kind of happiness in me, and the grass and desolation seemed very sweet and pleasant to see."

"That was a sensation of returning health," said Dr. Temple.

"Yes, to some extent it was, I know. To be free from all pain, feeling the warm sunshine on me, walk-

ing in the quiet streets with the green grass inviting my eyes to rest on it with its greenness, to be without strength or will to work, and wish for no change in that languid existence—that was a novel and enchanting sensation. I remembered Tennyson's *Lotos-Eaters*, especially this passage:

Branches they bore of that enchanted stem,  
Laden with flower and fruit, whereof they gave  
To each, but whoso did receive of them,  
And taste, to him the gushing of the wave  
Far, far away did seem to mourn and rave  
On alien shores; and if his fellow spake,  
His voice was thin, as voices from the grave;  
And deep asleep he seemed, yet all awake,  
And music in his ears his beating heart did make."

"I would much prefer not to receive and taste of your lotos plant," said Dr. Temple.

"Naturally," replied Ralph. "But when you have tasted and the poison in it has not killed you, then you are able to appreciate fully the enchanting beauty of that wonderful poem. Philosopher you call me—a deep thinker! Well, the truth is, I'm simply incapable of thought at present. I can't even read a poem that has any thought in it or anything except mere beauty; it taxes my poor bloodless brain too much. It gives me a headache. Take Tennyson, for example, who of all poets is the easiest to read. You can read him resting in an easy-chair after a hard day's work and enjoy him when dozing as you enjoy a soft soothing dreamy music. Even he is too much for me just now. *Maud* is too passionate, *In Memoriam* too profound, *Locksley Hall* too bitter, *The Princess*

too full of fire and action, and so on. They strike the strings too roughly. In *The Lotos-Eaters* the strings are not touched at all, but only softly breathed upon, with a breath full of warmth and fragrance:

What pleasure can we have  
To war with evil? Is there any peace  
In ever climbing up the climbing wave?  
All things have rest, and ripen toward the grave  
In silence; ripen, fall and cease:  
Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease."

"For my part, Herne, I desire neither dark death nor dreamful ease. At the present moment—and this remark, Norah, is meant especially for you—my only wish is for a cup of tea. That restful feeling, and the desire for its continuance, which you are now experiencing, is natural in one who has just come, as you say, from the grave, with the grave-clothes still hanging about him."

After this conversation they were just about to enter the house when a person on horseback appeared in the distance, galloping towards them, the hoofs of his animal making an extraordinarily loud clattering in the quiet street.

"It is Charlie," exclaimed Lettice. "Oh, what folly!"

"Folly, do you call it!" broke out Dr. Temple. "That's too mild a word. He's a rank lunatic, I should say. Does he think, coming from a distance, that he can breathe this poisonous atmosphere with impunity?"

In a few moments Wendover was with them, off his horse, joyfully shaking hands all round. He had

grown quite a beard, and was looking very sun-browned and healthy. He did not appear to recognise his old friend at first, but Ralph came forward and shook hands with him. "I'm awfully glad to see you back and looking so well, Wendover," he said.

"How d'ye do, Herne!" answered the other. "Can't say I return the compliment—about your looks, I mean. You are certainly not in blooming health!" Then lowering his voice a little, he added: "I've taken your hand, Herne, but, unless things have got strangely mixed up in my mind, we did not part friends."

"No, I'm sorry we didn't," returned Ralph. "But we've buried so much here since you left us, we can, I think, bury that little quarrel also."

Wendover did not reply, and when the others went into the house he remained outside with Lettice, waiting to leave his horse in the care of some passing boy.



## CHAPTER XIII

### A QUARREL REVIVED

“**L**ETTICE, my poor dear girl, how pale you are looking!” exclaimed Wendover; then, in answer to her questions, he explained that, having had no news of them, anxiety for their safety had induced him to return from the country. On his arrival, he learned to his dismay that she and her sister were still in town. He had come on directly to urge her to go away at once.

“I’m sure, Charlie, you can give us no reasons for leaving town which have not been already urged a hundred times,” she replied. “We have been living in this poisonous air so long that it will make little difference now whether we go or stay. But you—oh, how could you come here? It was madness of you to come to town. And how strangely you behaved to your friend! Didn’t you know that poor Ralph had been down with yellow fever?”

“No, I didn’t. But he is not my friend now, Lettice—I want no false friends. And I wish you wouldn’t call him Ralph.”

“Why not, Charlie? Perhaps you don’t know how nobly he has acted, working among the poor in the very worst part of town. The people of the Medical Department were glad to send him his diploma

after the fever broke out, when they saw what he was doing.”

“Oh, they sent it to him, did they? Like throwing a dog a bone, I suppose!”

“Have you come here at the risk of your life only to quarrel with me, Charlie?” said Lettice.

“No, please don’t think that, Lettice. You can’t imagine how I’ve been longing to see you, and how awfully anxious I have been. But I can’t ever have the same feeling for Herne I used; and it is so hard to find him here and to hear you talking about him as if you had got intimate.”

“Here is a little fellow to hold your horse, Charlie; and now let us go in to tea,” said Lettice, without noticing his last speech.

When they were all together once more, Dr. Temple and Ralph both appeared to have lost something of their bright spirits; a general conversation was maintained, but not without visible effort, while Lettice, who had grown strangely serious, glanced frequently from Wendover to Herne, apparently trying to fathom their thoughts.

Dr. Temple soon left them to go on his rounds. “Wendover,” he said impressively, before going, “let me tell you this: if you sleep in Buenos Ayres to-night, I wouldn’t give much for your chances of escaping infection.”

“I have no such intention,” said the other. “I am going to stay with friends at Merlo, and shall take the train at nine o’clock this evening. I’ll run away now to attend to a little business before the banks

close, and put up my horse; then I'll come back to spend the evening."

Ralph remained chatting with the girls, and from his mind and also from Norah's a slight cloud seemed to have passed away with Wendover's departure; but Lettice still wore a troubled look not usual with her.

At seven o'clock, when Dr. Temple had come in again, the little party of four sat down to their modest and safe dinner, consisting of roast mutton, a tapioca pudding, and a little pale sherry. It was not a repast to keep them very long at the table, and very soon they adjourned to the drawing-room; the lamps were lighted, and Lettice sat down to the piano, having promised Ralph a song to make him prolong his visit.

The few friends they saw at this period professed to be scandalised that Lettice could play and sing—secular music too!—so soon after her grandmother's death, and when people were dying daily by hundreds in the town; but Dr. Temple had his own ideas on the matter, and had instilled them into his daughters' minds. "The best prevention," he told them, "is a cheerful, equal mind. Your grandmother was over eighty; the immediate cause of her death was yellow fever, it is true; but then it merely touched her with a finger and she dropped, for she was ready and ripe for death, and her end was not therefore so painful as it is to many others I see dying every day. You are not afraid for yourselves, and that is well; and if you can postpone grief for those that die for a while, we shall all three of us weather this storm. For my part, I have succeeded in convincing myself that I

am not going to take it. I have no doubt that imagination is, in most cases, the final or immediate cause of yellow fever, just as it is of sea-sickness and many other maladies, and if we let nothing trouble us very much we shall be safe."

The death of old Mrs. Temple was, therefore, not allowed to make any difference in their everyday habits. Dr. Temple's serene, cheerful temper continued unchanged, and his daughters concluded that he dissembled remarkably well, or else that he was able, by an effort of will, to banish all feelings of sorrow and of anxiety.

When Wendover returned in the evening he was surprised, and not a little annoyed, at finding his rival—as he still persisted in regarding Herne—with his friends. He had hoped to find Lettice alone—alone, and with a strange glad light of welcome in her eyes; he had hoped indeed for wonderful and beautiful things. Then, too, Ralph had told him distinctly, he remembered or imagined, that he would never again set foot in that house. What treacherous double game had his former friend been playing during his (Wendover's) long absence from town?

Ralph could not help noticing the cloud on his face, and, wishing to appear friendly, addressed him in a pleasant, familiar tone. This was too much for Wendover, in his present suspicious state of mind; for a few moments he remained silent, then in a low voice replied: "Herne, you have no right to address me in this intimate way after what passed between us. I suppose we can be strangers in this house as well as out of it!"

Ralph bit his lip and was silent. But Dr. Temple had partly overheard the low-spoken words, for at that moment there had been a momentary silence in the room. "What is the meaning of this?" he asked in great surprise.

"It means only this," replied Wendover: "Herne knows perfectly well after what passed between us before I left Buenos Ayres, that it is impossible for us to be friendly. He meets me here, and tries to make it appear that we are on the same intimate footing as formerly. He has no right to do that! It is not honest, and I could not help saying so, though I am awfully sorry that this has happened in your house, Dr. Temple."

"I did not know that you wished to revive or keep up a foolish quarrel," returned Ralph. "When we met this afternoon I told you that I wished to bury it."

"Quite right," said Dr. Temple. "The best thing you can do with a quarrel is to bury it."

"I can't do that since I find him here," said Wendover. "He never used to come, and before I left Buenos Ayres he pledged his word that he would never enter this house again."

"I pledged my word! What has made you imagine such a thing? When you are ready to go to your station let me walk there with you, and I will recall to you the very words used on the occasion of our quarrel. I am sure, Wendover, you will acknowledge that you are wronging me. It can't be very pleasant for our friends to have to listen to all this."

"No, I suppose not," said Wendover. "I'm very sorry it has happened."

Lettice, sitting on the music-stool, which she had turned round so as to face them, had been intently listening, her eyes going from one to the other. Then she said, "But haven't we a right to know the facts too? I wish to know, Ralph, why you were not to come here. Had anything been said to make you think we had other than the friendliest feelings for you?"

"Oh, Lettice, it was not your place to speak!" murmured Miss Temple.

"Am I wrong, papa?" said Lettice, appealing to her father, with a keenly distressed, almost scared look on her face.

He rose, and coming forward, placed his hand on her shoulder. "No, my child, you are not wrong, only impulsive," he said. "I do not think that I am erring in supposing that your name, Lettice, has been brought into this affair, and since our young friends have permitted us to hear this very vague and unsatisfactory account of what took place, I think it is only right we should know the real facts."

"It would be rather painful," said Ralph, "to have to repeat words spoken in anger long ago, and perhaps not now distinctly remembered."

"I remember them very well, if you do not," retorted Wendover. "And when I come here I find you so—so domesticated in Dr. Temple's house I can see plainly enough that you are not one to be trusted."

"I can't stand these absurd accusations," said

Ralph, turning pale. "This is what passed. Just when we were leaving Buenos Ayres I saw in the papers that yellow fever had broken out, and at once resolved not to go away. Wendover, after trying his utmost to make me alter my mind, lost his temper and bluntly told me that I had a motive in remaining behind in town, that the epidemic scare was a mere pretext."

"And what was the motive?" asked Dr. Temple.

"Is it necessary to tell you that in so many words?" said Ralph, growing red.

"It is my wish to hear it," answered Dr. Temple gravely, almost sternly.

"That I would stand a better chance—that I should be able to supplant him in someone's affections when he was out of the way."

"You said that, Charlie?" exclaimed Lettice, with flashing eyes.

"I did say it, and I'm not going to tell a lie about it. Ask him what he said in reply."

"I asked you if your motive in trying to drag me out of Buenos Ayres against my will was that you feared to leave me behind. And that is all there is to tell."

"Well," said Dr. Temple, smiling a little, "it is really not so bad as I imagined. Not a pleasant little disagreement, I must confess, but not so bad that you need to cherish undying animosity against each other. There was nothing more said by either of you?"

Both were silent.

"Remember that if anything material is concealed, all we have heard, which, I fancy, we can forgive and

forget, goes for nothing. We heard something about Herne pledging his word not to enter this house."

"That I denied," said Ralph.

"It was my mistake," added Wendover. "I beg his pardon for making it."

"That's right, Wendover; I am glad you are so ready to acknowledge a mistake. And when Herne made that speech about your motives did you make no reply?"

"Yes, I told him——"

"Wait one moment," said Ralph, starting up. "Remember, Wendover, that not one word more was spoken with reference to Dr. Temple's family."

"That is all I wished to hear," said Dr. Temple. "And now that my daughters have heard the whole matter, what is there to prevent us from all being good friends once more? Wendover and Herne, what do you say?"

Wendover looked up with a clouded face and hesitated. "Dr. Temple," he spoke at length, "I cannot—I will not owe anything to Herne's magnanimity. I must first tell you my answer to that speech he made about my reasons for trying to drag him out of Buenos Ayres, as he put it. I told him to do his best. I said I did not fear a man who had behaved so disreputably as to make himself the talk of the town."

Lettice started up from her seat. "It was bad enough to bring my name into your quarrel," she said, "you might have spared Ralph that insult. I shall never forgive you, Charlie."

For a moment or two after speaking she remained



standing, looking very pale in her anger; then she said: "Good night, Ralph; I am sorry your first evening with us has been such an unpleasant one." But she did not give him her hand, not wishing, perhaps, to show him how much it trembled.

After kissing her father, she turned to leave the room. Wendover rose hurriedly from his seat, all his anger changed to keen distress.

"Lettice, are you going to leave me in this way?" he said. "If I have offended you, forgive me, and say good-bye."

She stood hesitating for a while at the door, then turned and slowly came back to him. "Very well, Charlie; I will shake hands with you and try to forget it. It is a bad time to quarrel now with Death standing by waiting to decide which one of us he will next strike down."

"What dreadful nonsense are you talking, child?" said her father, kissing her very tenderly. "I'm always telling you that these silly prophecies are apt to bring about their own fulfilment. Prophecy that we are all going to live far into the twentieth century, and you will be proving yourself the sensible daughter of a wise father." Then he led her back to the piano, and made her sit down to sing them a song.

Her fingers trembled when she touched the keys; she tried to overcome her agitation and sing, but was at length forced to give up the attempt. Dr. Temple and Ralph, who had been closely studying her pale, agitated face, exchanged anxious glances when she rose from the piano. Her father would not

let her retire yet, knowing how perilous it was to lie down with a troubled spirit. He rang for wine and biscuits; and when all were served, he addressed them very gravely. "My young friends and my daughters," he said, "if you can feel, as I do, that you are able to forgive whatever there is to forgive, to forget what is past, I ask you to drink with me. If there is one who cannot do that, let him set down his glass untasted."

They all drank their wine. Then Wendover and Herne, after exchanging glances, rose and shook hands in silence.

"Herne," said Dr. Temple when, later in the evening, they were alone together in the smoking-room, "when Wendover made that clumsy attack on you, I feared for a moment that something very disagreeable was about to follow. But I might have known that your feelings towards my daughter are too chivalrous to allow you to drop a word, even in the heat of passion, that would lead to a breach in our friendship. Just now I rather pity Wendover, he is such an ass. A thorough Englishman, honest and open as the day, good-tempered, generous, ready to acknowledge a fault, but still an ass. He has a muddled intellect, and though Lettice knows him, I daresay, better than he knows himself, I think that to-night he has spoilt his chance of winning her. His jealousy she might have overlooked, but not the insult; she has too high a regard for you."

"He should have held his tongue about that," said Ralph.

“He told me that in answer to my question, and because he was angry with you, and would owe nothing to your magnanimity, as he expressed it. And therefore I pity him, knowing what the results are most likely to be. I can hardly believe that, in any case, the friendly agreement, or whatever it was between them, would ever have resulted in a genuine engagement, for they are not very well suited to each other. In matters of the affections my daughters take their own course—I have nothing to do with such questions. I suppose that Lettice, who has some romantic ideas, imagined that she owed something to Wendover in return for all his love, and so went so far as to promise not to engage herself to anyone else for a year: an absurd compact, according to my mind, which is not romantic; but then, that is not her mind. The upshot of it all is that you, Herne, need not despair.”

Here was an unworldly father indeed! Ralph could only look at him in silent astonishment.

“I can very well guess all that is passing in your mind, Herne,” he continued.

“Not all,” interrupted the other. “My shattered health and penniless condition, the unspeakable folly I was guilty of not so very long ago. Lettice has many admirers, men of means, and well able to give her any luxury, and a position beyond anything I can ever look forward to.”

“Herne, there are, I should think, five to ten thousand persons in Buenos Ayres, at the present moment, shattered in health in the same way as

yourself, and in another three to six months they will not have a vestige of yellow fever in them. When I was your age, about thirty years ago—but please don't ask me to be exact on that point—I was nearly as poor in money as you are to-night. I had not studied as hard as you have done, and I am quite sure that I never had your fire and energy. As for the follies you were guilty of at the beginning of your career, they are now where the glyptodon and the megatherium are, crumbling to dust in the post-tertiary deposits. If you are palæontologically inclined, dig them up and lecture on them, by all means, but you will soon find that, with the exception of perhaps two or three desperately scientific old ladies, no person will take any interest in the subject. The rivals you speak of can offer luxury and a position, it is true; you have something better to offer, the splendid fame you have won in this city in a time of unexampled calamity, which is on everybody's lips, and which any woman in Buenos Ayres might well be proud to share. Eleven o'clock, Herne! I have ordered the brougham round to take you home, I think I hear it coming now."

Herne, with a heart overflowing with gratitude, and with a new hope that was like joy, took his departure, and though many doubts troubled his mind when he thought of his friend Wendover, they did not affect him very deeply, and he saw nothing of the great black thunder-cloud now fast approaching and threatening to overwhelm him.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE BLACK DAY

**W**ITH returning strength that passive, restful condition of mind Ralph had spoken of soon wore itself out, his mind so far outstripped his body on the way to recovery that he began to chafe at his enforced inaction, and in about a week after his visit to the Temples he was once more going about among the yellow-fever-stricken poor in his neighbourhood. For a few days there had been signs that the epidemic was abating. For several consecutive weeks during the hot months of January and February the daily average of deaths had continued about the same, then during the bright, almost bracing, weather in March, when the grass began to grow in the streets, there was a marked decline in the mortality. After this came yet another unfavourable change; the days were excessively sultry, with massive black clouds suspended almost motionless in the air, and discharging frequent heavy showers, which did not mitigate the heat in the least. With the atmospheric change the death-rate rose rapidly again, and those who had begun to think that the pestilence had about spent its force were now once more ready to resign themselves to despair. Then came that day of wrath called afterwards the

Black Day, when from sunrise to sunset a darkness almost as of night reigned over the city, while a continuous torrent of rain fell for about fifteen hours, accompanied by the most awful thunder and lightning. Never before during all those miserable months had the cases of yellow fever been so numerous or fatal. Different doctors had adopted different methods of treatment, and some had boasted loudly of their success, but on this fatal day all methods seemed futile, and those who fell ill died with terrible suddenness. In such a condition of things even the hardest and most heroic began to be overwhelmed. For long months they had striven fearlessly, and now when they were worn out with excessive labours the evil suddenly assumed a magnitude so terrible that they could no longer cope with it. A great cry of terror and despair went forth and passed from lip to lip, and many who had bravely borne themselves until now sank broken-hearted, while throughout the whole city during all that black day, Death held his hideous carnival.

Ralph, who had become aware quite early in the day of the awful change in the virulent power of the disease, did not spare himself for one moment. His house was filled, hour after hour, with miserable people—their soaking garments sending up a blue steam in the close hot rooms—who had come there piteously crying for help, and when not dispensing drugs and advising them what to do, he was wearily dragging himself from house to house through streets which had now become rushing torrents, so that

when crossing them he was often up to his knees in water. At the close of the day, the thick gloom changed very suddenly to intense darkness, and the frequent vivid flashes of lightning were then useful to the few pedestrians abroad, for in most of the streets in the poorer quarters the lamps were left unlighted. Worn out with his efforts, Ralph had dragged himself home some time after nightfall, and while trying to divest himself of his wet clothing, he called for a tumbler of hot brandy and water. Then someone put a scrap of paper, which had been left an hour before, into his hand. It was from Dr. Temple. Opening it mechanically he read:

“Come to me at once if you can. What I feared has happened. She is down—God help us!”

For a moment he felt his senses ebbing away, but the tumbler of warm brandy came just in time to save him, and he took the whole of it at one draught. The fiery liquor sent the blood rushing through his veins, the sudden reaction making him shiver like a person in a fit of ague; then feeling strong again, he rose up, and without a word left the house. Out of doors it was now excessively dark, and for a distance of three or four hundred yards he proceeded by feeling his way along the houses, then the fumes of the spirit began to make him giddy, and he was forced to sit down on a door-step.

The fear that the fictitious strength imparted by the brandy would evaporate before he could reach his destination almost maddened him, and very soon he got up and went on again. The frequent flashes

of the lightning showed him where to cross the flooded streets, but for a long time did not reveal a single human form. At length he perceived a dark object hurriedly advancing towards him, and in another moment a vivid flash revealed a tall, gaunt old woman, her head uncovered, and her long grey hair hanging down loose in the rain. She instantly flung herself on Ralph, fastening her fingers like an eagle's talons in his clothes.

"Praised be the Mother of God that I have found help!" she screamed. "Oh, señor, for the love of Heaven, and your mother's sake, come quickly with me! I have left my daughter alone, dying—come, come before it is too late and save her!"

"Leave me, woman, I cannot help you," he answered, trying to shake her off. Then he directed her where to go for help, but she refused to listen to him.

"She is dying — dying, my daughter is dying!" she screamed in a frenzied manner.

He struggled violently to escape, but her strength was greater than his, and she not only maintained a grip of his coat, but began to drag him along the pavement, imploring him all the time to save her dying daughter. For a few moments he allowed himself to be drawn along, feeling powerless in her hands. She had conquered him, and a stupor of despair was settling on his mind. Then the thought of Lettice stung him to make one last effort. He clutched hold of an iron railing and brought her to a stand; and at that moment a vivid flash of lightning revealing



his wasted face in all its ghastly whiteness, favoured his stratagem.

“Woman, look at me!” he cried. “Do you not see that I too am dying?”

She started back with an exclamation of horror, and at that moment, using all his little remaining strength, he tore himself from her grasp and fled away in the darkness. The cry of despair she uttered when he had escaped pierced him with unutterable anguish; but he knew that he was powerless to help her. He could only have gone to see that poor girl die, and that was all. Lettice was more to him than this stranger’s child, and she too was dying—his beautiful Lettice, his sweet friend and guardian angel, his “divine woman,” for whose sake he had tried to do such noble work. And the little strength left to him would, perhaps, not enable him to reach her, to look once more in those dear eyes that had once shed tears for him, before their light was quenched in death!

With these bitter thoughts passing through his mind, he stood clinging for support to a corner post, while at his feet the water swept by with a deep, low, rushing sound. He was about to plunge into it to cross to the other side, when a sudden flash revealed the dark, swirling torrent, down which a long train of black boat-shaped objects were being swiftly borne. He remembered that the pavement he stood on was built up to nine or ten feet above the street, which was now full to overflowing. Instantly it was all black again, and then, not daring to move, he

waited for a second flash to show him one of the iron bridges with which the deep and dangerous paved gully was spanned in many places. When the flash came, he perceived the bridge twenty or thirty yards away before him, and he also then distinctly saw that the dark objects floating on the current were coffins. Either a cart laden with dead had been swept away, or some of the men engaged in collecting the dead had got rid of a load by flinging it into the current.

After crossing the bridge he struggled on for half an hour, and then his strength entirely failed him, and with a bitter moan of despair he sank on the pavement. He was beside a long blank wall, where there was not even a doorway to shelter him from the pouring rain. There, crouching close against the wall, with closed eyes, waiting for the end, the image of his love came distinctly before him as he had seen her that day in Palermo, looking down into his face, with her eyes wet with tears.

And while he crouched there, his body growing numb, and that bright mental picture becoming dimmer and dimmer by degrees, through the continuous rushing sound of the rain came other sounds—the hurried tread of feet and voices of people eagerly speaking. The bright light of a lantern flashed on his face.

“He has been attacked with fever here; lift him, boys, and carry him to the lazaretto,” said one. A moment after he exclaimed, “*Dios mío*, it is Dr. Herne!”

Ralph felt a flask pressed to his mouth, and after

swallowing the liquor he roused himself, to recognise in the speaker a young friend—one of that band of brave young volunteers who formed the Sanitary Commission.

As soon as Ralph had revived sufficiently to explain how he came to be there, he was taken up and carried to his destination, which was not more than twelve minutes' walk from the place where he had sunk down.

Before he had been many minutes in Dr. Temple's house, dry clothing, the warm bright air, and the restoratives he was made to swallow had brought him back a little strength.

"Lettice is very bad," said his friend despondingly, "but you cannot see her now, Herne. You are utterly prostrated and could do no good. It will be impossible to tell for some hours yet whether the attack is going to prove fatal or not. Lie down and get a little rest before the crisis comes."

"No, I cannot. Let me go to her now, for God's sake!" exclaimed Ralph, with sudden energy; and starting up he made his way to the room where she was lying, his knees trembling under him, and supporting himself by catching at the furniture as he walked.

Lettice, exhausted with the paroxysms she had suffered, was lying back on her pillow, with her eyes closed, uttering low moans. Norah was with her applying ice to her head when he entered. He sank on his knees at the bedside and gazed long and with a terrible anxiety into the sufferer's wan face, and then

placed his hand on hers. Suddenly she opened her eyes and stared at him.

“Oh, Ralph, Ralph,” she cried out aloud, “I knew that you were coming to me! I saw you coming a long way off. And you were saying, ‘How pleasant to see the street so desolate and overgrown with grass!’ I heard you saying that—do you remember the grass you gave me, Ralph? I have kept it because you kept the promise you made me. Oh, Ralph, must I die—must I die—must I die?”

“No, no, no, my darling sister, you will not die,” murmured Norah, bending down and kissing the sufferer’s face.

“Oh, Norah, where will they put me?—tell me, tell me!” she cried again with sudden terrible energy. “Norah! Papa! Papa! have mercy on me and hide me away when they come for me! Look, there are the men selling coffins in the street! Oh, papa, will you not buy one and hide me away in the yard under the flowers, where they will never, never find me? Oh, save me! save me! save me!” And here she burst into piercing cries, and with raised hands and eyes almost starting from their sockets, seemed to be gazing at some horrid vision. Then her eyes closed again and her head dropped back on to the pillow. Ralph was still kneeling with his head bent down, and when Dr. Temple spoke to him and received no reply he looked closely and found that he was insensible. They carried him into an adjoining room, and Dr. Temple passed the night in going from one room to the other.

Lettice had intervals of relief from the maddening paroxysms, and he would then hasten to Herne, but for several hours he could not restore him to consciousness. Only when the sun was up and shining brightly into the room from the now cloudless sky did Ralph open his eyes once more.

Dr. Temple had been for some time at his side. "Swallow this, Herne," he said, placing an arm under him to raise him up, "it will give you strength."

Ralph put the glass aside from his lips. "No," he murmured feebly. "Let me go now my work is finished. I am tired of the world and life. Where she is there will I go also."

Norah had come in, and stooping down, listened to his last words, spoken almost in a whisper. "Oh, Ralph, rouse yourself," she said, "Lettice is not dead. She will live—she is better now."

He opened his eyes wide and fixed them on her, then struggled to rise, but in a moment fell back fainting.

"He will wake well, or never at all," said Dr. Temple, then once more hurried to his daughter's side to satisfy himself that Norah was right. It was even as she had said, she was sleeping quietly, and her worn-looking discoloured face, which seemed to be the face of a corpse, felt temperate and moist to the touch. These blessed signs were not delusive, and the improvement continued hour by hour; Lettice proving one of the few who survived after being attacked by yellow fever on that terrible Black Day.

Ralph also recovered, but was in so exhausted a

condition that only after carefully nursing him for three or four days did Dr. Temple consent to his removal to his own house.

This was virtually the end of the epidemic. The malignant spirit signalled its departure, Herod-like, by a great slaughter. On that Black Day alone there were over six hundred fatal cases, raising the tremendous total of deaths in that city from the pestilence to upwards of twenty thousand. The population had been literally decimated, or, if it is taken into account that during the epidemic half the people were absent, one in every five persons perished. On the day succeeding the Black Day there were only about a hundred deaths, and a week later not one fresh case and not one death, so rapidly had the mortality declined after reaching its climax. The absentees came flocking back to their homes, many thousands every day; the tender autumn grass and herbage vanished from the streets, which were once more thronged with people as in normal times, and the only difference to be noted was that they were all in mourning.

## CHAPTER XV

### A LOTOS-EATER: CONCLUSION

**A**PRIL, loveliest in that southern land of all the bright autumnal months, was drawing to its end, when one day out under the trees in the garden of a country house at Las Lomas de Zamorra—a village not far from Buenos Ayres—Norah and Lettice were sitting together. The utter prostration which had succeeded her illness, and which for some weeks made her final restoration to perfect health a doubtful matter, had now passed away from Lettice. She was still very weak, as could easily be seen in her thin, pale face and her languid attitude, as she reclined with her head resting on the cushioned back of her easy-chair. But within the pulses were making pleasant music; all the exquisite sensations of returning health, which made of earth an “opening paradise,” were hers; and how like a paradise that autumn’s painted world now seemed to her tired eyes! The garden, bright with many-hued late-flowering china asters and yellow and white jonquil and narcissus, and full of the perfume of autumn violets and beds of mignonette, about which the bumble-bees were still humming; the graceful, towering eucalyptus, with its glossy, dark foliage;

the acacias, with their deciduous leaves now yellow as flame; and tall Lombardy poplars, rustling far above her to the soft, warm breeze, and shedding ever and anon a large heart-shaped leaf, that came circling slowly down to fall at her feet. Beyond the garden trees, the earth, stretching away in gentle undulations, was everywhere clothed in that vivid green of autumn which reminds the English stranger of his own moist island. On the convalescent's lap lay an open volume of Tennyson, for since her recovery began she had grown strangely fond of his poetry; but just at present she was not reading: her eyes, full of soft dreamy pleasure, were gazing across the green distance into the blue haze of the horizon; while Norah, seated by her and holding her hand, was gazing with an absorbed expression into her face. Her sister and father now frequently gazed thus long and earnestly into her face, with a look expressive of a love that was like idolatry; for she was their darling, their beautiful pet, and had been so nearly taken from them. From what grief and desolation of heart had they not been saved! What overflowing joy and gratitude they experienced when they looked on their precious one, pale and just returned from the gates of death!

Presently into the garden and to them came their father. "Norah," he said, "do you mind giving up your place to me for a few minutes? I have something important to say to this little lazy-bones who sits here all day dreaming under the trees."

Norah resigned her seat, and understanding from



sundry winks and nods that she was in the way, returned to the house.

"Papa, I think you are very jealous and greedy," said Lettice. "All these absurd winks, which I saw plainly enough, were only to get rid of poor Norah and have me all to yourself."

"I didn't mean you to see them, Lettice; but you are mistaken if you think I deceived Norah. I have just received a letter from an important young person who seems to imagine that he has some right in you. He says he considers it very hard he should still be put off from coming here on the score of your weakness, when, he hears, you are getting strong enough to take long carriage drives every day. He wants to see you very badly, and asks for permission to come."

"Do you mean Charlie, papa?"

"I mean Wendover, of course; but I can't imagine why you call him Charlie. You might just as well speak of the president of the municipality as Tom."

"Poor Charlie!"

"Yes, it's all very well—'poor Charlie'; but what must I say to him? Is he to come bothering here, monopolising you altogether?"

"Tell him, papa, that I am very grateful to him for all his kind solicitude about me, and grapes he sent, but cannot see him just yet; that when I am a little stronger I shall be very glad to receive him—as a friend, papa, never, never anything more than that."

"You're a dear, good, sensible girl, Lettice," said her father, stooping to kiss her.

“Yes, I know I am, papa. But if you had liked Charlie and favoured him, I suppose you would have called me a pig-headed little donkey.”

“No, Lettice; as a scientific man, I couldn’t be capable of such a zoological solecism as that. Now, if you had put it the other way, and said a donkey-headed little pig!”

“Oh, papa, you are too ridiculous! Fancy a man of your age and position talking such nonsense! Sometimes you make me feel quite ashamed of you in company.”

“Quite right, Lettice. You may always feel ashamed of me—in company. You are reading Tennyson. Well, trust me, Lettice—not Clara Vere de Vere—from yon blue heavens above us the gardener Adam and his wife, when they look down on what you call company, feel very sorry that they left any descendants on the earth. Those wooden he and she marionettes, with black coats and rustling dresses, each with the same eternal smile carved on their faces, and, when you pull the strings, squeaking out the same everlasting platitudes—oh, how I despise their company! Poor old Adam and Eve, I heartily sympathise with them. But if those two should happen to roll their eyes this way and see an elderly gentleman talking to his daughter in the garden and listen to him, then I fancy they would drop a little tear. Very fragrant, no doubt, and beautiful with all the colours of the rainbow, but a real, genuine tear all the same. I can also fancy that after wiping his eyes with his celestial

rainbow-coloured pocket handkerchief, the old gentleman—Adam, I mean—would say, ‘Cheer up, Eve, my love; after all there is some naturalness left in the dear old planet we used to live in.’”

“Yes, papa, that’s all very funny and nice, but I can’t help thinking that if Adam looked a little closer, he would discover that the charming and very natural old gentleman—the one in the garden, I mean—he admired so much was after all something of a hypocrite.”

“My daughter, you are forgetting yourself! What reason have you for calling me a hypocrite?”

“Oh, never mind, I am not going to say anything more about it just now. Some day when I hear you ostentatiously talking about your daughters being their own mistresses, I shall perhaps return to the subject.”

“Hem—ha. You are very unjust, Lettice—very unjust indeed, indeed. But I can take the state of your health into account, and make all allowances. We will say no more about that just now. I have something else to tell you, Lettice. I have also received a letter from another young friend of ours, and he also—oddly enough—asks to be allowed to come and see you!”

“Who is he, papa?” she said, putting her hand in his, while the rosy colour overspread her pallid face.

“Herne, my child; could you not guess? And before you tell me what to answer, I wish to tell you just what he says—something intended, I know, for me and not for you. He promises, Lettice, that if he

is allowed to come, there shall be no word, no sign to cause you even the shadow of annoyance or distress. He wishes me to remember that he saw you for the last time on that terrible day, when your mind was clouded with the torments you were suffering, when it seemed to him that the shadow of death was on your face, when your blackened lips were uttering words and cries that are still ringing in his brain. This last image, he says, is a constant torture to him, so that he craves for a sight of your face as it is now, just as a man tortured with thirst craves for a sight of water!”

“I have often wondered how I looked to him that night. I remembered him just for one moment. I saw him close to me, and then—oh, I can’t tell what horrible things came before me! Do you really think, papa, that all traces of that strange colour have gone off now? Do be honest for once, and tell me how I look!”

“Honestly, my darling, you never looked more beautiful—not before your illness even. Your skin could not be clearer, though you are still pale. I think it would be cruel to refuse him permission to come.”

“You may tell him to come and see us if you like, papa!”

“Ah, Lettice,” said her father, becoming strangely serious, “that awful night is in most part a blank to you, but the anxiety I suffered I shall never forget. Your recovery surprised me even less than his. He had become convinced that you were going to die

that night, and he felt his own life ebbing away, and was only too willing to lose it. It was hard for me, threatened with a double loss, my child and the young friend I had learned to love, more than I had ever loved any man before. At some future time, perhaps, when you see him with the bloom of health on his face once more, when his noble conduct during the epidemic has begun to bear fruit, and you remember all you went through with him, then, Lettice, perhaps you will learn to think of him as even something more than a friend."

She glanced quickly at him, with a heightened colour on her face and a curious little smile on her lips.

"Well, well, child, don't look at me in that mocking way. What I said meant just nothing at all—there. Now I must run away."

"Oh, papa, stoop down and let me tell you a secret—I love him with all my heart!" And having made her confession, she hid her blushing face against his arm.

"Do you, my darling? I am glad, very glad, to hear it. Only a poor young beginner, but rather to him than the greatest millionaire of them all would I give my child. This is what I desired with all my heart, and you have made me very happy. And now I must go and write to him; and, Lettice, am I to say nothing about that promise he makes me—take no notice of it, in fact? Or must I simply say——"

"Say what you like, papa."

Dr. Temple rose and went back to the house. She was alone with Nature's voices—and the incessant

murmuring of the bumble-bees, and the soft rustling of the wind in the tall poplars.

“Ah! Ralph, come soon,” she murmured, “while this lovely weather lasts; for by-and-by there will be wind and rain to scatter the yellow leaves, and dim this soft warm sunshine. It will be so pleasant for us to sit together here and feel the sun on our faces—so pleasant now because we have been through the valley of the shadow of death together, and have come back alive. Come, Ralph, and say those lines again, for I can appreciate them now:

Branches they bore of that enchanted stem,  
Laden with flowers and fruit, whereof they gave  
To each; but whoso did receive of them,  
And taste, to him the gushing of the wave  
Far, far away, did seem to mourn and rave  
On alien shores.

Ah, I did not know then how bitter your lotos-fruit was to the taste, nor how it burnt in the blood like fire, and maddened the brain. But to those that have tasted and not died, how strangely peaceful this beautiful world seems; how like a land where it is always afternoon! I watch the shadows grow long, while the yellow leaves dropping at my feet remind me of the changing season; but to me it seems there can come no change or sorrow, or shadow of death any more. The suffering and troubles and rumours of wars that fill the world reach me only like the sound of waters that mourn and rave, far, far away on alien shores. Come soon, Ralph, and we will listen together to the music that falls softly as ‘tired eyelids on tired eyes.’ A little while ago when I heard that

you were coming, it suddenly seemed to me that I was no longer a lotos-eater; I felt as I should feel, galloping over those green slopes with the fresh wind in my face. It was a sign that the days of sitting and dreaming here in the sunny garden are nearly over. What has papa said in his letter, Ralph? I dare not ask him; but when I see you coming towards me through the trees, and when I look at your face, then I shall know just how much he has told you!"

Ralph, now a guest of three or four days' standing in Dr. Temple's country house, was in the garden alone before dinner, when his host, who had just arrived from town, joined him. "Herne," he said, "what is all this nonsense I hear about one—two—three—fifty years? You know that all along I have been with you in this matter, but you must not forget that I possess a power of veto, which I am determined to exercise if you two come to any arrangement in which I cannot concur. Wait a minute and hear me out. There is one person concerned whose happiness must be secured."

"That is precisely my view," said Ralph. "Her happiness is everything to us, and must——"

"*Her* happiness!" interrupted Dr. Temple, with affected surprise. "My dear fellow, that has been already considered. I am now speaking of myself."

"Oh!"

"Just so," returned the other. "For years I have been looking forward with dread to the appearance of a rapacious kite in the shape of a lover. My eldest

daughter, I believe, contemplates leaving the paternal roof before very long, and she will reside at a considerable distance. *Your* plan, it seems, is to hover threateningly over us until an opportunity occurs to swoop down and carry my youngest child also out of my sight. Do you think all that can be a very pleasant prospect for me? Now I trust that you will prove yourself a kite amenable to reason, and that you will have some regard for a father's feelings. My proposal is that you become my partner; and then I think it will be possible for you to get married some time next spring, after which we can all reside under one roof at Calle de Marte. It is a big house, and together we shall have a big practice, and you and Lettice can be very happy, I think, without making me miserable for the rest of my life."

It was not in human nature to demur to such a proposal as that; and so it came to pass that in the following spring Herne and Lettice were united for life. Frank Barry, with his face browner than ever, and his forehead looking whiter by contrast, acted as best man, and to this day he is a constant visitor and a very dear friend of the Hernes.

The Anglican church was filled to overflowing with those who had come to witness Herne's marriage; and so great was his popularity, that paragraphs appeared in almost every one of the twenty-seven daily papers alluding to the happy event. Wendover, unable to endure the sight of his rival's triumph, left the country for a time; but with all that Ralph and Lettice had seen and endured fresh in memory,



and with the grass not yet growing on the graves of so many scores of friends, they could not afford to waste many regrets at his loss.

Sixteen years have gone by since their marriage. In that time Buenos Ayres has greatly changed; her population has increased by a hundred thousand souls; she has called science to her aid, and now fears a return of the dark days of 1871 as little as London fears a return of the Great Plague. But from many minds peaceful, prosperous years have not yet effaced the memory of that terrible time when for three long months the shadow of the Destroying Angel brooded over the city with the pleasant name; when the daily harvest of victims were flung together—old and young, and rich and poor, and virtuous and vile—to mingle their bones in one common sepulchre; when the echo of passing footsteps broke the quiet less and less frequently, as in the night-time, until the streets were “desolate and overgrown with grass.”

PRINTED BY  
THE TEMPLE PRESS AT LETCHWORTH  
IN GREAT BRITAIN