Leon Roch

by Benito Pérez Galdós

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Transcriber’s note

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LEON ROCH A ROMANCE

BY B. PÉREZ GALDÓS Author of “Gloria,” etc.

From the Spanish by CLARA BELL

—AUTHORIZED EDITION—

IN TWO VOLUMES—VOL. I.

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Leon Roch

LEON ROCH

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

FROM THE SAME TO THE SAME.

“Ugoibea, August 30th.

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

“But now I am recovering mine. An end to recrimination; I am firmly resolved never again to be irritable and suspicious and inquisitive—as you say I am. Your

explanations really and entirely satisfy me; their frankness and fulness impress me strongly—I hardly know why—and leave no room in my mind for doubt, but fill my soul with a conviction—how can I express it? that is in itself a sort of affection, that is its twin brother and as inseparable from it as—as—I cannot finish my sentence; but what does it matter?—To proceed; I was saying that I fully accept your explanation. A denial would have increased my suspicions; your confession has removed them. You tell me that you did love—no, that is not the word, that you had a fancy, a mere fancy, as a boy—as children together—for Pepa de Fúcar; that you have known her since she was little, and that you played together—I remember you used to tell me something about it in Madrid, when we first made your acquaintance. It was she, no doubt, who used to go with you to pick up the blossoms fallen from the orange-trees—who was frightened at the rustling made by the silk-worms when they were feeding, and for whom you used to make crowns of Marvel of Peru? Yes, you told me many funny stories of your companion as a child. You and she used to dye your cheeks with blackberries, and make paper crowns to wear; you loved to take birds' nests, and her greatest delight was to pull off her shoes and stockings and paddle in the streams among the rushes and water-plants. One day, almost at the same instant, you fell from a tree and she was bitten by some reptile. That was Pepa de Fúcar, was it not? You see I remember very well, and could write your history quite accurately.

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

"I remember now some more stories of your childish amusements, which you told me not long ago. How such trifles cling to our memories! When you were a boy, and

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

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

"Yes, I will be so foolish—I have read that blessed page once more. Oh! it is good to be told that 'a true, deep, and lofty devotion has blotted out that fancy and left no trace of it'—very good! 'the illusions of childhood rarely last into mature years' of course; 'Your sentiments are sincere, and your intentions thoroughly honest'—yes no doubt; 'The voice I heard, the words that made me feel as if the world had come to an end, were simply one of those wild suppositions thrown out at random, to be

taken up by malice and used by her as terrible weapons'—so it is, so it is; 'Pepa de Fúcar is as indifferent to you at this moment as any other woman living'—that is perfect, exquisite! and finally 'I and I alone'—me and no one else.—What joy to press my hand closely to my heart while I think to myself—me, me alone, and no one in the world but me!

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

"I cannot avoid telling you—though this letter already seems interminable—the impression that girl produced on me, even setting aside the rancour I could not help feeling at first. But now the storm is over; I can judge her coolly and impartially, and though, when I heard what you know, I thought she must be perfectly charming, I see her now in her true light. Every one talks of her shameful extravagance. It is an insult to Heaven and humanity! Papa says she spends enough in clothes in a week to support several families comfortably. She is elegant, no doubt; but sometimes very affected—as much as to say: 'Gentlemen, I behave in this way that you may all see how rich I am.' Mamma says, no man would ever think of marrying a girl who thinks of nothing but displaying the products of industry. Rothschilds are not to be met with at every turn, and Pepa de Fúcar is enough to frighten away her suitors. She is recklessly extravagant and wilful, full of whims, and very badly brought up, and will end by falling into the hands of some fortune-hunter. So Mamma says, and she knows the world; and I really believe she is right.

"I do not think her so pleasing even as some people do, nor as I thought her myself, when I was dying of jealousy. She is too tall and thin to be graceful. It is impossible

to deny that she has a fine complexion, but one needs a microscope to see her eyes, they are so small. They say she is very amusing and agreeable, but this I know nothing about, as I never talked to her, and never wish to. I have seen her from a distance, on the sands and in the gallery of the bathing house, and her manners struck me as decidedly free and easy. I fancied she looked rather particularly at me; and I looked at her, intending to convey to her that I did not care a straw about her. I do not know whether I succeeded.

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

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

"He came in to-day quite proud to show me your new book. He praised it highly and read the opening sentences aloud to Mamma. It was a most laughable scene; neither he, nor Mamma, nor I understood a single word of it; but, in spite of that, we had the highest opinion of the learning displayed in the book. You may fancy how much we

should understand of an ‘Analysis of the Plutonic rocks in the Columbrete islands,’ and the interest I should take in quartinary deposits or in metamorphic or azoic strata. Why, I find it hard enough to spell the words, and have to copy them letter for letter. However, the mere fact that it was you who wrote this mass of mysterious learning, is enough to give it a charm in my eyes. I spent a long time poring over your pages, as though I were trying to learn Greek, and—you will not believe me, but it is quite true—I read and read, full of admiration and respect for you who had written them. Among all those monstrous names too I came on some which took my fancy in a vague fashion, such as syenite, variolite, amphibolite. They sound to me like the endearing names of fairies and cherubs who danced round you while you were studying the works of God down in the bowels of the earth.

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

“Leopoldo, too, is bored to death. He says it is a population of savages, and he cannot understand how any decent person can like to bathe among the Caffirs—so he calls the poor Castilians who swarm on the sands. Gustavo is gone to France, to visit that good angelic creature Luis Gonzaga, who is very ailing. Poor little brother! A few days since he sent an Italian priest to call on us, Don Paoletti by name, a charming man who talked delightfully. But I want to tell you everything and really cannot. My paper is coming to an end, and Mamma is calling me again. Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye. Do not fail us on Monday, and we will talk of that—you know what. At night, when I say my prayers, I pray for you. Now do not put on that disagreeable face. There is a dark corner in your soul which I do not at all like. Well,

I will say no more for fear of assuming the airs of a preacher, and for fear too of anticipating a great work—that sentence too may remain unfinished. Give my love to Syenite, Pegmatite and Amphibolite, the only fair beings of whom I am not jealous, and good-bye. I love you with all my heart; nay I am simpleton enough to believe all you tell me, and I expect you on Monday. So till Monday, farewell. Beware of failing me. If you do, you will see what you will see!

María."

CHAPTER II.

LIFE AT A WATERING PLACE.

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

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

The visitors were limping and coughing in the avenue, or sitting in various groups on the banks of turf under the trees. Whole monographs on every imaginable complaint were being delivered by the sufferers; elaborate calculations as to digestion, past or to come; grotesque diagnosis; narratives of sleepless nights, of

spasms, headaches and hiccoughs; inventories of palpitations; dissertations on the irritability of the sympathetic nerve; mysterious hypotheses as to the nervous system, as impenetrably obscure as the arcana of Isis; observations formulated into aphorisms by optimist speculators; forebodings of the apprehensive who thought each cough was a step towards the grave; hopes from the credulous who believed the waters might work miracles and bring the dead to life again; suppressed sighs of these who were in pain; soliloquies of those who were past curing, and glad laughter of the convalescents.

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

Nevertheless there is a certain charm to be found in this invalid community. The constant change of drama; the beautiful faces which arrive every day followed by more satellites than a planet; the luxury, the evening meetings; the delicate ambrosia of gossip, served up constantly fresh and spicy, never satiating and never exhausted in spite of the incessant demand; the flirtations begun or revived; the moral friction, sometimes against the grain but sometimes delightfully soothing; the thousand floating ends, as it were, that get tied or sundered; the little dances; the parties to see this or that grotto or panorama, or heap of ruins, which every one has seen a year ago but which must be once more admired in chorus; the harmless or very venial gambling; the jokes, the plots, the small intrigues, with which some members of this little world are so bold as to disturb the monotony of the common contentment, the common amusement, the common hygiene—for this sort of society is eminently a Commonwealth, and its gaiety and splendour hide a regimen as dreary as that of a

hospital—all these accessories make such colonies highly attractive, to a certain class of mind at any rate, and, as it would seem, the commonest. For this reason the whole Spanish nation resort to such spots, some with their own money to spend, and some with that of others; and at the beginning of July, the ‘Governor’ or the money-lender is put under requisition to supply the funds necessary to the attainment of this great desideratum of modern life. It would seem that there is a certain form of dipsomania, a craving to drink of sulphurous waters; and, to slake that elegant thirst, a man is willing to become a sort of hydropathic Anacreon.

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

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

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

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

“Leon, my good fellow, choicest of souls—won’t you walk with us this morning?” said the tallest, a consequential personage, who was walking, as usual, between the

other two, so that they looked as if they occupied their place on each side of him for purely ornamental purposes, and to throw his personal and social dignity into the strongest relief. The young man in mourning excused himself as best he might.

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

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

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

Who, again, does not know Don Joaquín Onésimo, that beacon light of Spanish bureaucracy, which burns so brightly wherever it shows itself, the central glory of the myriad Onésimos who, under different pretexts, fill various offices of the State? “Not a family, but an epidemic,” was said of the Onésimos. But there is no doubt whatever—Heaven knows—that if this luminary were to be extinguished, all the precincts of the administration would remain in darkness, and all social order, social institutions—nay, society itself, would revert to primæval chaos. The third side of this triangle was formed by a polished and well-dressed man, in whose pallid and languid features all the freshness and energy of his two and thirty years seemed prematurely quenched. His manners were insolent, and his whole aspect gave that impression of exhaustion and fatigue which is common enough in those who have wasted their moral strength in politics, their intellect in party journalism, and their

physical vigour in vice. The type is peculiar to Spain, and to Madrid—nocturnal in its habits, perfervid, lean; the very incarnation of that national fever which betrays its burning and devouring heat in night work over newspapers, in gambling-houses where the lamps are put out only when the sun rises, in twilight rendezvous, and in mysterious meetings in the corridors of theatres, in the corners of cafés and in Minister's offices. Such a specimen looks strangely out of place in this pure clear atmosphere, under these gigantic trees. It might almost be supposed that he would feel uncomfortable at such a distance from the dens of corruption and wickedness, that there could be no corner in his heart for the glories and graces of Nature, nor a perception of its beauties in his dulled eyes, with their red and swollen lids, heavy and bleared with late hours.

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

CHAPTER III.

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

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

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

"But has Tellería really nothing left but his house?" asked the man of politics with

the anxious curiosity of a creditor appraising an estate.

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

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

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

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

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

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

changed! I saw her last week at Ugoibea, and she is a wreck, a perfect wreck! María, on the contrary has grown to a goddess. Such a head, such an air, and such style!"

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

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

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

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

"My dear Sir, be as catholic as you please," said Fúcar, laughing less boisterously than usual, nay with a certain solemnity. "We are all catholics.—But let us avoid exaggeration. Exaggeration, Sir, is the bane of the country. Let us put religious beliefs out of court, not but that they are to be respected, deeply respected. What I say is that Leon is a man of mark, a man of very great merit. He is the best specimen the School of Mines has turned out at all since it was founded. His enormous talents

find no difficulties in any branch of study; he is as good a botanist as he is a geologist. As I hear, he is familiar with all the latest discoveries in Natural History, besides being a capital astronomer."

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

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

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

"Is he rich?"

"Oh! very rich," said Fúcar emphatically. "I knew his father at Valencia—poor Don Pepe, who died three months ago after spending fifty years in toiling like a negro. I used to deal with him when he had a chocolate mill in the Calle de las Barcas. As a matter of fact, Don Pepe's chocolate was in high estimation there. I remember at that time I used to see Leon, a scrap of a boy, with a dirty face and ragged elbows studying arithmetic in a corner behind the counter. At Christmas, Don Pepe sold

marchpane (cakes). Indeed he dealt in such goods till about fifteen years ago, and it is not thirty since he transferred his business to Madrid. When he had accumulated some capital he began to wish to increase it more rapidly. The amount of money is incalculable that has been made in this country by manufacturing chocolate out of canary-seed, out of pine-kernels, out of red ochre, out of everything rather than out of cocoa. We live in a land of bricks,[B] and we not only build our houses of them, but we eat them! Señor Pepe worked hard; at first with his own hands, then with those of others; finally with a steam engine. The result being (and the marquis pushed his hat back to the roots of his hair) that he bought land by the acre and sold it by the foot; that in ’54 he built a house in Madrid, that he got the management of the best lands belonging to the nation, and that by his command of public funds he added considerably to his fortune. In short, I should think Leon Roch must be worth eight or nine millions.”

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

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

“Indeed,” said Fúcar gravely, with the air of a man who felt it his duty to suppress such levity in the young. “I can assure you Don José Roch was a good-natured soul, kind and simple in all the relations of life; I knew him well. He made chocolate of the flower-pots in his wife’s balcony, or so said the spiteful gossips in the neighbourhood; but he was a worthy old plodder for all that, and so wrapped up in his boy that he thought of nothing else. There was in his mind but one creature in the

world: his son Leon; he was insanely devoted to him. He regarded every man as his enemy who did not consider Leon the handsomest, the most learned, the first and greatest of all men on earth. All his pride and vanity were centred in being his son's father.—We met one evening last year at Aranceles. I wanted to discuss a sale of cork with him—for he had a large property in cork-woods—but he would talk of nothing but his son. It was almost with tears in his eyes that he said to me: 'My friend Fúcar, I want nothing for myself; six feet of earth and a stone at the top will do for me. My one desire is that Leon should have some title in this country.—It is the only thing I wish for.'

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

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

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

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

world. He is a man of principle."

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

"You speak figuratively."

"It is the simple truth."

"We live in the land of Vice-versa."

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

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

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

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

The two friends watched him depart in silence. The marquis walked slowly, on account of his obesity, and his gait reminded one of the stately motion of some ancient ship or galleon freighted with the rich spoils of the Indies. He seemed to be carrying on board, as it were, all the weight of his immense fortune, collected during

twenty years of such unfailing prosperity that the outer world could only look on and tremble and wonder.

CHAPTER IV.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I can tell you one thing,” continued the intelligent official, “the man who marries the damsel will have hard work with her. What bringing up! my dear fellow what training! Her father, who knows the value of money uncommonly well himself, has never taught her the difference between a bank-note and a copper piece. She is a real treasure is the Señorita de Fúcar! I had heard that she was capricious, extravagant and had the most preposterous and outrageous fancies you can imagine. Poor husband—and poor father! If she were only pretty; but she is not even that.—She will vex Don Pedro at last.—And no one listens when I thunder and declaim against these modern and foreign fashions which have spoiled all the modesty of our Spanish women—all their christian humility; their delightful ignorance, their love for a retired and domestic life, their indifference to luxury, their sobriety in dress, their neatness and economy. Only look at the hussies that are the result of modern civilisation. I quite understand the dread of matrimony which is spreading among us and which, if it is not checked, will compel the government to pass a law for betrothals and a law for marriages and create a president over bachelors.”

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

Leon answered coldly:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Onésimo winced; but recovering himself at once he added:

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

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

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

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

“And Pepa?” asked Leon.

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

While Don Pedro was thus pouring out his paternal troubles, his three friends sat silent; only Onésimo now and again murmured a few commonplaces about nervous irritation, the result, as he stated, of some strange influences to which the fairer half

of humanity are exposed. The marquis took Cimarra's arm saying:

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

Don Joaquín and Leon Roch were left together.

"What do you think of Pepa?" asked Onésimo.

"That she has been very badly brought up."

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

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

"To María Sudre?"

"To María Sudre."

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

CHAPTER V.

ILLUSTRATING ANOTHER TRAIT OF SPANISH CHARACTER.

It was getting late and the dancing was beginning to flag. The last whirling couples were gradually disappearing, as do the last circles of a pool into which a stone has been dropped die away on the margin; the conventional embrace which does not offend even the most coy was finally relaxed, and at length the murderous pianist,

whose ear-splitting music inspired the dancers, consented to retire. A fair visitor however took his place and endeavoured to prolong the entertainment by wringing a doleful Notturno from the chords of the instrument—the most dreary and dismal form of second-rate music ever devised. This parade of lamentation however was happily short, for the mothers were out of patience and the gay groups of girls began to move away across the polished floor. The legs of the chairs creaked and clattered on the boards; with the babble of young voices mingled a hollow chorus of coughing, and the fair bevy threaded their way through the door where their exit was impeded by a knot of the elderly men—the orators, lawyers and politicians who were the glory and lustre of the company at the hotel.

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

In the card-room sat the Marqués de Fúcar, reading the newspapers. His invariable attitude when engaged in this patriotic exercise was one of perfect rigidity; he held the paper almost at arm's-length, while a pair of glasses assisted his sight, riding on the tip of his nose and pinching his nostrils. If he wanted to look at anything but his paper, he did it over the top of the glasses or with a furtive glance on each side. He was very apt to laugh aloud whilst reading, for he was keenly alive to a joke—more particularly when the point of it—as is not uncommon in a newspaper—was not only palpable but envenomed. Two other gentlemen were also reading, and four or five were engaged in conversation, lolling at their ease on the lounges. Federico

Cimarra, after walking up and down two or three times outside, with his hands in his pockets, came into the card-room at the moment when the marquis laid down his last newspaper, and taking his pince-nez off his nose, closed them up and stowed them away carefully in his waistcoat pocket.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Labour!—Why we scarcely know how to weave homespun cloth; hemp-shoes are fast disappearing; our home-made water-jars are growing quite scarce and even our brooms are brought from England.—Still, we can fall back upon Agriculture; that is the favourite theory with all these fools. There is not an idiot in the country who will not talk to you of agriculture. I should like them to tell me what agriculture you can have without irrigation, how you can have irrigation without rivers, or rivers without forests, or forests without men to plant them and look after them—and how are you

going to get men when there are no crops? It is a vicious circle from which there is no issue—no escape! My dear Marquis, it is a matter of race I tell you.—It is one of the few things which are of the nature of primary truth: the fatality of inheritance. We have nothing to rely upon but communism supported by the Lottery—that is our future. The State must take the national wealth into its own hands and distribute it by means of raffles.

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

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

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

"Here too!" exclaimed Fúcar with some annoyance.

Cimarra went back to the drawing-room where the lights were now being put out and presently four other men came in at his request. Only Leon Roch remained

walking up and down the darkened room. After speaking a few words to the waiter, Cimarra took the young man's arm and walked with him for a few minutes. The words that passed between them were somewhat sharp; however, Leon at length went up to his room from which, in a few minutes he returned.

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

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

The contest with Chance is one of the maddest and fiercest battles in which the human mind ever engages. Chance, which is neither more nor less than an incessant and incalculable contradiction of facts, is never tired out; we can never meet her face to face, and to defy her is folly. She is as nimble and supple as a tiger, she fells and clutches her prey, while her favours—if by a whim she bestows them—light a flame in her victim's soul that consumes him from within. His brain reels and he raves in dreams like those of the drunkard—for a vague picture of the Gorgon with whom he

is contending takes possession of him and reduces him to bestial madness. Fighting in the dark, desperately and wildly, the gambler is the victim of a hideous incubus; he finds himself started in an orbit of torturing unrest, like a stone flung off into measureless space.

And at each deal the marquis would say:

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

CHAPTER VI.

PEPA.

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

“Pepa?” he said.

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

“It is a very dark night; I did not recognise you,” said Leon, putting his hand on the top of the window railing. “The damp air is not good for you. Why do you not shut the window? It is of no use to wait for your father. That rascally Cimarra has got

him to gamble and they are all quite happy—Go indoors."

"It is so hot inside!"

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

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

"And what a specimen she is!" cried Pepa interrupting him with a bitter laugh that made Leon shudder. "The poor lady is never to be seen except in church! You do not understand!—You seem to have lost your wits. I am speaking of your future mother-in-law, the marquesa de Tellería. When I was stopping at Ugoibea I had a fancy to see her. They told me all the nonsense she talked about me. The usual thing—that I am badly brought up, that I am wildly extravagant, that my manners are too free, and my style of dress disgusting—yes, disgusting. But the poor woman herself has been so very different ever since she began to lose her beauty—Besides, you see, she cannot live such a worldly life now that she has such a saintly son—for of course you know that Luis Gonzaga, your María's twin brother who is at the college of the Sacred Heart at Puyóo, is said to be a perfect angel in a cassock? Why, my dear fellow, you are going to live in the very courts of Heaven! Your mother-in-law even wears a hair shirt. You do not believe me? But I know it—her

lovers say so....” And Pepa blew away a rose petal which fell on Leon’s forehead.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“You are too proud.”

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

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

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

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

"You are charitable I know, for you are tender-hearted; but Pepa, in what a foolish way! A woman comes to you for help to get masses said; you put two thousand reales into her hand. The same day comes the widow of a bricklayer who has died of

an accident while at work on your house, and you give her only a dollar. You have no idea of the magnitude and proportion of the needs and miseries of the poor.

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

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

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

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

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

“Why?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pepa started to her feet.

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

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

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

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

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

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

sighing, betraying that in the depths of that blackness lurked a sorrow.

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

CHAPTER VII.

TWO MEN AND THEIR SCHEMES IN LIFE.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Leon did not reply; his mind was disturbed; but his thoughts were far from the ignoble ideas which agitated his companion. Instead of going upstairs as Federico had asked him, he went with him into the card-room. One of the ‘victims’ was

snoring on a sofa; the other was saying good-night, with a voice and demeanour that did justice to a diabolical temper; but he did not hurry himself and wrapped up elaborately, as a protection against the night air.

The two friends were left alone.

“I shall not play,” said Leon shortly.

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

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

“What is not your fault?” asked Federico looking up in amazement. “Something has gone wrong with you old fellow—where have you been?”

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

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

“Friend! you are not my friend.—No friendship can subsist between us two. Chance made us friends in childhood, but our natures have made us indifferent to each other. In that atmosphere of frivolity, of mere superficial virtue, if not of actual corruption in which you have your being I can neither move nor breathe. My poor father’s vanity flung me into its midst; his devotion to me led him into many follies and illusions. He—who had made his fortune by the sweat of his brow in a chocolate

factory—wanted to make a fine gentleman of his son, a finikin and aristocratic creature such as he pictured in his deluded fancy. ‘Be a marquis,’ said he, ‘enjoy yourself; ride your horses to death, drive your carriage, make love to other men’s wives, marry into a noble family. Get into the Ministry, make a noise in the world, let your name stand at the head of every list.’—These were not his words, but that was what he wanted.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“And in choosing my wife,” Roch went on—“I ought not to say choosing for I fell in love like any fool—but that did not prevent me from realising my position and calmly and coldly reviewing the character and qualities of my future wife. It is my duty to marry her, Federico, distinctly my duty; there I am on firm ground and that much is beyond a doubt. María captivated me by her beauty it is true; but that is not all—far from it. I smothered my passion, I studied her closely and I found behind that beauty, a mind in no respect unworthy of it. María’s goodness, her sense, her modesty, the submissiveness of her intelligence, her exquisite ignorance of life added to the seriousness of her tastes and instincts—all made me feel that she was the wife for me—I will be perfectly frank with you: her family are not at all to my liking. But what does that matter? I can separate from my relations. I only marry my wife and she is delightful—she has feeling and imagination, and that sweet credulousness which is the most ductile element in human nature. Her education has

been neglected and she is as ignorant as can be; but on the other hand, she is free from all false ideas and frivolous accomplishments, and from those mischievous habits of mind which corrupt the judgment and nature of the girls of our day. Do you not think me a happy man? Do you not see that this is the very woman I want; that I shall be able to form my wife's character, which is the most glorious task a man can have—form it to my own mind and on my own image—the highest achievement I can aspire to, and the only guarantee of a peaceful life.—Do not you think so?"

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

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

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

"Most worthy and wisest of men, we, the depraved and ignorant, look into the future as well as you; we too lay our plans, not indeed mathematically but perhaps with better hopes of security than you practical men. We are apt indeed to think of the ass as a practical animal. We do not condemn matrimony; on the contrary, we regard it as indispensable to the progress of society and the improvement of the condition...." He paused a few moments and then went on—"of the condition of the individual.

You will understand what I mean. We, to be sure, are not learned and when we have fallen in love like a schoolboy we do not make an elaborate analysis of the qualities of the women whom we choose to be our wives. We do not aspire to form their character; we take the article ready made, as God or the devil has wrought it. This marrying to become a school-master is in the very worst taste. There is something else to be thought of in these latter days besides a woman's character. The inequality of fortune among human beings, and the luckless fate to which some are born, the hideous disparity between a man's fortune and the 'material of war' which he requires to fight against and for life—the miserable 'Struggle for existence' as the evolutionists have it—that is what weighs on me—the scarcity of work to be done in this accursed country, and the impossibility of making money without having money.—Do you hear what I say?—All these things and many others make it necessary to look out for something besides virtue in our future brides."

"What?"

Cimarra shook his hands as if he were clinking coin.

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

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

"You! And what are you an example of pray?"

"I was going to say that I, if I found myself the possessor of a fortune, should be a

model gentleman, and might even be known to posterity as the Illustrious Cimarra. For is it not a matter of course, a phrase ready coined?—Tom, Dick and Harry are Illustrious nowadays."

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

"Everything is relative, as my friend Fontán always says in jest," replied Federico shrugging his shoulders. "You cannot judge off-hand, in that light and easy way, of a man like me who lives with the rich and is poor himself. Get that well into your head. I talk to you with perfect frankness. My projects after all are as yet merely visions—sketches, my dear fellow. We shall see—I flatter myself I have made a good beginning. Time will show. Some day perhaps when you have quite forgotten me, lost in the bliss of pedagogic matrimony, you may hear that that reprobate Cimarra has found a wife. We all have to come to it—sooner or later. Even a poor devil like me has his schemes and his philosophy. We are all tortoises together, but some have more shell to cover them than I have.—Do not take it into your head that I am indifferent to the moral graces of my wife—nor that I propose to marry a monster. I shall have a virtuous wife, my learned friend, thoroughly respectable, take my word for it, and a fine family of children and grand-children."

"Then you have made your choice."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Suddenly he turned to Cimarra and said:

“Well, I wish you luck!”

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

“You are going too?”

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

Cimarra emphasised his words with a cunning smile.

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

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

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

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

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

the happiest man on earth.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARÍA EGYPTIACA.

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

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

María's affection for him, which at first had been bashful and cold as that of a well brought up Cupid who has just had his eyes unbandaged, was soon as ardent as he could wish. The passion, that at first had sat shyly behind a blind, soon peeped out, with its flaming torch, its ambrosial chalice and its chain of yearning anxieties, choking its victim with the pain of a too great happiness; so that for some time her husband forgot his educational schemes, though, in his more lucid moments, his common-sense reminded him that it would be needful to put them into practice and realise the effects of his very superior system. By degrees he recovered his habitual equanimity and his excited feelings subsided into the subordinate place which he

had always assigned to them as compared with his intellect. At last he felt like a man who wakes from a long dream; he regarded his mind as a wide and fruitful territory which has been for a time drowned out by an inundation, and where, as the waters subside, at first the highest points become visible, then the hills and at last the plains. "This will pass away," he said to himself, "it must. When the land is clear I will attack the dreaded subject and begin to mould"—he was fond of this form of speech—"to mould María's character. It is of exquisite clay, but formless—almost formless."

Leon Roch's young wife was slightly and elegantly-built, every part in such perfect proportion that a sculptor could have hoped for no better model. Her hair was black and her skin white with very little colour, giving such refinement to her grave, fervent expression that all her admirers were her lovers and envied her husband his happiness. It was not a face of Spanish type, and the outline of her profile was an uncommon one in our country, for it was that of the Athenian goddess, so rare here though occasionally met with, even in Madrid. Her eyes were large and open, of a sea-blue colour with changing tawny lights, and their gaze had a sentimental serenity which might have been thought insipid among a crowd of black eyes, firing endless volleys of flashing glances. But María's looks gained her the reputation of being proud rather than stupid, her lips were brilliantly red, her throat slender, her figure round, and her hands small and "moulded of soft flesh" like those of Melibea. She spoke in measured tones with a sort of deliberate plaintiveness that went to the souls of her hearers; she laughed but little—so little that it added to her reputation of pride, and she was so reserved in her friendships that in fact she had no friends. Even while quite a child she had always been credited with so much good sense that her parents themselves regarded her as the choicest production of their illustrious race, throughout the whole course of its glorious existence. To this almost superhuman beauty—this woman, in whose form and face were combined, as in a perfect æsthetic union, all the charms of antique sculpture, Leon Roch, after ten

months of a most platonic engagement, found himself married. Love at first sight had enslaved him: he had met her and spoken to her at a court ball, when she, having only recently been presented, was at that wondering and budding stage when a girl's beauty still bears the stamp of innocence and still blushes with the reflection of the rosy dawn of infancy. Leon fell in love like a country swain, to his shame be it whispered, and he was himself astonished to find that his theodolite and his blow-pipe had turned to a shepherd's crook and pipe in his hands. Did he see anything in his wife beyond her uncommon beauty? What share had his heart in this dream of ecstasy? It would be amusing indeed if he, whose boast it was that he was master of his imagination, should find that it had fairly run away with him.

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

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

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

"No, no, it is all for you both," said a clacking voice from a window behind them. "Now, my pretties, come in to supper, it is getting late."

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

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

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

“Rat, tat!”

“Who is there?”

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

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

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

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

No, it was neither verse nor prose; but it was poetry. These were stanzas on the model of verses from the Bible expressing the feelings of a contemplative nature.

How the priest laughed as he read:

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

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

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

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

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

She only lived long enough to receive Extreme Unction.

When their grandmother was dead and buried the twins went home to their parents, who at that time were in extremely narrow circumstances. The boy was sent to a seminary and from thence to France, while María, whose country manners distressed them greatly, was sent to a college for girls. At the end of two years she emerged from this retreat with the polish acquired in such establishments and her mother introduced her to her circle of friends; a favourable turn in their fortunes had now given the family of Tellería a chance of rising from the depths of poverty and obscurity; at length the marquesa was able to quit the apartments she so sincerely detested, and for some time the mother and daughter were to be met constantly in

various fashionable circles. Their names were familiar on the lips of María's admirers and to the pens of the fashionable chronicler; they were on view at the play and out driving; they disappeared in the Spring to reappear with revived brilliancy in the Winter season. Then at last came the longed-for day when María was married.

This match was regarded as a great stroke of fortune for the whole Tellería family, whose nobility was not of the highest rank and whose wealth was not such as to justify any extreme fastidiousness in the selection of a son-in-law. In spite of all that may be said to the contrary, the aristocracy of the present day have no blind reverence for their pedigrees, and if we except half a dozen names which, besides their historical glory, have a spotless descent, our nobles do not hesitate to accept an alliance of which the honours are merely substantial and to bolster up their pride by the aid of a fine fortune; thus we see every day damsels of high degree giving their hands—and giving them willingly—to nobles of very recent creation; to marquisés all hot from the mint as it were; to colonial counts, to adventurous politicians, distinguished officers and even to the sons of industry. Modern society is blessed with a short memory; low or inferior birth is soon a buried part of the buried past. Personal merit in some cases, and fortune in others, effect the levelling process with irresistible force, and society progresses with giant steps towards equality. There is no country in the civilised world more nearly bereft of a real aristocracy than Spain; trade, on one hand, which marks every one plebeian, and the government, on the other, which makes every one noble, are gradually doing away with it.

The happiness of the two young people was undisturbed for the first few months, excepting by the shadow cast over it occasionally by María's relations. After a time however Leon began to think that his wife's anxious and suspicious affection had lasted longer than was reasonable. This would not have been alarming but that it was allied with an iron resistance to some of her husband's views and feelings, and it troubled him greatly to perceive that, without ceasing to be devoted to him, María showed not the slightest disposition to yield to his doctrines—not religious doctrines

in any sense, for he respected his wife's conscience. It was a puzzling disappointment; hers was not an embryonic nature, but a formed and stubborn character; not a flexible wire ready to take and keep the form given to it by a skilful manipulator, but hard set bronze which hurt his fingers and never bent under them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

fire which was blazing brightly.

“María!” cried Leon, startled and disconcerted, and he put out his hand to rescue the hapless heretic. But she clung closely to his arms so as to prevent his moving; then, kissing his forehead, she went back to her prie dieu and returned to her devotions. What was there in his book? What in her prayers?

CHAPTER IX.

THE MARQUESA TELLERÍA.

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

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

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

She was a woman of good figure, who had grown suddenly old after a prolonged youth and fallen a victim to those ravages which are severe in proportion as they are staved off. Nevertheless, certain traces of past beauty were still visible in the lady's face; though her sun was setting behind mists of paint and powder, not always judiciously or skilfully applied, and it was not a glorious evening of life. Her tall figure, which had formerly been dignified, was now bent, as though in anticipation of her descent into the chill tomb, though the steel ribs of a pair of stiff stays did what they could to buttress up the decrepit form. Her eyes, still bright and black, were the only living sparks in the dilapidated mass; they, from time to time, glistened with eagerness and vivacity, reminding one of a flash of true inspiration in the midst of the academic dulness of archaic and commonplace ideas. Her hair, which had long since exchanged its Andalusian blackness for Venetian gold, had now passed from Venetian gold to a dull and powdery white. Her complexion, always coarse and sheenless, was disguised under an artificial texture commingled with various perfumed chemicals intended to deceive the spectator, just as in a theatre the painted scenes simulate the greenery of a glade and even the diaphanous purity of the sky. The effect, successful to a certain point in embellishing the withered cheeks of the faded beauty, failed of its result now and then, because when she smiled the dead whiteness of the paint gave a yellow hue to her teeth, though they were still perfectly sound and even; and she constantly displayed them with her gracious and condescending smile—an old habit that would need to be modified if once that double row of ivory keys should begin to desert, like an army that has had enough of fighting. She was always well and elegantly dressed; she talked indefatigably, attempting—sometimes not without success—to insinuate some more intelligent formula among the flood of empty words that usually form the basis of conversation among such brainless individuals.

"I am listening, Señora," said Leon.

"I hate circumlocution," said the lady; "and besides, María has doubtless spoken to

you on the subject. Your father-in-law is a lost wretch....”

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

“No, no. It is of no use to try to defend him. His conduct is indefensible ... and at his age! The strange thing is that in the prime of life he was a steady and prudent man, content to stay quietly at home. I assure you I cannot bear to see him behave like an elderly boy—that describes him exactly: an elderly boy! about two years since—just about the time when you married my daughter—my worthy husband began to go to the young men’s club; there he met with some young fellows who turned his head; he took up a new set of words, and a new style of dress, stayed out at night, took to gambling ... you must have noticed that he has grown quite young again; you must have laughed, if you confess the truth, to see his efforts to look like a boy among boys. Why, you may see him any day with some party of dandies, fluttering like a butterfly about Madrid.—It really is too ridiculous—with a flower in his button-hole. Only this morning I spoke to him rather sharply about it. How he is ever to pay his tailor I do not know for his outlay in dress is frightful to think of! ... In short, to you, in the strictest confidence I can say all this: the fact is my husband spends more money than he has got, or ever will have as long as he lives. He never was economical, but, on the other hand, he was not extravagant; he never kept any kind of accounts but then he never let himself do a mean thing for the sake of some impossible luxury ... and who is the victim? I—I, who after having had always to sacrifice myself, must do so now when my health is failing and I need care and rest and peace of mind. Oh! how I envy the mistress of this house, and how thankfully I would accept a corner here, even the humblest. My life is one incessant misery. My husband spends what he has not got; Gustavo is well conducted and careful it is true, but he has no great affection for his parents; Leopoldo neither is, nor ever will be, good for anything, he is a helpless being and has idle and dissipated habits in spite of all I have done to prevent his acquiring them. I can only thank God, who has

given me so many trials, for having at the same time given me such proofs of his mercy; for what greater pride can a mother have than to be the parent of two such children as Luis Gonzaga and María?—He, so devoted to his vocation, and promising, as I am told, to be a shining light in the church; she, married to you, happy with you, a pattern with you of perfect and harmonious union.—But what a pity it is that you should have no children!" At this point the marquesa, giving way to her feelings, shed a few tears, which she promptly dried with her handkerchief before they could roll down her cheeks. Then she went on with her description of her woes as a wife and a mother.

She had suffered much, she explained, from her husband's levity, and the refractory or venial conduct of her two eldest sons had necessitated her passing her youth, and indeed chief part of her life in heroic efforts to avert the ruin of the family; she had indeed given up some of her own fortune, which had been considerable; still she had kept back the larger portion of it, and she intended to keep it till her husband's gallantries and her sons' extravagance drove her to extremities. She could not expose herself to a pinched and miserable old age nor look forward to living on the charity of her daughter and a rich son-in-law. Her habits, her principles, and her dignity would not allow her to sacrifice her whole fortune to the reckless man who had dissipated the patrimony of the Tellerías on the green tables of the gaming houses and in the dressing-rooms of ballet-dancers. If she were only to tell him all the things she knew!

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

to be angry about, do not you think?”

Leon did not answer.

“What are you thinking of?” she asked.

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

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

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

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

“You can have them.”

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

“It is quite unnecessary—I assure you....”

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

“With María?”

“Yes, with María: even she has her faults, though they are only the excessive side of

her virtues. You know that she is very devout—devout to excess; indeed, at times I have felt that this question of religion has given rise to some little differences between you." Leon sighed.

"To some," he said, "but nothing serious."

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

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

"Well—at last?..."

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

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

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

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

“I will send you that money to-day.”

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

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

CHAPTER X.

THE MARQUIS.

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

His fashionable dress, his easy demeanour, his refined and frigid courtesy, which masked a total absence of kindliness or intelligence, decorated his exterior as a gorgeous binding covers a book that is destitute of rational contents. He was not a vicious man; he was equally incapable of wilful evil or intentional good; he was a vacuous compound of weakness and dissipation, corrupt rather from “evil communications” than from inherent wickedness; one of so many! a creature so hard to be distinguished from the rest of his species, since absence of character has reduced certain groups of the upper classes—as well as of the lower—with a few notable exceptions, to a common type which will lack a generic name till the advance of terminology allows us to speak of them as “the masses of the upper class.” Still, this empty-headed and unenlightened mortal had a great command of words in no respect deficient in meaning, and was an admired master of all the commonplace of the press and the law; he added nothing to be sure, but, on the other

hand, he deprived them of nothing. He was, in short, always prepared with a perfect thesaurus of those ready-made phrases which to many people form the Alpha and Omega of learning and wisdom. He was constantly insisting that “administration rather than legislation was what was needed;” he was convinced that “Spain is a nation past all government;” he was for “upholding the venerable creeds of the past so that we may once more become a terror to our foes at home and abroad;” he was convinced that nothing of native origin could be good for anything; that Spain is a ruined country, notwithstanding the fertility of her soil; and at the same time he maintained with punctilious exactitude the immovable dogmas of Castilian Nobility, of the Faith abandoned by the modern populace, of the materialistic tendencies of the age and so forth; he had a sacred horror of “Utopian dreams”—and anything he did not at once grasp was to him an Utopian dream. In short, not a string was wanting to his inexhaustible fiddle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You will make a brilliant report."

"It is a delicate matter," added the marquis, throwing himself back in his chair so that he sat with his eyes fixed on the ceiling and his feet in the air. "It is the question of the day. I have said again and again to the president of the council: 'so long as we have no good vagrancy law legislation is impossible.' We must go to the root of the

matter, to the foundation of things, do not you see? It is the immense number of idle and disreputable souls, the starving and thieving classes, who count on a revolution to make their harvest, who are the festering cause of the ferment in which we live. Sweep away all this low filth and I will be responsible for social good order."

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

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

He had in fact reached the point which was the object of his visit; but though he approached the matter with a degree of anxiety that made his heart beat, he contrived to conceal his agitation. The man was too weak not to suffer from such qualms, but too highly artificial to betray them.

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

and the marquis wound up his harangue by saying with apparent indifference: “Well, what do you think of it? Will you invest some of your capital in our shares.”

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

“What, man!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Be quiet, you little plagues,” said María impatiently to the birds and she tried to

hear what was going on. Presently the curtain over the door was hastily jerked open and revealed the pointed horns of the marquis' moustache and his face, in which solemnity was now tempered by affability as though nature had intended it as a living symbol of the eternal and supreme duplicity of the human species.

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

"Be quiet you little torments," said María.

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

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

CHAPTER XI.

LEOPOLDO.

One morning when Leon Roch was sitting at work in his study he was suddenly interrupted; raising his eyes and looking in the large mirror that hung over the chimney opposite to him, he saw a lean, tall figure surmounted by a death's-head, on which the grave seemed to have spared little but the skin; eyes that looked starting from their sockets, like those of a delirious creature; a long, thin neck, all red and scarred; a nose, also purple, finely-cut, though its extreme sharpness gave it the aspect of a beak and lent the face a bird-like expression; a meagre crop of yellow hairs that straggled round the cheeks and chin, forming a narrow line that irresistibly

recalled the band tied round the face of a dead man; a low forehead, on which his hat had stamped a livid line, like a streak of blood; a flat head with the red hair parted into two elegant wings; a face in short which seemed the transfiguration or parody of a handsome countenance, the caricature of the family type; and at the same time he saw a man with his hands in his pockets, feet like a woman's of which the toes were scarcely visible below the loose trousers that covered them, and a body devoid of roundness, of modelling or of grace, like a lay figure made to wear a coat. His dress was a morning suit, striped from head to foot, with an elegantly-knotted cravat; a stick that he held in one hand stuck out on a level with his pocket-hole, and a gorgeous flower blazed in his breast like the blood-stained handle of an assassin's knife. As he caught sight of this personage Leon exclaimed with frank good-nature:

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

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

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

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

“She does not wish to go, and that is the fact,” said the hoarse-voiced youth. “By-the-bye, my dear Leon, I hear people say that you and she are very unhappy, that you do not get on together in the least, and that your infidelity is a constant torment to my poor sister. I, of course, laugh at such nonsense. ‘I tell you he is the best soul living, a thorough gentleman as you will find.’ That is what I answer, and by Jove, you know I do not say a thing unless I mean it. Last night the Rosafrías were saying that they could not imagine—What simpletons!—They could not imagine how my sister could have married you. ‘But, ladies, be reasonable,’ said I, ‘consider....’ It was of no use, they were utterly out of humour. I heard one lady whom we all know—I give no names—I heard her say in so many words: ‘I would rather see my daughter in her grave than married to a man like that....’ Of course you had plenty of defenders, even of the fair sex—‘Oh! but he is so clever, such a gentleman!’ But she cast you off by word and gesture.... ‘There are things that are impossible, quite impossible,’ said she. At last, I really did not dare put in a word for you. What I advise, by Jove, is that you should cease to go to certain houses; you will only expose yourself to insult or to a snubbing. There is that little Señora Borellano who speaks of you as the bête noire, still, she allows that you are very attractive. Pepe Fontán said a sharp thing apropos of that woman’s aversion for you. ‘It is all vexation,’ she said, ‘because Leon is the only man she knows who never made love to her.’ You know she has had an admirer at her heels for this year past, and Cimarra says she cannot conceal her age. Poor Federico! They say he has quarrelled with his wife and his father-in-law—he forged some letters it would seem. I suppose they will send him to Havana. What is the time? Eleven! And María is not home from church? You must allow that it is rather too much of a good thing. Oh! I know; she and my mother will have staid to chat with Padre Paoletti—an Italian dyed black, as dark as a negro! By Jove! if I were married I would not be henpecked, I know. My wife should go my way or I would know the reason why.

María is as good as gold; but when she has got a thing into her head!—You may not believe it but I myself have spoken to her roundly before now for her nonsense.—Why, my dear fellow, it is intolerable to have a wife who is perpetually at you with her one tune: 'Go and confess: go to communion: go to Mass.' By Jove! it is enough to make you go and shoot yourself! Since you leave her free to go her own way she ought to know better. You are wrong to take such folly so much to heart. Look here: I should never forbid my wife attending four hundred and twenty-six Masses a day and undergoing penance from every confessor; but by setting a limit to her spending my money on processions I would soon cure her of her fancy. If she tried to talk to me about religious matters I should say to her: 'Very good, my child, just as you please; I quite agree to all you say.' In short, we should never quarrel over a dogma more or less; and meanwhile, my dear Leon, I should amuse myself to the top of my bent. Why, my good fellow, on your plan we should go to the devil without having any fun first; there can be no greater folly! You bury yourself among your books in this world, to be damned in the next. For that is what you will come to as well as I, we are all in the same boat!" And he laughed as loudly as his short breath would allow.

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

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

Leon opened a drawer; he smiled—why, it is hard to say, but of all the members of his wife's family, this inoffensive creature was the one who filled him with the deepest pity, for which reason perhaps, he loosened his purse-strings for him from time to time, not merely with patience but with a vague kindliness, not to grieve so hapless and frail a being. Or perhaps Leon approved of the system of the Vicar of Wakefield who, when he wanted to rid himself of some importunate relative, would lend him some money, a coat, or a horse of no value, "and never," said he, "did it

occur that he came again to my house to return it to me."

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

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

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

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

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

From where he sat Leon could see the carriage drawn up by the gate, and the bull-fighter on horseback; a huge young fellow with his legs swathed and a voluminous scarf—a supple figure, not wanting in sculpturesque beauty, crowned

with a head of vulgar Spanish type, of the hue of tobacco, under a wide sombrero. His horse snorted and pawed, and the count had his hands full with those in the break, a fiery pair of a cross-breed between the Bearnais and Andalusian. Polito was soon seated in the carriage with Lady Bull, and the jolly party set out down the street, Higadillos leading the way, and cheered by the jingle of the horses' bells. Leon looked after them with some curiosity; it was a small but significant fragment of contemporary Spanish history.

CHAPTER XII.

GUSTAVO.

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

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

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

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

Neither tall nor short, neither fat nor thin, dressed in dark colours with a calm eye behind his spectacles, free from every vice—even smoking—simple in his tastes and pitiless to the dissipation of others, Gustavo, eldest son of the Marquis Tellería, was generally spoken of as the best of the family, as an honour to his rank, and one of the hopes of the country. It is needless to add that he was a lawyer. His brother Leopoldo was a lawyer too; almost all young Spaniards are; but while Polito hardly knew what a book looked like, Gustavo studied every day and even found employment under the protection of one of the most eminent pleaders of Madrid. He had chosen what may be called the national career, and having left the university a

nobody, he was now on the high road to becoming somebody. It should be added that he had a natural gift for oratory.

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

Leon inserted some remark but Gustavo went on: "The blame, I admit, lies with my father. Our education was very desultory. It would be absurd to try to hide the fact that my mother, much as it costs me to own it, has never succeeded in weaning herself or in preserving us from the seductions of the gay world; she has always lived more out of her home than in it. To this day—for what is the use of denying what you know as well as I do?—to this day, when our fortune is so much impaired, and when, as I believe, the little that remains will fall into the hands of our creditors, is it not preposterous that my mother should keep up the house on a footing which is so far beyond our means? It is outrageous vanity; and you may take my word, Leon, when I tell you that I pass hours of anguish in thinking of it. When I see the expensive entertainments she gives, the outlay to keep up appearances while so

many—so very many—necessaries are overlooked; when I note the shameless variety of her dresses, her constant presence at the theatres, her anxiety to vie with others who have a great deal more to spend—when I see all this, Leon, I feel impelled to renounce the career of which I have dreamed in my own country, and to go and earn my bread in some foreign land."

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

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

"You can know nothing of this occult disgrace, Leon; you cannot know what it is to live in a house where nothing is paid for, from the carpets on the floors to the bread we eat; nor the shudder that comes over one at the sound of that recurring knell, the front door bell, announcing some doleful or insolent creditor come to claim his dues; you can have no idea of the farces that have to be played day after day by people whose name seems a guarantee of respectability and honour; nor dream of the moments of acute misery that we, in a more than decent position, endure for want of a sum of ready money that would not spoil the night's rest of a common workman. You who are both rich, and moderate in your requirements—and that is as good as a double fortune—cannot conceive of the anxieties of acting this bitter comedy among scenes of vanity on the boards of poverty. You—calm and content, with no passion but for your books, superior to those ambitions which scare sleep from my pillow, and free from the slips and reverses which embitter life—you are the spoilt child of Providence; here in your own house, never besieged by creditors, never molested by intruders, in the delightful society of your wife who is a perfect angel.... Poor María!"

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

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

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

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

Leon interposed warmly, but Gustavo went on:

“Oh! I loathe and detest hypocrisy as much as you can. I admit but two alternatives: you are a Catholic or you are not? In our sacred faith there is no trimming or compromise. I—I am a Catholic, and as such I act in every phase of life; I do not carry my creed on my lips and atheism in my heart; I scorn the ridicule of the frivolous—I go to Mass, I confess, I communicate, I fast, I glory in defying the outrages of the mob that seems to direct public opinion; I face its cynicism with courage and answer its Voltairian heresies with the holy dogmas and the authority of the Church. And these ideas, this strictness of conduct, I purpose to carry with me into public life. I shall take it up with all the resolution of a soldier and a martyr, guided by the Almighty hand that will not leave me defenceless in the blood-stained arena of human passion. Though men have dared to let loose the wild beasts of infidelity and rationalism, be assured that God will not fail to send among them those who can tame them.

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

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

“It is true,” he said, “the votes of your tenants at Cullera have saved me, and I feel sure of success. Between you and me, in the strictest confidence, I particularly wish to be returned. It will be the high road to success for me you see—my career. When a man has fixed principles and the immovable determination to defend them against

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

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

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST ILLUSION.

The man whom we have seen in the retirement of his study, disturbed at intervals during many months by such scenes as we have described, did not, however, give up his whole time to scientific work. He, like others, was a wheel in the social machine, attached to it by his instincts, by his marriage, nay by science itself; and he was by no means one of those cobweb-spinning savants of whom we are told in romances that they are inseparable from their books and their alembics, and as ignorant of the outer world as they are of the true mysteries of science. Leon Roch went into the

world, he dressed well, and indeed was not to be distinguished from the well-clothed multitude which constitutes the most important, though not the most picturesque portion of society. He never excused himself from the methodically dull routine of the life of the wealthy classes in the Spanish capital and he might be seen with his wife in the fashionable employment of “taking a drive”—a pleasure which consists in going at a fixed hour to a particular avenue and gently jolting to and fro in single file, one carriage behind another and close together, at a regular pace, so that the ladies who lounge in the landaus feel the hot breath of the horses just behind them, while the quadrupeds, mistaking the flowers in their bonnets for real ones, try to make a mouthful of them. He frequented the theatres, on the delightful system by which the subscribers share a seat and go in turns, and which has the advantage of providing them indiscriminately with emotion or amusement, quite irrespective of their frame of mind at the time. He invited a select number of friends to dinner on one day in the week, having asserted and won his right to choose his guests from among the best of the few distinguished men of whom Spain can boast. Nor did he select them by any rule of creed or opinion, but solely to suit his personal sympathies; as a consequence his weekly entertainments and his evening parties gathered together superior men; independent thinkers, staunch Catholics, politicians of the epicurean pattern, aristocrats of the most ancient coinage and nobles all hot and shining from the press, with men who had risen to social importance by their talents as omniscient gossips, or by the genuine charm of their conversation; there too were rising stars from the university—young men distinguished as professors, or who shone in the debating societies. Perfect harmony reigned however, for nothing is so soothing to the temper as a good dinner, the presence of elegant women, and the necessity for observing the laws of good breeding.

Though certain individuals, no doubt, detested each other cordially, the general atmosphere was one of mutual consideration, and the hours were passed in conversation always polite, tolerant, instructive and delightful—the happy product

of this friction of various minds. Art, letters, manners, politics—all were discussed; there was a little grumbling, of course, a little scandal; one group would take up some serious question—of religion, for instance, a theme sure to occur where two or three men are gathered together, and one which has a perennial and unfailing interest. This absorbing subject, which is so constantly discussed, in the family circle, among students, and in the highest conclave—in the confessional, in the palace, in the hut—among friends and among foes—with words in every human tongue, and sometimes with the roar of cannon—with the jargon of party-spirit, the formulas of reason, the slang of flippancy—overtly or in secret; with ink often, and not seldom with blood—fills the air with an incessant murmur, that rolls its ceaseless tide from pole to pole without pause or lull. If our ears were but a little keener, we might hear the dull unceasing soliloquy of the ages.

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

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

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

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

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

After this Leon went through a period of development utterly devoid of follies or escapades of any kind; he never fancied himself a dramatic poet; he never plotted schemes of elopement or duelling; he went through no moods of melancholy, no agitations as to the choice of a profession, no ambitious dreams. He was set to learn mathematics and told to “get on if he could.” He did get on, it is true, and then he was launched on an ocean of rocks where he had to struggle with the petrified waves that bear testimony to the Plutonic and Neptunian storms that have vexed the globe; he was thrust head foremost, as it were, into the bowels of the earth as revealed by deduction or represented in museums, and told: “All these pebbles, that look as if they had been gathered out of the roadway, form a book of marvels; each flint is a

letter of it, and you must learn to read it."

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

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

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

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

This man, to whom it was a matter of absorbing interest whether one pebble were

more or less silurian than another, and whether a solution crystallised in rhomboids or in prisms, had from his earliest youth cherished a dream of ideal life—a quiet and virtuous existence, soaring on love and study, the two wings of the spirit, as he used to say in his figurative jargon. The end of his career of toil was to be the beginning of such a life, secured by a marriage that should realise his dreams, and by the growth of a family. This family that he dreamed of—the one ideal family, the happy circle of souls that he could call his own—constantly occupied his thoughts. Could there be a sweeter or a brighter lot? To see himself united to a wife he adored, loving and submissive, with a sound understanding and a heart of inexhaustible goodness to watch the growth of tiny creatures who might ask him with tears for the bread of learning—to work upon them by the best methods for the development of their moral and physical nature—to live for them, and provide the necessaries of life for that beloved and ever charming group, whose crown and centre, the ideal wife, would appear as the living image of Providence, and the dispenser of its benefits; now the mother, and now the teacher—clothing them, feeding them, guiding their first tottering steps, checking their over-boldness—Ah! for such a dream it would be worth while to live! His imagination painted the joys of a rich man, who can taste all the pleasures of toil without being its slave.... A perfect life, partly given to study, partly to the cares of a family; divided in fair proportion between the country and the town, since in that way nature and society, each in turn, appears most delightful; a life neither too secluded nor too public, in a calm retreat—not dull, but far from the bustle of life, though not inaccessible to a few select friends.

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

critical, accustomed to analyse human nature?—And yet—and yet....

CHAPTER XIV.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

“And yet I made a mistake.”

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

Leon had dropped his evening newspaper—no less a jangle in its kind, of broken strings, of tuneless bells, and the vacuous clack of rumour—and was gazing at his wife, raging inwardly at the hideous mockery of Fate. He—he who through all his early years had been absolute master of his fancy, had one day, all unconsciously, given it the reins, and then, cheated and betrayed, had allowed himself to be carried away by an illusion altogether unworthy of so sober a character. How could he have failed to see that between himself and this woman there could never be any community of ideas, nor that sweet union of minds that subsists even among fools? How could he be thus deluded by the witchery even of such perfect charms? How had he overlooked the wall of ice—high, dense, insuperable, which must stand for ever between them? Why had he failed to detect that recusant will, that

deeply-rooted standard, that narrowness of purview, that absence of magnanimity, for all of which there was so little compensation in an over-wrought religious excitability? Why had he not foreseen the dulness, the emptiness of his home—lacking so much that was tender and attaching, lacking above all the tenderest and most attaching element of life: mutual confidence?

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

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

All his efforts to form María’s character had been vain; at the earliest stage of her married life she had loved him with more passion than tenderness, but ere long, without ceasing to love him, she had begun to regard him as an erring soul—to be pitied but shunned. Leon had given her all liberty in the exercise of her religion, and at first she availed herself of it in moderation; but as he tried by degrees to influence her mind—not undermining her beliefs, as his detractors declared—but endeavouring to bring her intelligence as far as possible into harmony with his own, she abused the liberty he had granted and gave up almost all her time to her devotions. Not that she renounced all worldly pleasures and vanities; on the contrary, she enjoyed them keenly, though in due moderation. She went to theatres, except in Lent—she dressed well, frequented the fashionable promenades, and gave up part of the year to the excursions and country visits that became her position and fortune. She took great care of her personal appearance (for she liked to be admired by Leon), very little of her household, and none at all of her husband; the rest of her time and thoughts she devoted to the various pious meetings and benevolent dissipations to which she was carried off by her mother or her friends; in short, she served in the charmed ranks of fashionable religionism.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“That is just what I say,” another would reply, “belief and disbelief are a matter of sex.”

“The fact is that he is desperately in love with her.”

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

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

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

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

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

Leon looked and read the column aloud.

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

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

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

“No.”

“Well, I have been rather extravagant, but I will make up for it by being very economical next month.—I know, my dear, I have spent more than my allowance. Let me see—there are three dresses, sixteen thousand; the triduo, four thousand; the novena which I ordered, ten thousand; the new hangings in my room—but that was all your fault, for laughing at the white angels playing with the blue corn.—Then I have to add the presents made to the actors who would not charge anything for the charitable performance; two watches, two snuff-boxes and two brooches.—But I will give you the whole account to-morrow.”

“It is not that, I tell you—nothing of the kind. You may spend as much as you like—you may ruin me for aught I care, and waste all my substance on dressmakers, priests, and actors. It is a much graver matter than your extravagance that I want to

discuss, María: I want to ask you whether you do not think it high time that the emptiness and misery of our married life should have an end—that you should recognise that your excessive devotion to church ceremonies is almost a form of infidelity, and that by giving up so much to the cause of piety you are in fact doing an injury to me and to our common interests?"

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

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

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

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

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

"You are mad, utterly mad! What is it that you do wish? That I should deny God and the Church, that I should turn rationalist like you, that I should read your books full

of lies, that I should believe that we are all apes, that materialism is truth, that Nature is the only God, or that there is no God—all your hideous mass of heresies? Happily I have been able to escape falling into that abyss. I am pious and can believe all I ought to believe; I worship sincerely and constantly, for that is the best means of keeping faith alive and active, and of closing the soul against the entrance of any false doctrine.—I go to church too often? I am unreasonably particular in my attention to the rules of the Church? I am extravagant in the services I pay for? I listen every day to the Word of God? I pray night and morning?—This is the old story—is it not? I know I am looked upon as a fanatic. Well, there is a reason for everything. Do you suppose that I should cling so passionately to the Cross if I had not you for my husband—you—an atheist; if I were not—as I am—in constant peril of contamination by your views, and by my daily intercourse with you, nay, by my very love for you? No—if you were not so far from devout I should be less so. If you were a sincere Catholic I should not be a bigot—I should fulfil the most necessary duties but nothing more. It is like this Leon—supposing two men are out together in a small boat on a stormy sea; if both row with equal strength they will easily reach the shore; but no—one only lifts his oar, and does not pull at all. Must not the other work twice as hard or else they perish? Understand that clearly my dear—one oar must save us both."

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

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

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

keep yourself as far away from me as possible?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I do not require it," he said. "I never took it into my head to be uneasy because my wife went to the confessional three or four times a year to make a clean breast of her shortcomings and crave absolution in accordance with her creed. At the same time

the confessional has its abuses: it asserts its rights to spiritual control by devious and underhand means, by daily interference, by constant and secret discussion of details, fostered on one hand by the scruples of an innocent soul, and on the other by the prurient curiosity of a man who has no natural family ties."

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

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

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

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

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

"And it would be a hotbed of virtue if we danced and talked gossip?—No, in my drawing-room no one has ever discussed atheism nor anything approaching it. Your pure and childlike conscience may rest easy! Do not let that distress your happy and innocent soul, if you believe that you have accomplished every duty by carrying the

external practice of religion to the verge of folly and by worshipping words, symbols, dogma and routine with superstitious fervency, while your spirit lies cold and torpid, devoid of joy or sorrow, of struggle or of victory, lulled to sleep by the drone of sermons, the braying of organs, and the rustle of silken vestments! You believe yourself to be perfection, and you have not even the grace of a wavering spirit held firm, of doubts sternly silenced, of temptation resisted, or of contentment sacrificed. How easy, how accommodating is the piety of our day! Formerly, to dedicate yourself to the faith meant the total renunciation of every pleasure, the abdication of self-will, hatred of the pomps and vanity of this world, contempt for riches, luxury and comfort, so as to cast off the flesh and spiritualise the soul and meditate more freely on heavenly things; it meant living only the spiritual life to the highest pitch of rapture, of frenzy even—the rich emulating the poor, the healthy praying God for chastening disease, and the clean craving to be covered with foulness. It was an aberration, no doubt; but it was a sublime one, for self-sacrifice and abasement are of all virtues those which least lose their merit by excess. It was suicide, but it was guiltless suicide, since it was the very madness of self-abandonment! While now....” and Leon fixed on his wife a gaze fired with enthusiasm and scorn—“now the rules of piety demand constant oblations and a positive competition in the matter of ostentatious services; still, every one is dealt with according to his rank, the poor—as being poor, and the rich as being rich; provided, that is to say, that they do not refuse to contribute in due proportion. The devout women of the present day attend Mass, mortify themselves in comfortable chairs, pray kneeling upon cushions, and sweep the dust of the sanctuary with their trains. This only occupies their mornings; in the evening they are free to dance, to go to the play, to cover themselves with jewels and finery, to meet at the tables of the rich—though they may be Jews or heretics, to display themselves in promenades, and enhance or improve their charms to captivate men!—After all, what is the harm? The devil is in his dotage—he has come to terms—he is grown old and has forgotten

his business!”

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

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

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

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

“Foolishness?” said Leon, putting his hand under his wife’s chin—soft, round and delicate.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I!”

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XV.

A MODUS VIVENDI.

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

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

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

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

“What o’clock is it?” she asked.

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

“And you—are you not going to bed?”

“I am not sleepy.”

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

“No, I am thinking.”

“What we were talking about?”

“Of that, and of you.”

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

They listened. They could hear the barking of the dogs, which in the suburbs of Madrid, where every house has a wide and vacant let attached, meet in dozens to unearth kitchen refuse and rummage in the gutters; they could hear the distant creak and jangle of the latest tram-cars, and the faint, steady, metallic ticking of Leon’s

watch in his waistcoat pocket—nothing else—much less a bell.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

science—in short, no conversation, no talk whatever....”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Only on Sundays!”

“Only on Sundays.”

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

“Oh! as to that....” Leon murmured.

“You will not?”

“No.—You ask too much at once. I am making an enormous sacrifice, while yours is but a small one. You are giving up superfluous luxuries to enjoy all that is

necessary and reasonable; you are snatching off the mask of hypocrisy and bigotry to reveal the true beauty of a Christian wife. This is not a sacrifice. Mine on the other hand is the loss of everything;—in laying my studies and my friendships at your feet, I am cutting off half of my life that you may trample it in the dust."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"We must part?" she sobbed. "But you are mad—cruel...." María's love for her

husband was as great as his for her—a gulf, an absolute divorce of their souls she could bear, but to live apart...!

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

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

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

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

The air was in fact full of the discordant jangle and clang of bells from the towers of the numberless stuccoed and whitewashed structures which, in Madrid, boast of the name of churches, and bear witness to the piety of the natives.

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

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE DOG-DAYS.

The season of exodus and dispersion had arrived. Madrid was swarming and bustling like an ant-hill, every one exhausted by the heat and eagerly seeking money. The price of gold went up as though war were impending, and transactions in small shares were as lively as though there were some real increase of business. Many a family drew the rope that the extravagances of the past winter had tied round its neck, yet a little tighter; while others, not owning even a rope to pull, consoled themselves by singing the praises of the Madrid Summer, and declaring the

charms of its promenades and its beautiful nights to be far superior to the solitude and dulness of the country. A summer at Pinto or Getafe was as bad as a winter at El Escudo or Pajares!

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

They were all startled and dismayed at the news and still more so when, on the following day, the poor lad appeared, so surely stamped with the marks of suffering that he looked like a spectre in a priest's gown. Though his features were shrunk under the cold kiss of Death, they had a strong resemblance to the bright and lovely face of his sister. As has been said they were twins, and were as much alike as a man and woman can be, but that the girl, full of health and vigour, had always had the advantage in strength and beauty over her brother, who had been frail from infancy.

Delicate and beardless, he had believed himself destined by Nature for the priesthood and had accepted his vocation to prayer and devotion. His eyes, which in form and colour were the very duplicates of María's were set in dark circles; he had even in childhood always had the hectic flush of fever which had lurked in his veins as though it were part of his temperament, and now, when the end was drawing near, it was an internal fire, consuming his existence. The flowing black robe revealed every angle of his emaciated frame as he sat or walked; his voice was that of a man speaking in some deep, invisible airless pit, where the sound dies away in dull vibrations like the dropping of hidden waters.

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

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

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

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

"You know how good he is?"

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

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

“But your husband will not like to be detained.”

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

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

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

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

The Tellería family, she explained, were in financial difficulties; the illness of her youngest son required immediate and considerable outlay; she really could not find it in her heart to treat a party of physicians as her husband treated his back-stairs creditors—his extravagance indeed was positively scandalous; for her part she was weary of the life of superficial display which her husband and sons insisted on keeping up out of sheer pride, and in spite of all she could say. She was sick to death of balls and parties, and could only endure in silence the hidden misery and incessant care which made a hell of her wretched home. Oh! her education, her birth, her principles, her best feelings were all in revolt against the hideous farce; but she was weak—she was led by her affections, and even though she found no return, she loved the authors of her wretchedness—she could not break them of the habits they had acquired. However, now she was resolved to be firm and energetic; to put an end to the malpractices of her household; to check the marquis in his recklessness; to speak plainly—very plainly—to her sons, to institute a strict—an

excessively strict régime; to live on their regular income, and to renounce delusive splendour and ridiculous pretentions in favour of a respectable sufficiency. Then she sat bathed in tears, praying God to spare her daughter such woes as had fallen on her parents' hearth—a mercy which indeed He seemed disposed to grant, since he had blessed her with so exemplary a husband—a wise, a model husband—a man of a thousand—worthy to be a saint, if he were so happy as to win the absolution of the Church.

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

himself her accomplice; he had been false to the sound conservative principles which were the pole-star and beacon of his life. But now he was determined to stop these abuses, to introduce a radical reform of his household, to insist on economy, to maintain domestic order, which was the basis of all virtue, public or private.

Nor was his son-in-law to suppose that he had discussed this painful subject with the object of obtaining any assistance to get him out of his difficulties; no—this would ill become his dignity, which was extremely susceptible on such matters—his only purpose was to let Leon know, once for all, the painful truth, so that he might use his influence in the family and point out the abyss that lay at their feet. The illness of his favourite son was a great grief to him, and he cared for nothing now in this world; he was the victim of a fatality, of all the desperate ills that weighed on his ungovernable country—a poverty-stricken land in spite of its fertility. How was a man to make headway against the difficulties of such a state of things? Why, he himself—the marquis—ought to take sulphur baths for his rheumatism, but he could not, he did not care to undertake the journey. Duty kept him in Madrid by the side of his invalid son and prohibited his spending on himself the money which was needed to prolong that precious life—a young man of a thousand, almost a priest, and quite a saint sent down from heaven!—But the marquis knew where his duty lay and was prepared to fulfil it. His rank as a Spanish nobleman required it; still he craved the advice of a sympathetic and disinterested friend, who might encourage him with brave words and help him by spirited example; he needed an upright, judicious and outspoken man who hated all shams; he wanted moral support, purely moral support.

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

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

“It is strange but very certain, my dear son, that a man may have a warm good heart

with a head absolutely devoid of religious notions." And when the marquis added:

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

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

CHAPTER XVII.

DESERTERS.

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

One morning Leon found her in a state of bewildered indecision, contemplating a collection of summer hats that had come from a shop in a large basket covered with

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

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

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

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

On enquiring of a servant for Señor Polito they learnt that he was breakfasting out, and that he intended to go straight from his friend's house to the station without

coming home again. His packing was done and his trunks locked. This extraordinary proceeding, proving how much family and filial feeling her worthless son could boast of, was a deep grief to the marquesa, who, with all her follies, lacked neither tenderness nor the sense of right. Leopoldo, she frankly admitted, had been shamefully ill-brought up—though by no fault of hers—and was a hardened scapegrace, impervious to all good feeling, and capable of leaving his family in the lurch in their hour of greatest need if he saw a chance of riding a borrowed horse, of driving a friend's coach, or riding in a friend's phaeton, of being hand and glove with some sprig of the nobility or staking a few dollars at cards.

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

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

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

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

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

“It is really no fault of mine,” he went on as he walked up and down the pretty drawing-room, crammed with a thousand costly trifles of French exportation, tapestry, porcelain, furniture, and all the expensive magnificence which fills our houses for lack of the real works of art which are taken away from their proper place and use, to be stored in museums by an æsthetic government.—“It is no fault of mine; you can easily believe that I go very much against my will. I am truly distressed at the levity of my two sons who have deserted their father’s roof just when poor Milagros most needs their society to cheer her and when Luis is so ill—for he is very ill, it is of no use to deceive ourselves. I believe he will go on getting worse; he may get through the autumn—but the winter.—In any case the boys have behaved badly, very badly. Leopoldo is going to-night and Gustavo to-morrow. I should not have thought it of Gustavo—however, he is going, he is in love, over head and ears in love. The Marquesa de San Salomó starts to-morrow for Arcachon, Paris and le Havre; Gustavo accordingly is going northwards too and the labels of his luggage are addressed for le Havre via Arcachon and Paris—a very nice little journey. The marquesa is very pretty and elegant, and Gustavo is very attractive—whether all they say is true! who knows? I don’t believe a word of it. But there is no doubt that Gustavo’s fiery eloquence and his fearless and vigorous defence of the Church made a great sensation in the fashionable world. The ladies’ seats were filled quite early with pretty faces under the most elegant hats, and there was a constant murmur of discussion and approval. And it is certainly the fact that women are among the staunchest guardians of the time-honoured creed of our ancestors. Do you hope to pervert the national conscience, you atheists? Then you must begin by annihilating the fairer half of the human race.—The truth is that Gustavo is an admirable speaker; his fervid language moves the Chamber and delights the galleries. Then he has found a congenial subject, a subject that speaks

for itself—that appeals to the feelings, to the heart, to all that is most sacred and precious in the soul and which is altogether consonant to the spirit of Castilian nobility. The Marquis de Fúcar said to me yesterday with a knowing wink: 'That young fellow has struck into the right path'—and I replied: 'Oh, yes! Gustavo knows where he is going—and how to get there.' He is so full of talent that, as my friend Don Cayetano Polentinos said to me: 'He is a perfect manual of hopes!' Clever, good-looking, full of eager eloquence. However, I must own I should have liked to see him with more family feeling. I leave home because I absolutely need rest and health; but Gustavo.—Still, I can understand the attractiveness of such a woman as the Marquesa de San Salomó.—Yes, yes, I am coming. (This to a servant who had come in to say that breakfast was getting cold.) Are you ready for breakfast Leon? You too will be weighing anchor I suppose...."

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

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

"Her—who?"

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

"And there is my father with two friends who are getting in with them.—Now, I ask you—what can such folly lead to in a man who ought to remember his age and his

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

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ASCETIC.

Leon was not long in discovering that Luis Gonzaga was out of his element in his father's house. The lean, angular figure, wrapped in a black gown with a cord round the slender waist,—bare-headed, feeble and drooping, with eyes always fixed on the ground, with a dull, clammy skin and weak swaying neck that could hardly support the head above it, with broad, yellow, transparent hands like little faggots of thin sticks, too weak for anything but to be folded in prayer—wandered like an ominous shadow through the drawing-rooms hung with gaudy papers or tawdry tapestry. It was a dark and dismal stain on the gilded furniture, and the oriental and Japanese decorations, in which the queer figures, like those of a grotesque dream, seemed to harmonise, though remotely, with that of the emaciated student. He was always to be seen wandering and restless, like an imprisoned bird that seeks some escape; and when he cast an eye on the objects that environed him it was to select the most uncomfortable seat in the most obscure corner, where he might pursue his

meditations. Now and again the servants, when dusting or tidying a room, would come upon the black and silent form, and pause in their bustle with a mechanical gesture of reverence, while Luis would fly to seek some fresh refuge in this desert of worldly adornment, of profane pictures, of damask and chintz, of satin and rosewood. The hapless, dying anchorite, as he fled from one corner to another, hunted by his own fevered mysticism, would stumble against a piano, a Chinese screen, a stand supporting a bowl of gold-fish, a pillowy sofa covered up with brown holland, or a nude bronze Venus.—He could not understand this covering up of furniture and uncovering of statues.

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

"What is your name?"

"Felipe Centeno."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Socartes."

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

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

"I do not fear death," he would say with perfect truth, "on the contrary, I long for it

with all my soul, as a captive longs for liberty. You do not understand, for you cling to the world—you do not live that inner life, you have not broken, as I have, with every tie of earth."

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

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

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

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

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

"Why," he said, "are you uneasy? Why do you shed tears? I am neither alarmed nor sad, but the more I suffer the more I rejoice. I assure you that, seeing death so near at hand, I am full of contentment; though perhaps it may be that the hope of soon

finding myself free from this corrupt and earthly body has given rise to some vanity in my soul, or to some other feeling displeasing in the sight of the Lord. I can only pray that if indeed I am too proud to be dying, God will chasten me and condemn me to live yet a little longer."

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

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

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

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

He received visits from various priests, principally Frenchmen, with fringes of hair and three-cornered cocked hats, highly-bred, worldly, soft-tongued, and they discussed the affairs of the Seminary. There was a veneer of polish in their conversation with an affected tone peculiar to certain circles. More rarely there came grave Spanish priests, who, when they are really good men, are the most priestly priests in Christendom, true ministers of God, pious, affable without affectation and full of sound and healthy wisdom. Luis Gonzaga liked their company, but he preferred solitude; still, in conversation he displayed his keen judgment—not devoid of flavour and wit, his perfect piety which none could fail to appreciate, and his gift of grave, subtle and impassioned eloquence. He went every morning in the carriage, carefully wrapped and watched, to church, and came back towards evening; on his return, he meditated for a time on his knees, and would take no food but when his emaciated frame was fainting for lack of it, and even in the midst of his scanty meal he would often be seized with such acute spasms that it seemed as though his last

hour had come. He would allow no one to help him to dress and undress, nor to sleep in his room; María pointed out to her husband that sometimes the bed was undisturbed and he must have lain on the floor. The padded sofas and chairs, which the march of industry has placed within the reach of the most modest household, knew not the weight of his bones; he commonly sat on a cane stool without a back and remained there for hours, rigid, weary and bathed in sweat. When he could no longer hold himself up, he would push the stool to the wall and lean his aching shoulders against that, with his head thrown back, his eyes closed, and his hands clasped—he looked like a criminal about to be throttled.

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

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

Like his Jesuit model, Luis Tellería suffered frightfully from headaches. Acute neuralgia, which had frequently attacked him at the Seminary of Puyóo, tormented him no less at Madrid, scorching his brain and upsetting his whole frame; his head felt like a mould filled with molten lead. But through all these periods of intense suffering, his soul, thrown back on itself, revelled in the martyrdom and accepted physical torture with a defiant rapture which bordered on pride, and a sort of

delirious luxury. He never uttered a complaint; nay, when his brain seemed turned to fiery serpents he could force his lips to smile. When Saint Luis Gonzaga suffered thus, his Superior advised him not to think so much and he would have less pain. His friends gave his namesake the same advice; but the young man, rejoiced at the implied comparison, answered:

"You wish me to think less that I may have less headache, but it would hurt me far more to try not to think."

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

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

He lived habitually in tranquil silence, and in spite of his sincere affection for his parents, he had fought out many a desperate battle with himself to keep his mind from ever dwelling on the thought of them, so that nothing should alienate his mind from the constant presence of God which was the sole aim and end of his hopes and sufferings. His talents were as conspicuous as his saintliness; he had made rapid progress in his studies and was so versatile and keen-witted that he had early

mastered philosophy and theology, and could argue so closely that the most practised debaters were astonished. But this became a great anxiety to his conscience, for all these praises jarred on his humility; so, for fear they should make him vain, he affected stupidity; to be treated as the lowest and least in his college was his greatest desire, and it was only by the peremptory command of the Superior that he consented to display his talents, but then his convincing logic and persuasive eloquence drew tears from the most strong-hearted. He always obeyed his Superior, was exact in his observance of rules and regulations, and achieved such perfect command of his senses that at length he seemed to have lost them; his closed ears and eyes always fixed on the ground, paid no heed to anything that went on. He passed other people without even seeing them; now and then he would take a walk with his companions, but he observed nothing. He had registered a vow never to look on the face of a woman excepting his mother or his sister, and he kept it with the utmost strictness. By such a system he must surely keep his spirit pure—almost as pure, as that of the babe unborn!

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

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

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

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

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

My readers may perhaps say that this figure is an anachronism, a reminiscence of the middle ages. But it is not; it is a sketch of our own day; at the same time, to see it you must know where to look for it, and that is not in a fashionable promenade. They do exist, these seraphic youths, and are the glory of our Church. The nineteenth century—the richest and most encyclopedic of the centuries—has

produced them as it has produced every type. Ours is a monstrous synthesis of all the ages, and who can foresee how far it will go before it has ceased shuffling and mingling its own inventions and marvels with the relics and curiosities of the distant past?

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MARQUESA GOES TO A CONCERT.

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

On the eastern side of the house lay the melancholy landscape of parti-coloured downs—in winter showing a prevailing, dingy green tint, in summer yellow, grey and brown; fields that are never tilled, that are swept by the winds that dance in the hollows of the hills and fling clouds of dust in each other's teeth. Here and there the dreary monotony is broken by a smoking brick-kiln, or a lonely and forlorn house which, if it has any expression, it is that of astonishment at finding itself there. The brick factory is surrounded by hovels constructed of straw and mud—architectural efforts which the house-martin, the mole, and the beaver would laugh to scorn; and round these huts, that a good kick would demolish, those eager speculators in nastiness, the scavengers, busily analyse the morning's dust-heap, raking in the

mounds of rags, sweepings, paper and other nameless trash which form the daily refuse of a great town. A little way off, groups of half-naked brats are at play, their dirty brown skins scarcely distinguishable from the soil. They look as if they had just sprung from a crack in the earth and must vanish there again—graceful, blaspheming, mischievous creatures, engagingly and innocently impudent, a combination of angel and gipsy. Here too, routing away the heaps of refuse, sneak numbers of mangy dogs—not above biting your calf if you give them the chance—and here, in April and May, starveling hens bring out their broods of chicks and teach them the rudiments of gaining a living. Here and there is a pool of stagnant water into which the sky looks down, astonished to see itself so dingy; black caravans of ants cross the land in every direction, loaded with tares stolen from some carelessly sown field. In the mornings the silence of these barren solitudes is broken by a delightful pastoral concert—the bleating of the flocks that wander from Vallehermoso to their pasture at Abroñigal to return in the evening, when the sweet stillness of the twilight is disturbed by their low, melancholy tones. Goats too go by, jumping and butting, and meditative asses for milking, whose shrill bells are heard at break of day at the door of the consumptive sufferer, pass calmly by.

This dismal, drouthy, thankless, stubborn landscape, with its gloomy suggestion of robbery and assassination and its look as of an abandoned graveyard—this landscape, which does not invite and yet detains the traveller, whose yellow stony stare stays his steps and makes his heart quake with Dantesque terrors—is a very different scene when night has fallen on it, when the winds are at peace and a mysterious calm broods over it all, under the immensity of the starry sky. The purple arch looks so high and remote that the eye and mind throb as they gaze upward. The wanderer holds his breath as he contemplates the glorious firmament that covers the wide plain of Castile, like a spiritual life bending above the barrenness of asceticism. In some lands the beauty of the landscape lies in smiling meadows, woods and

streams, tenderly overshadowed by fleecy clouds. The views from Madrid must be sought overhead in the vast space sprinkled with suns and worlds. From Leon's house, as evening fell, might be seen the fiery glow on the horizon reflected from the setting sun and the pleasing regularity of the landscape which seems to set no bar to the east—where the most vital events in the world's history have taken place; then the successive lighting up of infinitely distant suns, as though each one dropped into its place and burst into flame; the vast vault of the sky, where some stars seem to be eager to rise while others, wearied out, sink to rest; the rapid scintillation of some, which wax and wane; the wondrous fixity of others which pierce, as it seems, with a single shaft of light, the immensity of space; the twinkling hesitancy of some, the solemn, almost stern, steadiness of others, the grand haze of the milky way—and beneath the sky the wide unbroken levels of the earth, noiseless, treeless, streamless, a present image of humanity which lies dreaming—in sleep or in death—with darkened senses under the splendours of the midnight heavens.

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

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

As they were all sitting in the garden, they heard carriage-wheels and immediately after the voices of the Marquesa de Rioponce and her daughter, who had come to persuade the Marquesa de Tellería to go with them to a public concert in the garden of the “Retiro.” The invitation had already been often repeated, but the lady had always excused herself on the score of her son’s serious illness. “Really she could find no enjoyment in anything; how could she take any pleasure when her household was in such anxiety? Her friends she was sure would excuse her, they would not insist on carrying her off to entertainments and would understand that she could not—in fact ought not.... She had sacrificed herself to stay in this furnace to be with her son, she had submitted to make the move to Leon’s house, though it was exile—complete exile.... But her feelings as a mother ... she could not hesitate. And how could she be seen in public at the gardens when every one knew that her poor Luis was suffering so constantly.... He was better no doubt, much better; you could see it in his face; but in spite of the improvement she—the miserable, anxious mother—could not think of amusements and music. To be sure, her spirits sadly needed cheering, that she knew very well ... and what more innocent or soothing pleasure could she have than a little good music?... But she really could not make up her mind to leave him—not for a single evening. She was so absorbed and fettered by her sorrow that she could not escape from its clutches. Suffering as she was, her very anguish bound her to the side of her dear invalid.”

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

“It was as clear as day that Luis Gonzaga was better ... better? Why, out of danger. It was visible in his brighter looks, his eager gaze, the way he walked about the garden, and the gay tone of his voice when he spoke—the marquesa might go out without the faintest shadow of a doubt and come to the concert. Why not? Was it not her duty to take care of her own health? Was she wise to allow herself to be crushed by groundless anxieties; that high sense of duty which had kept her by her son’s side

demanded some care of her own health to enable her to continue to bear her burthen of affectionate solicitude. She could not be required to make such extravagant sacrifices to the injury of her own health, and the thorny crown of abnegation might surely be varied from time to time by the introduction of some little innocent flowers."

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

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

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

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

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

"Good night, mother."

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

CHAPTER XX.

THE OLD, OLD DRAMA.

“María dear, are we alone?” asked Luis pressing his sister’s hand to his heart.

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

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

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

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

“For God’s sake do not say that!” she cried in terror. “You are better, you will get well....”

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

“But you will not die.... You will not die!” said María caressing his head.

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

She did as he desired.

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

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

“Well, not a miracle, but a special intervention of His grace ... and this you ought still to hope for. Ask it of Him without ceasing, and meanwhile do not neglect for a day—for an instant—the precious work of your own salvation. Devote yourself to that, María; regard your life on earth as a ladder by which to scale Heaven; cultivate the inner life, strengthen it by unfailing devotion, arm yourself with patience and crown yourself with sacrifice, for your situation is a perilous one. Your liberty is fettered; through a fatal error of your youth you are bound to a man who will strain

every nerve to drag you out of the only path that leads to eternal glory. So that you have in fact a double task before you. Your sorrows will be terrible—you must sweat blood, drink gall, and suffer those lacerating tortures of the soul which are more acute than the flames of the martyr's stake.... Poor, poor, darling sister!... When the Fathers of the Seminary sent me home to Madrid I was miserable. 'Why,' said I, 'will you send me to that hotbed of sin? Why not let me die here in peace?' But I was resigned to obey when a sudden thought flashed upon me: 'Rely upon it the Lord has some good work for you to do there' ... and I soon saw what it was. This voice, so soon to be silent to the world, might yet utter some precious words to the sweet and innocent soul that the Lord would fain keep for his own. God knew full well that you were the being I most love on earth; he formed us as one, and our feelings, like our faces are intimately kin; we both had a natural taste for the spiritual life; why, when we were little enough to play games we would make believe we were martyrs. Our life together in that dreary little town laid the foundation on which we each had to build up a structure of piety. My vocation to the priesthood preserved me from contact with the world. You wandered from the path of light into darkness; and in that darkness, when the eyes of your soul were blinded, you married ... but whom? I do not condemn marriage, which is a holy estate, but your choice. However, the good seed in your soul will fructify in spite of everything; yes, thrive and fructify.... I, by a special mercy, have come to die in your arms; I was sent to you that you might see and hear me."

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

"We know everything there; I knew his deeds, his opinions, I had heard of his amiable person and of his many natural good qualities. I knew too of the vices that are undermining our wretched family—vices which between you and me can be no secret. Our poor father does not lead the life of a Christian gentleman; our mother is

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

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

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

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

Leon ran to his wife’s assistance.

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

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

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

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

María's arm, tottered like a drunken man.

"Leon, Leon, for heaven's sake!"

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

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

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

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

Leon presently rose and left them; his step rang on the path with that bell-like clink that sometimes is more soothing than music. When the faintness of the sound showed that the master of the house had turned the corner of the garden, Luis called his sister.

"María," he murmured without moving.

"What is it dear?"

"Soon, very soon, my soul will escape among those hosts of stars, which look as though they waited there to receive triumphant souls ... ah how glad, how happy I am!... If I could only make you feel how happy; if I could only make you understand what joy there is in casting off this weary burthen and soaring free. Up, away, to the

immensity of space made everlastingly glorious by the rejoicings of the redeemed!... Away, alone, without casting a glance back at this miserable earth. Do you see that wondrous vault of stars? If they, which are so splendid, are not worthy to be compared with the dust that the blessed tread under foot, what must those be which crown the head of the immaculate Mother in the furthest distance, the supremest height ... where our gaze cannot pierce?"

"For pity's sake do not talk so much!" said María anxiously. "Be calm ... you are excited."

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

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

"Listen to my words," said Luis, holding her hands, "and mark them, so that they may sound in your ears throughout the rest of your existence. They are the last exhortations of your dying but happy brother; and even if my person lends them no authority my death will, since there is something of the prophet in every departing soul. María, I quite admit that you have already done something towards saving your soul; that you have started on the right path, carrying out, besides the devotions which are incumbent on us all, others of a more special character addressed to the Blessed Virgin and the Saints; but this is not enough, my darling sister; nay, it is as

nothing so long as you give up part of your thoughts and time to the vanities and delusions of the world. The devotions in vogue, which allow you to frequent theatres and gay society, to dress with audacious luxury, to drive out always in a carriage, and to foster your pride and extravagance, are a mere farce of piety. Reform your life altogether; flee from the world, avoid gaieties, renounce splendour, rich clothing, and the elegancies of life, walk instead of riding, give up the show and comfort ..." and as he spoke he waved his hand as if to strike out each item of the catalogue. "Let it be your aim to be looked down upon," he went on in his saintly and poetical vehemence. "To be laughed at, to be caluminated, to be despised as ridiculous and unsociable, to be forgotten and rejected by the whole human race. Have no care for the things of earth, but only for heavenly things.... We were born together, and as our bodies have been twins, growing with one growth even before our birth, so let our souls be as one in the life to come. We will be twins to all eternity, María. Say, do you desire this? Do you long to be for ever one with me in the presence of our Father, can you desire, as I do, that our righteousness may be as that of one, and that the praises we shall sing before the throne of God may sound as one hymn?"

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

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

"That is well," said Luis, "then never forget me. I must depart; but I leave my hopes, my words with you. Listen to me," he went on in sentences broken by coughing, "your husband, utterly corrupt through his philosophical speculations and his

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

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

"Nay, you will be as much and more a saint than I, for you will suffer and strive, and your triumph will be all the more meritorious. Having no children you can consecrate yourself entirely to the improvement of your inner life. By breaking entirely with the world you can have nothing to fear; and the utter opposition of your ideas to your husband's, leaves your conscience perfectly free. If, in external matters, he plays the tyrant, you must be his slave; but if he tries to domineer in matters of opinion, pay no more heed to him than to the dropping of the rain. If he revenges himself, suffer in silence; if he smites one cheek, offer the other; but if by insidious argument or diabolical persuasions he tries to insinuate any heretical

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XXI.

A STRUGGLE WITH THE ANGEL.

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

He was learned in astronomy, and he longed for something that might divert his mind from the gnawing pain that oppressed it. What better respite could he find than

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Who bid you interfere in the government of another man’s home?” said Leon blind with rage. “Who gave you a right to rob me of what is my own? Who are you? Where did you come from, with your hideous boast and hypocrisy of virtue? Of what avail is it that you should flay yourself alive if you have no true spirit of charity?” and the hapless creature, gasping for breath and helpless with anguish, closed its eyes in death under his crushing embrace. Leon, mad with fury, still tightened his clutch; his victim seemed to fall to pieces in his arms; nothing remained but a black bundle with shrunken shanks, bony grasping fingers and a limp body—broken like a cardboard manikin in the hands of a child....

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

“Coward! do you think I fear your blade?”

“Impious wretch! Die!”

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

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

“Wretch, begone....”

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

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

CHAPTER XXII.

CONQUERED BY THE ANGEL.

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

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

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

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

“The worst danger that awaits you is that you will be asked to yield to compromises, to arrange matters. Guard yourself against this snare of the devil. It is a snare,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“We must carry him indoors,“ said Leon.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Wretch! would you dare to touch him?”

CHAPTER XXIII.

WEATHER PERMITTING.

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

The amphitheatre was crowded but dull. Excepting for a few minutes occasionally it was all in shadow. The high structure of iron, painted slate-colour, looked dingier than ever, its elegant suggestion of manufactured architecture being little in harmony with the boisterous, clamorous, inebriate, and debasing character of the national Spanish festival. The uniformity of dress, which increases every day to the great loss of æsthetic effect, would give a public entertainment the aspect of a solemn congregation or a patriotic meeting, if the picture were not disturbed by the roar of voices—now an impatient murmur, now harsh yells of rage, in every key of passion, pleasure and frenzy, forming the hideous music of the sanguinary opera of which the libretto is the struggle in the arena. Coloured handkerchiefs are fast disappearing; still, a few bright spots of red and yellow, like gaudy butterflies, here and there relieved the huge black spot, and the incessant flutter of fans gave animation to the long rows of men and women. The uncovered seats on the shady side, especially those affected by the youth and students of the town, were closely packed with heads in ranks like the seeds in an ear of maize. The less crowded places on the

sunny side were occupied by busy knots of press reporters, by country folks, by a hundred or more of Andalusians, in manners and dress a grotesque caricature of the torero; of hardworked artisans, seeking in this wild orgy of excitement some respite from the dreary round of labour. The distinguished society of mataderos, butchers, leather-dressers, tanners, the myrmidons of the slaughterhouse and purveyors of fodder, seethed like a boiling pot; and the hubbub, with the fitful ringing of a bell, sounded like the spasmodic progress of a neighing and kicking beast. The detestable medley of slang and dialects rose up like the hissing of some coarse and malodorous fry as it simmers over the fire. The chula muttered a hoarse oath as she insolently forced her way through the crowd, diffusing a mixed perfume of musk and garlic; and the miserable lout whose natural destiny it was to clean tripe and bladders, being incapacitated by nature for any more worthy function in life, made a speaking-trumpet of his hand to hurl a torrent of abuse, flavoured with a hot vapour of raw spirits, at the president's box, where it would, no doubt, reach the ears of some official of the Spanish capital—the governor perhaps, or perhaps the president of the council.

The front seats of the amphitheatre presented a more pleasing spectacle; here there were a good many white mantillas decking pretty heads, on which camellias as white as milk or as red as blood, bloomed as naturally as though they had grown there. The ladies of the demi-monde, with their unmistakable and characteristic air—a sort of family likeness—their obtrusive elegance and vulgar assertive beauty, formed a notable proportion of the long row, elbowing here and there a woman of still lower morality. Some of these faces were of wonderful beauty, others mere masks of white and red, and burnt cork. Respectable families of the middle classes filed in, led by the father—a merchant perhaps, or a rising stockbroker, the head of a house of business, an infantry officer, a retired magistrate, a contractor for the supply of bacon to the public asylums, a stage baritone, an attorney, a professor of music—in short, whatever you choose—and closed by the youngest child, a little

schoolboy. Here and there might be seen the essentially Spanish figure of a wealthy woman of the shopkeeping class; showy, generally very stout, with a certain loftiness as of a Roman matron grafted on to her florid native smartness; equally proud of her black eyes and her sparkling rings which cut into the flesh of her fat fingers; shedding contemptuous glances on all sides, as much as to convey that she is a very great lady and very rich, that her shop, with its stock of ancient furniture, or her butchery, or her pawnbroker's parlour, is as good as the Bank of Spain, and that so long as she lives there will be no lack of occupation for the horrible gladiators below, who are loitering round the arena in green and gold, or crimson and silver, their cruel weapons in their hands and their spirits high with bold adventure. There is in the lavish proportions and air of satiety of these women, in their pretentious and sometimes cynical expression—particularly when they traffic in human creatures—an indefinable look of depravity suggesting Vitellius, Otho, or Heliogabalus; excepting that they are apt to turn pale when they hear the fatal 'morituri te salutant.'

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

There were faces there, withered, and faded, which betrayed even at a distance the pains that had been taken to hide their ruin, and others, young and innocent, that hid

behind a fan when the loathsome teasing of the bull began; there was no lack of splendour—an atmosphere of elegance seemed to emanate from the style of dress, the glances, the air with which the women were pretty or ugly, and pervaded everything that they wore, from a blossom to the white paint, from the curl that the breeze fluttered on their temples to the jewel that rose and fell with every breath, and the glove that waved as the little hands clapped applause.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Yes, take it, I do not want it.”

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

Among the men stood ladies in couples, in groups, in dozens, waiting for the weather to clear. Up here every one was in a good-humour, laughing and jesting; for this class of spectators is not so seriously annoyed by a delay which to those below is a serious grievance. Indeed, the unforeseen has greater charms for them than a

programme fulfilled; they have plenty of pleasures and a surprise or a little check has a certain relish. After all, the rain is not a serious evil to people who keep a carriage.

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

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

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

“Are you coming to dinner?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“And the little girl, how is she?”

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

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

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

Once down the stairs and safe in the large hall they drew a breath of relief, as though they had accomplished a long and difficult journey, though it was full of people impatiently watching the incessant drip from the eaves, and putting out their hands to feel whether the storm were abating. Some ventured forth under umbrellas, others made a rush for an omnibus. Gentlemen’s coachmen were on the look-out for their

masters, and Pepa's took up the two ladies and the two gentlemen and rolled off, splashing up the mud, down the broad street which turns out of the Carretera de Aragón (Aragón Street). There it turned into the court-yard of the Fúcars' house and drew up under a covered vestibule—a large alcove with scagliola columns and two enormous candelabra, shrouded in linen covers and looking like a couple of Carthusian friars.

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

CHAPTER XXIV.

REMINISCENCES—ANXIETIES.

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

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

communicative; he gloomy, and silent.

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

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

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

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

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

“You have married into a delightful family!”

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

The reader has been told that she was not handsome, and why should I repeat it. But there is nothing so bad as to have good in it, nor woman so plain that she has no detail of beauty. Pepa indeed did not lack charms, and to some she possessed them in a high degree; her eyes were effective, small but very bright, with a sweet and caressing glance. What was most conspicuous in her was her thick red hair and the dead whiteness of her skin which gave her the effect of a statue of alabaster and gold. She was tall and somewhat bony, but this defect was qualified by her well-proportioned limbs and the exquisite lightness of her gait, with an air of gentle confidence that was extremely captivating. The volubility of her tongue covered a grave and thoughtful nature; she seemed to have no pride at all, and her manners, somewhat independent of etiquette, were most engagingly frank and cordial. Her caprices and eccentricities were so much changed from what they were when we first saw her at Iturburua, that she was hardly like the same woman. Sorrow, that tames all, had brandished her scourge over Pepita’s head, and there was little left of her old violence beyond a rare and transitory echo. She presently returned to her seat, and for some minutes she silently watched the intelligent but melancholy countenance of her old friend. Leon remained lost in thought, like a mathematician absorbed in the depths of a calculation.

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

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

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

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

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

They both laughed, but Leon suddenly turned melancholy.

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

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

“No, for pity’s sake.”

“Nonsense, let me tell you.”

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

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

“So many!”

“And have you heard of her poet?” Pepa went on with malicious enjoyment. “Has not the marquis told you about him? This inspired being whose verses are all about white doves and lilies of peace, the Christian home, the glories of Sinai, the Virgins of the Lord, pious aspirations, the azure empyrean, the spirits of the deep and the soul of Virtue—this sublime Christian poet adores your mother-in-law as his Beatrice.” Pepa could not help laughing. “It is she who inspires him with all these divine visions and metaphysical raptures. It is a pity you should not have seen him; he is quite a character. To talk to him after reading his verses is like falling from the clouds into a mud heap. You have not only dramas in your family but farces!”

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

“Go! where?”

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

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

“I do not know even that.”

“Nothing calls you abroad?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Where Monina plays.”

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

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

tears from falling.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We must go no farther in our story without explaining that Leon Roch visited at the Fúcar’s house as the friend of the marquis, no less than as a true and loyal friend of

his daughter's. Theirs was not the only house in which he was intimate; he went to many in search of some diversion from his melancholy in pleasant society and worthy friendships. At the same time it must be owned that his visits to Pepa had of late been long ones. Why? Some people would have answered the question promptly, to his discredit; but their answer lacks evidence. There had budded in Leon's soul, without his dreaming of its strength, a pure and tender passion of which more will be told presently.

CHAPTER XXV.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Leon repeated the names with dull indifference.

"And they went away when prayers were over."

"Very well, you can go."

The man went away; but he noticed in Leon Roch an anxious and absent manner,

indicating that he was absorbed by some ruling idea; still, a servant cannot offer to console his master or to persuade him out of his melancholy by demonstrations of affection, so he went.

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

“You startled me,” he said.

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

After looking at him for a minute or two María said in a hard voice: “well, are you afraid of me?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You need not fancy that your violence will wear out my patience. For some time you have taken to talking to me as if I were one of the men you argue with at your club, or debating societies, or whatever you call them. Light, do you say? Light? Then you are at last tired of your blindness? What do I ask better than to show you the light? It is you who are determined that I shall not—that you will remain as you are—blind. You refuse to see! To me it would be the greatest comfort if we could save our souls together; but you will not ... you will rush on to destruction. I, so far

as I am concerned, to my dying hour will never cease to say: 'Leon, Leon, look and see.... And you laugh? But I am hardened against your laughter; God grants me such patience that I can bear to be the victim of your mockery as well as of your scorn and spite. Laugh as much as you please—laugh me to scorn! I do not care; nay, I ask it of you; my one hope, my one desire is to suffer and endure.'"

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

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

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

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

Leon looked at her scornfully and said very gravely:

"I do not kill—for that."

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

"If grief could kill, María, I should by this time be dead and buried. This infernal torture by a slow fire, this incessant discussion and recrimination arising from the radical opposition of our views on the things of the next world—and indeed of this—are a constant succession of blows that kill ... aye more surely than steel or lead! Ah! the misery of two beings, together and yet apart; of feeling that two souls that ought to be one are growing further and further asunder, each on its own side....

For all this I grieve bitterly, bitterly, child—and then to find a cold and lonely hearth where the wife I loved once sat—to be isolated and abandoned....” And Leon, deeply agitated, broke down and was silent.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I too have my bill of indictment, and it is a heavy one. I was brought up in our holy faith and taught to put my faith into practice in all sincerity and truth. I married you—I loved you, I believed you to be good, kind, honourable, and did not understand the hideous void in your soul; I loved you—and I love you still, for it is my duty to love and respect you; but I soon began to see that in loving you I followed the promptings of a worldly passion, and that my choice was a fatal mistake; that my soul was in the utmost peril of contamination; that we could never come to an agreement; that your learning was of a most pernicious character; that I, as your wife and influenced by your reprobate ideas, might fall into the depths and lose my faith.—I was on my guard. I fully admit that you were tolerant and lenient, that you did not abuse my devotions, nor mock at religion as you have done since.

But you cannot deny that there was a certain amount of contempt in the facilities you granted me; you had a particular smile when I spoke to you of such subjects.—However, we got on very well. Then one day it struck me: 'I am a fool if I do not convert him. Why should I not light the lamp of faith in that darkened soul?' But you gave me to understand that I was mad, that all believers were mad; and you smiled—how you smiled—and with what affectation of good humour you would laugh at all our sacred dogmas. 'Let things alone,' you said, 'let every man save his soul in his own way.' This made me miserable, for there is but one—if I repeat it a thousand times—there is but one way of being saved. Then came those dreadful days, that I can only call my sainted brother's Holy Week—the days of agony of that angelic being, whom God vouchsafed to send to me that he might direct my steps into the right road—I see that the recollection of them vexes you. You cannot forget the bitter humiliation of your spirit in those days when the mere presence of my brother was a constant ground of remorse to you."

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

"I too felt remorse or rather deep repentance for my sins, and an eager desire to grow more like the angel whose soul, as God had willed, was twin to mine. I believe I am reserved for a death no less glorious than his. Celestial fires were lighted in my heart, ardent but pure—different indeed from my love for you! What joys I felt, what heavenly strains I heard, what visions I saw, what glories I dreamed of, what anxieties I endured, what a craving for sorrow on earth that I may be happy in heaven! What a longing to die that I may enjoy, if only a small part of that sacred peace in which my brother revelled. I have prayed and longed till my brother has appeared to me, whether in my dreams or no I know not, radiant with happiness and beauty, calling me to him, and repeating the exhortations and warnings he gave me in the last hour of his life. I never pass a night without hearing his voice in my ears!

You, of course, will not believe in this ecstasy, you are fast bound in materialism and can see only with your bodily eyes. Oh! wretched handful of clay! And this is what the world calls a wise man, because he has learnt half a dozen facts which cannot matter to any one. Wretched and miserable man! Still more miserable if you had no one to intercede for you, to beseech God for the mercy you do not deserve."

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

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

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

intercede to God for you, and God will forgive you and call you to himself, with me for your guide! What a triumph, what a victory that will be!”

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

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

Leon watched her in silence as she left the room. Long endurance had made him stoical; she had hammered so long and so constantly on his heart that it seemed to have turned to a dead cold anvil. But he let his fist fall on the arm of his chair with such force that the very floor trembled. It was as much as to say: “No more, no more of this!”

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DEVOURING OGRE—CROUP.

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

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

The demesne of Suertebella is one of those estates which ample wealth and perseverance have succeeded in creating in the neighborhood of Madrid, and which

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

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

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

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

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

Pepa, still dressed as she had been at the bull-fight had sunk into a chair, her hands folded, her eyes fixed; her speechless despair terrified all who were with her, and some who could not control their grief left the room to cry. She was sitting close to a little bed so daintily pretty that the fairies themselves could make nothing more innocently fresh; it was like a little basket of gilt cane fit to contain the most delicate flowers, and the white curtains, with their lace and pink ribbands, were so fine and white that the angels might have played at hide-and-seek among the folds. Leon

went up to the head of the dying child that lay heavy and motionless on the pillow; the pillow was covered with golden curls and wet with tears. Leon himself was tremulous with apprehension; his heart stood still with anguish as he looked at Monina—the little face, pale with suffering, the lips blue, the eyes wide open and the lashes wet with tears, her throat swollen and dark from the swelling of the veins—and worst of all as he heard the plaintive, stertorous groaning which was neither a cough nor a sigh—hoarse, guttural and yet sharp, as harsh as the whistle of a pipe in a demon's mouth, a horrible, mechanical recurring crow. The child struggled with suffocation, clutching at her throat to seek relief, as if she could give a passage to the air for which her lungs were panting. This agony of an infant by strangulation with no possibility of relieving it, while neither science nor a mother's love can loosen the invisible cord that is choking the baby throat—the little neck, generally as white as a lily and now as livid as a piece of dead flesh; the ebbing of a pure, blameless, loving, angelical life in the most tragical torments, with the convulsions of a strangled criminal and the misery of asphyxia, is one of the most appalling instances of the inexorable fate which, whether it be for trial or for punishment, oppresses humanity.

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

Leon knew not what to say, and for a minute or two his eyes wandered in bewildered horror from the child to the mother, and noted the most trivial details; the table covered with medicine bottles, the child's playthings scattered on the floor—shabby undressed dolls, horses without legs and cats without tails—they looked as forlorn and disconsolate as the human watchers. When he studied the

child's face and then looked into that of the doctor who was still standing by her, Leon augured the worst. Pepa looked up at him with tearful eyes and said in a low, heart-broken tone:

"She will die."

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

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

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

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

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

"Go away, go away. I will punish him.... Spit it out my pretty." The little girl did as

she was bid; then her mind seemed to wander. “More, more,” she said—always a child’s cry when it is pleased or amused. Then, with her eyes shut, and as if in delirium, she put her tiny hand out from under the coverlet and waved it up and down. The infant gesture struck them to the heart; she was bidding them farewell. Its baby grace was tragical.

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

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

They carried her to her own room. Leon stayed with Monina. How many things flashed through his brain in a minute—in a single minute. He himself wondered to find that his grief completely filled and occupied his mind as if the poor little child was all that the world contained for him to love and care for. Since his father’s death he had not felt his heart so strongly drawn to any creature at the moment of death. He was not even remotely connected with the child’s parents, and yet he felt as if its death would rob him of something strangely near and dear. No doubt the mother and child were to some extent one in the passion of pity which absorbed his soul to the exclusion of every other feeling.

On their first acquaintance he and Monina had established an ardent friendship—not wholly disinterested to be sure on the child’s part, since it involved frequent visits to the toy-shop and the confectioner’s—and not unfrequently he had found himself neglecting a more important engagement in order to go to the Fúcars’ house to play with Monina. She was so sweet, so merry, so intelligent, so inquisitive. Her ungrammatical chatter was so expressive, she made such intelligent remarks, she was so lively, so graceful, so gentle, so docile! The friendship had been but brief, but in that short time Leon had played every game that a man can devise; he had carried her pick-a-back; had tried to teach her to speak, to give a penny to a beggar,

to forgive when she was hurt, to pity the poor, to be kind to animals, to obey her mother, to answer as soon as she was spoken to, not to cry for nothing. He had grown accustomed to her winning smile and could not bear to miss it. How could any one help adoring such a rosy dawn even though it were veiled in mist? Monina's real name was Ramona, after Pepa's mother, the late Marquesa de Fúcar. She was two years old and not very like her mother, for she was very pretty—pink and white, with eyes of cherubic blue and a sweet round lisping mouth, slightly built and as restless as a bird. Her chirping jargon, with every verb made regular, fascinated him; and when she took a fancy to flit from spot to spot—fluttering like a butterfly and as busy as a bee, he could not take his eyes off her. Play brought roses to her cheeks; she was so overflowing with life that she laughed when she talked, flew rather than walked, and her innocent questions and baby comments would startle him with an innocent logic with which infants so often confound the wise.

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

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

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

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

“We can try mercurial rubbing.”

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

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

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

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

The child still murmured softly, calling Tachana and Guru, the two children of a neighbour with whom she was in the habit of playing. Then came another fit of

suffocation so violent that it surely must be the last. Pepa cried aloud:

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

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

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

But Moreno Rubio answered in a hollow voice:

“At that age it is tantamount to murder.”

“We must try everything; even murder.”

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

“You desire it?”

“Yes—I desire it.”

“We must consult the mother.”

“No—I take the responsibility.”

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

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

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

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

Her grief was growing fierce; the terrible glare of her wild eyes, her dry, white,

quivering lips, the nervous tension of her hands, all betrayed that intensity of misery which gives a bereft mother the aspect of a fury.

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

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

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

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

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

Moreno went at once.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Keep her well covered,” said the doctor, in the short imperious tone of a pilot steering a life-boat; and then, unable to contain himself, he swore a mighty oath. Six hands covered Monina closely.

Leon and Pepa looked at Moreno. But they dared ask no questions; it was better to be in suspense, which is a kind of hope, and the doctor’s face revealed nothing

beyond a reprieve of immediate fear.

“She is still perspiring?”

“Yes.”

“Still?”

“Yes—rather more.”

And they watched the almost imperceptible moisture on the delicate skin as if the existence of the universe depended on it.

“But is it not a favourable symptom?” Leon said at last.

“Favourable, yes. But even....”

“Can we not help nature?“ said Pepa.

“Nature does not require our aid at present.”

“But—is it possible...?”

“I can say nothing, nothing.”

“And it is still going on?”

“Yes, so far....”

“Oh, my darling! She will live....”

Behind the chair on which Pepa was sitting hung a picture of the Virgin with two tapers burning in front of it. Pepa started up, flung herself on her knees and kissed the very ground before it. For a few minutes she remained sobbing violently with her face buried in the carpet. Certain that she could not overhear him Moreno whispered low in Leon’s ear:

“If expectoration continues to any favourable extent it is possible that she may be saved; but for four chances in her favour there are ninety-six against her.—So say nothing to the mother....”

“Four in her favour,” thought Leon, “that is something—and I feel hopeful ... sure!”

His heart seemed to leap with a mad jubilation. The life of the whole human race might have been in the balance. There, under his very eyes, hanging on a thread—a breath.

Time went on; Pepa had come back to watch and was walking up and down like a wounded lioness. She did not want to ask anything; it was enough to read their faces and note their actions. There was something new and fresh in the air—the circling of the universe seemed to have been suddenly reversed. The two men were visibly anxious, but not downcast.

“What is it?” asked the mother.

“Hope,” said Leon.

“Very little,” muttered Moreno.

Pepa clasped her hands in an ecstasy of thankfulness.

“Nay, do not allow yourself to be too sanguine,” said the doctor. “The reaction that has set in is not, so far, sufficient—far from it. It may be a delusive relief, like the former ones—go and lie down for a little while.”

“I! lie down; I, rest, when my baby is getting better?”

“But still....”

“She is perspiring a good deal—a great deal,” exclaimed the mother, whose excited hopes magnified the cool moisture into a heavy dew. “God will let her live, He will give me my treasure.”

She knelt down by the bedside, clasping her hands close to the child’s little form without daring to touch her; hardly daring to breathe lest her sighs should disturb the blessed reaction. Monina was lying comfortably and her breath came less painfully.

“It is possible? say Doctor....”

“I can say nothing yet....” said the inexorable physician. “The hope—the chances, are very slight. We shall see how she goes on.”

“Oh! all will be well; the Blessed Virgin will have pity on a lonely mother ... Leon what do you think?”

“I, I cannot tell,” replied Leon. “I do not know, but I feel ... but I dare not, I dare not. Still I feel encouraged ... who can tell ... perhaps....” Pepa could hardly repress a cry of joy.

“Oh! how can I bear it? She may live! But if we are deceived, if we are mistaken. Merciful Father! Blessed Virgin! Why do you let me hope if after all you rob me of my only treasure—the joy of my life, of my home, of my soul?” And she wandered vaguely about like a demented creature, not knowing what to do.

“Let us pray, let us pray,” she said at length. “The Virgin has heard me and I will beseech her, entreat her, till I can see and feel no more. Pray, Leon, with me—why do you not pray?”

“I too am praying,” replied Leon, bowing his head.

“You! you? Those who ask in fervent humility will be heard; but you! How do you pray?”

She seized his arm and dragged him towards the picture, in her frantic energy her strength was surprising.

“As you will,” said Leon, who was no longer master of himself; and he never knew how, but he found himself on his knees, and with eyes raised to Heaven he exclaimed in piteous accents: “Merciful God! save her life, she is what I love best.”

A dying child, a despairing mother, a man on his knees praying after a fashion of his own. It strikes me that it is folly to write of such commonplace occurrences.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE MOTHER.

What a night they passed. Nothing happened, and yet it was as full of interest as the

years of an eventful life. Pepa was in such a state of nervous excitement that her brain seemed to be affected; she laughed while she cried, and her broken sentences, often incoherent and irrelevant, betrayed that her mind was tossed between despair and hope. She would sit trembling like an old woman, and again, flit restlessly about the room like a child that does not know what it wants.

Monina's skin was still warm and moist—that moisture was as a dew from Heaven. The deadly greyness of her face gave way to a faint pink tinge; it was a joy to watch the frail flowers of life blossoming again where, so lately, had been a desert of death. Her breathing grew easy, and on her silent and slightly parted lips dawned the sweetest charm of infancy, a happy smile. It was impossible to look at her and not to hope; and it was impossible to refuse to listen to that hope which seemed an inspiration from Heaven.

The dawn was breaking when Moreno Rubio once more addressed Pepa:

"I can now pronounce a definite opinion."

"Yes? My little girl...."

"The child is out of danger," said the doctor, clasping the mother's hand. "This favourable reaction has saved her. Leon wanted me to try tracheotomy.... But the treasure we thought we had lost is restored to us."

Pepa kissed his hands, bathing them in tears.

"It is none of my doing, Señora, but Nature's, helped by tartar emetic and the caustic solution ... nay, Nature's only; or, to speak truly, God's. Now it is time that I should get a little rest."

And after giving a few instructions he left.

Pepa could not speak; she was dumb with joy; she knelt down and remained absorbed in prayer for more than half an hour. Leon sat by the child's bed, his head sunk between his hands. Suddenly he heard a voice close to him; he looked up and

saw Pepa.

“What a night you have had,” she said. “Hours of anxiety—death and then joy! You have no children; if you had, how happy your children would be! The interest you have shown in this little one—a friend’s child only, not related to you....”

“It is an irresistible passion,” he said, “that I cannot account for; it is a strange folly indeed.”

“A folly! Oh, no! I like you to love my child. If I were to live for a thousand years, Leon, I should never forget the hours during which my heart and brain went through so much suffering; and the last thing I should forget would be the moment which was to me the most solemn and critical of all, and the words I heard and which are stamped on my mind as if they had been burnt in.”

“I do not know what you are talking about.”

“Nor I, either, I believe,” she answered, leaning over him. “Joy has turned my brain, I think, I feel a sort of aberration or bewilderment.... Can it be true that I have my little one? That this angel is still left to comfort me in my loneliness?”

She looked at the child and bending over her, kissed her forehead very softly, so as not to disturb her sleep. When she looked up again at her friend he noted a strange light in her eyes.

“You are too much excited,” he said. “You ought to go to bed and sleep for some time. Poor little mother! You have gone through a great deal since the night before last.”

“Yes,” replied Pepa, “a great deal; but not only now; before that too; I am familiar with misery.”

“Be calm, you are half delirious.”

“And as I was saying,” she went on with an air of sudden recollection, and a bright smile, “I shall never forget your words: ‘Spare her life. She is what I love best in the

world.’” Leon looked down. “But I am glad, so glad, that you are so fond of her,” said Pepa on the point of crying. “For then I am not the only creature to love her. You are a good old friend, a friend of my childhood. I have always valued you, and now more than ever, when I see what an interest you take in Monina, a true warm interest.—Leon, I feel that I must break a silence that is killing me and tell you a secret that I cannot bear to keep....”

Her head drooped on Leon’s shoulder; she wept copiously, and he did not speak. He felt the weight of her head, the warmth of her breath, and the moisture of her tears, and he sat silent—stern and self-controlled. Pepa might have been shedding her tears on a rock. Suddenly a sense of dignity and modesty sprang up in Pepa’s soul; she lifted her head, crimson with blushes and gave a little cry of dismay.

“Pepa,” said Leon, taking her hand in a firm, kind grasp, “your child is safe. I am going now.”

At this instant they were both startled by hearing a sweet, silvery voice—an angel’s voice speaking from Heaven—which said:

“Mamma, Mamma!”

Pepa covered her with kisses. Monina sat up and began to ask for everything: she wanted meat, and fish, beef, sugar-plums, bread and butter—all at once, altogether and a great deal, more, more ... and then not knowing words enough for her desires, she asked for ‘things,’ a comprehensive word, representing in a child’s vocabulary its insatiable desire for possession; epitomising its instincts of craving and greed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MARQUIS DE FÚCAR ENJOYS THE SPECIAL FAVOUR OF HEAVEN.

From this moment Ramona’s illness needed no special attention, and as soon as its favourable termination was known in Madrid, the great house was filled with friends

who called to congratulate the mother, just as they had before called to condole with her and make enquiries. There are people to whom this is the whole of life, who spend year after year in congratulating or condoling, and who would perish for want of occupation if there were no deaths or christenings, no carriages and visiting cards.

Leon set out for Madrid when the carriages with their gaudy coats of arms were beginning to stream into the park of Suertebella. Even when he had got half way he turned back to leave a message about some medicine that he feared might be forgotten, and his mind was so full of Monina that all day long he was thinking: “If they let her get up too soon—if they do not keep her warm enough.... If they put too much chloral in the cough mixture.... If they let her eat sweets....”

After settling various matters of business and paying one or two indispensable visits in the evening, he went to bed early. He did not see his wife and she took no steps to see him.

Next morning he set out for Suertebella where a surprise awaited him; the Marquis de Fúcar had just arrived there, accompanied by his French friend, the Baron de Soligny, who, like Fúcar himself, was one of those banker-princes who go about the world in search of those tremendous strokes of business which seem most easy to meet with in bankrupt or impecunious communities, just as there are certain trees that grow spontaneously and flourish best on the poorest soil.

They were soon joined by the Marquis Joaquín de Onésimo whom Fúcar had invited to discuss, without loss of time, a grand project for a national loan.

Leon found the marquis unusually grave and thoughtful, with gleams however of good spirits; a most unaccountable state of affairs, for the most precarious business never seemed to affect the serenity of his perfectly artificial exterior. When he spoke of Monina’s illness and marvellous recovery, Don Pedro, who was devoted to his little grandchild, was quite happy; but his eyes fell again and he frowned—he smiled—then he was solemn; and at length, putting his arm through Leon’s and

taking him aside, he said:

“We must prepare Pepa for some bad news.”

“Bad news?”

“Yes, and I say bad news because.... Well, I hardly know why. Still, the news of a death, whoever the victim may be, is in a way bad news.” And the marquis fumbled in his pockets which were full of cards, letters and papers, covered with notes in pencil scribbled in his carriage, in the train, in his office.

“Here is the message. It is a frightful catastrophe—the wreck of an American steamer between Puerto-Cabello and Savanilla.... The papers here have not mentioned it, but my Havana correspondent telegraphs this.... Do you see? The steam packet City of Tampico....”

Leon turned pale as he read the message.

“So that Pepa....” he murmured.

“Hush, not a word; she might hear you and she is quite unprepared. Yes, my daughter is a widow.”

Leon Roch was speechless.

“Between ourselves, and in the strictest confidence,” Don Pedro went on, putting his mouth close to Leon’s ear that he might not be overheard, “it is a real mercy for Pepa, and for me too, in spite of the shock of the catastrophe. If Federico had returned to Europe he would have ruined her and me too. A merciful providence, it would seem, has cut the knot in a sudden and tragical manner, and released my daughter and me from the miserable position in which we were placed by her marriage with that gambling, swindling, forger. It was a girl’s fancy which cost us all very dear. Do me the favour to shut that door that we may talk freely. We must not be overheard.”

Leon did as he was desired.

“You,” he said, “are the proper person to tell her.”

“There is no help for it; I must confess that I do not think that Pepa will be heart-broken or even grieved. It will be a painful shock—not even that perhaps. Between you and me ...” and he lowered his voice to a whisper, although the door was shut—“I believe that Pepa loved her husband as little as it is possible to love a husband, do you understand? I cannot help thinking that her feelings towards that scoundrel of the first water were very nearly akin to mine, and I never concealed the fact that I hated him—hated him with all my heart. Pepitinilla will not shed many tears—By Heaven! Very likely none at all!”

And the marquis rubbed his hands as he did when he had concluded a good stroke of business. The very Exchequer office quaked in the recesses of its empty vaults when the Marquis de Fúcar rubbed his hands. “It is a mercy, a real mercy, for her and for me,” he repeated, as if he were talking to himself, “Providence has interfered to save us. If that man had come back to Europe—and he would have come back when he had spent all his money—Ah! Vampire! You were not satisfied with fleecing me in Madrid but you must need get hold of all the moneys in the hands of my Havana correspondent, you were not content with forging letters to rob me of the thirty thousand dollars I had in Ferguson’s house in London, but when we sent you to Cuba you must try the same trick again. Rascally gambler! But God can punish, God will not let a rogue escape!...” and he ground one fist into the palm of the other hand. Then, as if he had remembered the duty imposed upon him by human dignity and christian charity, he added:

“But we must forgive the dead, and I forgive him with all my heart. His punishment has been terrible. What awful disasters these fires on American vessels are! Not a soul was saved on board the City of Tampico but the cabin boys and one passenger—a mad Quaker. Federico embarked in her with the intention of going to Colon, and on to California, the natural home of adventurers; he had made away

with all the money I had in a house there—how wonderfully Providence has put a stop to his criminal career! And then you freethinkers declare that the Almighty is too great to trouble himself about our miserable little lives! I tell you he does; I tell you he does! Of course we must not exaggerate, and I do not pretend to say that he attends to every trifle when he is asked. But you see?—my daughter filled the house with tapers when Monina was ill and put up prayers to all the saints.... They would have enough to do up there if they attended to all the mothers whenever a child coughs or sneezes; but great crimes, great rogues...."

Leon had nothing to say to this interpretation of the working and ways of Providence.

"Well, well," the marquis went on. "He disgraced my name and tormented my little fool of a daughter. But it is all over; may the earth—the waters—lie lightly on him.... There is one thing I never could comprehend, and that will always, always be a mystery to me...."

"I can guess what," said Leon quickly. "You cannot imagine what made Pepa marry Cimarra. She is kind-hearted, intelligent, and full of feeling; Federico was always a heartless reprobate; you had only to talk to him for half an hour to discover what a shallow, selfish creature he was."

"Just so. Well, I do not deny that I brought up Pepa very badly. She is very much altered; her troubles have done for her what I failed to do. Only four years ago she was so capricious.... But you can remember her. Really, but that she has a heart of gold, my daughter might have been my greatest grief, I own it.—But then, what a soul she has! What noble sentiments, and what a depth of tenderness under the whims and airs that come to the surface.... Mere bubbles, mere bubbles—I can find no other word—while her true self is sound and good to the core. I will tell you one thing that I am as sure of as I am of the Gospel: if my daughter had but married a good man, judicious and at the same time attractive, whom she could have loved

without reserve, she would have been a woman out of a thousand—a model wife and mother...."

"I am sure of it," said Leon gloomily.

"And the more I feel it," Fúcar went on, folding his arms, "the less can I understand her fancy for Cimarra; a fancy, I say, for I can think of no other word. She never even tried to justify herself by the attraction that a handsome man always has for a woman, though Cimarra was what you call a good-looking man...."

"Decidedly."

"In spite of that I cannot comprehend it, for Pepa felt no charm, no fascination; in short, her choice seemed to me a very bad one; however, I could not oppose her, I had not the strength to oppose her. That has always been my weak point. When Pepa was but a baby she used to whip me and I laughed at it; when she grew to be a woman she wasted a perfect fortune in trifles, and still I laughed. When Federico asked for her hand, when I spoke to her about it and she said she would accept him—well, I did not feel inclined to laugh; but I consented. What could I do? At the same time Pepa did not seem to me to be very much in love; still Federico suited her for a husband.

"In short, on an evil day they were married—I spent a hundred thousand dollars on the wedding! What a day! If the whole human race had married on that day it could not have brought more misfortunes on my devoted head. My poor child has never had a happy hour since. She seemed to be consumed by some mysterious anguish—moral? physical? God only knows! She was mad after every form of entertainment and luxury—it is madness. Look at the girls of the present day; they marry for nothing on earth but to be free to amuse themselves, to spend money and whirl giddily through life. Not even during the honeymoon did I ever see Pepa and her husband really loving to each other. 'This is like having a wooden doll for a husband,' I said to myself. Sometimes she was silent, sometimes drunk—I can find

no other word—drunk with banquets, balls, trumpery novelties, and fine clothes. Every day she must have something new, and sometimes not all the marvels of the Arabian Nights would have cheered her melancholy. Poor foolish child! As for Federico, she troubled herself no more about him than if he had been a chair. She treated him as if he were an idiot. Ah! Leon, my good friend, we live in a strange world. A vale of mistakes, that is what I call it."

"I do not deny it; but it is even more a vale of tears."

"Just so. Well, as I was saying, I began to be very anxious about my Pepilla's health and even her reason. Happily her child was born, and from that time I date her regeneration. She ceased to be captious and extravagant; she devoted herself to the care of the little girl and gained that balance of mind, that majestic dignity—I can find no other word—that she has never lost. It was just at the time when the child was born that Cimarra showed himself the blackguard he was. But you know—all Madrid knows the history of his infamy, his swindling villainy. He shortened my life by ten years, the scoundrel! How many tears has my poor girl shed in this very room! How many times has she begged my pardon for having given me such a rascally son-in-law! 'I was mad,' she would say, 'I did not know what I was doing.' While he was ruining me, she would kiss me and implore my forgiveness. 'We must set one thing against the other,' I said.... Well, it is all over! God Almighty ... Providence ... You had better prepare her for the news."

"I?"

"Yes, you are clever; now I should not know what to do but just go in and say: 'Pepa, your husband is dead....' Now you can go in and take up a newspaper, and say: 'What a terrible fire at sea!'"

"I? No, not I. Excuse me, I cannot invent a scene. It is your duty, or that of some member of the family."

"My dear fellow, do me the favour. You are such an old friend."

At this moment the door opened and Pepa came in fresh and smiling. Leon Roch felt a thrill at the sight; she seemed to him more beautiful than he had ever before thought her, and his heart leaped with joy. It was a shock of surprise and exquisite pleasure, like that of a happy memory, or the flash of a new idea in the mind, filling his soul with brightness. He gazed at her a moment in silence, seeing her in a haze of glory; she was transfigured in his sight, and her commonplace features, by some miracle, had adapted themselves to the type of the ideal woman.

“You have come at the right moment, Pepinilla.“

“Papa,” she said, “Monina is awake now, come and see her. How are you, Leon?”

“Stop a moment, child? Leon wants to speak to you, he wants to read you something—some paper in which....”

“It is all Don Pedro’s nonsense; I have read nothing.”

“What a lovely day,” said Pepa, going to the window through which the sun was shining gloriously, “look Leon. Do you see a roof there among the trees? That is the house of which I was speaking. Do you know Papa that he is looking out for a solitude where he may retire from the vanities of the world. I recommended him to look at the little house belonging to Trompeta, where the priest of Polvoranca lived.”

“It is a pretty place, and not two steps from here. Do you really want to come to this suburb? Well, my dear boy, if you want to find a den where you can devote yourself to gnawing at your books....”

“I hardly know, I am quite undecided,” said Leon, staring vacantly at the roof which he could just see among the verdure. “Let us go to see Mona.”

Pepa led the way.

“What is worrying you, my dear fellow?” said Fúcar to the younger man in a tone of kindly familiarity and laying his hand on Leon’s shoulder. “I know of course that your wife—ah, this is the deplorable result of exaggeration. You have it in a

nutshell: piety is a virtue; but carry it to excess and what is the consequence? Misery and horrors."

Then, as they went on, Fúcar leaning on Leon's arm, he said in a low voice:

"My poor Ramona was just such another. There was no bearing it. Still this sort of infidelity—a religious passion—must be winked at, must be forgiven. I ask you, what is a man to do in such a case? It is frightful but irremediable. When a wife is faithful to her husband there is no reason, no excuse even for a separation and nevertheless she may be too much for endurance. I feel for you. I can only repeat what I said: we live in a vale of mistakes."

Not long after Leon took his leave. He was so absorbed in thought that he failed to bow to Don Joaquín Onésimo who was walking in the park with the French baron, and discussing the pending loan with the deep interest that some men feel in a public calamity. On reaching Madrid he got out of his carriage to walk home, and he wandered through endless streets and turnings like a man walking in his sleep, seeing nothing and hearing nothing but a voice within which said again and again: "A widow!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

ERUNT DUO IN CARNE UNA.

For several days Leon did not go to Suertebella excepting once to leave a complimentary card at the door. He spent most of his time away from home; he had given up study and packed all his books into cases. He frequented clubs and meetings, but his friends found him taciturn and indifferent alike to gossip, news and discussion. He talked of a journey without saying whither, of a long absence; but if he had occasion to speak on any other subject it was with a bitterness of sarcasm or invective very unlike his usual serene and lofty way of viewing the events of life or the persons with whom he had come in contact.

One night at the beginning of April he went home soon after eleven. The door was opened by an under-servant.

“Where is Felipe? Why does he not let me in as usual?” asked the master.

“Felipe is not in the house, Sir.”

“Where is he then?”

“My mistress has dismissed him.”

“What for? Was there anything wrong?”

“She was angry because he would not go to confess, Sir.”

“You do then?”

“Yes, Señor; once a month. My mistress takes care of that; if we do not bring home a certificate she turns us into the street. But Ventura, the coachman, has a friend who is a sacristan and who can get him as many as he wants and so he satisfies my mistress who believes he goes to confess. If it were not for your Honour, Sir, my wife and me, we should have been off long ago from this place where so much is expected and there is never a moment’s peace. When a poor man has been hard at work all the week and Sunday afternoon comes round what a terrible thing it is that he cannot be allowed to go for a walk, but must needs be packed off to hear a sermon. My wife says she can stand it no longer! And then look at the scarecrow she has brought into the house. This morning when she sent off Felipe she said she should put some one in his place at once. I thought she would promote my brother Ramón: but no, she wrote a letter to the priests at San Prudencio, and before we could turn round, in came a fellow that looks like a sacristan, fat, red-faced and clean-shaved, with coat tails down to the ground, a low-crowned black hat, a sanctimonious, spiteful face and the manners of neither a man nor a woman. My mistress told me that I was to take Felipe’s place and the porter was to take mine and that this new gentleman—Pomares is his name—was to be the new porter and a sort of steward and superintendent of the rest of us.”

“You do not know what you are talking about. There has never been a steward in my house!”

“Steward. The mistress herself said steward; and the long-tailed rascal grinned and looked at us with his fishy squint as much as to say: ‘I’ll send you to the right about.’ And then he preached us a sermon and looked as sweet as he knew how, and called us all his brothers and crossed his hands and declared he loved us all dearly!”

“Is your mistress in her oratory?” asked Leon.

“I believe she is in her sitting-room.”

Leon went into his wife’s boudoir where he found her talking with Doña Perfecta, a confidential friend whom she took with her when she went out at night. The worthy dueña was startled to see the master of the house, and having no doubt a subtle intuition that a scene was impending, she rose and took her leave.

No sooner were they alone than Leon began, without betraying any annoyance or temper.

“María, is it true that you have dismissed poor Felipe?”

“Perfectly true.”

“Before turning him out of the house you would have done well to reflect that I was very fond of the lad for his attention, his desire to learn, and his thoroughly good heart which covered a multitude of childish and provoking faults. I took him from your mother’s house because whenever he came here, he was in such ecstasies at the sight of so many books....”

“And in spite of these admirable qualities I was obliged to discharge him,” said María coldly.

“But why? Did he fail in his duty to you?”

“Yes, shamefully. For a long time I have made him go to confess. To-day I reproved him for having omitted last Sunday and the Sunday before, and the impudent fellow,

instead of being penitent, turned upon me and said in the coolest way: ‘Señora, leave me in peace; I do not want to have anything to do with your priests.’”

“Poor Felipe! And in his place,” Leon went on without betraying his purpose, “you have engaged an elderly man....”

“Yes, Señor Pomares. I had hoped that you might come in early this evening that I might speak to you and have your consent. He is a very superior man, full of piety and good feeling, who thoroughly understands his business.”

“I have no doubt of it.”

“And who can do as much work in a day as two or three of your profligate idlers. He is a perfectly confidential person and to whom you may entrust your house, your interests, your most private business without the smallest hesitation.”

“I should like to see him. Send for him.”

María did so and in about five minutes the weak-eyed, red-faced dignitary made his appearance, exactly such as the man-servant had described him. After gazing at him from head to foot, Leon said very quietly:

“Very good, Señor Pomares. I will give you my first instructions.”

“What are your wishes, Sir?” said the new steward in mellifluous tones and arching his eyebrows.

“That you walk out of my house, this instant.”

“Leon!” cried María, seeing with astonishment the wrath in her husband’s face.

“You have heard me. Take your baggage and be off without loss of time.”

“The lady—your wife sent for me,” said the old man with an attempt at firmness, feeling himself strong in his mistress’s support.

“I am the master of the house, and I order you to go,” said Leon in a voice that admitted of no reply, “and I warn you that if you ever set foot within this house again you will go out not by the door, but by the window.”

The man made a low bow and vanished.

“Good heavens!” cried María, folding her hands, “what a shame! To treat such a good, humble, respectable man in such a way!”

“From this hour,” said Leon looking his wife full in the face, “understand that everything in this house is changed. Henceforth I find that I must absolutely interfere with your proceedings and snatch you, either with or against your will, from the monstrous course of life into which you have drifted; I must cure you, as mad people are cured, by removing you as far as possible from the influences that have occasioned your madness. My long suffering has been fatal to us both; but now my determination, which will border I warn you on tyranny—and by no fault of mine—is to straighten somewhat the crooked paths in which you have chosen to walk.”

“I am resigned to endure,” said María with the hypocritical unction she had learnt to display. “I will drink the cup you force to my lips. What is it to be? What do you require of me? Will you kill me; or is your cruelty more refined? Will you force me to renounce the habits of piety that I have formed? Do you mean to make me abjure my faith?”

“I have no desire that you should abjure your faith.... No, what I want is something quite different. Woe is me!”

He turned away as though he really did not know what he wanted. In point of fact while María was calm and played the part of the victim to admiration, Leon was disturbed, and hesitated in his part of executioner.

“I do not wish to have any discussion with you to-night,” he said. “We have fought too long without result, but now it strikes me that some definite action on my part may rescue us from this hideous state of things. Forgive me if instead of giving you explanations I threaten you, if instead of arguing I command, if instead of answering you I say nothing.”

“What do you require? Tell me at once.”

“I am going to leave Madrid.”

“Why? Are you tired of theatres, bull-fights, clubs, and atheistical meetings? Ah! if you leave this it will not be to live in a desert but to go to Paris, or London, or Germany!”

“You forsook and neglected me,” said Leon sadly. “You avoided me and flung me back upon the frivolities of society; you, entrenched in your impeccability, have destroyed all that might have been the joy and comfort of my life and have made my home the abode of misery.”

María was speechless.

“Well then,” said Leon with unwonted vehemence. “I am tired of having no home. I am determined to have one.”

“And is not this your home? For my part I am always here,” said María, as coldly as though she spoke with a mouth full of snow.

“This my home! And what are you? Harsh, thorny and repellent! Henceforth....”

“You have only to command, and yet you are far more agitated than I; my resignation gives me self-control, while with all your haughty tyranny you tremble and turn pale! In one word Leon, what would you have?”

“I am going to leave Madrid. That is imperatively necessary.”

“What is the matter?”

“I do not want ... I cannot stay here; I have no comfort, no affection in my own house; I have no one to care for me, since the companion of my life, instead of surrounding me with gentleness and tenderness and fondness, has shut herself up in an icy shroud. She, in the delirium of her exaggerated pietism, and I, in the gloomy solitude of my scepticism, are not, and can never be, a sympathetic and happy pair. Some men might be able to vegetate in this barren, arid atmosphere; I cannot. My

soul cannot be fed with study only; however, as it can have no other nourishment, it is forced to be content with that."

"And why can you not study here?"

"Here!" exclaimed Leon, amazed at the proposal. "I cannot stay here. I have told you already that I am going away."

"I do not understand you?"

"I daresay not; it is quite possible that you do not; but who will understand me ... who?"

He clasped his hands over his head with a bitter groan of despair; and María, respecting his anguish, refrained from making the impertinent remarks she was accustomed to indulge in on such occasions. At last she repeated her former suggestion:

"You can study as much as you like here. Let us live together. You will not interfere with my religious exercises, nor I with your studies. We shall be two recluses—I devoted to faith and you to atheism."

"A beautiful prospect indeed! Nay, what I crave is not a cell, but a home; I have no contempt for the joys of life; I ask to enjoy them, in all moderation and honesty; I do not want a life of fevered exaltation, but a wholesome and practical life, the only life that leads to true human virtue, to duties fulfilled, to a free conscience, to peace and honour. What I want now is what I looked for when I married you. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand. What I do not understand is why, in order to gain such a home, you must quit Madrid."

"You quit it with me."

"I!"

"Where I go you must go."

“San Antonio! help me to do my duty!” said María with sanctimonious resignation. “And where do you propose to take me?”

“Wherever you please. But when once we are settled in the place we select for a residence you will lead a totally different life.”

“How?”

“I shall lay down a plan which you will have to follow with perfect exactitude. I shall forbid your going to church on ordinary days; I will not have my house filled with the crowd of priests and bigots that have taken this house by storm; I shall weed out your books, picking out those which are really pious from others that are mere farrago of horrible nonsense and rhapsody....”

“Go on, pray go on; what more?” said María with cold sarcasm.

“I have only one thing to add; and that is that you can take your choice between this and a complete separation, henceforth for the rest of our lives.”

María turned pale.

“You are cruel! abominable!” she exclaimed. “Give me time to consider at any rate. All this is to take place away from Madrid, you say?”

“Yes, quite away. You may choose the place.”

“Come, come, do not drive me crazy with your preposterous nonsense,” she suddenly said, trying to make light of it, “nothing shall induce me to leave Madrid.”

“Then good-bye,” said Leon. “Henceforth you are mistress of this house. Our separation is an established fact—not by law, but by my will. To-morrow my lawyer will call upon you and tell you what allowance I propose to make you. Now good-bye; in matters of business there is nothing like decision and promptitude. It is settled.” And he went towards the door.

“Wait,” said María following him; but then, as though she repented of the impulse, she folded her hands and raised those sea-blue eyes to the ceiling.

"O Lord!—Blessed Virgin!—Luis, my brother! inspire me rightly; tell me what I ought to do."

Leon waited; they looked at each other in silence. Then, yielding to some instinct, he went up to her and took her hand with tender respect, saying as he did so:

"María, is it possible that I count for nothing in your memory, in your heart? My name that you bear—my person as your husband—do these not appeal to you? Does my presence rouse no feeling in you, no echo of the past even? Has fanaticism crushed every faintest thrill of human feeling in your soul—even pity and charity? Has it extinguished every glimmer of duty and fitness?"

María covered her eyes with her hands as though in contemplation of some mental vision. "Answer me this last question: do you not love me?" María looked up; her eyes were red but not moist, and she gave him a cold grudging glance, as we bestow a penny on a beggar to be rid of him. Then she said in a dull dry voice:

"Wretched infidel, my God commands me to say: No."

Leon turned away without a word and went to his room. He remained up all night arranging his things and packing books, clothes and papers. The next morning he left the house, not without looking back at it for the last time; it was not merely a home closed against him; it was hope deceived, an ideal life blasted and wrecked, like a cathedral that has been destroyed by an earthquake. There was still a fibre in his heart that attached him to that cherished ruin, but he wrenched it out and flung it from him.

CHAPTER XXX.

AN IRRUPTION OF THE BARBARIANS; ALARIC, ATTILA, AND OMAR.

"Now then, Facunda, make haste, Señor Don Leon will be in soon from his ride and he will be put out if his room is not done. Though, Lord knows, he is never put out!

A better man never was born. ‘Good day, Facunda; have you fed your poultry? And Señor Trompeta, how is he?’—‘Pretty well, thank you Señor Don Leon!’—And that is all we have to say to each other. Well, well ... and only yesterday Trompeta was saying there must be two hundred books here; more like two thousand! Señor Don Leon Roch—it is a queer common sort of name—as common as ours.—Every time he goes to Madrid, he brings back a whole carriage full of books and then he makes these pictures. Señor Don Leon, I wish you would tell me what is the use of them? They are pretty too. Red and green lines, and spots, and splashes of every colour. Now if I could only read I might know all about it, for here, at the edge, there are letters and words scribbled....

“But come, woman! What are you about Facunda, gaping and dawdling like a booby? Make haste and sweep and clear up before the master comes. Then you can go down to the kitchen and eat the slice of ham that is frizzling in the pan; and then take a turn in the sun!”

The speaker was Dame Facunda Trompeta, whose habit it was to talk to herself whenever she was alone, addressing herself by name and praising or scolding herself in turns. Even when she did not actually express herself in words she did by gesture and grimace. She was the happy wife of José Trompeta, a worthy coal merchant of Madrid, who, having made a humble fortune by his trade, had retired to Carabanchel to spend the rest of his days in peace. No life could in fact be more peaceful and quiet than that of these two childless old folks. They were both easy-tempered creatures and took affectionate care of each other in their old age, with a kindly and respectful tenderness that defied the chill of advancing years. They had bought the little house of which they occupied the ground floor, letting the upper part at a fair profit to some of the swarming families of the city who fled from the whooping-cough or the measles.

In the beginning of April these rooms had been taken by a gentleman, who had

previously been very often to the great house of Suertebella and who seemed to be a man of distinguished education, though he hardly ever laughed and spoke as rarely as possible. The room Leon had taken was spacious but bare; it might have been a prior's cell, lofty, airy and old-fashioned. From the windows to the east the trees of Vista Alegre were visible in the distance, and in the foreground the park of Suertebella; between this and the Trompeta's little court-yard, there was a gate in the wall, which almost always stood open. To the west lay the picturesque road through Upper Carabanchel with the park of La Montija, and the blue undulations and green levels of a country which, from March till the beginning of June, is not without a charm of its own. Out of this large room, which served as drawing-room, dining-room and study, opened a bed-room and two other tiny rooms, in one of which his servant slept. A few articles of furniture brought from Madrid, with books, geological specimens, prints, maps, an easel with paints and portfolios, a microscope, some geological hammers, a simple chemical apparatus for analysis by evaporation and the blow-pipe, filled the large room.

"There, now your room is ready and you can come in as soon as you like," said Facunda dropping into the student's arm-chair; "you cannot complain of my having turned your things topsy-turvy." For the worthy woman not only talked to herself, but addressed remarks to the absent. "And tell me, Señor Don Leon, if you please, is it true that formerly you used to go to dine frequently at Suertebella? Though you now go there very seldom it strikes me that you admire the Señorita Marquesa more than enough. She is so rich that her not being handsome does not matter. You keep away from the great house at present because she is in mourning. I know, I know what you fine folks are!..." And Facunda paused, for she not only addressed her invisible interlocutors but imagined their answers. It was not a harangue but a discussion.

"What do you say? I am talking nonsense? Is it not a fact that you are sweet upon the lady? All that courting of the child, what does that mean; you may talk—San

Blas! but if you were not a married man.... However, you fine gentlemen are not so very particular. Don't talk to me; I was in service for twenty years with a countess, and I could tell you things!... But come, come, Facunda, what are you doing idling here? Stir about, woman, trot round. You have not got the puchero on yet.... Hark! what is that? What a noise, who can it be?"

On the stairs there was a clatter of baby laughter and the busy patter of little feet. Monina, Tachana and Guru, after playing in the grounds, had wandered into the cow-yard and through the gate into the Trompetas' little plot, and finding themselves there they had set their hearts on a regular exploration of the house, Monina's nurse following in their wake.

We have already made acquaintance with Monina, but Tachana and Guru are strangers. Tachana, a young person of three, was the daughter of the bailiff at Suertebella, Catalina by name, with a sweet little face and a shy, quiet manner; she was Ramona's companion in all her games, and though they quarrelled on an average three times an hour—not unfrequently fighting like infant furies—they were the best friends in the world, and either of them would cry bitterly if the other were threatened with punishment. It is easy to understand how, by the process of transformation that words undergo in baby mouths, Catalina or Catana had become Tachana, what is less intelligible is how a boy christened Lorenzo, came to be called Guru; but so it was, and even stranger travesties of names have been known. Guru, who was Tachana's brother, was nearly six, he was as grave and demure as his sister, an unusually thoughtful but a fine, handsome boy, and the pride of his father—with a sweetheart, and a watch, and a little great coat, and a stick—and he always spoke of the two younger children as 'the girls.'

"Facunda," said the voice of the nurse from below, "the locusts are upon you. Mind, they do no mischief."

They rushed up in a crowd, Monina skipping and dancing, Tachana walking with

much dignity with a shawl tied round her waist for a train, while Guru gave himself the airs of the father of a family, warning them to be careful and well behaved.

“Why here is my little day-star!” cried Facunda, snatching up Monina and covering her with kisses. Ramona kicked with all the strength of her little legs, crying:

“No, no, ugly old woman!”

“Bless her, the darling! You, Catana, don’t get into mischief or I will be after you.... Lorenzo, let Monina alone. Naughty boy, what are you doing to the child? Let her be, poor little thing.”

Monina and Tachana trotted all round the rooms. They were already tired with playing in the garden, and their faces were hot and their eyes bright. Monina had dimples that an angel might have coveted at the corners of her mouth when she laughed, and Tachana’s dark curls fell over her forehead so that she had to push them out of her eyes, which she was constantly blinking as though the light hurt them. Monina, on the contrary, kept hers wide open with a keen, restless, investigating glance, the expression of insatiable curiosity and ambition which wanted first to examine and then to have everything that came within her ken.

Facunda told them to be very good and to touch nothing, and she would have been more precise in her injunctions but that she heard the voice of the nurse down-stairs gossiping with Casiana, the wife of one of the game-keepers. It is within the limits of possibility—happily an infinitely remote possibility—that the earth, rebelling against the laws of attraction, might quit its orbit and perish in flames from dashing against some other globe; but under no conceivable theory could it have been possible that Facunda, hearing the voices of two other women, should resist the attraction and not run to hear what they were talking about. Consequently she left the children, creeping silently and cautiously half way down the stairs. Monina and Tachana meanwhile had come to a standstill in front of the table on which lay the geological plates, and drawings finished or in progress. A smile of triumph, such as

might light up the countenance of the discoverer of a new world, shone on each little face. What pretty things! What bright colours! They had no idea of what the pictures meant, but they admired them none the less for that; indeed, they were almost like one of their own works of art, when a kind hand supplied them with paper and pencils. Guru, who had a paint box, could certainly have produced works in this style. These were not mere pictures of babies and houses and horses; they were a gorgeous blaze of colour and splendour!

Now it is a well-known fact that when a child sees a thing it admires, be it what it may, it never takes it for granted that it is finished. It always wishes to add some embellishments of its own handiwork. Children have, no doubt, a loftier ideal of art than their elders, and from their point of view every work of art will bear touching up. This was Monina's opinion, at any rate, who discovering on the table and close at hand an ink-stand, dipped her small finger in and drew a broad black line across the drawing. Enchanted with the marked effect of the experiment she laughed with glee, looking round at her companions who laughed too, and Monina, encouraged by success put her whole little hand into the ink and daubed the paper from end to end. The result was sublime. Over the strata, carefully washed in with various tints, lay heavy black clouds, charged, it would seem, with thunder and rain.

Tachana was much too dainty to put her fingers into the ink; on the other hand, she was great at pencil effects. Happy opportunity! On the table lay a blue chalk pencil and on a portfolio stand, close by, a fine geological atlas—a master-piece of German lithography—was lying open. These delightful gaudy pages wanted improving; who could doubt it; an industrious hand might draw a bold line round the margin of each. What could be better? This was Tachana's idea and she was a Raphael in strong lines which she executed with unhesitating dash.

Guru knew that their efforts might end in a whipping and he bid the little girls cease their mischief; but at the same time he felt that it was a grand opportunity for

him—he, who had a paint box, and really knew how to “do pictures” almost as good as those of Velasquez. Monina’s was horrid daubing! What was the meaning of the black blotches and crosses with which her dirty little fingers had marked the margin of the print? Appearances might be saved if only he were to embellish the picture with a house in one corner of it—a house with two windows like eyes, a chimney at the top, and a dog in front of the door. No sooner thought of than done. He selected a red chalk pencil that there might be no mistaking his work for Monina’s, he took another plate and began his house. In less than five minutes he had added a horse with a man riding on it and smoking a pipe bigger than the house.

Three artists can never work in one studio without occasional outbreaks of temper. Monina wanted to add a touch to Guru’s house, and he shoved her off with his elbow. Monina snatched away the sheet saying: “Mine, mine!”

Then Tachana echoed the cry: “Mine!”

The plate, which was of folio size, fell off the table, Tachana and Monina each seized one end and—crash. The two babies shouted with glee as it tore across and Monina clapped her inky little paws.

“Oh! you naughty girls, now see what you have done!” said Guru, turning pale with horror. But Monina’s only reply was to snatch down another print and tear a piece out of it. Then she clutched the pencil from Tachana and across the long lines that she had so gravely drawn, Monina scribbled a perfect spider’s net of flourishes, holding the pencil by the middle and scratching with all her might and main. Guru at last succeeded in putting a stop to her Vandalic energy, and threatened to slap her; but the little imp escaped, skipping about the room and wiping her grimy little fingers on the silk cushions.

In the course of her peregrinations her eye fell on the table on which stood the microscope and she stopped short to stare at it, standing on tiptoe with her hands on the edge of the table. Then she tried to reach it exclaiming:

“My! pretty, pretty!” which being interpreted, meant to convey the idea that she supposed it to be a new toy and intended for her.

“Look at her! naughty, naughty,” said Guru, “now she wants the eye-glass.”

And Guru himself, anxious to prove his superior knowledge, drew the instrument within reach and applied his right eye to the top of the tube.

“In this glass I can see Paris,” he announced.

Tachana had pulled a chair to the table that she might see too; but Monina had gotten ahead of her; she climbed up on the chair, and from thence, on all fours, on to the table, sending the microscope and the rest of the apparatus crashing to the floor.

At this moment a man entered the room. The three little Vandals were turned to stone; Monina on the table, not in the least abashed but very grave and her eyes very wide open; Tachana on the chair, her finger in her mouth and her eyes downcast; Guru looking for a corner where he might hide himself.

“What have these brats been doing?—San Blas! What a mess!” cried Facunda, who came in at the master’s heels.

Leon cast a despairing glance at the torn prints, the scribbled atlas, the microscope on the floor; that one glance was enough to reveal the extent of the disaster.

“You little wretches, what have you done?” he exclaimed, going up to the table. “And you, Facunda, what were you thinking of to leave them alone here? What were you about? Listening to gossip no doubt—You are a worse baby than they are!”

He stamped his feet angrily. Then he heard a piteous cry from Tachana—a cry from her baby heart.

“Was it you, Monina?” said Leon, looking at the child with grave displeasure. Monina shook her head in denial till it seemed as though she would shake it off; at the same time her conscience no doubt pricked her, for she looked at her hands like a second Lady Macbeth.

“But it was you ... look at your hands. You little wretch!”

Monina looked up in his face, imploring mercy; two large tears rolled down her cheeks, and her face was puckered up for a whimper when Tachana’s lamentations suddenly filled the house; she was a perfect Magdalen; there was nothing for it but to believe in the sincerity of such noisy repentance.

“There, there,” said Leon, kissing the two little sinners and taking Monina in his arms, “do not cry any more. What a pretty pair of hands! What would Mamma say? Come and wash them—you dirty little creature!”

“The nurse let them come up alone, that she might stay down-stairs and gossip and chatter,” said Facunda, following with the water jug, “I cannot be everywhere at once; it is all her fault.”

Monina’s hands were washed; then Leon, seating himself, took a young lady on each knee.

“Look, what a lot of mischief you have done,” he said, “and Guru, where is Guru?”

Lorenzo had vanished. “He is at the bottom of it all,” said Facunda. “These poor little dears would have done no harm if he had not led them into it.”

“Guru, Guru,” cried the two babies in a duet, laying the burthen of the crime on the shoulders of their absent accomplice.

“That monkey of a boy! If I catch him here....”

Monina, whose alarm had given place to sauciness, was pulling Leon’s beard.

“Stop! little lady, you hurt,” he exclaimed.

“Tachana say,” babbled Monina. “Tachana say....”

“Well, what does Tachana say?”

“Tachana say ... you am my papa.”

“No, no,” said Leon, looking at Tachana who was sucking her fingers. “I am not your papa. Take your hand out of your mouth and tell me why you say I am your

papa."

Very slowly, and in low tones Tachana made answer:

"My mamma say you am."

Monina, who was a merry little soul and who when she had got an idea into her head stuck to it and repeated it, burst into shouts of laughter, clapping her hands and kicking with delight as if her feet had a language of their own, and repeated again twenty or thirty times:

"You am my papa. You am my papa...."

Facunda turned to leave the room saying to herself:

"Why, it is as clear as day; I did not need the child to tell me that."

"Señora Facunda," said Leon. "The nurse may leave the children. I will take them home."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CRISIS.

An hour later Monina and Tachana were playing on the floor with paper birds and boxes that Leon had made for them, while he restored order and sorted out what could be saved from the effects of the invasion. The noise of an opening door made him look up and he saw before him his father-in-law, the Marquis de Tellería. He looked aged, and his face, more lined and wrinkled than usual, betrayed some nervous tension or perhaps the neglect of some cosmetic he was accustomed to use; his eyes, dim with tears or want of sleep, blinked and twinkled like little lamps that flicker for want of oil and struggle with a feeble smoky flame. His dress only remained unchanged and was as precise and neat as ever; but his voice, formerly bold and decided, as that of a man who has always something to say that is worth hearing, was low, timid and deprecatory. Leon felt greater pity than ever for the old

man, and he offered him a chair.

“I am suffering from fever,” said the marquis, putting out a hand that Leon might feel his pulse. “For the last three nights I have not slept at all; and last night I thought I should have died of exhaustion and shame.”

Leon asked one or two questions as to the cause of his distress and sleeplessness.

“I will tell you all about it. From you I can have no secrets,” said Tellería sighing deeply. “In spite of all that has happened between you and María—which I deplore with all my heart—oh! but I still hope to see you reconciled.... In spite of everything you will always be a son to me—a dear son.”

So much mellifluous flattery put Leon on his guard.

“Well, dreadful things have been happening. Your hair will stand on end when you hear it all, my dear son. But I have a good deal of fever, have I not? My temperament is so sensitive and nervous, and I cannot bear these great agitations. God grant you may never go through in your own house such scenes as have taken place in ours these last few days! I have come on purpose to tell you, and you see I do not know how to begin. I am afraid.... I dare not.”

“I understand it all perfectly,” said Leon, interrupting this long preamble. “The moment has come when it is no longer possible to carry on the system of drifting. Everything in this world must come to an end, even the dishonest farce of those who live by spending what they have not got. A day comes when the creditors are tired of waiting, when the workmen who have been put off from day to day—upholsterers, tailors, drapers, purveyors of all kinds—send a cry up to heaven, and ceasing to ask, proceed to take; ceasing to grumble, begin to rail.”

“Yes,” said the marquis closing his eyes. “That day has come. They would not listen to my good counsel and now the catastrophe has fallen; a hideous catastrophe, of which it is impossible to foresee the consequences. In one word, my dear fellow, we are in danger of having an attachment put upon the house.... I do not care for the loss

of all the fashionable rubbish that Milagros has collected from half a hundred shops without paying for it; what I feel is the scandal, the disgrace! The day before yesterday a dealer who supplies us with groceries, and who has been to the house again and again, set up the most terrific hubbub on the stairs. I heard his torrent of abuse in my study, and rushed out in a fury, but he retreated into the street where he continued his harangue. Yesterday the man we hire the carriage from refused to serve us any more, and the worst of it is that he wrote me a most insolent letter.... I will show you...."

"No, no. There is no need," said Leon, staying the trembling hand with which the old man was fumbling in his pockets. "I can imagine what the poor wretch would say."

"Yesterday I was summoned before the magistrate; those rascally shop-keepers—fuel merchants, upholsterers, and dealers of every degree, had put in above five and twenty claims against me. It is horrible to have to talk of such low things; the words seem to burn my mouth, and my face tingles with shame. Tell me—say that you pity me."

"I do indeed," said Leon moved to sincere commiseration.

"I do not pretend to excuse myself," the marquis went on with melodramatic pathos and closing his eyes. "Every resource is exhausted and every door is closed. Of our jewels nothing is left—not even the pawnbroker's tickets. A money-lender to whom I applied yesterday, the only one in whom I had the slightest hope, gave me a very rough reception and showed me out with speeches that I would rather forget. Oh! it is dreadful to have to tell you such things, Leon, and I do not know how I find courage to say them; I go round and round the treadmill of misery into which I have been thrust, and still it seems to me that it is all a lie—that it cannot be I who have to bear such things—I, Agustín Luciano de Sudre, Marquis de Tellería, the son of one of the noblest gentlemen of Extremadura and heir to a name that has been handed

down through centuries with dignity and honour."

"Yes," said Leon stiffly, "it might well be a lie! and the most improbable part of it is that after having been rescued already, more than once, by generous hands from this abyss of disgrace and misery, you have fallen into it again."

"You are right, but I am weak; and the fault is not mine alone," said the marquis as meekly as a schoolboy. "My wife and my sons have given me a push that my fall might be the quicker and more certain. If I were to tell you the worst, the darkest feature of it all—indeed my dear Leon, my only friend, I must tell you all, though these are things that a man only tells to the pillow he sleeps on, and blushes even then. But I have no secrets from you ... still it is hard, very hard ... all the blood of the Castilian nobles that flows in my veins curdles at the thought, and I feel as if an invisible hand held my lips."

"But if it is not the aim and object of your visit, you need say nothing about it."

"Nay, it has to be said, bitter as it is. You know that Gustavo has been very intimate for some time with the Marquesa de San Salomó. Well, Gustavo—but I do not believe that it was his idea, I believe it was some cunning suggestion of my wife's—Milagros—I hardly know how to speak of it—what words to use in speaking of the members of my own family. In short, Pilar de San Salomó gave Gustavo a certain sum of money, for what purpose I do not know, but a considerable sum, which my miserable wife, on some inconceivable pretence, chose to appropriate; they made their own arrangements; whether there was any promissory-note or written agreement I did not hear. But my son, who is a gentleman, finding himself seriously compromised, had a violent scene with his mother only last evening about this money, and you cannot conceive the row there was in the house. Gustavo and Polito were ready to fight. I had to strain every nerve to keep peace. At last Gustavo went off to his own room; I, suspecting something worse, followed him and found him with a pistol at his head, about to shoot

himself.... Then there was another scene and a fresh outburst, with the addition, this time, of his mother's horror.... Oh, what a night! My dear fellow, what a dreadful night! To crown all, the servants, in despair of being paid a farthing, have left the house after insulting us with a chorus of abuse, calling us ... But no, there are words which I cannot utter."

The marquis was quite beside himself; great drops of sweat stood on his forehead and his breast heaved like that of a man who has been carrying a terrific burthen. Leon found no words to break the pause that ensued. It was Don Agustín who at length collected his failing strength and, putting on the most dismal and appealing face that he could command, exclaimed:

"Leon, my son, save me, save me from this depth of misery! If you do not I shall die ... we shall all die—save my noble name!"

"How?" asked Leon coldly.

"Do you not see that I am disgraced?"

"Certainly; but I do not see how I am to prevent it."

"But could you bear to see your relations begging their bread?" said his father-in-law, employing a figure of speech that he thought must prove effective.

"I am quite willing to save my relations from beggary. But if you expect me to pay the debts you have incurred by wastefulness, dissipation and vanity, so that you may be free to begin again and get into fresh debt, and go on living in the same scandalous way, I am obliged to say very plainly: No. Not once, but several times, have I extricated you from a similar predicament. I have heard endless promises of amendment, endless schemes of reform; but they have all resulted in greater extravagance than ever. You, the marquesa, and Polito have eaten up a good quarter of my fortune; I can do no more."

Leon's resolute energy startled the hapless marquis, who sat stunned; the bluntness of his son-in-law's refusal deprived him for a time of the power of speech; at last,

stammering and hesitating like a man who has lost count in telling his beads, he managed to speak.

“I am not asking your charity ... that is not in my nature ... whenever I have appealed to your generosity ... you have had my bond ... and interest.”

“The bond is a mere formality, the interest purely visionary; I have accepted the hypothesis simply and solely to give a gift the semblance of a loan. What security can you give who have neither land, nor houses, not even a stick that does not belong to your creditors? What I have done for you has been anything rather than really generous, Señor; it is a crime. I have not succoured the needy but sheltered the vicious!”

“Good God!” cried the marquis quaking with astonishment; “remember—what you have done for me—for my sons and my wife was the natural outcome of your affection for us ... but Leon, for the last time ... this is the critical moment of my life. The honour of my house is at stake.”

“Your house has no such thing as honour; it has had none for a long time past.”

The marquis drew up his effeminate head; his wrinkled cheeks were purple, and his eyes flashed as though a sudden light had blazed up in front of him; it almost seemed as if there might be a grain of dignity still lurking in the soul of this man, weak as he was, in mind as in body, a spark of honour urging him on like a dastardly soldier who, after keeping out of danger in a battle, tries in the last extremity to escape the taunts of his comrades by seeking a glorious death. But Leon’s ascendancy over the poor coward was so great that he could not find strength to speak and could only groan, while his head fell again on his breast and he listened dully to his son-in-law. He was but a dry and blasted tree, awaiting the fatal axe.

“No honour,” repeated Leon, “unless we give the word a purely conventional and fictitious sense. True honour does not consist in repeating a set of formulas to protect ourselves against weakness and meanness. It is based on noble deeds, on

prudent and respectable conduct, on domestic honesty and an unbroken word. Where these do not exist who can talk of honour? Where everything is falsehood, insolvency, vice and folly how can there be honour? Since we are here in strict privacy supposing I remind you of your wife's proceedings, of Polito's, nay of your own?"

The marquis put out a deprecatory hand as if to implore his son-in-law to do nothing of the kind. But Leon thought it right to strike home.

"I entreat you," said Tellería penitently, "not to go on with your list of grievances. I regret them bitterly; I do not deny that I have committed follies ... who has not? It is the way of the world. Now that I am sinking, Leon, either put out a hand to save me or leave me to perish; but do not vilify me, do not make my fate more cruel than it is. Of course I have no right to appeal so frequently to your generosity. Still, you must reflect that your circumstances and mine are widely different. I have children, and you have not."

"But ..." Was he going to say: "'But I may have some day?'"

The marquis sat for a few minutes looking at the two little girls playing in the middle of the room.

"Well," said Leon. "I will make you an allowance sufficient to enable you to live decently, but this is all I can do. I have not a gold mine; nor, if I had, would it ever fill up the gulfs that you open at my feet from time to time."

Don Agustín turned pale, and as he sat gazing at the floor he mumbled with his jaws as though he were turning over the dry husk of a fruit.

"An allowance!" he muttered. In fact the idea stuck in his throat, and though common gratitude forbid his making any overt objection his changed expression plainly showed that this eleemosynary annuity, doled out by pity, revolted his pride and embittered his blood. So complete was his moral obliquity that, while he felt no degradation to ask a loan on fictitious security, tantamount in fact to a distinct

purpose of never repaying it, he was wounded to the quick by this offer of a pension which he called “throwing his bread in his teeth.” Besides, his selfish pride made him recalcitrant to any scheme which did not extricate him from his immediate dilemma. What did he care for living the decent and respectable life that Leon spoke of? What does the spendthrift care for the future? His first anxiety is to avoid scandal at a great crisis, so that, when it is past, he may go on again with a bold front and a confident stride along the same road of ruin and insolvency which was so familiar to him. However, the marquis had too much respect for propriety and too much genuine courtesy to allow him to betray his feelings; on the contrary, he expressed himself grateful for “the St. Bernard’s mess of pottage”—the pittance that his son-in-law had offered.

“An allowance,” he said trying to make the best of it, “you are most liberal; I am grateful for your foresight. But in point of fact it will not get me out of the scrape. The ship is wrecked, and your allowance is land in sight a hundred miles away.”

He could find nothing else to say; but he was paler than ever, and did not raise his eyes from the ground. Vexation and disgust had changed his features as if he were suddenly and miraculously aged. His lips were pinched between two deep wrinkles, and his moustache, all unstiffened, stuck out in every direction, as threatening as a hedgehog’s spines. His cheeks, of a dull and faded pink, were furrowed and worn, and under his eyes were deep ridges of puffy white flesh; it almost seemed as though his neck was leaner and his ears larger and more transparent, while his temples had taken the yellow hue of a mortuary taper; he seemed to have fallen into decrepitude. However, after a few moments of reflection over his hapless fate, he raised his head, and forced his lips into a grimace in which a hypocritical smile hardly concealed the foaming of rage.

“You are, I am sure, most kind and considerate,” he began. “But if we owe much to you, on your part, you have ample reason for your good offices. We cannot be

expected to overlook the fact that you have made our beloved María a miserable woman."

"That I have made her miserable," said Leon quietly.

"Yes, most wretched! though we have kept it quiet out of consideration for you—too much consideration. At last our feelings are too much for us and we cannot sit by in silence when we see that angel's sufferings. Do you mean to say that you do not see that the grief of her separation from you will bring her to the grave?"

There is no creature on earth however insignificant that does not try to bite or sting when it is trodden under foot. The marquis, wounded in his pride and cheated of his wild hopes, had recourse to his sting.

"This is too complicated a question to be discussed in a hurry. Do you, as her father, demand an explanation of my action? Because, if so, you have been a long time thinking of it. María and I parted more than a month ago."

"But the fact that I have delayed it need not prevent my doing so now," retorted Don Agustín, plucking up his courage now he thought that he had laid his hand on one of those weapons which give a coward the advantage over the most valiant foe. "I am a father, and a devoted one. There is no name for your behaviour to María, that angel of goodness! In the first place you assailed her with your atheism and almost broke her heart by your materialistic views. Do you think that the piety of a woman, brought up as she has been, in the true faith, is not even deserving of respect when she desires to practice it with all due fervour? Without beliefs and without faith, do you expect to govern the world or a family by the laws of an atheistical Utopia?"

"And what in God's name do you know about governing the world, or even a family?" cried Leon, laughing bitterly at his father-in-law's solemnity. "When did you ever know anything about religion? When had you any beliefs, or faith, or anything of the kind to boast of?"

"Very true; I am not learned in such matters," replied Tellería conscious of his

incompetence. “I am ignorant; but I cherish certain traditions which have been stamped on my heart from childhood, that I have never forgotten in spite of my shortcomings; and by the light of those principles I can declare that you have behaved atrociously to María, and that by forcing her to this separation you have trampled on every sound principle and all that the human conscience holds most sacred.”

This hackneyed scrap of newspaper bombast exasperated Leon more perhaps than the speaker’s pretensions merited. Pale with wrath, he turned upon him at once:

“Of what good are your moral laws and your interpretation of the human conscience? A beautiful thing indeed is your reverence for tradition. Why! I was such a fool as to endure for four years a life of mental asphyxia in a world where everything is dogma and formula! Morality, religion, honour!—Words! mere words! Wealth even is an empty mockery; the very laws are mere formula—made brand-new every day and never obeyed; the whole thing is a miserable farce—a stage, where the actors are never weary of cheating each other and the rest of the world in their lying parts, and making believe to be virtuous, pious, or noble. This is your model society, worthy to be preserved intact to all futurity!... No one must lay a finger on it, or even find fault with it. I, you say have failed in respect to that herd of hypocrites who succeed in hiding their depravity from the million, and are clever enough to pass for creatures with a soul and conscience—I, who have seen and suffered, and said nothing, not even in opposition to the aberrations of a wife, who, though less guilty, is more fanatical than most—I, you say, have broken the laws of morality! How and in what respect I ask you?

“Nay, but I will tell you. I have been such a fool as to yield to the contemptible formulas which in your world pass for principles; I have looked on in silence and been content to screen vice and extravagance, supplying money to a spendthrift father, and wasteful mother, and libertine sons. I have encouraged dissolute living,

have lent support to every vice—nay even to crime. These sins I have committed, and I own them to my shame!"

Provoked at first, and lashing his fury with his own words, Leon struck the table, threatened his father-in-law with his fist, till the old man shrank almost to nothing as he sat through this philippic with his eyes fixed on a water-jar that stood on the table, wondering whether it were large enough for him to hide in.

Monina and Tachana, terrified by Leon's vehemence, gathered up their paper playthings and, daring neither to laugh nor to cry, crept silently away into a corner of the room.

"I only spoke as a father," said the marquis in so faint a voice that it might really have come from the bottom of the vase.

"And I spoke as a man wounded in his tenderest feelings, a husband exiled from his hearth by a cruel inquisition, and cast into the loneliness of practical celibacy by gross fanaticism and heartless bigotry. Those moral laws of which you talk so much condemn me, I know, for what they most absurdly call my atheism; but the true atheist, the hardened materialist, are those who trick themselves out in borrowed robes to be my accusers, and who would be just as ready to dress themselves up as harlequins to dance at a fancy ball. But though I should scorn to defend myself before them, I would have them know that I am the victim and not the executioner, and that I have quite made up my mind henceforth to defy the censure of hypocrites and the attacks of detractors. I mean to go my own way; I know where to find truth and the really immutable laws. I can scorn dogmas and traditions! It will be a pleasure to me to show my contempt, not in secret but publicly, for a tribunal that deserves no veneration, and a verdict pronounced in accordance with the clamour of a crowd devoid of all moral sense. Composed of agitators, hypocrites, rakes, idlers and bigots; of antiquated fops and decrepit youth, of foolish women and men who traffic in public moneys and private consciences; of would-be authorities who are

but apes, of men who would sell everything—even their honour—and others who would sell themselves, but that no one will buy them; of worldlings who put on an air of sanctity—mere bags of rottenness with human faces; of cowards, sneaks and renegades; of all in short who would like to constitute the basis of society and who do not hesitate to insist that all mankind ought to be moulded after their image and likeness. Well! let them stay where they are! I will withdraw—I have withdrawn—leaving my hapless wife behind me, by her desire, not my own, I can look on from afar at the edifying spectacle. They understand each other—they live from day to day, spending what is not their own; paying for church ceremonies, and encouraging vice; dividing their inheritance between sacristans and ballet-girls. Families are either dying out, or perpetuated by generations of unhealthy descendants; the most serious facts and laws of life are laughed to scorn; virtue and true piety are contemned, while they preach in bombastic rhetoric a scheme of morality of which they are utterly ignorant and a God whose laws they have not studied. They, indeed, are atheists, a thousand times over, who measure the sublime purposes of the Almighty by the puny standard of their mean and selfish souls!”

The burning words had parched his lips; he took the jar from the table and drank some water. His hapless opponent had shrunk so completely into nothingness that he had ceased to think of the vase as a conceivable hiding-place; his eyes now rested on a match-box as though to say: “How happy should I be if only I might disappear into that!”

Being a man of the world with a multitude of commonplaces at his command, even on the most critical occasions, Tellería was trying to find some words that might release him from the present dilemma, or at any rate cover his discomfiture.

“I will not attempt to imitate you,” he began, pulling himself together and clearing his throat. “I shall indulge in no violent language. I have appealed to the laws of morality and to them I still appeal. You have sinned against my daughter and against

society at large ... that is how I feel it, and how I must continue to speak of it. I go back to the insult you have offered to María, who is a faithful and blameless wife, and to the underhand manner of your separation. In short, I do not believe that it was María's bigotry that moved you to it, I strongly suspect ..."

But the marquis did not finish his sentence. Tachana was heard crying. She and Monina had crept behind a chair and had been peeping through the bars in great alarm at the two men who were arguing so fiercely. Tired at last of this amusement they had begun to quarrel; Ramona had slapped her companion.

"Whose children are those?" asked the marquis eagerly, "that red-haired child is Pepa's, surely?"

"Yes; Monina, come here."

"Suertebella is here is it not?"

"Quite near."

"To be sure!" The marquis had an idea—slow of wit as he was and rarely able to boast of an idea of his own; for his logic, like his phrases, was borrowed ready made. He felt a strange light flash through his murky brain; yes! yes! he had an idea, and nothing on earth should persuade him to abandon it! He rose.

"Good-bye," he said shortly, putting on a face so solemn as to be quite ludicrous.

"Good-bye," answered Leon in no way disconcerted.

"We will meet again and renew our discussion of the laws of morality," added Don Agustín, "of my daughter's position—your desertion—her honour—all these are very serious matters." And as he drew himself up he seemed to grow taller; the match-box, the water-jar, the chair he sat in, nay, the room itself seemed too small to hold him.

"Very well, discuss it at once!"

"No. We must be calm, very calm. My daughter must put herself under the

protection of the law. I shall communicate with my family on the subject. It is a most serious matter ... my honour....”

“Ah! To be sure; your honour!” said Leon with a laugh. “Very good; we will try to find it, and when we have succeeded we can talk about it. Good-bye.”

The marquis departed. Though somewhat crestfallen at the failure of his application for money, he was very proud of himself. There was something in his mind which made him swell as he thought of it; the stairs, the doorway, were not big enough for him—even the street, the fields, the whole wide world! It was the idea which had slipped in hardly visible and expanded within him, suggesting with miraculous fertility a thousand accessory possibilities of the most flattering description, raising him in his own estimation, and lowering others. How comforting it is to have an idea! especially when it condones our own sins by showing us the sins of others, and allows us to say with satisfaction: “Ah! we are all alike, all alike!”

CHAPTER XXXII.

REASON VERSUS PASSION.

The following day Leon had visitors; two friends who gave him some information which, though certainly interesting, was far from pleasing to him, and he spent the day in agitations and the night without sleep. Early in the morning he called Facunda and told her that he was going away; then an hour later he said to himself: “No I must stay—I ought to stay.”

In the afternoon he rode out, and on his return sent a message to Pepa saying that he wished to speak with her.

Since the day when the news of Cimarra’s death had reached them, Leon had hardly seen her; a feeling of delicacy had kept him from repeating his visits to Suertebella.

Pepa received him in the evening in Monina’s nursery, where he had seen the little

girl suffering and dying. This evening the saucy baby, lying half-uncovered on the bed, was rebellious to the law which sends children to sleep betimes. Kicking and tossing between the sheets she was chattering to herself, relating scraps of all the stories she knew, full of fun and impudence; beginning long speeches that ended in nothing, punishing her doll after she had fed it, sitting up in bed to bow like a gentleman, and making a peep-hole with her tiny fingers to imitate the Baron de Soligny's eye-glass. After much ado, between laughter and a pretence of severity, Pepa succeeded in making her kneel up and repeat a pater noster with a very bad grace and a great many yawns. This she followed up with a baby hymn and, as though this innocent litany had a soporific virtue, Monina dropped upon the pillow and her eyelids closed over her unwilling eyes while she was still murmuring the last words of the verse.

They stood watching her for some time in silence, and then Leon, bending down to kiss her, said:

"Good-bye, little pet," in a tremulous voice.

"Why good-bye?" asked Pepa anxiously. "Are you going away?"

"Yes."

"You sent word that you wanted to see me?"

"To take leave."

"Are you not happy here?"

"Immensely happy—but I must not stay."

"I do not understand; have you made it up with your wife?"

"No."

"You are going abroad?"

"Perhaps."

"Where to?"

“I have not made up my mind.”

“But you will let us know; you will write?”

“Nay; perhaps not even that.”

Pepa looked steadily at the floor.

“It is folly that you and I should talk in riddles and beat about the bush,” said Leon. “For some months we have always used vague phrases, as if we had something to hide. If there is any guilt in our souls it had better be plainly uttered than hypocritically concealed. In fact I must speak out.

“After I had so completely lost every dream of domestic happiness I became a constant visitor at your house. Perhaps—nay indeed, certainly—I went there too often. My loneliness, my dulness, my longing for some of the pleasures of a home life, led me there in search of that comfort which is as necessary to the human soul as equilibrium is to the body. I was perishing of cold; what wonder then that I went where I found warmth? I began by amusing myself with Monina, I ended by worshipping her, for I felt not merely a want but the maddest craving to love and be loved. It is so easy to win a child’s love. I had a wild desire to revel in childish things, to lay my heart, empty and void as it was, at her baby feet for her to stamp upon it—I do not know how else to express it—but you will understand. I always fancy you can read my soul since yours is no secret to me. I feel as though for a long time we had been acting a comedy....”

“I never act!” interrupted Pepa.

“No, no, nor I, but listen. I was alone; at home, in the street, in the turmoil of society everywhere; always alone except when I was by your side. A fatality ... nay, I will not give that conventional name to the consequences of our own errors and want of foresight.... I will say the situation in which we had placed ourselves forbid our declaring honestly the feelings of our hearts. We were both married.”

“Yes,” said Pepa calmly and steadily, as having often made the same reflection, and

said the same thing to herself, having contemplated the fact many times and from every possible point of view.

“Now, to be sure, you are free, but I am not. The situation is not materially altered; but the fact that you are a widow is maddening me.—I ought not to be here at this moment—and yet here I am! When I see you and Monina dressed in black I am filled with a ferment of sacrilegious passion; I struggle to quell it and be silent, but you yourself drag me on with irresistible force and compel me.... Well, there is but one way of saying it ... to tell you that I love you; that I have loved you for a long time. I cannot find courage or words to curse this passion, which in me is the outcome of my banishment from all happiness, and in you of ... I don’t know what.”

“It was born with me,” said Pepa under her breath. “You have told me what my heart knew already.... But to hear you say it ... with your own lips ... here, to my face.... Here, where only God and I can hear....”

Her voice failed her and she turned as pale as death: she could find no utterance for the feelings that crowded on her soul, but she seized one of Leon’s hands and kissed it again and again with passionate tenderness.

“We are in a very difficult position,” he said. “We must face it together.”

“A difficult position!” repeated Pepa with candid surprise, as though to her it seemed a very simple matter.

“Yes, for at this moment we are both the victims of calumny.”

Pepa shrugged her shoulders as much as to say: “What do I care for calumny?”

“You will feel with me that I made a great mistake in coming to live so near you.”

“A mistake! In coming to Carabanchel!” she exclaimed in an accent that conveyed that if that was a mistake, then so was the daily rising of the sun.

“Yes, a great mistake. But indeed I, who am regarded by a good many people as a man of sense, am always making mistakes in matters of conduct.” Pepa thought that

possible. “My last blunder has given a pretext to scandal. My poor darling, do you know that they say in Madrid that within two months of your husband’s death you have encouraged a lover; that I am that lover; and that we are living in open defiance of all decency and morality. Not content with this they have chosen to invent a piece of retrospective slander, supporting it by what passes for substantial evidence.”

“And what is that?”

“Monina is said to be my child.”

For a minute Pepa stood bewildered; but the terrible charge had made no very deep impression on her mind. By a rapid and inexplicable process of logic she said:

“The calumny is so preposterous, so absurd, that we need not let it distress us.”

“Do you know of any shield against which the arrows of calumny are shattered?” said Leon. “There is but one and that is innocence. Our innocence, Pepa, is not immaculate. The slander that is directed against us is not without foundation; it is mistaken only as to the facts. It is false when it asserts that I am your favoured lover, but it is true when it says that I love you—it lies when it says that Monina is my child, but it is true—” Pepa did not let him finish the sentence.

“But it is true that you love her as if she were!” she exclaimed with joyous haste.

“Calumny may be wrong as to the facts, but failing facts she has intentions, desires, hopes to go upon. Answer me, can you say that we are innocent?”

“No. I, at any rate, am not. The scandal that has dragged my name in the mud is a just punishment,” said Pepa sadly. “And if I think of it with less horror than I ought to feel, it is because there is so much, so very much to excuse part—most—the foundation of the report. You are upright, honest, steadfast—I am not. I have allowed myself to cherish feelings in my heart in opposition to my duty; I am a wicked woman, Leon; I do not deserve your love; I am guilty, and I cannot feel that delicate horror of calumny you feel.”

"Pepa, Pepa, do not talk so," said Leon grasping her hand. "It is not thus that I have seen you, dreamed of, as, by degrees, you have conquered my heart and become sovereign of my affections."

"But if you cannot love me as I am," she said, her words almost choked with grief and bitterness, "why did you not come in time? Oh! if you had come when I wanted you, you might have found me lofty and pure! What a high and holy devotion—worthy of you indeed—you would have found under the childish follies which were nothing but the mad outbursts of an oppressed heart and a fevered fancy, if you had come in time and vouchsafed a loving word to the wilful girl, mad and foolish as she was, what a treasure of devotion would have been yours!—it was reserved for you, and in your hands it would have been refined and purified. I was a rough ore, apparently of no value—nay, I might have been a misfortune to the owner—you thought so? But all I needed was to fall into hands that were not put out to take me; I was an instrument that could yield no music excepting in the hands for which I was born, and without my natural master all was jangling discord. Do not complain then if you now find me somewhat wanting in principles and moral sense. I have suffered much; I have led a life of constant and fearful struggle with myself, my life has been passed in utter disharmony with those I have had to live with; I felt myself scorned and misunderstood and that has always weighed upon my soul; it made me unreasonable and perverse and so, by degrees, I lost that purity of soul which once I cherished for you—you who would not have it as a gift! I am not so strict as you are; my conscience is less sensitive, and I have no courage left for further sacrifices, for my heart is weary and as full of wounds as a madman who tries to kill himself. I cannot admit that the world has the right to require me to torture myself any more; it has imposed sufferings enough upon me—and so I dare to ask you too to be less severely strong, to ignore the moral susceptibilities of society, to make some concession to feeling, to remain here and see me every day, to pay me some portion of the debt you owe me—by loving a little."

She could not command her voice to the end of her speech and burst into tears.

“It was my idiotic pride,” said Leon, more ready to accuse than to defend himself, “that has brought misery on us both. May the scorn of which you speak be visited on my own head and all the evil wrought by my mistake be mine to suffer!”

“Nay, you need no more disasters; you have had enough to go through! The fault was not all yours. I had no other merit than that of loving you; I was wilful, violent and spoilt; I quite understand your preference for ... her; and she was so handsome; I was never good-looking.... And now, now after so many years, you come to me ... and now....” She could not say it; her brow was contracted with despair, at length, with a gesture of horror, as if she saw some terrific vision she said hoarsely: “You have a wife.”

Leon could say nothing in reply to the appalling eloquence of this fact. He bent his head in silence. “A wife! handsome, saintly, impeccable!” Pepa went on. “But even so, have I not triumphed? You have left her and come to me.” And she looked up radiantly.

“No, no,” said Leon eagerly. “It is she who has left me. I loved her and did all in my power to prevent the rupture of the sacred tie that binds us; I have kept my marriage vows faithfully ... till now, when I have broken them.”

“And they are better broken!” exclaimed Pepa vehemently. “Why should you respect the judgment of fools? Why should the image of your wife come between you and me?”

“Pepa, my dearest, be calm for pity’s sake; your wild words alarm me.”

“But I tell you I have no moral sense; I lost it—you took it with my last hopes. When one is hopeless is that not the same as being wicked? I have been wicked ever since that evening when my last hope died out of me as though it had been my very soul, and left me rigid and cold—as if really and truly mad. From that moment I have gone wrong in everything; I married just as I might have flung myself into the

sea; I married as a substitute for suicide. I did not know what I was doing, but there was a seed of evil in me that I actually tried to foster into growth. If only I had been well educated! but I had no education; I was a savage, and I loved to display my riches, social advantages and pinchbeck splendour,—just as the Caffirs display feathers and beads. And bitter pique rankled in my heart and made me resolve that I would give to the least worthy suitor what I had intended for the most worthy. If I could not have the best I would take the worst! Do you remember my throwing out my jewels on the dust-heap? I wanted to do the same with myself. Of what use was I if no one loved me? How could I marry a good and worthy man? It would have been folly ... no, no, I wanted to hate some one—to hate the man who was nearest to me—whom the world would call my other half, and the church pronounce my mate. You see I longed to be wicked! In our rank of life, you know, when a girl of base instincts craves for liberty, marriage is a wide and open door. In my madness I said to myself: 'I am rich; I will marry a fool and I shall be free;' and I never thought of my poor father. Oh yes, I have been very wicked!

"Well, many a girl has done the same, though not with such fatal consequences. I married, and every conceivable misfortune fell upon me and mine ... I was free—but you were as far off as ever. Your very virtue enraged me, though it gave me much to think of. Would you believe that I was quite humiliated by it, and at times flattered my fancy by dreams of being virtuous too? God knows what the end might have been! He saved me by giving me my child. Her birth brought an interval of peace which till then I had not known; as Monina grew under my eyes I seemed to become miraculously gifted with intelligence, prudence, a love of order, and common-sense. I was a different creature, I became what I should have been if, instead of the torments of rejected love, I had lived in peace under the yoke of your authority.

"Now I am cured of those vagaries which made me notorious; I am not as good as I ought to be; I do not fear God as I ought; I cannot feel ready to sacrifice my feelings to the laws to which I have been a martyr; I see now that I have been living in a

world of empty dogmas, where fine words are more plentiful than good deeds, and so I say: 'I am free, you are free....'"

"I?"

"Yes, you. For a man is free who breaks his chains. Did you not say that she had left you?"

"Yes!" A pained and doubting expression came over Leon's features.

"No! I see that it is I—always I—who am really abandoned!" cried Pepa. "Well, so be it!"

"Abandoned, no. But there is a moral impossibility which neither you nor I can fail to see. As for me, I am in the most desperate and wretched dilemma that any man ever had to face."

Pepa looked straight into his eyes in agonised expectation of what he might say next.

"I am married; I do not love my wife, nor does she love me. We are incompatible natures; there is a gulf between us. We are separated by utter antipathy, as strong in her as in me. But why did my wife become alienated from me? She was faithful and virtuous, she brought no dishonour on my name—if she had I would have killed her! As it is I cannot kill her—nor divorce her; even a legal separation is out of the question. The only crime that has come between us is religion. Of what do I accuse her? Of being a bigot, a fanatic. And is that a fault?... Who can decide? Now and then with shameful sophistry it has occurred to me that I might accuse her of insanity; horrible thought! And what right have I to call any excess of pious practices insane? God alone can read hearts and determine the boundary line between piety and fanaticism. In my own soul I can declare that my wife is a fanatic; but I have no right to accuse her before all the world."

Leon spoke calmly and judicially as he uttered these questions and answers. As though he were pleading and arguing for and against a criminal.

“My wife has sinned against love, which is as much a law of marriage as fidelity,” he went on. “But she has done nothing to disgrace me; is there then sufficient cause for me to pronounce myself free?”

“Yes, if your wife has ceased to love you; she has annulled the marriage.”

“She has annulled it by her fanatical religion. But I look into my conscience and say: ‘Am I not as guilty as she is?’ For if she has a form of fanaticism that impels her to abhor me, have I not a kindred fanaticism which makes me abhor her? She holds a scheme of belief that parts her from me; I too have a scheme of belief that drives me from her. Am I not perhaps a bigot too?”

“You, no! It is she, it is she.”

“At the stage which we have reached, which of us is the more to blame? Fanatical she is, no doubt; but she has a thoroughly good and upright nature. María is incapable of a dishonourable action; she is a bigot and narrow-minded, but she is honest. She does not love me, but she loves no one else. Am I not perhaps the guilty one ... I who love another?” He passed his hand across his aching brow and paused to consider the desperate case.

“Even if I should decide that I would be free,” he said at last. “I could marry no one else. I could not dream of founding another home; neither law nor conscience would admit of it. I must abide by the consequences of my errors. I am not, and I never can be, one of the crowd who acknowledge no law human or divine; I cannot do as those do who have a moral code for their public acts but whose private life is corrupt, whose thoughts are evil. My family, if I had one would be illegitimate, my children would be bastards and nameless, we should breathe an atmosphere of disgrace. Do not suppose that in speaking thus and in flying from the situation in which we find ourselves, I am surrendering to the gossip of Madrid; nor even that, in speaking of the illegitimacy of such ties, I am bowing to the decisions of the law which is impotent to decide the right and wrong of this vital question on moral grounds. I am

simply obeying my conscience, which makes itself heard above all the other voices of my heart. Appeal to your own conscience....”

Pepa drooped sadly as though she were falling to the ground, but putting her hand to her head she murmured:

“My conscience is love.”

There was something deeply pathetic in this declaration from a woman who for long years had been storing up treasures of affection without knowing on whom to bestow them and who now saw herself condemned to lavish them as best she might on the images of a joyless and fevered fancy.

“But picture to yourself,” said Leon, “all the odious and disreputable conditions of an illegitimate, or I would rather say an immoral, family. The children without a name—the ever-present image of the absent wife....”

“Do not name her; I tell you not to name her,” cried Pepa, making an effort not to be too vehement. “Her mad fanaticism excludes her altogether!”

“But if I am no less fanatical?”

“No, that makes no difference!”

“Well, there is one remedy for the state of mind from which you and I are doomed to suffer.”

“What is that?”

“Hope.”

“Hope!” murmured Pepa, shaking her head; the word found a melancholy echo in her brain. “Hope! that is my fate, there are lives in which hope is a torment and not a comfort.”

“Look at that little angel,” said Leon, pointing to Monina who slept in blissful ignorance at the storm that was rolling over her innocent dreams; “there is your true conscience. When all this agitation is over if your bitterness still survives and your

sad memories prompt you to wander from the right path, let your thoughts dwell upon your child. You will find that act like a magic charm. A hundred sermons, and all the logic in the world, could not teach you what you will learn from one smile of that tiny creature, whose innocence hardly seems of the earth; and in her eyes you will read perfect truth."

"You are right, you are right," cried Pepa bursting into tears.

"Her eyes are like a mirror in which if you can read it rightly you may see something of the future. Think of your child as grown up, as a woman fifteen years hence; how could you bear that some malignant tongue should whisper in her ear shameful tales of her mother's disgrace? Think of your feelings if some one were to say to her: 'your mother, before she had been a widow two months, had taken for her lover a married man, the husband of a faithful wife.'"

"Oh, no!" cried Pepa with a flash of indignation, "that they shall never say!"

"But they will say so; why not? If they are ready to say what is not true, why should they not say what is? You must think of the fateful and inevitable influence that a parent's actions have on the children. There is certain tradition of morality which is a great protection against disaster and dishonour."

"I implore you not even to suggest that my child can ever be anything but innocence itself!" exclaimed Pepa, drowned in tears.

Then they were both silent; they sat on Ramona's bed, arm in arm, with their faces very near together, wrapped, as it were, in an atmosphere of tenderness that breathed from them both, gazing in loving contemplation of the child's happy slumbers. Deep, very deep, down in her heart Pepa was thinking: "child of my body and soul, I can be happy so long as I feel that you are mine, and fancy that I can bestow you on some one I can trust."

Presently they rose from their place side by side and Pepa seated herself in a dim corner.

“I must be going,” said Leon.

“Already!” said Pepa in dismay and looking up at him imploringly.

Leon was about to answer when they heard footsteps and the marquis came into the room; he was in the habit of coming to bid his daughter good-night before he retired for the evening. He was surprised to see Leon, though there was nothing unusual in the hour for a visit.

“What is the matter? Is Monina ill?”

“No, Papa, she is quite well.”

“Ah. I fancied—” and the marquis kissed his daughter. “I am glad to see you here,” he said kindly to Leon.

“I came to say good-bye to Pepa and to you.”

“You are going on a journey? Well, it is the best thing you can do. And where are you going?”

“I have not made up my mind.”

“And you start....”

“To-morrow.”

“If you go to Paris I will give you a commission. I will go to your lodgings early in the morning; just now I am going to bed, I have a headache.”

Leon saw that he must leave at once.

“Good-bye, good-bye,” he said grasping Pepa’s hands. Their eyes met with a keen glance; she was disappointed at this abrupt leave-taking. Leon looked at the sleeping child and then, with calm self-possession, he went out. He felt a stranger in the suites of rooms as he passed through them; but the pretty nest he had just left was so intimately part of his life that he could hardly forbear from turning back to breathe once more in that atmosphere of peace and contentment—an atmosphere full of the delicious sense of home, hallowed by a woman’s love and a child’s slumbers.

As they parted Don Pedro said:

“I am very uneasy at having heard no details of Federico’s death.”

Leon made no reply; he went out into the garden. There, so many remembrances appealed to his affections that at every step he paused to sigh and dream. He had reached the avenue that led from the gardens to the stables when he heard himself called, with a shrill “hist” that came on his ear as sharp as a dart. He turned and saw Pepa, wrapped in a shawl with her head uncovered, coming towards him in breathless haste. She eagerly grasped his hand.

“I could not bear that we should part like this,” she said, “it is too hard!”

“It is as it ought to be,” replied Leon greatly disturbed. “And what does it matter? I shall come in to-morrow for a moment.”

“For a moment!” cried Pepa in pathetic reproach. “Think what it is to have given years—long years—as long as centuries, and to be repaid with moments!”

Leon took both her hands firmly in his.

“My dearest,” he said, “one of us must yield to the other. I know, and I tell you, that if I allow myself to be dragged away by you our ruin is complete. Then let yourself be guided—not dragged away—by me and save our souls alive.”

“And then—but I know what you will say: Hope! Every madman has his hobby!” and she smiled, a heart-rending smile of self-pity that might have drawn tears from a stone. “Hope! and if I die first?”

“No, no, you will not die ...” Leon murmured, taking her head between his hands as if she had been a child and kissing her.

“I am but a helpless thing,” stammered Pepa, who could hardly command her voice, “you can do what you will with me; but you are cruel.”

“And you will obey?”

“Nay, you need not ask; I have long obeyed you in intention. I used to dream that

you came to see me, when you had in fact forgotten my very existence; that you commanded me to break with every duty, and I obeyed you with all the force of my will and desires. This submission was my only joy—a melancholy one! Do not blame me for the aberrations of a broken heart—I only tell you that you may see that if I would follow you to any crime, I shall not refuse to follow you when you lead me to do right."

"Where would you have me lead you?" muttered Leon clasping his brow. "Tell me, if I were to say ..."

"What?" asked Pepa quickly and catching at his idea as a bird catches a seed before it can fall to the ground.

"The idea of flight has passed through your mind?"

"Oh! every idea in turn has passed through my mind."

"So that if I were to say ..."

"If you say 'come,' I am ready."

"Now?"

"This very minute. I would take my baby in my arms...."

Pepa, vehement in her devotions, looked first at the house and then in his face; forgetful of every other consideration, she could think of nothing but the two beings she loved. Leon was going through a brief but agonising struggle. He stamped with his foot like the Warlocks of old when they wanted to call up a familiar spirit.

"But I must bid you let me go alone, and wait, and hope," he said at length, with a firmness that was almost heroic, and Pepa bowed her head with resignation. "I say it because I love you—out of a certain selfishness too, for I cannot bear to destroy a beautiful dream."

"I submit," said Pepa, but the word was hardly more than a moan, and hiding her face on his breast, she sobbed aloud. Then she added: "but you will fix a time. If I

were to die before....”

This idea of an early death was fixed in her mind like a sinister star that nothing could eclipse.

“Yes, I will fix a time. I promise that.”

“And when it comes....”

“When it comes—” echoed Leon who could hardly breathe; some demon seemed to have flung a rope round his neck and to be tightening the noose.

“Supposing that God does not open the way....”

“But He will.”

“And if He does not.”

“But He will.”

“But, I say if He does not?”

“You will see He will.”

“Your conviction makes me believe it, but I do not know why,” said Pepa, turning her head on his shoulder as though it were a pillow on which she might fall asleep. “Now, if you want me to go home satisfied, tell me that you love me very much.” Her eagerness had taken a childish tone.

“You know it.”

“That you will love me always—always.”

“That in fact I loved you when we played together and stained our faces with blackberries,” added Leon, stroking the golden head.

“What days those were!” said Pepa, smiling like a soul in bliss, “we could talk for hours of those recollections, taking the words out of each other’s mouth. Ah! our life then was what life ought to be. Really life; not these horribly short moments and sudden changes. If only we might chatter, laugh, remember, talk nonsense and read

each other's thoughts and wishes!"

"If we could...!"

"But we must live apart. We have lived apart all our lives, and yet I feel as if I were saying good-bye for the first time. You go to an inn and I to a palace."

"Take care of your child for me."

"Oh! there is one terrible thought: if it is long before you come again she will not know you, she will be afraid of you."

"She will soon get over that."

"But are you not coming again to-morrow morning?"

"What for? That we may have another and more cruel parting? If I were to see you again my courage might fail me."

"I will send Monina to see you."

"Yes, send her," and Leon coughed.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Pepa anxiously, and turning up the collar of his coat. "You are catching cold! it is chilly—take care of yourself ... so—"

"Thank you, my darling; I am cold, I confess."

"Well, then, we part now?"

"Yes," said Roch, "now or never."

The words: "then never!" were on Pepa's lips, but she dared not utter them.

"And you will write to me very often, like a good boy?"

"Yes, every week."

"Long, long letters?"

"As long and as full as the thoughts of a man that waits in hope."

"And where shall I write to you?"

"I will let you know. Let us walk towards the house; you must not go back alone.

We will part there."

"Come as far as the door of the museum; I came out there and can get in again."

They walked on; Leon with his right arm round Pepa and holding both her hands in his left.

"It is a dark night," observed Pepa, with that inexplicable impulse to speak of trivial things which comes over us when the mind is fully occupied with a fixed train of ideas.

"Are you happy?" asked Leon trying to speak lightly.

"How should I be when you are going away? And yet I am, glad of all you have said to me. It is a mixture of pain and gladness. First I say to myself: 'what joy!' and then I feel that I shall die of grief."

"And I feel just the same," said Leon gloomily. They were at the door of the museum.

"Good-bye, good-bye," she said, "remember, you are mine."

"Au revoir," said Leon in a choked voice, and he kissed her twice. "This one for Monina, and this for her mother."

The door opened on a dark staircase; Leon gently pushed Pepa in and hurried away; she reappeared for a moment and he waved his hand.

In a few minutes he had reached his lodgings; crushed with grief he threw himself into his study chair, not knowing whether to find relief in tears or in dumb despair. His heart was broken; and yet the deep and spacious reservoir of sorrow and passion had not yet poured the whole of its crushing contents on his devoted head.

END OF VOL. I.

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William S. Gottsberger, Publisher, New York.

Transcriber's note

Obvious printer errors have been silently corrected. Original spelling was kept, but variant spellings were made consistent when a predominant usage was found. Blank pages have been skipped. Throughout the text the following replacements were made: "Maria" by "María", "Telleria" by "Tellería", "Joaquin" by "Joaquín", "Fontan" by "Fontán", "Leopold" by "Leopoldo", "Agustin" by "Agustín", "Perez" by "Pérez". The following changes were made: Page 18: "Atheneam" replaced by "Atheneum". Page 28: "Centa" replaced by "Ceuta". Page 75: "Corralles" replaced by "Corrales". Page 144: "Cerinola" replaced by "Ceriñola". Page 147: "Cayentano" replaced by "Cayetano". Page 199: "Arragon" replaced by "Aragón" (twice). Page 246: "Monilla" replaced by "Monina". Page 274: "her papa" replaced by "your papa" (twice—after checking the Spanish original version).

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LEON ROCH: A ROMANCE, VOL. 1 (OF 2) ***

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LEON ROCH: A ROMANCE, VOL. 2 (OF 2) ***

LEON ROCH A ROMANCE

BY B. PÉREZ GALDÓS Author of “Gloria,” etc.

From the Spanish by CLARA BELL

—AUTHORIZED EDITION—

TWO VOLUMES—VOL. II.

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Leon Roch

LEON ROCH.

PART II.

CHAPTER I. WHICH TREATS OF THE CASTILIAN NOBILITY, OF THE LAWS OF MORALITY, OF ALL THAT IS MOST VENERABLE, AND OTHER SMALL MATTERS.

The crisis through which the house of Telleria was passing remained unsolved. In fact the catastrophe was so complete that to try to stem it seemed madness; nothing could be done but to conceal it as long as possible. The incorrigible actors in the wretched drama strained every nerve to prolong their reign before abdicating disgracefully and retiring into poverty; and though, behind the scenes, they were forced to soliloquise on the fact that they had no servants, that there was not a shop that would trust them, that they had not the bread of vanity in the form of a carriage, to the world they made it known that they were all ill. The marquis, poor man, suffered terribly from rheumatism; the marquesa—it was most distressing—had sunk into an alarming state of debility; the whole family were depressed and ailing. They received no one, not even their most intimate friends; they gave no dinners, not even to the hungry; they went nowhere, not even to the most interesting first nights.

At church was the only place where they could appear with such rueful countenances. What can be more edifying than to listen to the counsels of religion and to shed a tear at the feet of the Mother of Sorrows. Poor Milagros! The parishioners, who saw her come in and go out with a penitent air that was an example to all, paid her woes the tribute they claimed:

“Poor woman! what a trouble her sons have been to her!”

The evening meetings at the Marquesa de San Salomó’s, which were the only refuge of the distressed family, were very quiet and consisted of one or two poets, a few

handsome women, half a dozen models of piety and a half a dozen hypocrites. Rome was the favourite theme of conversation, and “l’Univers” the favourite newspaper; the poets recited verses that exhaled an odour of sanctity, and under the influence of this suffocating literary incense the whole human race was regarded as excommunicated. Gustavo Sudre’s speeches were discussed beforehand; reputations were made for youths just come from the seminary: such a one was a St. Paul, such another a St. Ambrose or a Tertulian, or an Origen—in point of talent, of course; in short the evenings at the San Salomó’s had that club-like character which is a conspicuous feature of modern society. Political prejudices have found their way into the drawing-room and make themselves felt in the perfumed atmosphere of the boudoir, and more conspiracies are discussed there than in the barracks.

The marquesa was young, pretty, tall and shapely, though rather faded looking; her manners were pleasant and she patronised poetry, especially when it was of a pious and mystical tone. A sworn foe to materialism and liberalism and all the evils of modern civilisation, she was both elegant and clever, and the hours of the tertulias never seemed long; she had the art of spicing with wit and grace the anathemas that fulminated from her drawing-room, and she encouraged in her house and at her table a tone of moderation which was equally agreeable to the patriarchs and the poets. The St. Pauls and St. Ambroses no doubt swore to themselves that asceticism was better to preach than to practise.

The Marquis de San Salomó, a man who would sooner have been sawn in slices than have yielded a jot of his opinions—if indeed he had any—was not a frequent figure at these meetings. He more often went to the theatre, the casino, or other even less mentionable places of amusement. By day he sat in his study and received bull-fighters and all the rabble of the arena, and three-fourths of his conversation consisted of the slang inseparable from the lowest type of sport, and stories of the escapades of his boon companions. He was rich and not only made his wife a handsome allowance for pin-money, but granted her a considerable sum for religious

purposes, so that a current account with Heaven formed part of his regular household expenses. Of his current account with the ladies of the ballet we need not give the particulars.

On the evening of the day when the marquis had been to see Leon Roch at Carabanchel his wife was conversing eagerly with a stiff old gentleman, decorated with the ribbon of some military order; a most innocent, harmless creature in spite of his calling, and one of those soldiers whose existence seems intended to prove that the army is a perfectly inoffensive body of men.

“It is vain to try to comfort me, General,” she said. “I am broken hearted! You yourself have said in exquisite verses that a mother’s heart is an inexhaustible treasury of endurance; but mine is full to the brim, I can endure no more; it must overflow.”

“Then, my dear madam, of what use is your Christian resignation?” asked the son of Mars, with a look of innocence worthy of a cherub all head and wings. “The Lord will vouchsafe unexpected consolations. And María, is she resigned?”

“What else do you expect from that angel? My poor child! You might crucify her and she would not utter a groan. But Heaven always allows its most saintly children to go through the severest trials. She, like my adored Luis, only prays the Lord to take her to Himself; to him He sent physical suffering; to her, mental anguish.”

“We see every day,” said the general with an expression of horror that sat very funnily on his babyish face framed in white whiskers, “that scandals, infidelities and wickedness are on the increase. All laws human and divine are less and less respected every day. Where will you find a man of upright character, or a trace of chivalrous honour? Turn where you will there is nothing but effrontery and cynicism! Only picture to yourself, my dear Milagros, what the end must be of a society which, day by day and hour by hour, neglects all the principles of religion. But no! I ought not to say that, for there are still saints and martyrs. Your daughter

for instance, deserted by her husband for her very virtues, is by those virtues—by those very virtues let me repeat—a shining example, a light, a standard in the battle."

Yes, that she certainly was. Every group in the room was discussing her. Deserted! and solely for being too good! Such a deed cried to Heaven and clamoured for vengeance—a second deluge, the gulf that yawned to swallow Korah, the fires of Sodom, the flies of Egypt, the sword of Attila—of all these curses the one which seemed most likely to be realised then and there was that of the flies in Egypt, for their buzzing and their sting were not inadequately represented by the spiteful tattle, the commonplace denunciations, and amateur excommunication with which people of a certain way of thinking castigate whatever they disapprove of in their fellow men.

"If the separation had been based on any other pretext," said a poet to a journalist, "it might pass ... for it is an obvious fact that Leon...." But their voices were lost in a chorus of comments and tittering. Two old ladies put their noses into the group to inhale the atmosphere of scandal—more fragrant to them than the scent of roses.

"I have suspected it for a long time," said the mistress of the house to a deputy who held the archiepiscopal throne in the ultramontane coterie. "Pepa Fúcar is a hussy. But there was never more than a crumb of principle in all the Fúcar household. It does not do to be too particular in the way you make either money or love. There are some families that are fated to it."

"I have no doubt that the connection is one of old standing," replied the deputy, who admired the marquesa's dinners, and who was wont to improve on her slanderous insinuations.

"From what I know now, and from certain dates," added Pilar bowing with a reproachful glance to Gustavo who just then entered the room, "I can positively assert that they are of very old standing." And she continued her remarks in a low

tone to the worthy general, who, though fully determined never to be astonished at any wickedness could not conceal his dismay and perplexity.

“Leon’s child!” he muttered.

In another part of the room the Marquis de Telleria was enlarging on a new—a perfectly new idea—with a ready flow of hackneyed phrases. This was the theory that we are all monstrously alike; that there are no men of mark left, and that the world is dismally uniform. He—the marquis—was in fact fast losing faith in the traditional chivalry of the Spanish nation.

“Society is fast rushing on its ruin,” the general agreed, “and though some deluded minds refuse to see it, it is none the less certain. You have only to observe one thing, one most significant fact.”

Every one turned to look at the speaker, awaiting the announcement, which might have been a declaration of war to judge from the grave truculence of his face.

“Observe, I say, one fact. When there is any scandal, or rumour of a scandal, who gives rise to it? Mark, I say, who gives rise to it. It is always a man devoid of religion; one of those conceited and infatuated beings who dare to despise the Christian faith, and who may be seen every day flaunting their insolence, and lifting their heads to defy the stars.”

This speech was received with the silence of grave consent; then a question arose between the deputy and the journalist as to whether Leon sinned from indifference or from perversity.

“There is no doubt of it,” said the deputy, “corruption is universal. But while those who cling to the faith are in a position to amend and save their souls, the rationalists are going on straight to ruin. Like Samson, they have pulled the temple about their ears, and, like him, they must perish in the ruins.”

Meanwhile Gustavo and the Marquesa de San Salomó were talking together in too low a voice to be overheard.

“You ought—you must,” she said. “Tell the whole truth to María.”

“The truth? But I cannot trust to appearances. I have not at all made up my mind as to Leon’s guilt. Until I have seen him and talked to him I shall say nothing to my sister.”

“Then I will.”

“No, you will not.”

The lady was fractiously eager; she felt as though she could not breathe freely till she had sent the arrow home to her friend’s heart.

“But I assure you I will,” she said, with dilated nostrils, sparkling eyes and a mounting colour.

“In matters that concern my family the decision must be left to them.”

“Oh! I have a voice too in matters which concern your family,” said the marquesa with an impertinent accent on the words “your family.”

“Never, with my consent,” retorted Gustavo, repressing his indignation. He was pale, and his whole expression was that of a man who had worries of his own. Pilar raised her voice.

“Our friend here—the father of his country—tells me that he cannot make his speech to-morrow on the subject of article twenty-two.” There was a murmur of dissatisfaction. “The president has allowed him to exchange his turn.”

“When will it be then?”

“This sad business of his sister’s,” she went on, looking at Gustavo with assumed sympathy. “Has been too much for his brain.”

Gustavo went across to where his mother was sitting.

“Compose yourself,” she said affectionately, “we are as miserable as you can be, but we have not lost patience.”

“Ah well, I have.”

“But have you made any effort to verify the truth of this report about Leon,” asked the deputy who gave himself the airs of a whole convocation.

“Oh there is no lack of dates. Agustin went to see him to-day ... he tried to bring him to a sense of duty....” And the conversation still ran on this absorbing subject till presently the group was diminished by several persons moving off to hear the mistress of the house read an article by Louis Veuillot. Gustavo and his mother went into an adjoining room.

“Is it true that my father went to-day to see Leon?”

“You heard me say so.”

“I was afraid that his journey to Carabanchel might have had another object. It would be a fresh disgrace....”

“What nonsense! Disgrace! You are a perfect Don Quixote!”

“Yes,” said Gustavo with a glare of wrath in his eyes, “I am afraid he went to throw himself at the feet of our enemy and to beg of him....”

“What shocking things you say! We, we, beg of him!”

“Oh! that would not astonish me; I am accustomed to shocking things. I will go to see Leon and talk to him myself. Who knows but that he may not be so guilty as we think. Horrible lies are invented in the world and it is quite certain that all are not good who are supposed to be. Others on the contrary—if he has really deserted my sister to live with another woman all intercourse between us and him must cease; he must be a stranger to us. Oh! what a shame it is—what misery—to have received from such a man so many favours that we cannot throw back in his teeth!”

“Good heavens! do not speak like that, you will attract attention,” cried the marquesa alarmed by her son’s vehemence. “You are really absurd!”

“Absurd!” repeated Gustavo bitterly. “What do I care; and after all I am the only one of the family who feels the vileness of our existence.”

“Gustavo!”

“I speak for myself, only for myself. This house is as odious to me as my own home. The everlasting babble about morality has deafened me and prevents my hearing the voice of truth—truth, which the more it is felt the less it is talked about. I am equally disgusted with my own part in the world, with the position of my family, and the worldly cynical set who call themselves my friends. I am satisfied with nothing, and the one thing I hope for, is a voluntary exile that may remove me from all who belong to me.”

“And do you wish to add fresh troubles to those I already have to bear?” she said, visibly moved. “You, emigrate, renounce all your future prospects—even the hope of becoming a minister....”

“No, the idea of emigrating is, of course, mere madness; I cannot go. My ambition and my disgrace are one and I am bound to them as the snail is to his shell. Here I must stay—for ever inseparable from my family, my fancy, my class, and my principles!” He accented the last word ironically. “I must live on, seeing what I see, and hearing what I hear. By the way, I have a new disaster to tell you of. This evening Polito was slapped in the face, in a house I need not name, in consequence of a dispute over a game of cards. There was a fight, women screamed—the police interfered....”

“But was he hurt?” asked his mother.

“No—a bruise or two; but the row was heard all down the street—no matter the name of the street;” he groaned and went on: “We live in an evil day, a day of wrath! However, from this time forth I shall insist on managing the affairs of the house, and we shall see whether I can get it out of the present difficulty, and save our credit at any rate—save the honour which is no longer a fact but a fiction. I am deeply vexed that my father should have gone to Leon with the purpose that I suspect.”

“It is an absurd suspicion.”

“Nay—it is a miracle if I am mistaken. But I will know the truth, for I will see Leon.”

“You?”

“Yes I. I must know his guilt from himself. I believe him to be in error, but not in wilful sin; I will talk to him frankly and he will answer me in the same way. If he is such a wretch he will have to confess it ... meanwhile be sure you do not let a word of these reports reach María’s ears.”

“Oh! I shall tell her myself; poor child! It would be a pity that she should not know all the virtues of her loving husband! Fancy if a stranger were to tell her, exaggerating or misrepresenting the facts.”

“Say nothing about it to her.”

“Do not interfere in that matter. I shall, and this very night. You need not teach me my duties as an affectionate and anxious mother; I know perfectly well what I ought to do. María must be informed of everything. How do you know that we may not arrange a reconciliation?”

Gustavo was on the point of replying when their privacy was invaded by a certain poet who was said to be very attentive to the marquesa and one of her favourite followers—a common, clumsy-looking man, but older than he seemed. There was no trace in his features of that lofty refinement which might have entitled him to write, in a dozen different metres, of the perennial founts of gladness and the mystical union of souls, or to proclaim his indignation against those who denied or ignored the existence of God. It was hard to credit so despicable a person with magnanimity.

“It is admirable, unanswerable!” he exclaimed as he came in.

“What is?”

“Louis Veuillot’s article on modern society—on those base and corrupt minds who, to smother their own remorse, wish to abolish faith. Do you want this copy of the Univers, Gustavo?”

“You can take it if you will let me have it to-morrow. I have an article to write on the same subject.”

They went into the drawing-room.

“Then it is understood we sing to-morrow,” said the marquesa to her friend.

“Yes, to-morrow, without fail.” There was a rustling of silk dresses, a chorus of: “To-morrow then, to-morrow—” a chirping of kisses and moving of chairs. The company were dispersing. Some left in pairs: some went smiling, others frowning. The Tellerias departed, then the general, and the deputy with his archiepiscopal airs; and with him went Gustavo, discussing church politics but without losing his expression of gloom.

“Good-night, Pilar; to-morrow at San Prudencio.”

“Good-night—I will take your message to Padre Paoletti.”

And when they were all gone the Marquesa de San Salomó retired to pray and to sleep.

CHAPTER II. A PICTURE WHICH MIGHT BE ZURBARAN BUT IS ONLY BY GOYA.

María de Roch was very early at church next morning. For some time past she had accustomed herself to rise early and perform her religious duties so as to return home by nine o’clock, by which plan she avoided meeting the crowd of worshippers who selected the more convenient hours of the day. On this particular day, being Sunday, she was even earlier than usual and came out of church having fulfilled the duties that most flattered her soul; then, as usual, she spent the chief part of the

morning in religious reading. But she did not seek mental nourishment in the rich stores of the older mystical literature of Spain—writings purified in the crucible of the loftiest spiritual faith and which are a real feast for the faithful soul, warming it with a divine flame and edifying it with transcendental poetry and morality. María fed her piety, sad to say, on the worst of contemporary religious literature, the outcome, in many cases, of ecclesiastical jobbery—in style a borrowed medley and in substance not really religious at all, but materialistic in its tendencies—which, with newspapers and prayer-books, forms the staple of the booksellers' trade. Many of these effusions are translated from the French and bear a "made to sell" stamp which is little short of profane. Their covers do not lack the elegance and finish characteristic of good modern workmanship; within lie prose and verse. But what prose! What verse! There are certain ideas which demand simplicity of expression; it is their natural garb, without which they cease to exist; there are others which require dignity and grandeur, and which, lacking these, degenerate into affectation and rhodomontade. María could not appreciate these subtleties; her favourite works were full of "celestial smiles" and "seraphic fires," of "virgin souls" and "airs from Heaven." This sensual terminology appealed to her more directly than any other language; her narrow intelligence would not have understood any other or would have despised it, for her imagination was particularly susceptible to the suggestions of her senses. María admired the character of Santa Teresa because she had been taught to do so, but she could not understand her sublime metaphysics. Seraphic fervour was to her a flow of words or it was nothing. She did not exhaust her brain by trying to conceive of the subtler forms of devotion, nor was she capable of sublime abstractions. Her nature, with its plain common-sense, was coarse, and led her to seek religious fervour by other means. For instance, God's mercy to his creatures was to her a fact beyond dispute, but it only came home to her personally as associated with some relic; the infinite perfection of the Creator, though she believed in it implicitly, was real to her apprehension only through the æsthetic

medium of an image. The Virgin Mary, the ideal which of all others most interpenetrates the heart of a woman, did not fail to appeal to hers; but yet in order to feel her influence in full force, to be wrought to enthusiasm or moved to tears, she would steep—or shall I say dilute? her emotions in water from Lourdes.

Enough has been said to show that María's religion was that of the lower orders—meaning by low, incapable of thought and feeling, and leading that mechanical existence of eating, digesting and sleeping, which is the crassest and purest materialism. Vulgarity is not a class distinction; it is an element, a component, a chemical constituent of social geology; if a map could be constructed to show its distribution it would appear as a black stain—a foul deposit—in every stratum of humanity. And thus, just as a few elect spirits represent the aristocracy of mind, María was the representative of vulgar credulity. In other times and under other conditions, without ceasing to profess piety or to pray six hours a day, she would have told fortunes by the cards, have worked witchcraft by means of relics and rosaries, and have mixed up her religious exercises with the tricks and arts of a gipsy.

But these are things of the past, though there are still malignant souls in the world and gipsy arts and wiles, differing, it is true from those of the middle ages. María's aim and end was to belong to every religious society, charitable or otherwise. She was, more especially, what in the jargon of cant is known as a "Josephina," affiliated, that is to say, to a society named after St. Joseph, whose principal object is to send up prayers for the Pope. It includes a large number of highly respectable persons of whom no ridicule is intended. María was a member of various other associations and sisterhoods; nearly all of them have their periodical reports and tracts, intended to consolidate their existence and to supply a form of light literature which is sometimes extraordinarily droll to the outsider. María accepted it all as unctuous and edifying and would spend hours in reading the stories—would that we could reproduce a few of them!—and addresses; and above all the section which

may be called “Mystico-pathological:” the list, that is to say, of the cures effected every month by the wafers and ointments dipped in the famous “Perolito” of Seville—miracles even greater than those wrought by Holloway and other quacks. María had always by her a store of these medicaments for the benefit of her friends and relations, being absolutely convinced of their efficacy on those who employed them in faith. The “Perolito” could never be a paying concern in any country where common-sense and an efficient police were known. Though María constantly aimed at treading in the footsteps of her brother Luis she was free from his extravagant ecstasy, and her ideas and practice were unlike his in many particulars. Her unhealthy pietism was the outcome of a narrow intellect, and kept alive by her senses and the refractory pride of her nature. Her ideas and feelings were absolutely foreign to those of her husband, and we have seen what the character of her affection for him was—the only affection of which she was capable—and in her hours of penitential solitude how she had struggled to eradicate even that! What violence she had done to her imagination in trying to see as evil, what was good, as corrupt, what was worthy, as repulsive, what was noble and attractive! She firmly believed that so long as she allowed her mind to dwell on the image of her husband she was no true saint. Was she right or wrong? None can tell but God who, in his omniscience, saw the aspect that image wore.

“If only he were not an atheist!” was her constant thought; and the response was an implacable determination never to have anything in common with such a man. In thought she referred to that brother whose shade would visit her in the lonely watches of the night and it had been his wish—his will—that she and the atheist should live separated; he had pronounced her free from her matrimonial bondage and released her from the burden of earthly duty, that she might henceforth belong solely to God. And now and again she would start from sleep in an agony of distress, her forehead damp with sweat, and trembling in every limb. “And if he loves some other woman!” she would mutter to herself.

Her ideas had taken this turn. She could even bear to think that her husband might die without loving her, but that he should live and love some one else—that he should give to another that which ought to be hers.—That was her real grief and constant mortification; and when her reflections reached this point her whole being leaped into revolt with an impulse which was the very passion of egotism.

During the period when Leon was gradually becoming estranged from her María took a delight in humiliating him; it was a pleasure to see him come in every evening, ready to receive the lash. Nay, sometimes, from the force of habit and from the sincere regard which he had inspired in her, she was really glad at his coming but she took care to conceal both the gladness and the affection. Merciful Heaven! It would never do to let it be said that she hailed and welcomed the "Atheist." Secretly she took an interest in everything that concerned him, gave orders for his comfort, and if he were ailing, made him take advice and remedies, only taking care not to give him water from the Grotto at Lourdes or wafer from Seville as these are specific only for those who believe in them.

When they talked to each other it cost her a constant effort to keep herself from gazing with pleasure and sympathy on her husband's attractive face, and when she was alone, she repented of her weakness, calling herself reprobate and sensual and imploring her brother in Heaven to aid her by the virtue of certain sacred relics.—"But if only he were not an atheist!" And she would weep at the thought.

When Leon left her once for all, María who had clenched the matter by declaring that God forbid her to love him, felt utterly crushed; her hearth was vacant and desolate. She was terrified too—of what? She herself knew not. During one whole night she could not command her mind to a single thought of devotion. She was stunned, but at the same time her brain ached with a swarm of evil visions like the trampling of horses snorting as they charge. She needed much reading and all the counsel and warnings of her spiritual directors before she could fairly bury the fair

corpse of her departed happiness; much prayer, much penance, much labour of her fancy to see what she knew to be good and beautiful as evil and hideous. But she was not the first to undertake this odious task of purifying her soul by the instrumentality of the imagination—heaping foulness over the grave of all the joys of love and graces of life; hermits and ascetics had done it before her, and filled up the measure by personal castigation. María laboured in the obscurity of her tortured brain to see the happy days of her honeymoon in the darkest and foulest colours and so threw a lurid light on the sweetest hours of her married life.—It was a frightful revulsion and anarchy of soul.

As has been said, María, when her husband was absent for ever felt a miserable void, anxiety and solitude. Where was he gone? She made various enquiries, but without betraying her disquietude. She profaned even her prayers by thinking of it—San Antonio! but this man was hers—her husband and should belong to no one else!

Logic of this kind comes with fulminating force sometimes to a half-demented brain; and the strange thing was that in spite of what she choose to call Leon's atheism, she had always recognised in him a basis of honourable feeling in which she had perfect confidence. Still, so narrow was her apprehension, that she had never thought of setting that magnanimity against his disbelief. Why did she trust the honour of an atheist? She did not know, but that she did was beyond dispute. Now, when her husband, her mate, her companion, had left her, she was bereft of all trust. María was going through a strange experience. It seemed to be close to her, a monstrous and hideous presence that gazed at her, that haunted her, that glided with a cold and slimy touch up the pleats of her dress, looked into her heart with its wicked black eyes, poked in its taper head, and then drew in its long writhing body to the very tip of its slender tail—curled itself up in her heart where it lay coiled, radiating an intolerable heat but as still and motionless as death in the nest that it had made there.

CHAPTER III. THE REVOLUTION.

The Marquesa de San Salomó was talking to María.

“My dear friend,” she began, “I would not be the last to come and condole with you.”

“To pray with me?”

“Yes, to pray; but also to sympathise. I did not see you in church. Padre Paoletti told me that you had come and gone early; and I quite understood it. I long to talk to you and comfort you....”

“Comfort me?” said María much puzzled, “for my loneliness, my solitude ... but I have suffered long in silence, and the Lord has not denied me sweet consolation. What are we here for but to suffer? We have only to get that well into our minds and then no grief can find us unprepared.”

“Oh!” cried Pilar with eager admiration and kissing her friend, “how good you are! What a saint! What a beautiful exception in this wretched world! Folks ought to come and worship you and pray to you as much as if you were canonized.”

“No, no, you are wrong, very wrong. What if I were to tell you that I am dreadfully wicked?”

“You, wicked! you?” said Pilar looking as horrified as if the idea were rank blasphemy. “And if you are a sinner what am I? Tell me that.... What am I?” and she answered the question herself with a deep and prolonged sigh, the pathetic expression of a conscience that was too heavily laden. “It would be a marvel to me that there should be any saints, even if the occasions of sin were rare, and half the world lived in convents or in caves, setting each other a good example; but now, when liberty has multiplied the opportunities of vice, and every one does as he pleases, and there is hardly any one to set a worthy example, it is miraculous. That is why I say that you ought to be canonized; for in Madrid, which is beyond a doubt

the wickedest place under the sun—and in this century which, as Padre Paoletti says, is the opprobrium of the ages—you have been able to defy the temptations of the world and are worthy to be compared with the penitents, and confessors, and even the martyrs of the Church." She emphasised the last words with marked meaning.

"Oh! do not speak so," said María who though she liked flattery was wont to conceal the fact.

"My dear, I think you admirable, wonderful," added her friend with affectionate rapture. "For I am miles behind you though I long to be like you. Would that Heaven might grant me to take a single step alone and unhindered in the path of perfection in which you are treading, and on which I have not even started! Do you know what I should like? To be constantly with you, to go to pray with you, if you would allow it, to read what you read, to think as you think; and see whether in that way I should feel better inspired. For the present I will only ask you to give me something belonging to you—anything, a handkerchief for instance, that I may always wear it in my bosom as if it were a relic. I want always to touch something that you have touched. I would never be without it, because when I see your handkerchief it will remind me of you and of your goodness, and that will help me to conquer an evil thought or a bad impulse. Admire you? And ought I not admire you, dear angel? Indeed, ma petite, you do not know your own value. You will see, when you die people will fight for pieces of your garments."

"Pilar, you are offending Heaven by your adulation!"

"It is only that you are so good that you do not like to hear it. Your brother in glory was just the same, but you are better than he."

"Pilar, for God's sake!" cried María, now really horrified.

"Yes, and greater than he; I say so. He was a saint but you are a martyr as well. You have reached the climax of Christian heroism. I know no living creature to compare with you, and I do not know whether to admire or to pity you most."

María did not understand her.

“The name of saint seems to me too weak—and what name of horror can I give to the man who, having in his house such a treasure of goodness and piety, abandoned it, despised it and covered himself with ignominy by scorning gold for base metal, and filling the place of the angel Heaven had granted him for a wife with a....”

“Pilar! Good God! Are you speaking of my husband?”

“Oh, my dearest friend,” said the marquesa, colouring with excitement, “forgive me for being furious as I speak of it. I really cannot help it!”

“But Leon.... Pilar, you do not know what you are saying; my husband is a strictly moral man.”

It has been said that María was a woman of limited intellect though of fairly strong feelings; her nature lacked delicacy and refinement, but, at the same time, what was best in her was a basis of loyalty and honour and a vein of innate rectitude which is always accompanied by a certain confidence in the honesty of others. Her friend’s reticent insinuations aroused her indignation.

“I see,” said Pilar, “that I have been very rash and indiscreet. You have heard nothing.”

“I have heard nothing? What about?”

“Oh! I cannot tell you; I ought to have held my tongue. I thought that your mother....”

“Speak out—you mentioned my husband....”

“And now I am sorry for it.”

“Then my husband—then you mean to say—he believes in nothing—there is no hope for his soul—he is an atheist, an infidel ... but he is perfectly well conducted and blameless in his life....”

Pilar suddenly burst out laughing; her loud and impertinent mirth, lasting for some

seconds, disturbed María beyond measure.

“If you call it blameless to desert his wife, who is a saint, and live with another ...” said her friend, in a sharp rough tone like that of a file on metal. María turned as pale as death, her eyes staring and her lips parted.

“With another!” The idea was not a new one, but the fact was a shock. She had anticipated the revelation by vague and timid suspicions; but a sad truth startles us even when it has been foreseen in a terrible dream. “With another, you said?”

“Yes, with another. All Madrid knows it but you.”

“You said—with another ...” repeated María who had half lost her wits and stood stunned and paralysed as though those two terrible words were a mass of stone that had fallen on her head.

“Yes, with another,” said Pilar, with another burst of laughter, which did not argue any very great reverence for the saint of her adoration.

“And who is it?” asked María with a flash of vehemence, her bewilderment suddenly changed to passionate excitement. “Who, I say, who?”

“I thought you knew, poor martyr! It is Pepa Fúcar, the daughter of the Marquis de Fúcar; the man whom all the papers call ‘the eminent Fúcar,’ because he has made a fortune by paving streets, laying down railroads, poisoning the country with his tobacco—which is made they say of dead leaves swept off the roads, and finally lending money to the government during the war, at two hundred per cent; a specimen man of the century, with a Haytian title; a product of parliamentary influence and work done by contract. He cannot bear the sight of me because, one evening at the Rioponces’, he began paying me compliments and I turned my back on him, and whenever I see him within hearing in a drawing-room I begin talking of the adulteration of tobacco, of the increase of asphalt pavements, of the nuisance of gas, and of the shoes with brown paper soles that he supplied to the troops.” And Pilar laughed sharply for the third time.

But María had not listened to her spiteful sketch of the Marquis de Fúcar. She heard nothing but the tumult in her own soul, the storm of a rebellion, of a revolution, like the stormy rousing of a sleeping crowd. The serpent that lay brooding in her heart suddenly brought forth a swarm of others that started into life, alert and vicious, gnawing, and vomiting fire. Her jealousy took the form of a legion of invisible reptiles, stinging and scorching her on every side; this was in fact the guise under which it presented itself to her imagination, which always conceived of mental experiences as analogous to physical sensations; to her a pleasure was actually a caress, and a pain a blow or a pinch or a stab. The poor saint and martyr had never in her life before felt anything like this, and she did not know what it meant. Her grief was compounded with terror and surprise, and the shock was so great that she forgot to turn to God, as might have seemed natural, or to pray for patience or resignation.

What was this? It was the Real suppressing the Artificial; the woman's heart asserting its supremacy through the agency of a revolt of its imprisoned, but genuine, emotions. It was an entire revolution of woman's nature claiming its rights, and throwing off all that was false and assumed to raise the triumphant standard of truth and of that nobler part which—whether she be lover, wife, or mother, good or bad—makes her a true woman; makes her the other half of man—the Eve to Adam—whether faithful or faithless, a heroine or a baggage. This revolution is sometimes occasioned by the passion of love; but not invariably, because love in its innocent simplicity yields to the sophistries and treacherous blandishments of its brother mysticism. What never fails to stir it up is the brutal and overwhelming passion of jealousy, so well painted by Calderon as the hydra whose double nature, diabolical and seraphical, betrays its birth as the hybrid offspring of Love, which is divine, and Envy, the daughter of all the devils. The sudden frenzy that had sprung up in María's soul was more akin to its mother Envy than to its father Love. It was an instrument of torture and torment, a rack without respite, a fire that grew fiercer each instant. Her bigotry was suddenly shattered like a tower that has been

undermined and blown to the winds. At that moment her soul was dark; God utterly eclipsed. With a cry of anguish and clasping her head in her hands she exclaimed: “Wretch! But you shall pay dearly for it!”

Just at this juncture her mother entered the room and perceiving that María had learnt all, she threw herself into her arms. María had no tears; her eyes were dry and sparkling. The marquesa puckered her face up to shed a tear she had ready, as we are prepared with sighs as we enter the house of death.

“Do not suppress your grief, my darling child. I see you know the worst. I would not have told you for fear of agitating your tender soul ... be calm. Pilar has told you? It is horrible, atrocious! but perhaps not irremediable.... For days I have been miserable; but be calm; let me see you resigned.”

Pilar thought it was her turn to speak again.

“The atrocity,” she said, “is all the greater under the circumstances. It is a villainous thing to betray any woman, but a saint like you.... What is society coming to? In its passion for abolishing it will at last abolish the soul! Oh! c’est dégoutant! and then the wretches wonder that a handful of brave men stand forth, determined that God shall not be pensioned off. They are furious because a standard is raised to rally those who are ready to do battle for Religion, the Mother of Duty. If they are conquered through treachery, which nowadays triumphs everywhere, they will return to the charge ... they will return again and again, till at last....”

As she spoke she had risen, and was now standing in front of a mirror that formed the door of a wardrobe and contemplating her interesting person, twisting from side to side to study the fall of her elegant mantle and the effect of her fashionable hat. Her dainty, ungloved hands arranged here a pleat and there a curl; and then she returned to her seat.

“Did you hear that he is living there?” said the marquesa to her daughter and softening the words with a kiss.

“With her?” cried María drawing aside from her mother’s embrace. “Where?”

“At Carabanchel. Leon was so reckless as to take a lodging close to Suertebella. There is a way through the park.”

“I will go there,” said María rising and pulling violently at the bell.

“My dear, be calm. You must not take it so.”

A maid answered the bell and María said: “My black dress.”

“Your black merino frock!” exclaimed her mother. “A pretty object you will look! No, no, if you go at all—and we will talk of that—you must dress as well and look as handsome and as nice as possible.”

“Oh dear!” cried María regretfully. “I have no gowns; nothing pretty or nice; I have given all my good things away.”

“And you think you can go in that merino rag? Foolish child! how little you know of men. Very well; go to find your husband a perfect guy, and you will see how much he cares. Nay, appearances rule the world.”

“But first let us decide whether you had better go at all,” suggested Pilar.

“Yes, I want to go ... I want to go,” María insisted, clasping her hands, and her eyes glared with fury.

“No tragedies, no scenes—eh?”

“I do not think it is safe for you to go there. If he were to offer you some grosser insult, if you were to meet Pepa face to face, or her child—supposing that the child is in its father’s arms—for they say he is devoted to it....”

“Its father?” said María “Why Federico is dead?”

“No, no,” said her friend, with the expression of cruel resolve that she might have put on while thrusting a needle through some wretched insect to add it to a collection. “No, do you not see? Your husband ...”

“Leon ... my husband ... Monina’s father!” exclaimed the poor woman. The fresh

blow stunned her as the first had done.

“So the people choose to say,” said Milagros trying to soften the shock.

“And you, Mamma, what do you think? Is it true?” asked María with great anxiety.

These two women were not malicious; their state of mind—analogous to that state of the body which is known to physicians as cachexy—was the result of a lack of sound principle from moral impoverishment, a disease caused by the life they led and the constant infection of an atmosphere full of deceptions and scandal. Still, there was something in them that made them revolt at their own cruelty; horrified at the depth and bitterness of the cup they had put to María’s lips, they now attempted to qualify it.

“No, I believe it is a fable.”

“No, I believe....” But Pilar, who was less generous than her friend, did not finish her sentence.

“The idea arose,” she added, “from a certain likeness....”

“In Monina?”

“To Leon—I do not know what to think. It seems to me beyond a doubt that the connection is of old standing.”

María bounced from her chair; there is no other word for that spring, like a stag’s when wounded in his sleep, and she rushed to seize the black merino gown in order to start at once.

“Do not be precipitate, do not be rash,” said her mother, detaining her. “You cannot go at this time of day. It is quite dusk.”

“What does that matter?”

“No, you really must not.”

The evening had in fact come down on them and the room was almost dark. “Lights—bring lights!” cried María, “I cannot bear this gloom.”

“I think that you ought to go,” her mother went on; “but not to-night, to-morrow.”

“Marquesa, have you fully considered the step?” asked her friend. “Will it not be a humiliation; would not silent contempt be more dignified?”

“Oh!” said the affectionate and anxious mother; “I even hope for a reconciliation.”

In truth her hopes were small, but it was what she most ardently desired.

“A reconciliation! what madness! And you, María, do you believe in a reconciliation?”

“I, I do not know, I cannot tell,” said María, helpless to answer that or any other question. “I do not ask for reconciliation but for punishment.”

“Oh! my dear, we are not acting a melodrama,” cried the marquesa spreading out her hands with the affected solemnity of a white-robed priest on the opera stage. “Peace, peace! be calm María; yes you must go, and go dressed like other folks. That smell of dyed woolen ... pah! it is intolerable.”

The two marquesas laughed at the jest, while Pilar threw the objectionable garment aside. María glanced at it revengefully as much as to say: “Why are you not silk, and well made, and fashionable?”

For the first time since she had renounced worldly things the plain uniform of sanctity, which yesterday she would not have exchanged for royal robes, struck her as ugly.

“The question of dress will be easily solved,” said Pilar, “you and I are much alike in figure; I will bring some of my gowns for you to choose from.”

“And a mantle?”

“Yes, and a hat.”

“At what time will you start?”

“At once.”

“No, to-morrow at noon,” said the mother, “we must not neglect the proprieties—the

proper time and opportunity."

"I must go home to dinner, and I will return afterwards," said Pilar. "I will bring you what I have that is most suitable, for you to choose from. We will make you quite beautiful. The worst thing that could happen would be for Pepa Fúcar to laugh at you for fun. I shall be back again in an hour and a half; we have no one coming to see us this evening, and my husband is dining out with Higadillos and some other bull-fighters, and a couple of deputies. Au revoir, my dear—good-night, Milagros." She kissed them both and disappeared.

During her absence the marquesa ate a little dinner; María none, though there was no fast enjoined by the church almanac. Pilar by-and-bye returned with a carriage-load of elegant raiment—beautiful dresses, mantles, parasols, hats; and that nothing might be wanting she even brought boots of the latest make and silk stockings haute nouveauté. This was the sack-cloth worn by this coquettish votary of the faith!

The servants and the maid brought everything up and the sofas and chairs were covered. Pilar, who was a capital show-woman told them to place this gown here, and that hat there, so as to display them to the best advantage. María sat gazing seriously enough at the gay colours, the wonderful shapes and whimsical decorations devised by French milliners. She looked, but she did not seem to see.

"Well what do you think? Which dress will you wear?"

"This is pretty," said María pointing at one at random. "Who made it for you?" And then again she sat gloomily staring before her. She was like a reveller who has been long absent and is astonished to find the fashions changed.

"What a tight shape!" she said.

"This pearl-grey will suit you."

"No, I would rather wear black," she said.

"That black corded silk with pale straw colour. That suits you to perfection; I admire your taste though the season is not far advanced it is hot. Which hat will you have?"

María looked at three hats that Pilar displayed. After long meditation she said: "That black one with—what do you call that colour—cream? and the bird is pretty too with those pale roses."

"Ah!" exclaimed Pilar admiringly, "if you had not given up the world for more than a single day you could not do better. How well you have chosen. Very well, now you shall try them on. We must see if the gown fits you; it can be taken in, or let out; I brought my maid, and between us ..."

Before María could say a word her mother, Pilar, and the maid had begun to divest her of the coarse grey flannel dress which looked like the gown of some poverty-stricken priestling. But at this proceeding María felt a slight reaction.

"Mercy!" she cried, "what are you doing?"

"Silly, silly child," said the marquesa, "even at such a crisis can you not forget the follies of your exaggerated devotion?"

María allowed herself to be led into the next room and in front of a looking-glass; but the mirror was covered with a black curtain and looked more like a catafalque. They pulled it aside, and in the glass was born, as one might say, the charming image of María Sudre—a sudden creation as it seemed in her eyes.

"Good Heavens!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands, "how thin I am!"

"Yes a little fallen away, but prettier, much prettier than ever," said her mother enthusiastically.

"Lovely, charmante!... Juana, come and dress this hair," said Pilar to the maid, who was famous as a hair-dresser.

"Be clever now; something simple. Just a knot that we may judge of the effect of the hat."

Juana quickly unfastened María's plaits to begin her work, while María, after looking at herself for a few minutes, fixed her eyes on her lap and seemed to be praying in silence. She had seen her marble shoulders and snowy throat and the sight had filled her with conscientious alarms. Perhaps the reaction might have spurred her to resistance. If an arrow shot from her mother's well-aimed bow had not diverted her thoughts.

"When I look at you, my darling, it is incredible to me how that red-haired Pepa Fúcar...."

María's jealousy started her into life again as a jaded horse is roused by the spur. Her eyes flashed as they saw themselves in the glass. "How lovely God has made us!" they seemed to say. She turned her head from side to side, looking out of the corner of her eye to see as much as she could of her profile. Yes, it was a fair vision! her paleness was becoming; she might have been taken for a convalescent love-sick angel.

In no time at all Juana had dressed her hair high, so perfectly becoming to María's face and shape that the most famous coiffeur could have done no better; it was hailed with an exclamation of surprise, and María herself gazed in admiration, though she could not smile. Then, having induced her to return to the room where stood a large pier glass, they dressed her in a long princess gown, not an easy operation now that her hair was done.

"Oh! how handsome she is! odious creature," cried the owner of the garment with a pinch of envy. "Now the mantle; we will try this cashmere wrap with embroidery and a fringe. It was made by a disciple of Worth's."

María obeyed blindly, allowing herself to be dressed, watching the process in the glass with anxious eyes, and involuntarily giving herself the moods and attitudes which were needed. The maid held up the light to show the charming picture.

"Now for the hat!"

This was the finishing touch, and Pilar would trust no hands but her own with the delicate task. It was like crowning a queen. She lifted the hat and placed it carefully on her friend's head. What a result! what a success! what a triumph of the æsthetic arts! María was dressed. Complete and perfect in fashion and style! A fashion plate of flesh! Indeed, as she stood, she seemed the ideal and type of good taste; of that perfection of dress combined with the perfection of beauty which produce those distracting charms to which the prudence, the dignity, and sometimes the wealth and salvation of men are sacrificed. Alas! poor Adam! to think that there was a time when for full-dress you had only to pluck a leaf from the first fig-tree!

"Now I am going," said Pilar. "I have seen the effect; to-morrow I will come back and dress you myself. I leave you everything complete: shoes, stockings—look what pretty ones—take the blue pair. Will my shoes fit you? I think so. Here are a pair of high boots and a pair of shoes.... I have even brought you gloves, for, if I am not mistaken, you have none.—Good-bye till to-morrow."

She kissed her noisily and whispered in her ear: "To-morrow will be a day of trial for you. I will order tapers to be lighted before the Holy Picture in San Prudencio—but the Lord will uphold you, poor dear saint and martyr! By the way, my dear, the ceremony at San Lucas' to-day had all that aspect—that veneer, so to speak—of vulgar display that sticks to everything that Antoñita de Rosafría takes in hand. You should have seen the hangings and the flags! It was like a political demonstration. If they had struck up Riego's hymn, I should not have been astonished. And, oh, my dear, what a sermon! You should hear that man's squeaky voice! As for edification!—Well, I must not stay any longer; it is growing late. Good-bye. But one thing strikes me: shall I have tapers lighted before Our Lady of Sorrows?"

"Yes," said María eagerly, "Our lady of Sorrows."

"Good-bye Milagros; to-night I have my place at the opera; I shall be in time for two

acts of The Huguenots.... To-morrow then, at noon."

"At noon, and bring Juana—I will bring my dressing-case, for in this house there is not even a powder puff."

"Good-night—good-night."

CHAPTER IV. SUING OR DEFIANT?

The marquesa begged her daughter to go to bed, and María gladly obeyed, for she was very weary. She slowly divested herself of the handsome garments which had so unexpectedly resuscitated the beautiful young woman she had once been, and retired to her alcove. She was shivering with cold and had sunk into a fit of deep melancholy. After a long silence, during which she lay watching her mother with anxious eyes, she turned her face to the images, pictures, and relics which made her alcove a sort of oratory, and began to pray. The marquesa, who could also on great occasions make a due display of fervour, knelt kissing the feet of a crucifix.

"Give me my rosary, mamma," said María; and the marquesa took her the beads which hung at the foot of the cross.

"Now you can leave me," said her daughter. "I am sleepy, and when I have said my prayers I shall fall asleep."

The marquesa fixed the hour at which they were to set out next day. It was agreed that they should both go and that the mother should remain in the carriage while María went in to see her husband.

"My heart tells me that we shall do great things, perhaps effect a reconciliation," said the marquesa, kissing her daughter. "Now go to sleep and do not worry yourself with matters of conscience. You see the consequences of your obstinacy; honestly, my dear child, I put myself in a husband's place—any husband's; it is not that I wish to blame devotion, true devotion. Am not I a pious and sincere Catholic, though an

unworthy one? Do I fail in my religious exercise? You should have thought of this mania for sanctity before you married and took up other duties."

"One thing strikes me," said María showing clearly that she was not worrying herself about matters of conscience, "I ought to have some jewelry to-morrow—a brooch, bracelets, earrings—you can bring me anything you think proper out of the case I gave you to take care of."

"Very well," said her mother with some embarrassment. "But almost all your trinkets wanted mending—I sent them to Ansorena. But I will see...."

"Rafaela tells me that you took away all the plate yesterday."

"Yes, all of it. My dear child, I am always in a fright at your living alone in this great house. There are so many robberies."

"I do not want the plate—but tell me, did you not take the silk curtains too, and my lace, and the inlaid ink-stand and card case—oh! and those two vases, and the Sêvres jars, and the fan painted by Zamacois and the water-colour by Fortuny, and several other things?"

"You have a remarkably good memory," said the marquesa, laughing to conceal her annoyance. "Yes, I took them away. Such treasures ought not to be left in danger of robbery. Do you know that Madrid is swarming with burglars?"

"Then bring me my watch," said María turning over in bed, "I had better know the time to a minute."

"Very well—but I remember it is gone to be mended. It did not go."

"Then I must do without it; goodnight, mamma."

"To-morrow at ten. I will be here in time to dress you. Goodnight, my darling."

But María could not sleep. For the first time in her life she realised one of her earliest dreams of pious mortification; she had imagined the possibility of lying on a bed of brambles, so that her body being tormented to the great edification of the

soul, she might the better emulate the penitent saints whose lives she had read with such enthusiasm. That night her bed was a bed of thorns, till it became a bed of burning coals, and seemed to scorch her limbs. She felt like St. Laurence on his gridiron, or St. John in his cauldron; she could generally get to sleep by repeating her prayers, but to-night they hung buzzing on her lips, like bees at the door of a hive, while her brain seemed on fire, writhing like some soul in the depths of hell, nipped and stung by Satan's ministers. She could bear it no longer; in her ears was a continual hissing like frying; it bewildered her brain; her very eyes ached in the dark. She sprang out of bed and struck a light.

"Now," she said to herself, as she slipped some clothes on. "Now, this minute!"

Without stopping to put on her shoes and stockings she went to look at the clock in her boudoir, her heart sank when she saw that it only marked one. Still so early! She calculated how long it would be till sunrise; then she shut herself into her boudoir. Who can tell what she did there? In the silence of the night and of empty rooms the clocks, with their regular ticking, like breathing, seem to live and watch. Perched on the chimney-shelves, these bronze personages, with faces like masks with twelve eyes, would make us believe that they can hear and understand by the same internal organs which produce that ceaseless and rythmical beat. The clock in María's boudoir was the only witness to her proceedings; the portrait of Leon even knew nothing about them, for it hung with its face to the wall. The clock heard her, then, as she opened and shut various trunks; heard the pleasant splash of water as it flowed into the marble bath and over the rounded limbs of a human statue, dancing and rippling like the waters of a fountain in which alabaster tritons and nymphs disport themselves among translucent jets, cascades, and clouds of spray. The impudent rogue of a clock chuckled to itself as it steadily snapped its hundred teeth; it was long since it had heard such music. Then it smelt the faint, sweet savour of perfumes—it was long since that scent had been used there.

María returned to the boudoir carrying the light with her, and her first glance was at the dial near which she placed the candle. A quarter past two. Oh, what a bore is a clock that insists on telling you that it is very early! She had wrapped herself in an ample white sheet like a cloak, which helped to produce a reaction after the cold bath; her face was a little blue, but none the less charming, and her small hands clutched the wrapper to gather it round her, as a dove folds her grey wings over her white breast. The reaction from cold water is rapid and complete. She soon felt warm again, and then, as the reversed portrait caught her eye, she raised her arms to take it down—but it was too high. She mounted on a chair to reach it, and we have it on the authority of the clock that his mistress in her light attire was a charming figure which he opened his twelve eyes wide to gaze at.

María unhooked the portrait and, turning it round, set it upon a chair. There, as if he were present in the flesh, were the manly bust, the clever head, the deep honest eyes of Leon Roch; it was like the sudden entrance of a living person. María was strangely startled; all her blood rushed to her heart, leaving her veins empty and chill; breathless and rigid, she looked at the picture as though it were the apparition of some one long dead, or the embodiment of a face in a dream. It did not frown at her but gazed with a serene and kind expression—the natural expression of a warm and loyal nature. María stooped forward; her face was close to the portrait—then she drew back; with her hand she wiped off a little dust, and having done this, she kissed her husband—once, twice, thrice, on different parts of his face. At that instant she heard a dull, smothered chuckle—it was the clock, taking a deeper breath with the hoarse effort that is preparatory to its striking.

Three o’clock! the creature was growing more amiable and was getting the better of its mania for asserting that it was early. The house, as has been said, was on the outskirts of the city, and she could hear the cocks crowing to proclaim the end of this miserable, dreary, never-ending night.

"It will soon be day," thought María. "As soon as it is day I will set out."

Then she proceeded to dress. All the things that Pilar had brought were lying on the chairs, and, but that there were on the walls three several pictures of St. Joseph, the room might have been taken for that of a woman of the world after a night of dissipation.

María examined the colours of the silk stockings and finally selected the blue pair which she pulled over the rosy feet. Shoes were a more difficult matter; she tried the boots and shoes—happily her friend's foot seemed to be the twin brother to her own—but she doubted as to the particular pair—boots or shoes? A question as important as the greater alternative: Heaven or Hell?

After much hesitation the boots were definitely discarded and she decided on the shoes—high shoes of bronze kid, Louis XV. shape, and embroidered with steel—gems in their way. María looked at them for a long time and then put them on. She had very pretty feet—prettiest of all when bare—still, she must have shoes on as a social necessity, though it was not de rigeur in the days of Venus; and María looked down with satisfaction at the artificial beauties of feet with which not Daphne herself could have run, but which, nevertheless, were pretty enough to behold. She placed her foot firmly on the ground, contemplating the ankle; she turned on her heel and moved the pointed toe, almost like a thimble; the foot as well as the face has an expression of its own. María was satisfied and gave her mind to other matters.

Stays; coiffure; two important matters which could not be attended to together. The first is sometimes a question of strength; the second a sublime work of art. María began with the more serious matter, and it needed no hydraulic pressure to imprison her slender waist. The hair-dressing was a greater difficulty. She seated herself at the dressing-table in a meditative attitude, with her hands raised like a priest who pauses to pray before touching some sacred object, and at length, after various attempts she

succeeded in restoring to some extent the structure that Juana had achieved the previous evening—a perfectly simple knot, as it had to be in the absence of various articles of the toilet. But it was becoming, and that was the main point. No puffs or padding.

The rest of her toilet was on the lines of last night's rehearsal: the black silk dress, with its linings and trimmings of straw colour; the hat, which might have been the creation of fairy hands.... Nothing could be better or more bewitching. María gazed at herself in astonishment; she was a different woman! It could not be she who was so beautiful. It was magic. Nay, a good Catholic could not believe in magic! It was a special mercy of Heaven, a providential interposition, to enable her to carry out a meritorious purpose. It could be none other than God who had lent her such exceptional beauty and such brilliant and becoming attire. Superstition clung to her soul as a limpet sticks by suction to a rock.

"God consents, it is God's will—" she said to herself, eagerly seizing on the idea.

Then she looked at herself once more—in front, in profile—yes, she looked well. How slender and well-formed she was, how gracefully her head was poised on her shoulders! The misty veil slightly shaded her pale face, as it might be the shadow of a bird flying by and pausing to admire so sweet a picture. There was a sort of symbolical passion in the depths of the black velvet with lights of straw-coloured silk; in that sombre nimbus with sulphurous gleams framing her delicate complexion there was a perfect harmony; and in those melancholy sea-blue eyes, that looked as if a threat lurked under their sadness, a revenge under their pain, under their tenderness a dagger.

"Gloves!" she exclaimed, "where are they? How provoking if Pilar should have forgotten to leave them."

She found them however, and put them on.

"I have no trinkets, but that is of no consequence—I have my virtue," she added to

herself, “that is the only thing that really matters.”

After another glance in the mirror she went on: “Yes, I am handsome—if only I can say just what I feel.... If I can find the right words....”

She pulled the bell, startling all the household. The servants were some time getting up, but at last they appeared. Her maid, who came sleepy and stupid into her room, was astounded at seeing her mistress ready dressed—and so beautifully dressed! María desired her to send Señor Pomares to her at once. The worthy man, who had been recalled after Leon’s departure, presently made his appearance, with a puffy, stupid face and tottering with the bewildered air of a man who has been roused from his deepest and sweetest slumbers. But María did not look at him.

“Order the carriage to be got ready at once,” she said. The steward looked blank with astonishment.

“But—you forget,” he said, “you forget...?”

“What?”

“That the carriage is gone.”

“To be sure, very true,” said María. “I had forgotten. Well, send for a hired carriage, a landau.”

“At this hour?”

“Is it not daylight?”

“Dawn is only just breaking.”

“What has that to do with it? It seems to me that you want to make difficulties ... you are of no use at all—”

Pomares was dumbfounded. So hasty ... so violent.... His mistress must be mad.

“Well, why do you not stir, in Heavens name?” she exclaimed, “why do you stand staring at me? A carriage, and at once, at any cost!”

“Very good, Señora; I will go and see.”

"At once; as quickly as possible. I want to be off as soon as it is light."

After infinite trouble Pomares, dragging his weary limbs from one place to another, succeeded in hiring a carriage; but not till the day was somewhat far advanced. María burning with impatience, waited in her room. She took a cup of black coffee, and then alternately paced the room and paused to pray, or sat sunk in thought.

When at length the landau was announced she started up, and going straight to a pretty little cupboard she took out a bottle of not remarkably pure water. Her lips moved, muttering no doubt a prayer, while she poured part of the contents into a silver cup; then, carefully lifting her veil she drank that water which was from the sacred Grotto at Lourdes.

CHAPTER V. THE ICE GIVES WAY.

María had not gone more than half a mile when a terrible reflection occurred to her—a thought at once so serious and so obvious that she was on the point of turning back. It struck her that her dress, having been chosen with a view to an afternoon drive, was unsuitable for so early a visit—nay, ridiculous not to say "loud." How could she have overlooked this when she was dressing? Why had she not chosen other and simpler things, more suitable according to all the accepted laws of society for morning wear? She was really upset and distressed; however, there was now no remedy; so, though she was vexed to think that on such an occasion she should not be a model of good taste, she consoled herself with the reflection that beauty lays down the laws of fashion and has never been its slave. Other and more important matters soon put all thoughts of dress out of her head. As she drove along she tried to compose and remember appropriate phrases and speeches. She knew exactly what her husband would say, and how she, as the outraged wife, ought to reply. Sentence after sentence surged up in her brain as readily as if it were the crucible of the Spanish Academy. Now and then an adjective seemed too weak and she substituted

a stronger one; here and there a statement of fact gave way to a hypothesis; and thus anticipating the utterance of her wrath and injuries, she grew so excited that she spoke aloud to herself.

She paid no heed to the road along which she was being carried, nor to any object she passed. At the same time, as frequently happens when the mind is full of a fixed group of ideas, María, while she took no conscious note of the more important details, involuntarily absorbed certain trivial and minute ones. She observed a dead bird lying by the road, and a tavern sign-board in which the letter A was missing; as she passed the tram-car she perceived that the driver was blind of one eye. This is one of the commonest and oddest of mental phenomena.

At length she reached the hamlet, or rather detached suburb—neither town nor country, but an irregular medley of mansions and dung-hills. Not knowing precisely which way to go, she enquired of some women who civilly directed her; the man drove on. Now she was near the house—it must be quite close. Her heart throbbed wildly, and all the speeches she had so laboriously prepared deserted her at once.

The carriage stopped ... she could hardly stand. She saw a gate leading into a large court-yard, full of furniture cases, and an iron bed packed for moving. There was a woman too, talking to some one she could not see. María went in and approached her; then, to her horror, she saw that she was talking to herself; was she mad? But María asked for Don Leon Roch.

“Don Leon Roch?” said Facunda with a good-humoured smile after a pause of astonishment. “He is up there.” And she pointed to a door through which a staircase was visible.

María hurried up, but about half way she was forced to stop for breath. At the top she went into a large light room; there was no one there.

She saw books, articles of furniture that she recognised, all in confusion as packed for removal, but no one ... no one.

Suddenly, like a bird that hops out of a hedge at the sound of a voice, a little girl appeared from behind a table. She held a broken doll and was eating a piece of bread. She was warmly wrapped up, and on her head she wore a little white hood, very much like a nun's. Her face was that of a cherub, if a cherub can be supposed to have a little wet nose from a cold sharp morning. Monina fixed her eyes on the dazzling vision that had suddenly appeared in the doorway and stared at it speechless and motionless. This was not a lady; it was a doll, a very large doll dressed like a lady, and the child's astonishment soon changed to alarm. She saw the figure come slowly towards her without taking her eyes off her ... and such eyes! Monina turned white and would have cried out but she was too frightened. This enormous doll came slowly up to her without seeming to walk, and when it had reached her it stooped down ... the poor little thing was too much terrified to scream; those eyes had turned her to stone. It put out a hand and laid it on Monina's shoulder. Then, clutching the little arm, it squeezed it tighter—tighter—like an iron vice, while in a voice which Monina did not recognise as human, but rather as the strange croak which dwells in a doll's body and utters "papa" and "mamma," it asked her:

"Who are you? What is your name?"

The instinct of self preservation conquered her terrors, and at last poor Ramona found her voice. She gave a shrill cry and pulled away her arm. Leon Roch came to the door of the adjoining room where he too stood still, like a statue in a niche. Unlike St. Thomas, he saw but he could not believe. For a minute or two he could not shake off his dismay and astonishment, seeing clearly the dilemma in which he was placed. Her appearance there was extraordinary no doubt, but anything rather than absurd; what was absurd, was her coming fashionably bedizened with such extravagant elegance at this hour of the morning. It was a phenomenon which had formed no factor in his calculations and which was, so far, perfectly inexplicable. Having presently mastered his feelings and determined to face the scene that was

evidently inevitable, Leon, before saying a word to his wife, took Monina's hand, went to the top of the stairs and called some one to whom he entrusted the child; then, turning back into the room, he shut the door resolutely, like a lion-tamer who locks himself in with the savage favourites, who, to him, are, after all, only part of his family.

María had seated herself; in fact she could hardly stand.

"You did not expect me?" she said tremulously.

"No, I certainly did not."

"You thought you were free! poor man ... free to pursue ... without a road ... free, I mean, to pursue the road of infamy without let or hindrance. No, no! you must account to ... to me...."

All the speeches that María had in fancy delivered with so much unction had evaporated, word by word. She made a desperate effort to remember a single effective phrase; in vain! they were gone. She could hardly catch at a word as they whirled through her brain, and she could only cry out in a husky voice:

"Guilty wretch!"

Leon smiled slightly and María went on: "Wretch! I am here to apprehend you."

"Very well," said Leon calmly accepting the idea. "But allowing that I am guilty, and a wretch, and that you are the police—you have no chain to fetter me with because you yourself have broken it."

María had prepared her rejoinders on the supposition that her husband would answer her as she had imagined; but as Leon said something quite different she was in the position of an actor who has lost his cues.

"The chain," she murmured, not at the instant understanding what he meant, "and I, you say, have broken it."

"Yes, you. Who but you gave me my liberty?"

“You are a wretch, a libertine, a villain!” cried María dropping into the vulgar recrimination of every angry wife. “Liberty? What do you mean by it? You have none. You are my husband—tied to me by a bond that none but God can sever, since it was He who bound us. You abominable materialists think that the ordinance of matrimony is a thing to be played fast and loose with. I tell you it is a divine institution.”

“And a human institution as well. But we need not bandy words María. Tell me what did you come here for?”

“And now he dares to ask me what I came for!” she exclaimed, her nervousness giving way to a frenzy of wrath. “I will tell you. I came to require of you an account of your criminal behaviour, to surprise you in your lair, to put you to open shame, and then—and then to scorn you.”

“But you could have scorned me without coming here.”

“I wished to see whether you had a remnant of shame and decency; whether I could surprise you, face to face; if you would dare to confess your sin....”

“You have, you see, surprised me somewhat,” said Leon raising his eyes. “As regards my sins, if I have committed any, it is not to you that I owe a confession.”

“What audacious impudence!... But I came for something more,” added María livid with rage. “I came in the hope of finding here that abandoned woman, and of giving her the name she deserves; to ...” She clenched her fists and her eyes glared.

“What woman?”

“The hypocrite can ask! I do not name her for it would stain my lips ... do you dare to tell me that you are not on terms of disgraceful—of criminal intimacy with her?”

“With whom?”

“With her....” And she pointed in the direction of Suertebella.

“María” said Leon gravely and turning pale, “I do not like to see you a propagator of

base slander. I should find it very difficult to cease to respect you; but if you wish that I should never fail in the consideration which I owe to you, never repeat that question. Be silent ... go ... leave me. You do not want my love since your religion is all in all to you; go, serve your altars, and leave me alone with my conscience."

María drew herself up, clenching her arms against her breast like a wild beast preparing to spring; her eyes for a moment seemed dimmed, but the next instant they flashed fire.

"Coward, villain!" she exclaimed. "Do you dare to tear yourself away from me, your lawful wife, the wife to whom you belong and whom you shall never escape!... No, never—since God has pronounced us one? Who are you, a miserable wretch, to desecrate a sacrament and disobey the Father of us all?"

"Desecrate a sacrament? I ... I?" Leon stood up and went close to his wife. "It is not I," he said, "who desecrate the sacrament."

"Who then?"

"You," he said, pointing with his finger so close to her face that it was as if he meant to put out her eyes.

"I?"

"You.—You cast it to the winds. When I was trying to save our home and peace you said to me: 'My God requires me to say that I do not love you.'"

For a second María was abashed and silent; her wrath had abated a little.

"It is true that I said that. And, after all, if you desire my love, why do you not try to merit it by becoming a Christian and a Catholic. In spite of your wicked atheism I cannot say that I do not love you ... a little. But oh! why are you not like me? Why do you not imitate my piety?"

"Because it is beyond me," he retorted sarcastically, "because there are forms of piety so unnatural, so insane, so absurd, silly and irrational.... But at least you must

admit that it was you, you yourself who desecrated the sacrament."

"But I," replied his wife, catching at a cogent argument. "I have been faithful and you have not."

Leon was staggered for an instant.

"I have been faithful too," he said. "I swear it before God and by the sacred memory of my father and mother! Faithful, tender and kind to the last extremity—even when you, carried away by a sickly piety, and by the example and ardent warnings of your hapless brother, built up a wall of ice between your soul and mine. You refused to bestow on me even the commonplaces of affection, the gentle words and tones which may take the place of love when love is dead; you humiliated me with your senseless scruples and cruel recriminations, that bore a hideous resemblance to vulgar abuse; you made my home empty and dark, casting a gloom over it that oppressed my heart, dried my brain, and embittered my blood; you took a delight in neglecting your person to the extent even of sluttishness; to annoy me more deeply you dressed in absurd and shapeless clothes, and took a pride in making yourself repulsive and odious. Every word I spoke you regarded as blasphemy, and all my thoughts and feelings were crimes worthy to be punished by the inquisition. You were mad and blind! If you felt called to such a career of sanctity why did you not try to imitate the patience—a saintly patience, surely—with which I endured your proud assumption of humility, your unchristian bitterness, and your devotion, which for insolence, vexatiousness and recalcitrancy was for all the world like the pranks of a troup of demons playing the part of angels with masks on.

"And you come to me—to me who have borne all this—to me whom you have hated and tormented—to me! and call me to account instead of asking my forgiveness. 'Pardon,' María is the only word that it becomes you to utter this day! after all your bigotry, and hypocrisy, and insults, you desire me to account to you ... for what? A woman who has told her husband that she does not love him cannot call him to

account. I have been more than considerate in not declaring our marriage as void, in still acknowledging you as my wife, in regarding myself as still bound to you by some invisible tie, in asking not for liberty but only for peace—not for compensation but only for respite!"

"You might indeed lodge some complaint against me," retorted María, "if, since that time, you had been as faithful to me as I have been to you. But you have not; nay you have long, long been false to me."

"It is not true."

"Yes, false and faithless," she insisted, clinging to the statement with feverish vehemence. "And instead of defending yourself you turn upon me! Those are the tactics of every clever criminal.... I was blind, ignorant of your perfidy. You have cheated me shamefully!"

"It is not true."

"For a long time, for years."

"Not true."

"But at last it has all come to my knowledge. I have discovered the whole truth. You cannot deny it, for the present throws light on the past and your crime of to-day betrays that of yesterday. You have lost all decency; you do not even hide the distant date of your intimacy—and here, in this house, where you have buried yourself to revel in your sin, you pass whole days playing with that child ... with that sniffling little brat!..."

Leon glared at his wife with a terrible expression; his eyes darted arrows of wrath. María drew a deep breath and added in a hoarse voice: "With her child—which is yours."

With livid lips and a murderous glare in his eyes, looking as an assassin may in the very act, Leon went up to his wife and seizing her by the arm he shook her in his

fury:

“It is a calumny,” he said, “a lie....”

Then he let her go, swallowing down the rest of the words that were on his tongue.

María stung and devoured by all the serpents of jealousy, had no words for the rage that burned within her; for when jealousy has reached a certain pitch it cannot find utterance—it must act. Her revenge could not be satisfied with anything less than the destruction of the innocent cause of her indignation. To tear Monina limb from limb was what her passion prompted her to do, and without a moment’s hesitation she acted on the impulse; she snatched up the doll that Monina had left on a chair and tore it to pieces—arms, legs, hair—the trembling hands of the outraged wife wreaked her vengeance on the senseless toy. Then, flinging the fragments away, she exclaimed in broken gasps:

“There ... that ... that is how your lawful wife ought to treat her ... her....” She was almost choking.

Leon, recovering his self-command, spoke again.

“I should have thought you incapable of becoming the mouthpiece of such an infamous slander. Of what use is piety if it leaves you in ignorance of the first elements of charity? You never can have had any feelings!”

“Oh yes, I had once,” said María exhausted by her own rage. “But I can thank God that I have not transmitted them to any child of yours. He has blessed me in making me childless, as He has blessed other women in giving them children. He could not grant a family to an atheist!”

“Your blasphemy appals me,” said Leon, who could endure no more. “Can a sacrament be more utterly annulled, or a bond more effectually cut? Between you and me, María, there is a great gulf—bottomless and infinite; a space of endless desert in which, try as I may, I cannot see a single idea or feeling that we can have in common. Let us part forever; do not try to bring together two distinct worlds which

cannot approach each other without tempest and lightnings. If there ever were two irreconcilable beings, we are they. For I too am a fanatic; you have taught me to be, like you, a bigot—an ardent, even a relentless bigot. We will part, each to his own shore, and let the waste that lies between us be as the ocean of oblivion. Nay, to soothe our consciences, I will say the ocean of forgiveness. Each may forgive; both may forget ... good-bye."

While he was speaking María's feelings of anger and revenge had given way to other and very different sentiments, calmer and more contemplative, which by degrees took absolute possession of her agitated mind. She looked at her husband and found him—why should she deny it?—worthier than ever to be the friend and companion of a loving wife. His face had a charm of its own, with the dark beard that gave it an indefinable expression of romantic melancholy, with the eager eyes and broad brow, on which a reflected gleam of sunshine at that moment fell, like a beam of glory on that wise and intelligent head. This mute contemplation of his manly good looks appealed directly to her heart and made it beat with excitement. Her first and only love revived; she remembered the happiness of the early days of their marriage and against the background of these memories the fact stood out that the man was interesting, attractive, and—why not confess it?—very good-looking; she could not take her eyes off his face. 'But not for her—for another woman!' This was the spark that fired the whole edifice, that scathed and rent her soul, so that all her piety leaked out, so to speak. This was the diabolical idea that turned her ice to fire, her scorn to a tenderer passion and all that was harsh in her nature to gentleness—that lent grace and elegance even to her absurd dress. She was desperately in love, in short, from jealousy rather than from sympathy. It was a fearful blow to her to hear herself calmly dismissed—with a friendly pardon, it is true—but still definitely dismissed. She could have borne to accept her dismissal and part from him for ever; she might even forget him, and forgive him for having ceased to love her ... but that he should love another....

“No, never, never!” she exclaimed, as the result of her reflections; and her eyes sparkled through tears. But she would not confess the weakness, and hastily drying her eyes she went on:

“One night you asked me....”

“Yes, I asked you....”

“And I told you that God forbid my love for you ... and it is true; God did forbid it. I felt it in my soul, but yet ... you see, you should not have taken the answer. You should have asked once more.”

“But I had asked you so often, and in so many different ways.”

“Well, now I ask you,” and she went up to him and laid her hands on his shoulders; “I ask you: ‘Do you still love me?’” Leon’s nature rebelled against a lie. He paused to question his conscience. For an instant he thought that a generous falsehood would be the nobler course; but then he revolted against the notion of a mock devotion. Almost before he had thought out the matter the truth broke from his lips.

“No.... My God ... mine, María, compels me to say No.”

She dropped back into her seat. It was with a sort of roar that she exclaimed:

“Your God is a fiend!”

“You have no claim to anything more than my respect.”

“You love some one else?” she went on, gnawing the corner of her handkerchief, “tell me the truth.... I know you are truthful ... confess it and I will leave you in peace for ever.”

“But I deny your right to ask,” said Leon after a moment’s hesitation.

“Deny my right if you will; but reply.”

Leon was on the point of saying: “Well then I do.” But there are cases in which the truth is a form of murder; when it is baser than a lie.

“Well then,” he said, “no.”

“Your face betrays you, it is false!” said María starting up.

“My face?”

“You never used to tell lies.... I know that you never told lies. But this minute you prove to me that you have lost even that grace!”

Leon made no reply, and María, after a short pause, went on:

“I have no further business here....” Still he said nothing; he did not even look at her. “None, none,” she said. “I blush to think that I should ever have crossed the threshold of this abode of scandal and wickedness.”

She moistened her parched lips with her tongue, but there was a bitter dryness on both, compared to which aloes are as honey for sweetness. Her impulse was to spit out something ... to spit out that other She whose name was as the savour of fruits plucked in the court of hell. She stammered some inarticulate words and bit her lips till the blood came.

“It is a shame ... a disgrace!” she muttered. “To have fallen to such depths ... to have flung myself at the feet of this wretch ... a woman like me ... a woman!...” She was too angry to shed tears—even tears of rage. “Scorned ... despised....”

“Despised, no,” said her husband, moving towards her with an impulse of generosity.

“Despised as if I were a....”

“Never despised....”

“Not even....”

“Well?”

“Not worthy of your consideration.”

“Consideration, certainly ...” said Leon who was as much disturbed as she was; but she was going through a phase of reaction into the depths of dejection.

“To you,” she went on, “I am not even good to look at. You hate the sight of me; I

have lost....”

“No,” said Leon “I swear to you that, since I first met you, I have never seen you so beautiful as you are to-day.”

“And yet,” she cried writhing in her chair, “and yet you do not love me....”

“You,” retorted Leon “you who have so much cultivated the spiritual life must surely know that beauty of face and person is not what can best captivate the soul!”

“And to you my nature is hideous?” And she struck her forehead with a wild groan, as though she had suddenly remembered some vital fact or had come to her right mind after an interval of mental delusion. “How should it be otherwise when I am a Christian and you a reprobate atheist? Of course, of course ... and I have been so mad—mad do I say?—So wicked, as to take my eyes for a moment away from my Lord and Saviour to gaze on you—an infidel. I have put off my black serge to dress myself in this frippery, fit only for a lost woman, with the base purpose of pleasing—of courting you. My God! canst Thou ever forgive me?”

She snatched off her hat in delirious rage, and tearing it to fragments strewed them about the floor. In her haste she pulled down her hair which she had not fastened securely; the black locks fell about her temples and over her shoulders. She looked like a mad creature as she went close up to her husband and said to him in a low voice:

“I am as bad as you. I am an unworthy wretch. I forgot my God, my duty, and my dignity for your sake.... Wretch! I do not deserve to be called a saint, for a saint....” She glanced at her handsome dress with horror. “Women who devote themselves truly to God would not have put on this livery of sin. I am ashamed to see myself so tricked out. Away with you, for filthy rags!”

She tore the trimmings with unnatural strength, rending the stuff and ripping off the buttons, and at length she threw off her cloak and gloves and flung them into a corner.

“Enough, enough; I have stooped too low. I will return to God—to my seclusion and indifference to this world. I will curse my beauty for having pleased you. I will return to the peaceful practice of religion. No worldly humiliations can touch me then; I will find rest in sacred meditations, conversing with God and seeing the angels, and hearing the music of their songs in Heaven; I will go back to my peaceful life where, at any rate, I may be so happy as to forget you! In its gloom you will not come to curse my sight.... I have sinned and am unworthy of the least of the Lord’s mercies. Forgive, O Lord! Forgive! Never again will I sin thus.”

She fell on her knees and melted into tears that flowed in a ready torrent, while she covered her face with her trembling hands. They trickled through her fingers, and down on to her bosom, where she had torn her dress open. Leon was alarmed; the pathetic, helpless attitude and bitter fit of weeping touched him deeply. He bent over her and raising her in his arms placed her in a seat.

“María for God’s sake do not go mad,” he said. “Compose yourself—control yourself.” But she kept her hands clasped over her face.

Leon laid his hand on her shoulder, tried to rearrange her disordered hair and pull her dress round her—for she had really half-undressed herself in her fury. Suddenly she threw her arm round his neck with a convulsive energy and he felt her burning lips close to his cheek, but she did not kiss him; in a husky faint voice she said:

“I will strangle you—I will murder you if you love any one else.—Am I not handsomer, am I not more beautiful than she is?... Mine! you are mine.... Mine only....” But her grasp relaxed and her arms fell helplessly by her side; her head drooped on her breast, her hair veiling her face; a spasmodic quiver passed over her throat and neck—a shiver of the skin; he heard a faint murmur from her lips: “Dying—sinful....” And she sat in a heap speechless and unconscious. He felt her heart—her pulse; there was no perceptible flutter.

He rushed to the stairs, shouting for help. No sooner had he opened the door than the

room was full of people. Curiosity had brought the neighbours together, for they had heard loud voices; the cries they knew were uttered by the wife of Señor Leon Roch, and a wife who cries out is a legitimate object of sympathy and curiosity. They rushed up into the room, and with them the Marquis de Fúcar, who had come to give Leon his little commission for Paris. But they all stood in helpless astonishment.

“Take her to my house at once,” said Fúcar. “Have you any brandy, any spirit? The first thing is to put her to bed, to send for a doctor.... Take her to my house.”

“No, the doctor can come here,” said Leon.

“But you have no bed,” said Fúcar looking round at the dismantled room.

“There is my bed,” said Facunda. “A king has not got a better.”

“Move away all of you—let me see. I think her heart is still beating.”

“Yes, yes, it is certainly beating,” exclaimed Leon hopefully.

“It will be nothing—merely a fainting fit—and all for a squabble! You see the consequences of exageration.... But we must get her to bed. Wrap her in a cloak—get me a cloak.”

The Marquis de Fúcar was an invaluable person in these emergencies, when prompt decision, energy, and a tone of command are indispensable. Four strong arms lifted María, wrapped her carefully in a cloak, and carried her down stairs. It was like carrying a body to be buried. Leon looked on and allowed them to act, as he would have looked on at any other step Fúcar might have taken. It was like a scene in a dream, and for some time he failed to remember that this arrangement, which from one point of view was the best thing that could be done, from another was the very reverse; but by that time the little procession had started.

Pepa’s astonishment on seeing this inanimate figure brought into her house can easily be imagined.... “Merciful Heaven! María Sudre!” and what a state she was in. She could understand the fainting fit, but it was not so easy to account for the torn

dress and dishevelled hair.

They carried her into the first bed-room they came to and laid her on the bed.

“You have forgotten the most important thing of all,” said Pepa. “To undo her stays.”

“To be sure. How stupid of us!”

And, as he spoke, Don Pedro cut the laces with his pocket-knife. The village doctor now came in; he spoke of congestion of the brain, and regarded the case as serious. A messenger was at once despatched to bring the most celebrated consulting physician of Madrid. Presently, however, an improvement was evident; María turned over, opened her eyes, and breathed more easily. If it were but a fainting fit after all.

But María as she recovered her faculties was evidently delirious; she took no heed of where she was or of those who stood by her side, not recognising her husband. After talking feebly but wildly for a few minutes she fell asleep; silence, perfect silence, was indispensable. The doctor gave some instructions and prescriptions.

“Now,” he said, “leave her in silence and darkness. There is at any rate no immediate danger; but you must not allow the slightest sound in this room or in those adjoining; and she is better alone than with more than one person in the room.” He went away.

Pepa with her finger to her lips enjoined silence. Leon and the Marquis Fúcar stood speechless, gazing at the patient. At the end of half an hour Pepa said:

“She is sound asleep and seems to be comfortable. When she wakes I will come and sit with her; I will see that she has everything she needs.”

“No, no,” Leon interposed eagerly. “I beg—I entreat you not to come into the room at all.” Pepa bowed her head and she and her father went away on tiptoe.

Leon sat down by the bed. He was still under the influence of the horror and alarm

of the first shock, and even now had no clear idea of the position in which he and his wife stood to each other. María lay still, sleeping as if she were quite tired out; the hapless husband looked vaguely round the room. He sighed. There was something eerie in the air. Presently Pepa returned through a door concealed by some hangings; Leon looked up, startled and vexed; but she came nearer evidently puzzled and inquisitive. She was paler even than María—as pale as death. Her footfall was inaudible on the thick carpet and she might have been a ghost. She took no notice of Leon's anxious gesture of warning but came close to the bed, and looked down fixedly at the sleeping woman as if she were studying the most interesting, but at the same time the most appalling, object in the universe. At her heels crept Monina, as softly as a kitten that steals in and out, and clutching at her mother's skirts in visible alarm, she pointed to the bed and whispered: "Big dolly dead."

CHAPTER VI. RETURN TO CONSCIOUSNESS.

Leon Roch sat alone, but not at peace, by the bed where his wife lay sleeping. Watching her face, to note in its varying expression anything that might be a symptom of danger or a sign of improvement, his attention wandered occasionally from the patient to himself and the painful position in which he was placed by events and persons. How was it that he had fallen into it. How was it that he had not been able to foresee and prevent this diabolical crossing of the two circles in which he moved—the two orbits of antagonistic ideas and feelings? And as he asked himself the answer came with a mocking laugh from the depths of his consciousness, in the words of his own theories at the time of his engagement and marriage. In the early days of this veracious history he had, as we know, dreamed magnificent dreams, and among others that of moulding his life by making himself its master and ruling it absolutely to his will. But the men who cherish this dream of triumph take no account of what we may call Social Destiny—an irresistible power

composed of creeds—our own and others; of personal or collective resistance; of the errors—nay of the virtues—of our neighbours; of a thousand trifles which, from time to time, must be defied or deferred to; and finally of law and custom which it is rarely permissible, or even possible, to fight single-handed.

Leon was sorry for himself; at the same time he could not help laughing himself to scorn. “It is really absurd,” he said to himself, “that a stone cannot move without rolling down hill.”

As he thought of all this and much more, he did not cease to watch the progress of his patient. Two or three times in the course of the day María roused from her torpid state, but her mind was clouded; she knew no one and talked wildly. Conscious of suffering and unable to determine or localize it she tried to fling herself out of bed, and Leon had to use some force to prevent her. Towards night she became quieter but the fever did not diminish. The doctor, however, found that her pulse was steadier. In her sleep she spoke more clearly and coherently, but at last, clasping her hands on her bosom she cried aloud: “No, no, never! He is mine—mine!” With this she woke to clear consciousness; her eyes wandered round the room examining the walls, the ceiling, the bed—she perceived that she was in a strange place. Her calm gaze showed that her mind was collected though somewhat weary and that she had recovered her powers of judgment. Seeing her husband sitting by the bed, alone, watchful, and anxious, her eyes softened and she smiled as she said: “You?”

Leon went close to her and bent down putting his hand under the coverlet to feel her pulse; she clutched at his wrist and clasped it to her breast saying with a tremulous sob:

“What a mercy, to know that it was only a dream. I saw you—it was dark, and they were going to put you into a fiery furnace. I was terrified to death—I screamed out....”

Her imagination, excited by emotion and rage had been entangled in a vortex of

horrible visions—a frenzying whirl of shapes and colours ending without colour or shape, and then had gone through an agony of terror—lost in a void of space and blackness, filled only by the very presence of Fear. As she reached the bottom of the abyss, rushing downwards with increasing impetus, she was suddenly dazzled with light. This was Hell. She saw it of course with its hideous inhabitants as she had imagined them in her waking hours from written descriptions and pictures; but as our conceptions of the supernatural are always modified by the ideas of the time, and wear the aspect of familiar scenes and objects—so that, as we know, our notion even of the Almighty varies with the age—María saw the infernal precincts as vast railway tunnels or gasometers reeking with smoke and stench, or as a murky foundry with its roaring forges and machines clashing and shrieking, with the groaning of bellows, the thud of hammers, and the glare and swelter of a furnace. The demons, while retaining their traditional guise of deformed men with hoofs and tails, seemed to toil like smiths and scavengers, like the myrmidons of a gas-factory or of a coal-mine, the Cyclops of Birmingham or Sheffield. All were grimy, and bathed in sweat, and shiny as with the exuded grease of machinery. It was a gulf formed by the meeting of tunnels, and galleries, and iron causeways; the atmosphere was a mixture of coal dust, sulphur, gas and petroleum—the odour was most abhorrent to our heroine. In the midst of it all there was a tumult, a noise, a turmoil of which she could have given no conception but by saying that a thousand trains rushed at express speed on a central point and met—but no sooner was the catastrophe accomplished than it at once began again. Locomotives were in fact the principal feature in the Inferno of her delirious dream; she saw them tearing past, flying with wings tipped with claws of iron, snorting, groaning, rolling fiery eyes, and breathing out smoke and sparks and steam. Though they were as large—as she thought—as in real life, in that infinite void they were as a cloud of flies buzzing stupendously.

Soon after their marriage Leon and María had made a tour in Germany where, among other things, they had seen Krupp’s great foundry works at Essen. The scene

had made a deep impression on María that had never quite been effaced, and in this torment of hallucination the images brought away from that immense laboratory played a leading part in the composition of the picture of the eternal limbo whither men are consigned for their sins. Smaller foundries of the same kind, at Barcelona and in France, had supplied various details and gave movement to the terrific scene. The damned were spun round in a lathe and rounded off like cannons or passed between rollers, coming out as flat as paper; then they were cast into the white heat of the furnace and recovered their natural form. Some were put into chains and their heads laid on an anvil under a gigantic hammer that crushed their skulls. The inferior demons—the rabble rout of Hell, amused themselves by drilling holes in the skulls of some of their victims, and inserting a spoonful of fused metal—the extract of a heap of books which were seething in a bulky black cauldron, a hell-broth of heretical ideas. Others, whose crime was evil-speaking of sacred things, had their tongues torn out by particularly hideous fiends, and these tongues, hundreds and thousands of them, were twisted together to form a rope which was then hung to the vault, looking like strings of sausages put there to dry. Others again were put through a strange torment, almost impossible to describe. The wretches were knotted together, legs with arms, and arms with heads, into a string or chain—a tissue of suffering and wailing. This chain was then dragged out by a huge screw, till its length was stretched from miles to leagues, while the bones cracked with a noise like that of nuts trampled on by a thousand horses, and the flesh was racked and torn; and these again, being flung into the furnace, recovered their original shape to go once more through the same torture.

María saw all this in an anguish of terror: She was there, and she was not; she could not shriek, she could not even breathe. But at length there came a moment when terror gave way to grief. Among the crowd of damned—guilty of unpardonable sin—was one who seemed to be especially heinous, judging from the crowd of demons, male and female, who surrounded him. This was Leon. María saw him

seized, clutched by the horrible greasy hands, cast into the boiling cauldron, dragged out with a skimmer, pushed back with a spoon. Finally they picked him up on a pitchfork and carried him to the mouth of a furnace so fiery that any earthly fire would seem as ice by comparison. Then it was that María uttered a cry, threw up her arm and hand—her arm that seemed of enormous length, her hand that smarted with the burning heat:

“No, no, never—he is mine!”

The dream was broken, it vanished like the page of a book that is suddenly closed—but the impression remained.

CHAPTER VII. WILL SHE DIE.

María awoke to find herself in a large, bare room. Her husband stood in front of her, alive and tangible. She did not recognize the place, but she felt that she was in safe hands.

“Whose house is this?” she asked.

“Mine.... Be calm. I am here.—Do you not see me?”

María’s eyes wandered round the walls, and up to the ceiling.

“What a dismal place!” she murmured. “And I—did I come here?”

Then she was silent, trying to collect her confused memories.

The morning after the event which might well be called a catastrophe, Leon had discussed with the Marquis de Fúcar and Moreno Rubio the best means of moving María back to Madrid. Don Pedro thought the scheme dangerous, and the physician had firmly opposed it, saying that, in the state in which she was, the journey, no matter how carefully managed, might result in a rapid and fatal collapse. Leon was excessively annoyed and disappointed; nay, would certainly have carried out his purpose, if the doctor had not threatened to withdraw, and give up all further

responsibility. As it was impossible to remove her from Suertebella, though it was the last spot on earth where she ought, or could wish to be, he thought that the best plan would be to dismantle the room; and by the permission of his generous host he removed all the pictures, ornaments, porcelain and bric-a-brac. The room itself was very unpretending and was only hung with a common paper, so that it now looked bare enough.

“Yes, you came here,” replied her husband, stroking her hair. “You have been ill; but you are better now; it will be nothing serious.”

“Ah yes!” said María, struck with a sudden pang of remembrance. “It was my jealousy, your infidelity that brought me here.—But is this the house?”

“This is my bedroom.”

“Those walls—that high ceiling.—Why did you not take me home at once?”

“We will go when you have rested a little.”

“What has been the matter?”

“A little over-fatigue; it will lead to nothing serious.”

“I remember—you behaved disgracefully to me. What did I say to you? Did I say I forgave you? Or did I only dream it?”

“Yes—you forgave me,” said Leon to soothe her.

“You promised you would love no one but me. You swore that you loved me, and to make me believe it you gave me proofs.... Is it so or did I dream it?”

“It is quite true.”

“Ah! and you told me you had made up your mind to renounce your errors, and to believe all that I believe. That was not a dream?”

“No, a reality.—You must compose yourself.”

“And then we made it up—was that it?”

“Just so.”

“And loved each other as we used when we were first married.”

“Yes—just so.”

“And you said I had been deceived as to your connection with....”

María turned her head and fixed her eyes on her husband’s face.

“We will not discuss the past,” he said kindly. “We must make an effort to restore you to health, and you must help us, María.”

“Help you, what to do?”

“To save you, María.”

“Aye indeed! I must try to save myself! My God! I have sinned....” She was overcome with grief.

“I am speaking of your life—of your bodily health which is in danger.”

“Oh! I do not care for the health of my body, but for that of my soul which is in peril.... A little while ago, I do not exactly know how long, I thought I was dead. Now I am alive; but I think I shall die soon ... and I am in mortal sin.”

“You dreamt it, my child, it was a dream. Be calm, do not frighten yourself.”

“In mortal sin,” repeated María putting her hands to her head. “Tell me did I dream then that you told me...?”

“I?”

“That you did not love me?”

“What could it be, but a dream?”

María threw her arms round her husband’s neck and gently drew his face down to her own.

“Say it again that I may get rid of the miserable impression of that horrible dream.” They exchanged a few words in a low voice.

"Then give me a proof of your affection," said María. "As we are a long way from Madrid, and as I cannot go out for some days, send a message for me to Padre Paoletti. I want to talk to him."

"I will fetch him myself."

"You yourself?"

"Why not? I don't mind taking any trouble to gratify you."

In the course of the day the doctor came. Leon had thought it prudent to confide to him some of his secrets, for, as María's attack had been brought on by mental excitement, it was necessary that the physician should be aware of the delicate details. Moreno Rubio and Leon Roch were close friends; their intimacy was founded on sympathies of character, and on common grounds of scientific views and interests. That morning, when Leon had disclosed to his friend such facts as were indispensable to a sure diagnosis, they had a conversation of which some important fragments may be recorded.

"So that in short you do not care for your wife—neither more nor less," said Rubio, who liked to state facts as plainly as possible.

"I have always had a horror of falsehood," replied Leon. "And I am bound to confess that María does not inspire me with any affectionate emotion. I have two feelings when I think of her: one is the deepest pity; the other is a certain amount of respect."

"Precisely; but those feelings are not enough to make a good husband; however, there are others in your soul which might make you—and assuredly do make you a kind-hearted man. Tell me, do you wish your wife to live?"

Leon started like a man who has been struck.

"Such a question is an insult. The very disquietude of my conscience impels me to desire that María should not die."

"Very good. Then if you wish that María should live," said Moreno, laying his hand on his friends' shoulder, "the first indispensable thing is to soothe the irritation produced by her jealousy—which, unfortunately, is but too well-founded; her mind has received a terrible shock, and it must be allowed to recover its balance. Every life has, as it were a rhythm, a beat, of its own, to which it goes on regularly and smoothly. A sudden and complete disturbance of the measure may result in the gravest consequences, even in death. We have here an instance in point. We must therefore lay ourselves out to restore as quickly, and as effectually as possible, the steady measure that has been disturbed; then we can deal with the frightful blow to the nervous system which has affected, and may be fatal to the brain. All these jealousies must be eliminated as quickly as possible, so that her feelings not being excited, the whole machine may have a chance of recovering its tone and balance. All the scenes which gave rise to her attack must by degrees be effaced from her memory. If she lives there will be time enough to let her know the truth. She must be saved from any fresh outbreaks of anger or despair by being persuaded that nothing has occurred; and above all, my dear friend, you must treat her like a sick child; give her every thing she asks for and indulge all her whims, particularly as concerns anything that may divert and occupy her mind. Your wife—I am well aware—will claim your love and devotion: it is impossible to restrict her in her demands."

It was after this that Leon raised the question of removing his wife from Suertebella; but Rubio positively negatived the proposal.

Having abandoned this idea as homicide—that was the word employed by Moreno—they agreed to dismantle the room, to send to Madrid for the servants who were in the habit of waiting on María and for various trifles which would answer the purpose of carrying out the illusion. Before they parted Leon said to his friend.

"Answer me frankly. Will my wife die?"

"It is impossible to say. It may yet end fatally. You must leave me to ascertain

precisely the kind of trouble with which we have to contend."

That evening, when María was herself again, after going through her visions of a hell full of hideous machines and toiling demons, Moreno came in as was previously mentioned.

"Ha, ha!" he exclaimed, smiling as he found the husband and wife in such close proximity. "Like two turtle-doves! And how is my patient?—A good pulse; but we must have rest, absolute rest of body and mind."

María looked at her husband and frowned.

"No, no. You are not to look so cross at this good man who is as devoted to you as a newly-married lover. You will see—in a few days you will be able to go out together to smell the lilacs, and watch the butterflies. A sensible woman ought never to listen to spiteful gossip. When people are envious what can they do but talk nonsense? Now, my dear lady, you are going to be perfectly rational and calm; we are going to sign a permanent peace and be very fond and loving.... I say it for you both.... Well, let me see your tongue."

Then he himself mixed a draught, Leon and Rafaela helping him.

While this was going forward in the sick room the Marquis de Fúcar, setting aside for a moment the great business of the loan, already almost concluded, went to join his daughter, and said with a grave face:

"Rubio's anticipations are very serious. I am afraid we shall have a terrible calamity under our roof. However, we must not despair; science can do much, and God can do more. All we can do is to help science to the best of our little power, and to implore the intervention of Providence."

Pepa, raising her anxious eyes to look at her father lifted a face so pale that it was death-like; and with the desperation of a person who tears open a wound that it may bleed more freely, she asked:

“Is she dying?”

“That was what I was telling you, and you did not listen,” said Don Pedro, who was also suffering from a wound. “It is only our duty to show our unfortunate guest how deeply we sympathise in his misfortune. We must do something worthy of our house and name. Do not you think it will be well to perform a religious ceremony that may give due expression to our desire to see María out of danger? We will do it on a scale of magnificence. The chapel here stood me in eighty thousand dollars—though it might have cost less if the artists I employed had been men of less talent and pretensions.—Well then, to-morrow I will have a solemn penitential service, which all the servants and people shall attend, with you at their head. I give you full authority to spend as much as you think proper in tapers. The worthy priest from Polvoranca shall celebrate mass, and if you would like to have some more priests, send to all that are within reach.”

Having thus spoken, he sighed deeply and left her. Was it that, having a heavy burthen on his own soul, he yearned to petition the favour and mercy of Heaven on his own behalf? But we do not know what were the troubles which had so suddenly transformed the marquis’ radiant smiles into a sour grimace of annoyance. The loan, after crossing the troubled waters of the Spanish bourse with a fair wind, would this very day reach the haven of realization; and it was quite certain that Fúcar, Soligny and a few other birds of the same feather in Paris, Amsterdam, and London, would haul in a handful of gold for interest, brokerage and commission. What then...?

The chapel of Suertebella was a handsome edifice, at one angle of the mansion; high-roofed, thick-walled, and shining as if it had been varnished. The interior was of stucco, full of imitations of coloured marbles and porphyry, with a great deal of gilding on bosses and mouldings, which produced the effect of a lavish display of livery-buttons and gold cord on the pediments and spandrils. The style of architecture can only be described as Græco-Chino-Roman—Gothic gargoyles

combined with ornament of the new classical style which originated at Munich, and which our architects have adopted for the porticoes of our houses, the pantheons of our cemeteries, the entrances of our town-halls, and the dining-rooms of our millionaires. The pseudojasper, gold, and brilliant colours dazzled the eye till they all seemed to be swimming round and round the dome like fishes in a glass bowl. The roof was supported by highly respectable angels who, in the sculptor's studio, had played the part of seductive nymphs; and the paintings in the dome represented the cardinal Virtues, who had been predestined to figure as Muses. Everything blazed with the glaring splendour which is now fashionable in our private rooms, and which in them is not out of place. There was not a Christian attribute or allegory that had not been evolved from the palette or the sculptor's mould by the artists employed to decorate this chapel. We shall presently become acquainted with a ribald jester who, it was said, was one day giving a farcical, not to say a sacrilegious explanation of the figures that adorned it: This female figure with bandaged eyes and a chalice in her hand, represented Spain whom the financiers of state had blindfolded that she might not see the bitterness of her cup of ruin; that one, leaning on an anchor, with her eyes disconsolately turned up to Heaven, was Commerce in despair; and the matron caressing a whole tribe of children was Beneficence, a pleasing emblem of the interest taken by the Fúcars in property and labour, and of the tender solicitude with which they lent them a helping hand to the work-house. The four Fathers of the Church, all represented as writing very gravely with "The Eagle's Quill," personified the Press, always ready to sing the praises of wealthy capitalists, who, before acting on their own account, take advantage of its ready pen. The vessel sinking in the waves of Tiberias was the State, whose orators and leaders suffer so much buffeting, while the Multiplication of the Loaves was obviously prefigurative of the distribution and reception of certain articles supplied under contract; finally, the stolid Sibyls, sitting with their hands before them in utter absence of mind, represented government administration. And the irreverent

commentator went on to give new readings of the texts that were inscribed on the fillets and architraves for the edification of the faithful: “I am Pedro (Peter) and on this stone I will build my house. Give unto me that which is Cæsar’s, and that which is God’s.”

The chapel, the allowance being made for modern taste in ecclesiastical architecture, was a handsome one. It was on a level with the ground-floor, and there was a second door to the garden by which the congregation were admitted. The roof rose higher than that of the house, displaying its bell-tower somewhat ostentatiously. It was dedicated to San Luis Gonzaga—whose image—a really fine piece of sculpture—stood on the high altar beneath a large representation of Calvary.

The pious ceremony took place, as Don Pedro had arranged. The sun had scarcely risen when wax tapers innumerable were lighted on the high altar and in the side chapels, and thousands of delicious flowers, arranged in jars and vases, added their tribute of beauty and perfume. The little sanctuary was, to use a vulgar phrase, a blaze of splendour. The lights and odours inspired a sort of fervour by stimulating the senses and firing the imagination, so that sight and hearing were powerfully excited. All the servants on the estate were present, from the steward to the lowest scullion, and from the head-gardener to the tiniest stable-boy. The service was celebrated by the priest from Polvoranca, a humble protégé of the great house; an old man, somewhat ridiculous in appearance, uniting to the most elaborate ugliness certain eccentricities and manias which, though they had gone much against him in his ecclesiastical career, had made him well known in all the country side. He received from Don Pedro a small salary for officiating every Sunday for the benefit of the servants and women of the house, and hearing them confess once a year—a pious formality that the millionaire kept up, with a view to protecting himself against peculation and domestic difficulties of various kinds.

Pepa Fúcar attended the service in the gallery communicating with the interior of the

house; and with her, her waiting-maid and Monina, who could not understand why she was to be so quiet and good, and was on the point of lifting up her voice with a loud shout at the most solemn part of the service. Heaven only knows what she might have said if the nurse had not held her tightly, stopping her mouth, and threatening her that God would punish her by taking away her tongue. This had the desired effect, and Monina sat patiently till the end.

Pepa Fúcar knelt on a stool and leaned over the front of the balcony. Who can guess what was in her mind during that solemn hour, or for what, in truth, her aching soul petitioned?

The service ended, every one left the chapel, but Pepa remained in her place without moving from the attitude she had taken up from the beginning. With her head bent over the cushion and her face half-hidden in her folded hands she had not breathed a word or a sigh. When, at last, she looked up and prepared to rise, she gazed fixedly at the altar without any definite expression on her face; the cushion was wet with her tears, as though a jug of water had been spilt over it. She left the chapel and went towards her rooms; she was silent and grave, her eyes were red, her lips parted as if she must suffocate if she could not draw a deep breath. At the door of her own room she met her father.

Don Pedro, though he had not been present in person at the service, had looked out on to the chapel through a little window in the wall to the left, which opened from a passage in the house, and was screened by a figure of St. Luke the Evangelist. From thence Fúcar could note that all his household were present and that none were missing; he could admire the magnificence of his private sanctuary—la cathédrale pour rire, as our ribald jester called it—which in his eyes was “a gem among basilicas” and “full of character.” Indeed, it would have been difficult to refuse that modicum of praise to the grand Christian scheme of decoration worked out by one of the chief scene-painters of the capital.

But we have reason to believe that the good man's mind rose above this to a loftier range of ideas. He was deeply troubled that day, and no doubt, as he put his solemn face out of the opening in such a manner that it might have been taken for that of an Evangelist or a Father of the Church, his feelings were reverent and prayerful, and he craved something of the Creator. Still, this is mere hypothesis and devoid of foundation; it is put forward here for what it is worth, to fill up the vacuum which must exist in a total absence of data.

This much, at any rate, is certain. He stopped to say to his daughter:

"Every one was there."

"And how is she this morning? Do you know?" asked Pepa in a voice so husky that it sounded as though her lungs, in their scorching thirst had consumed the air they breathed.

"Be hopeful, my child. The unfortunate woman passed a quieter night, and she is better, Moreno tells me."

"So that she will recover...."

"It is very probable...." said Don Pedro, but the indifference of his tone showed that he was thinking of something else. "Really, my child, it seems as though God were piling every calamity on us at once!"

As he spoke the poor gentleman could not control his feelings. He held out his arms to his daughter who threw herself into them, and exclaimed in a voice choked with agitation: "Child of my heart—my jewel! How unfortunate you are!"

Pepa shed on her father's shoulder the few tears she had saved from the Mass. Don Pedro, commanding himself, said with an effort: "But we must not exaggerate.—Nothing is positive.—To-morrow...."

Pepa went into her own room and her father retired to his, where, for the twentieth time, he read and re-read a number of letters and telegrams which had made a deep

impression on a mind usually as bright and clear as the spring air and sunshine.

CHAPTER VIII. LEON ROCH PAYS A VISIT.

Acting on a generous impulse, and being desirous of fulfilling the promise he had made to his wife, Leon Roch set out for Madrid and went to the church of St. Prudencio in search of Father Paoletti. Nothing could be more unlikely than that he should set foot in such a place, and when the serving-brother had asked him to wait in the bare parlour, he had leisure to reflect on the matter and on himself, with a sort of incredulous surprise, feeling as though either the place he was in or he himself must be the creation of a dream. The man who vows that he will never cross the threshold of some particular door must be either very foolish or very proud, or incapable of discerning that the swift turns of life bring us in front of those portals—open them—and push us in; and we do not even think of escape.

Leon had not had much time for these reflections when a priest stood before him; a singularly small man of middle age, with a tiny, pale, boyish face, and such large inquisitive, piercing eyes, that, in fact, he seemed all eyes. The deliberateness of his gait contrasted strangely with the smallness of his person; his steps were measured, even stately, with a firm, slow tread such as might result from constantly wearing shoes soled with lead. Paoletti bowed to his visitor with elegant politeness, and Leon, who was in no mood for ceremony, briefly explained his object. Paoletti, seating himself in front of the weary infidel with the calm tenacity of a humble believer, listened to him with the benevolence of a father confessor, cast down his eyes, knit his fingers, and twirled his thumbs—his hands it may be noted were as slender and delicate as those of a fine lady.

“Let us go,” he said looking up and stopping the rotation of his thumbs. “I have heard of her journey to Carabanchel and of her illness, but I did not know that it was serious, nor that she had been carried to Suertebella.—To the house itself?”

“To the house itself,” said Leon gloomily.

“I suppose then,” said Paoletti with a subtle intonation, “that the marquis’ daughter has come to Madrid with her darling child.”

“She is to do so to-day.”

“And you?”

“I do not purpose leaving María so long as she is ill.”

“You impress me very favourably, Señor,” said the Italian, giving Leon his hand with a hearty gesture. “At the same time your position with reference to that blessed martyr is a strange one, and unpleasant for both of you.”

“It is the singularity of our position,” said Leon, “that made me decide on coming myself, that I might give you certain items of information which concern no one but me, and request your co-operation...”

“Mine?”

“Yes—to help me to carry out my arrangements, and get out of my difficulties as well as possible.”

Paoletti knit his brows. He had risen to start at once; but he now sat down again, and once more began to twirl his thumbs.

“In the first place,” he said in the tone of a man accustomed to drive matters home, “explain to me the motives which brought you here. It is strange enough that you should come to confess to me, surely?” And he smiled with sarcastic triumph in a way that to Leon was more offensive than open mockery would have been.

“To confess?—yes indeed!”

“No, no, Señor,” said Paoletti with an affectation of sweetness which betrayed his Italian blood, “I do not expect you to confess—far from it! you will neither lay bare your conscience, nor retract your errors. You will only tell me what I know already—what every one knows. And all in order that I may help you...” And the

priest ended his sentence by quoting the reports diffused by Pilar de San Salomó's gossiping circle.

"In all that there is a little truth and a great deal of falsehood," said Leon. "It is false to say that Monina is my child; it is false to accuse me of such a connection with Pepa Fúcar. That I love her is true—and that every kind of love for my unhappy wife is dead within me. I have no feeling left for her but calm regard, and a dispassionate respect for her virtues which I fully acknowledge."

"Regard, respect!" said Paoletti. "Appreciation of her virtues!... This, Sir, is something. The pure and noble soul of María Egyptiaca deserves more, much more, it is true; but if we might hope that your regard and respect would develop and expand...." Again he took Leon's hand in his own which was as white and cold as marble—"we might bring about a reconciliation."

"Impossible!" said Leon. "Utterly, totally impossible. A little while since it would have been easy—but what effort did she make to effect it?—You ought to know."

The little man looked at the ground and nodded affirmatively.

"Of course! you know all about it!" said Leon bitterly. "My wife's conscience-keeper, the ruler of my household, the master of my married life, who has held the sacred chain in his hand and could bind or unloose—the man whom I see now for the first time since he came to see my hapless brother-in-law, Luis Gonzaga, who died in my house—this man who, though it is no earthly concern of his, has secretly disposed of my happiness and of my life as a master does of his purchased slaves.—You, I say, must of course, know everything."

"This worldly tone of haughty philosophy is well known to me too, Señor," said Paoletti, in a tone of apostolic reproof. "If you wish me to meet you on that ground and to confute you utterly I will do so."

"No—I did not come here to argue. The horrible struggle is over—I am beaten, after having risked honour and delicacy, after fighting with skill, nay, and with fury. My

opinions were settled long since, and cannot now be altered. This is not the moment for discussion; we are in presence of a terrible fact."

"María then is dying?"

Leon told Paoletti of his wife's visit to his lodgings, and of the scene which culminated in the fainting fit and subsequent illness of the saintly María.

There was a pause; then Paoletti said severely:

"It is clear to me that María loves you, and that you are the real traitor to the contract—guilty to-day as you were yesterday and from the beginning. Without further knowledge of the facts, I cannot pronounce on the step taken by my beloved daughter; but such a step, such a proceeding, taken as it stands, argues that she still loves you, and that her tender soul is full of sweetness and kindness for a man who is wholly undeserving of them."

"You, who know everything, know very well that my wife no longer loves me; and if those who are incapable of judging of a pure and noble feeling choose to give the name of love to a sentiment that has no title to it, I shall at once assert myself as the sole judge of my unhappy wife's feelings, and declare that they do not satisfy my demands, that I repudiate them, and put them out of court in deciding on the question of separation or reunion."

Paoletti stood lost in thought.

"There is no fundamental and moral bond between us," Leon went on. "María and I are two separate souls: in my mind I see her and myself as the very idea incarnate of divorce."

"Yes—a group of statuary—a work of art!" said Paoletti, a lightning shaft of malice flashing across the dark cloud of his austerity.

"Well, yes—a work of art—which did not originate spontaneously, mark you, but was somebody's doing, somebody's work. My wife does not love me. I believe she

might have loved me as I hoped, if the grave faults of her character, instead of diminishing and vanishing under my authority and tenderness, had not become more marked under alien influences. She does not love me; I do not love her. Consequently any reconciliation is out of the question."

"You cannot say," added the priest, with some severity, tempered however by tolerance, "that I have not listened to you with patience."

"Patience! I have had much longer patience!"

"Even those who have it least retain with it a touch of the Christian about them, caballero.—Then the long and short of it, Señor de Roch, is that you do not love your wife and she does not love you—you respect and regard her.—But what is the upshot of it all? Or to put it plainly, what did you come here for?"

"María begged me to fetch her confessor. Far from opposing her I consented with pleasure."

"Then let us go at once!" said Paoletti rising.

"The most important thing is yet to come," said Leon laying his hand on the priest's robe. "You, with your perspicacity will at once perceive that I need not have come myself merely to fetch you. I came to tell you what no one else could tell you. Consider in the first place that her mind is the part really affected."

"I see."

"I ought to tell you that I honestly desire that she should recover," said Leon with firm composure. "I call God to witness that this is the truth: I hope and wish, without any kind of mental reservation, that my wife may live."

"I perfectly understand; you wish that she should get well again—that her nervous excitement should be soothed and removed, and to that end nothing must be suggested to her that can remind her of the cause of her illness. Comforting and pleasing ideas must be kept before her, to help her to disentangle the confusion

caused by her indignation and unsatisfied passions; my spiritual guidance must be qualified by a certain infusion of worldly tact, so as to foster her illusions and conceal the sad truth,—the father-confessor must be to some extent a physician, allaying jealousy and encouraging hope, so as to clutch back, as it were, the life that is fluttering to escape—that will escape, beyond recall, if the mental excitation that has imperilled it is not promptly banished."

Leon admired the confessor's sagacity.

"Very good," Paoletti went on; "I will do my best. I cannot pledge myself without knowing more exactly in what spiritual frame of mind my beloved daughter may be."

"María is at Suertebella."

"So I understand."

"She must on no account be made aware of it."

"Well—let that pass—" said Paoletti looking at the ground and screwing up his mouth. "It is a subterfuge which I hold excusable."

"She insists on displaying the affection which now—rather late in the day—she feels for me."

"Nor does that seem to me blamable. It may be allowed, considering that you think very little of her affection."

"While María is ill she must not be allowed to fancy that I care for any other woman."

"Stay, stay," said Paoletti, putting up his white hand as if to screen himself. "This is going too far. I have slipped some rather thick threads through the eye of the needle but the camel, my dear Sir, the camel is too much for me. That is a gross imposition."

"It is common charity."

"Truth forbids it."

"Her health requires it."

"A mere physical necessity to which we must not attach too much importance. My saintly daughter will die as a Christian should, contemning the baser and more worldly passions."

"It is always our first duty to guard against death."

"Always, if we can do so without baseness. Am I to allow that angelic martyr to believe in her husband's innocence when she is actually under the same roof as her rival? I will grant you that there may be nothing existing to insult or injure her while she, the unhappy wife, is breathing her last. Still, the frightful fact remains.—I will tell her nothing unless she asks, but if she questions me—and she will, she will!"

"You are right!" exclaimed Leon struck by this solemn appeal. "It is a farce, equally unworthy of her and of me. The truth terrifies me—the lie disgusts me; but the truth is certain death, and the lie possible recovery.—Do not come to Suertebella. I will find a priest—anybody—the vicar of the parish, or the house chaplain."

He was leaving the room when Paoletti called him back in a conciliatory tone.

"You must be fully aware," he said, "that the presence of no other confessor will have the same effect as mine. If you will pledge yourself not to interfere in any particular, I will go with you with pleasure, to comfort and help the hapless sufferer. Nay, more," he added with a burst of feeling, "I may tell you frankly that I earnestly wish to go. She is so saintly, so admirable! I not only admire and respect her—I look up to her as a superior being."

"And what will you tell her?"

"What it is my duty to tell her," replied the Italian fixing a pair of eyes on Leon's face, which might have been a hundred pairs. "It strikes me as strange that a man who declares that he had thrown off every matrimonial tie, should trouble himself so

much about his wife's conscience."

"I am not anxious about her conscience, but about her health," said Leon who was getting very weary.

"You tell me you do not love her, nor she you?"

"Yes."

"But it is her person—her mortal part, that a man may claim, not her exquisite conscience."

"Quite true," said Leon, draining the cup. "I leave her conscience to you, who have made it. I have no wish to put in a claim for the monstrosity."

"I forgive you the word," said Paoletti looking down. "Now Señor—Yes or No."

"Do you intend to kill her?"

"I!" and then, with a sigh, he added: "We will ask her who it is that has killed her?"

Leon's heart sank within him; after a moment's reflection he stamped his foot. A stamp sometimes strikes out an idea as a spark may flash from an iron shoe. Leon had an idea.

"Let us go, at any rate," he said. "I will leave so delicate a matter to your own conscience."

"And to prove worthy of your confidence," said the priest, unable to conceal his satisfaction, "I may promise you to reconcile truth and prudence as far as lies in my power, and to do my utmost not to agitate the last hours—if the Lord so wills it—of my precious daughter in the Church. I am perfectly certain that my presence will be the greatest comfort to her."

"Come then."

"I am at your service in an instant," said Paoletti, hastening as much as he could with his heavy step to fetch his hat and cloak. But pausing in the door-way he observed: "it is very early; you, perhaps have not had breakfast. Will you have some

chocolate?"

"No thank you," said Leon bowing. "No indeed."

And an hour later they got out of the carriage at the door of Suertebella.

CHAPTER IX. A PARTING.

The penitential mass had been celebrated, and Paoletti had gone into the room where his saintly daughter lay dying in alternate torments of fever and doubt, when Leon, hurrying from room to room, went in search of Pepa. He found her at last in Ramona's room. He had something very important to say to her and it might be supposed that Pepa was expecting this, for she was standing breathless, with her eyes fixed on the door, listening for his footstep, and as he entered she went a few paces towards a recess in the room, suggesting to him by the expression of her steps—for steps, too, have a language of their own—that they would talk more at their ease there than anywhere else. Monina ran to meet him and threw her arms round his legs, looking up in his face. He took her up, and the child, finding herself perched so high, began teasing him to admire the artistic beauties of a small clay vase with a handle and spout, a recent gift from the priest of Polvoranca, and then amused herself by holding on to his ear.

"Monina, be quiet—do not be troublesome," said her mother. "I know—yes I know what you have come to say.—Child be quiet; come to me."

She took Monina from Leon's arms and held her in her own. "You need not tell me; I understand—I know—I must go away. I had made up my mind to it, even if I were forced to leave without seeing you."

"I appreciate your delicacy," said Leon. "Yes, go to your house in Madrid, and for the present forget my existence."

"That I can hardly do.—Child, you are choking me," said Pepa to Monina who was

now pulling her mother's ear. "Get down and run away.—But I will go, without even asking when I am to see you again. I dread to ask and I feel for you in having to give me a reply."

Leon looked down and said nothing. There was not a kind word, a friendly formality, a common expression of hope even, which, on his lips, would not require a criminal accent. Silence seemed to him more decorous than any protestation of purity of purpose. They both were speechless for some little time, not daring to look at each other, each dreading to read the other's face and knowing that it would reflect his—or her—own feelings.

"Ask me nothing—tell me nothing—do not utter even a name that can appeal to her," Leon said at length. "Keep your heart full of generous feeling, and dismiss all hope."

Pepa wanted to say something, but her voice was so tremulous that she could not: "Nothing will be left me," she thought to herself, "nothing but the old dreary miserable thought: she will pray and pray—and live; I, hoping and still hoping, shall die."

Leon who seemed to read her thoughts in her contracted brow, said, looking into her face:

"It is in critical moments that the generosity or selfishness of a soul is revealed."

Pepa was trembling in every limb; she propped her head on one hand, and looking down at her knees, on which Ramona's tiny fingers were playing a tune, she said:

"I do not know whether mine is generous or selfish. I only know that I shed many tears just now in praying that God would let no one die for my happiness. How bitter our prayers can sometimes be! How cruelly our thoughts can torture us in the effort to prevent the flowers we must pluck and cast out turning into snakes! I have prayed more to-day than in any one day of my life before; but I cannot be sure of having prayed rightly and from a pure heart. The battle raged within me; I believe that the

words I used had a different meaning every minute—that the name of God meant the Devil—that love meant hate, and life stood for death. The feeling and the thought were struggling for the mastery and each tried to find expression in words.—I did not really pray, I was not really good; and yet, indeed, indeed, I meant to be. I am so much a woman, so little of a saint.—But I shall not feel so wicked when I have found courage enough to pray clearly and boldly that we may both die—then everything will come right....”

She rose.

“In short,” she said, “I am going. You know that my only joy in life is to obey you.”

“Thanks—thanks...” murmured Leon, taking up Monina.

“Say good-bye,” said Pepa, fixing a tender gaze on the child and the man who held her.

Leon held the little girl in a close embrace and kissed her again and again; such demonstrations of affection, he reflected, could hardly be deemed a scandal when bestowed on this angel-baby. He carried her up and down the room two or three times to conceal the emotion which, rebelling against every moral effort, was too legible in his face; and though he did not glance at the mother, she, sitting in her corner, might be sure that he was conscious of her presence. Passion has the keenest sight, and wonderful skill in discovering the thoughts of the object of its devotion, in assimilating them and extracting nutriment from this exciting but ethereal food.

As to the unhappy man himself, never had he so deeply felt as at this moment the irresistible charm of this sweet little creature—the child of a woman who was not his wife, and of a man whom he detested. He felt as if it would be impossible to part from this treasure and live—not that it was his, though he had accustomed himself to regard it as very much his own. His love for the child was as inseparable from the image of its mother as two stars that give but one light. It was an adopted affection which usurped in his solitary soul the vacant hearth and warming fire that ought to

have been for another. Was it his fault if in his weary journeying across the waste these two faces smiled upon him, one all dimples and the other all love, brightening the melancholy horizon of life and encouraging him to walk on, even when his strength was failing him, and he stumbled over the stones and thorns. In Pepa he had found affection, gentleness and a confiding nature—a mysterious promise of the peace he had dreamed of, the happiness he had so vainly and so painfully sought. It was the ideal family, with every human element in it except, alas! legitimacy; and the very fact of its being only a vision and not a reality, gave it added enchantment and greater attractions. Pepa's passionate devotion, and the tenacity which made her give it the pre-eminence over every other feeling, far from causing him any anxiety, altogether bewitched him; he saw in it the offering of her whole heart without reserve, the incalculating generosity which prompts a soul to abandon itself wholly without any concealment, without cloking its faults or veiling a single thought. Those who have been beggars for love cannot repel that which flows in their way, though the tide be too strong and boils and foams. At the same time he felt a sort of pride and pious emotion as he saw that this noble heart, without ceasing to be duteously religious, was nevertheless his, by a supreme law of humanity; and feeling himself so beloved—so completely the lord and master of her thoughts he could do no less than give his heart wholly to her. That secondary and long-past affection that he had known before the dawn of the glory in which they now saw each other faded into nothingness, as the stars do at sunrise.

However, this was not the moment for such reflections. Leon set the child on her mother's knee and said:

"Not another instant! Good-bye. If I find it necessary to explain your absence to your father I will venture to tell him all about it."

"I will tell him myself."

And they precipitately left the room by different doors.

CHAPTER X. BREAKFAST.

The historian does not feel it a serious lapse of duty not to have mentioned already that the Tellerias flew to Suertebella as soon as they heard of María's serious illness. It is so much a matter of course that the reader will have taken it for granted, though this truthful narrative has not spoken of it in so many words. A thing which it is necessary to state, in case posterity—always inquisitive and impertinent—cares to know, is that on the morning of that eventful Tuesday—the day of the penitential mass, of Paoletti's visit, and of Pepa's departure—the marquesa with her husband and Polito, heard, with blank astonishment, this emphatic decision pronounced by Leon Roch:

"You cannot see María!"

"Not to-day even? I can hardly believe my ears!" exclaimed Milagros, unable to command her indignation. "To forbid a mother who has come to see her sick child!"

"And me, her father!"

Polito said nothing, but whipped his trousers with the cane he held in his hand.

"What reason can you have for such a proceeding?"

"I can find a reason when I want to give one," said Leon.

"I demand to go in and see my daughter, to nurse her, sit with her...."

"I nurse her and sit with her."

"And you give us no reason, no explanation of such atrocious cruelty, Good God!" exclaimed the marquis looking solemn—which is as much as to say that he looked very comical.

Leon enlarged on María's extremely delicate mental condition, and of his fears of the consequences of some indiscretion if he allowed her family to see her.

"Is she alone now?"

“Her confessor is with her.”

The marquesa drew her son-in-law aside. “Really,” she said, “I could not have believed that you would go to such an extreme. Tell me, explain to me all the horrors that have taken place here.... Ah! my poor unhappy daughter does not even know, I daresay, that she is under the same roof as her husband’s mistress.... And you are afraid lest I should open her eyes, lest she should learn the truth from my lips—for from me she always hears the truth, spontaneously and naturally—for I do not know how to act, how to affect anything.”

“No madam, I am not afraid,” said Leon, only anxious to end the discussion. “But you will not see your daughter till she is quite well again.”

“And what right have you over the wife you have betrayed and neglected? Or have you repented? Do you wish?...”

Her tone and expression suddenly changed. The angry scowl vanished like a cloud before the sun; her eyes sparkled with youthful eagerness, and the bird in her hat almost seemed to flutter in its gauzy nest.

“You have some plan for a reconciliation?” she said in bitter-sweet tones. “If so, I am the last person to wish to interfere with them. And if it is the outcome of sincere repentance....”

“I have no plan for reconciliation; it is out of the question,” said her son-in-law shortly as the Marquis de Fúcar came into the room.

The master of the house, putting aside his cares and anxieties to fulfil the duties of hospitality and do the honours of his splendid house, came to make his bow to the Tellerias and condole with them on María’s illness, begging them to consider the house at their disposal as long as it might suit them to stay. And as the melancholy cause of their visit was not a matter of a few hours, the open-handed gentleman, anxious to give his hospitality a character worthy of his European notoriety, begged the trio to remain the day—to pass the night—to stay the next day and the next

night, for as long as they might wish; pressed them to breakfast—lunch—dine—sup;—to sit down and rest, to lie down and sleep—to make themselves completely at home, since here were tables, a larder, a cellar and servants—rooms enough to hold half the human race—horses to ride—flowers to pluck—etc., etc.

“Oh, thank you, thank you! How good you are!”

And María’s mother pressed Fúcar’s hand in speechless emotion. On such occasions, silence, a glance to Heaven, a silent clasp of the hand are more eloquent than a hundred phrases in praise of the generosity of those “who allow us to forget that we live in an age tainted by Materialism.” The lady endeavoured to give her face the expression which, in her own opinion, was most becoming to her peculiar style of beauty, or rather to those faded remains of it which were not yet devoid of brilliancy when art, dress, sentiment, and judicious gesture set them in the most becoming light. In talking on indifferent subjects with her host she contrived to lead him into a sentimental vein with so much grace and persuasiveness that the stock-broker listened to her with enchantment.

Meanwhile Telleria had led Leon to a window, and was saying to him with ponderous dignity:

“Matters have come to such a pass, and your behaviour is apparently so preposterous, that I really must insist on your giving me a satisfactory explanation; otherwise it will be necessary to take it up on the ground....”

“On the ground of honour!” said Leon sarcastically. “But you see it would be difficult for you and me to meet on that ground.”

“A father-in-law, of course.—It is not that I have any wish to augment the scandal by adding another and a worse one. We have the greatest confidence in your gentlemanly feeling, and that Castilian nobility which we Spaniards can never wholly belie, even if we wish it. And if God should touch your heart, and you were

to effect a permanent reconciliation with my beloved daughter....”

“That I shall never do.”

“Very well.—Then....” The marquis looked at his son-in-law with an eye which—considering the serio-comic aspect of the man—might fairly be called terrible.

“Then I know how to act.”

They were in a Chinese boudoir full of figures frightful enough to give nightmares. On its painted walls, amid sporting butterflies, were gilt dwarfs and monsters, meditative storks, platforms with impossible stairs, trees that looked like hands, and faces that looked like wafers. The human figures did not stand on their ill-shaped feet; the trees had no roots; the houses were as much in the air as the birds. There was no solid ground; everything was suspended ’twixt earth and heaven on a background of shining black, like a sky of ink. The vacuous Chinese faces, looking on with stolid impartiality, seemed to be making their own reflections on the living scene, and the gold and silver butterflies amused the fancy with a sort of reflection on those dream-like walls, of the Marquis de Telleria’s ambiguous smile. Chocolate-coloured bronzes stood in every corner and on every table; and those solemn idols—melancholy, hideous, dropsied and gloomy—might have been the embodiment of Don Agustin de Sudre’s grievances and woes.

It was like turning over a leaf in a picture book to go from this Chinese apartment into the billiard-room, an Arab divan, where Leopoldo with a tube for inhaling tar between his teeth, as if it were a cigar, was amusing himself with practising the game.

A footman came into the room.

“Did you ring, Sir?”

“Yes,” said the young man without looking up, “bring me some beer.”

The servant was leaving the room when Polito called after him to ask if breakfast would soon be ready.

“In a few minutes, Sir.”

And he went on playing with the balls.

The master of the house had left the Chinese boudoir to his visitors, and a pompous, red-faced maître d’hotel, picked up in some Paris café, who might have passed for an English lord but for his smooth servility and obsequious nervousness, waited on the lady to take her orders.

“Oh!” she exclaimed. “A mere trifle—anything will do for me.—Have you any potted shrimps? No?—never mind. But I cannot eat anything smoked. A beef steak, not overdone.”

“And do not forget,” said her husband to this benevolent official, whose black frock-coat was emblematic of the Christian grace of hospitality. “Do not forget that we drink nothing but Sauterne.”

Fúcar presently reappeared, still melancholy, but in a great hurry, proving that sorrows are not incompatible with an appetite. It was late and the whole party were in need of food.

The Tellerias and Don Onésimo, who made his appearance after they had begun, did honour—in gastronomic cant—to the marquis’ cook. Milagros, to be sure, whether from fastidious elegance or because grief had spoilt her appetite, hardly tasted anything.

“Do not let your anxiety be too much for you,” said Don Pedro, “you must try to eat something. I have much to worry me too—yet reason tells me I must eat. Make an effort, and do likewise.”

The happy efforts of Don Pedro’s self-command were amply proved by a slice of steak which he was carrying morsel by morsel to his mouth, plentifully seasoned

with its own gravy, and butter and lemon. Milagros after her oysters, only tasted and minced at the food, but really ate nothing; while her husband ate of every dish, savoury or sweet, first gazing at them with a flattering smile and then paying them treacherous attentions with his fork. Truffles, sausages, and smoked tongue, with other trifles more filling than digestible, tempted him to make acquaintance with their charms.

“And Pepa?” asked Don Onésimo suddenly.

“At Madrid,” replied Fúcar, not lifting his eyes from his plate, on which the remains of the steak might have represented the treasury of Spain so much was it shrunk in dimensions. A long silence ensued, interrupted at last by Don Pedro himself, who again remarked to his neighbour:

“My dear madame, my dear friend, it is our duty to control our feelings.—Besides, it is not a desperate case, María is better to-day.—What, tears? Come, come, just half a glass of Sauterne.”

The marquesa did not refuse. When she had swallowed the wine she said:

“We shall see if my tiger of a son-in-law will allow me to see my daughter this evening.”

Fúcar, anxious to avoid such a critical subject, spoke of a report he had heard that Polito was about to marry a rich Cuban heiress, whose family had lately settled in the capital with all the ostentation and éclat of an enormous fortune. The marquesa acknowledged the report, and Leopoldo indirectly confirmed it with a great deal of the false modesty that cloaks vanity. The rumours were true as to the young man’s pretensions and daily pursuit of the young lady on horseback or on foot; but, in spite of these attentions, the engagement was purely mythical, with nothing real about it but the marquesa’s vehement ambition of seeing her son possessed of a handsome and unencumbered fortune. The young lady’s family, named Villa-Bojío, though they were good friends of his mother’s were averse to Leopoldo as a suitor; still,

their opposition was not very vehement, and Milagros laboured in silence, with all the diplomacy and finesse of which she was mistress, to turn this golden dream into at least a silver reality.

Presently, the subject being exhausted, she rose from table, and a servant offered the gentlemen the finest cigars the world produces. This article—to speak commercially—was the very choicest of all the good things in the millionaire's house. His correspondents at the Havana sent, for his private use, the pick of their best, in return for the magic arts he employed to coax the government into making the rest of the nation consume the very worst. Matches were struck and the smokers smacked their lips.

"Polito," said Fúcar, "if you wish to ride tell Salvador to saddle Selika for you."

The smart rider of other people's horses needed no second bidding, but went down to the stables at once. Don Pedro sighed and signed to the poorer marquises—one noble by birth and one by his wits—who, following the millionaire marquis, seemed to offer him a sort of idolatrous worship, watching his glance, and burning the incense of his own tobacco in his honour. When they were alone Don Pedro confided to them in a low voice and with a melancholy face an idea—a piece of news—a fact. And thus, pouring the woes of his anxious soul into the ears of his friends, the worthy magnate found himself relieved; he breathed more easily, and could even throw off a little joke and laugh with that fat chuckle which we first heard at Iturburua.

"What a world we live in! What vicissitudes, what unexpected reverses!—Then there is that foolish tendency in human nature to exaggerate misfortunes and regard them as irreparable...."

Onésimo, for his part, was completely stunned by the information his noble friend had communicated. He began to think that Don Pedro, utterly absorbed in his complicated speculations and the metaphysics of loans, had failed to understand the

bearing of this more vulgar dilemma. Telleria, on the contrary had listened to Fúcar's melancholy tale with a sense of sudden joy, and had an idea of his own on the subject—happy idea. This he fondly turned over in his mind as he sat gazing at the painted walls of the dining-room, decorated with a perfect deluge of dead game and fish—partridges, hares, deer and lobsters, and a corresponding deluge of fruit, vegetables, gourds and butterflies. The carved oak panelling also displayed hunting-trophies and emblems—pouting masks blowing horns, dogs, birds hanging by the heads or heels; in short so many representations of the animal and vegetable kingdom that it might have been the palace of indigestion.

CHAPTER XI. THE PRIEST LIES AND THE COCK CROWS.

When María saw Padre Paoletti enter her room she gave a cry of joy. She looked at him with affection and then turned her eyes on Leon, expressing her gratitude for this concession—which in truth was little short of sublime—by holding out a hand to each. This simple and natural action, without a spoken word, was the epitome of her whole life, and might be regarded as the synthesis of my story so far as she was concerned. They asked her in the same breath how she was feeling, and the same answer did for both.

"I think I must be better—I feel brighter."

Leon patted her shoulder saying: "Then I will leave you."

"No, no," exclaimed Padre Paoletti with eager haste, seating himself at her left hand. "Doña María and I are not going to discuss matters of conscience. The doctor has satisfied us that her condition is not so serious as to require any immediate care for the concerns of her soul, nor is she strong enough for any long dissertation on spiritual things which, though most soothing and precious exhaust the attention. We will all three talk together for a little while; yes, Señor, all three of us—and

presently, when her mind is calmer and clearer—all in good time—my precious spiritual daughter can be left alone with me for a few minutes."

He ended with a smile which was reflected in María's face as the sea reflects the colour of the sky.

Paoletti, as will have been seen, was smooth-tongued and affable; he could be both sensible and agreeable; his appearance was modest and attractive, for besides a pleasant face he had the added charm of the clearest, sweetest and most pathetic voice that ever was heard. His speech was at once soft and firm, with a mysterious combination of two qualities that would seem to be antagonistic: precision and dreaminess. An after-taste of his native Italian, though partly effaced by the habit of speaking Spanish, gave it a slightly plaintive cadence which contrasted strangely with its vigorous inflections and strongly accented consonants. Well aware of his own skill in using the precious instrument that nature had given him, he took every advantage of it, polishing his language and suiting his words to his ideas and his voice to his words with the greatest nicety. His love of sonorous superlatives made his language tiresome.

While he talked he gave free play to the brilliancy and mobility of his striking eyes; their various changes, I might say phases, of expression seconded the eloquence of his tongue. His glance seemed to prolong the impression of his words: indeed it went further than speech, where speech could not reach. It was to his voice what music is to poetry. Of course there was much art in the wonderful charm of these gifts; still, the chief source of it was a natural grace, and a long habit of searching consciences, of reading faces, of surprising secrets by a piercing glance or by a clenching argument.

"From what our learned friend tells us," he said, "our beloved patient will soon be quite herself again. It has been a nervous seizure which will pass away, and her state will soon become normal. We are all liable to the treacherous effects of sudden

impressions which raise a storm in the nervous system beyond the power of reason to control. The Devil—always on the watch, the flesh—rarely mortified as it should be, rise up and assault us, taking us by surprise. On one hand we have an illusion of the senses which not merely magnify, but distort every object, on the other a fevered imagination which wanders whither it ought not, and sees everything in hues of fire and blood. The judgment succumbs to a hallucination—a mere hallucination, my dear daughter. Then comes the reaction, generally after a severe attack of physical suffering, and we see things in their true light; we see that our motives were inadequate, that we made too much of some gossip—or perhaps calumny, that we have seen visions and dreamed dreams—yes, mere dreams.—Well, we will talk all this over later. For the present try to rest, and bring your mind to a state of exalted contemplation and peace.—You seem very comfortably lodged here. I admire your husband's taste in retiring to such quiet quarters. I like Carabanchel immensely. Doña María, when you are able to get up again and your husband takes you out—for of course you will take her out—you will see what splendid wheat grows in the fields about here.—It is a paradise for poultry too; you cannot walk a yard without treading on the chickens.—Well, this is sermon enough for to-day, Señora. We began with the soul and ended with poultry. Well well!"

At this moment they heard a cock crow.

"St. Peter's cock!" said Paoletti in a low voice to Leon. Then, looking quickly round at María he went on:

"I began with thinking of your soul and ended with the cocks and hens in the village. Another time we will begin with the farm-yard and rise to Heavenly things ... God be with you."

"But are you really going?" said María sincerely distressed.

"I will take a little walk and get something to eat and come back later."

"On no account," said Leon. "You will eat something here."

"Thank you, thank you, Doña María," said Paoletti, bending over the lady with a very mundane bow and smiling familiarly. "Your husband is most kind. I have never seen him since that melancholy time when our dear Luis quitted this world for a better. It has given me great pleasure to see him to-day."

María looked at her husband with a mixed expression of kindliness and aversion.

"Do you know, my dear lady," he went on, "that to-day, by the most extraordinary coincidence, I discovered something?"

"What?" asked María anxiously.

"We will talk of it by-and-bye—I do not want to fatigue you."

"No, do tell me," said María in the plaintive tone of a child who begs for something it ought not to have.

"Well, then, I have discovered," said the Italian, lowering his voice as though he did not wish Leon to hear, "that your husband is not so wicked as he seems; that all you heard—all the thousand stories which I know Doña Pilar told your mother—are a complete mistake, a misapprehension—I am assured—do you hear me?—I am assured that there never has been any such infidelity...."

María's eyes glittered with excitement and pride. These words, which, coming from him were as Gospel truth, fell on her tortured spirit like balm applied by angel's hands. She felt as though she were being lifted from a black abyss into the light and fresh air of a lovely day. Afterwards she brought mature reflection to bear on these statements and to test them severely; but for the moment the priest's words had an immediate effect on her penitential credulity. If Paoletti had told her it was midnight, she would sooner have doubted her own eyes than his statement. Without knowing what to say or how to express her satisfaction she gazed alternately at the priest and at her husband, clasping their hands.

"Yes, indeed," added Paoletti. "There is no ground whatever for believing him to be unfaithful. My friend here...."

But at this moment again they heard the cock crow, and the priest broke off as though his voice failed him. He recovered himself, however, and to change the subject said:

“So now my sweet friend, you have only to get well as soon as possible. Oh! what a beautiful service you missed yesterday! When you get out again we will show you some prints that came to us yesterday—and we have a fresh supply of water from Lourdes.—But I was forgetting; we have been eating the chocolate you sent us. I must thank our kind benefactress in the name of all the household.”

“It is nothing—a trifle, God knows!”

“Doña Perfecta was quite vexed with us because we could not make use of her contribution. An angelic creature, Doña Perfecta! What a beautiful soul! And that poor Doña Juana. Last night she worried us to death, and even called us despots because we have forbidden the porter’s wife to make coffee for her and the other devout women who rise very early to go to communion and want to breakfast directly after. But really the porter’s lodge was a perfect restaurant on some Sundays.”

The doctor now came into the room.

“There is a great deal of talking here!” said he, “I shall have to come in like a schoolmaster with a cane and command silence.”

“I—not another word! I believe I have talked more than enough,” said the confessor. “I am going to take a turn outside.”

He drew Leon into the recess of the window.

“Well?” he said.

“Admirable,” said Leon, who had fully appreciated the priest’s dexterity—and again they heard the cock crow.

“I have denied my God! I have connived at falsehood!” said Paoletti with a smile

that might mean compunction. “If that cock continues to warn me with that crow that seems sent by Heaven, I shall not be able to hold out in this treason to my Master.”

“It is an act of charity,” replied Leon. “A cock cannot be expected to understand that.”

“She, and God, will forgive me I trust. I have never told her a lie or deceived her before—she has never heard me utter a word that was not truth itself, and she believes me implicitly.”

Leon stood silent for a minute after these words, which revived forgotten pangs like a blow on an old wound.

The physician gave a most hopeful report of his patient.

“Do you hear what the doctor says?” asked the priest in an undertone. “A good report, my dear sir—we may feel sure that Doña María will be spared to us.”

This possessive plural, used and repeated without the slightest intention to wound, was the cruelest sarcasm that Leon ever endured in the whole course of his life. He had seen, and rejoiced to see, the miraculous effect of the priest’s words on the hapless María; but this familiarity with his wife, though strictly within the limits of the charmed circle of spiritual affection, disgusted him excessively. It was one of the fateful moments of his life; he stood face to face with the overweening authority, the absolute and omniscient dominion with which he had been fighting in the dark during the long years of his married life. It saddened him and struck shame to his soul. Aye! That moral divorce of which he had often spoken, and which he felt divided them, had never been complete and final till this instant. Till now he had still cherished esteem, respect; but even these slender threads were now worn very thin, if not actually broken, and soon, very soon, they must give way.

Controlling all expression of this feeling he went to his wife’s bedside and said:

“Señor Paoletti and I are going to get something to eat. Rafaela will sit with you till

we return."

"Oh, yes! go and eat some breakfast," said María joyfully, and with a softer look in her eyes. "But do not be long, I want to see you, and to talk to you.—Do not forget that I must have you with me, that you are not to leave me for an instant. Now that we have the opportunity you will see what a scolding, what a sermon, we can give you—Padre Paoletti and I. I can see you already cowed and humiliated—poor man! Miserable atheist!—But make haste; I want to see you. Look; to-night we will have that sofa placed here, close to the bed, so that you may sleep by my side; then I shall sleep more quietly, and if I should dream any nonsense I can put out my hand and touch you, and then I shall rest in peace."

"Very well; I will do all you wish," said her husband, torn in his mind while his heart was full of bitterness.

"And listen," said María holding his sleeve. "See that some one brings me to-day—at once—my rosary, and my crucifix, and all my books of devotion off the table in my room; all the books, every one, and the water from Lourdes, and my relics, my precious relics."

"Rafaela shall go to Madrid this afternoon and bring you everything."

"It is easy to see that this is an atheist's room," said the sick woman reverting to the impertinent phraseology which she had only forgotten under the pressure of acute jealousy. "There is not a single religious picture, not an image, nothing to betray that we are Christian souls. However, go to breakfast, go and eat. The good Padre has had no food to-day I daresay—poor man! Give him the best of everything—do you hear? The best. Confess your own inferiority and humble yourself before him. Talk to him of me, and learn to appreciate me better."

Leon could hardly conceal a bitter smile as he left the room; and once more that cock was heard to crow.

CHAPTER XII. THE STRIFE OF WORDS.

As soon as Fúcar heard the solemn tread of Padre Paoletti's leaden foot on the floors of his house, he hastened to pay him the usual compliments, putting his house, his table, and his servants at his disposal—his carriages, chapel and treasures of art. It might have been supposed, from the lavish generosity with which he offered everything that could give joy and comfort to necessitous humanity, that he was lord and master over the whole created world. And bowing as low as his burly dignity would allow he expressed, by his polite subserviency, how inferior are all the riches and splendours of the world to the humility of a simple priest, who has no gala dress but his gown, and no palace but his cell.

Paoletti, who was an accomplished connoisseur, not only of the fine arts but of all the arts of life, complimented his host on the magnificence of Suertebella, thus giving the marquis a fair excuse for indulging his favourite vanity, which was to display the mansion, room by room, and do the duties of showman. The excursion was a long one and would have been enough to fatigue the strongest head, the gorgeous apartments contained such a miscellaneous collection of pretty things. Padre Paoletti admired everything with much politeness, showing that he was a man well versed in collections and curiosities. Don Pedro, who talked like the reporter to a newspaper and praised up the mediocre and even inferior works, was apt to quote the price of certain objects—pictures bought of Goupil, or porcelains from some auction at the hotel Drouot, most of them mere good imitations.

"I am overdone, positively overdone with fine things," said he, looking into Paoletti's face and folding his hands with an air of resignation. "I am the slave of wealth, my good Padre. No one would think it, but in fact it is the most intolerable form of slavery. I really envy those who live at ease, with the freedom and independence that poverty gives; without the anxieties of business, with no banquet but what I could eat out of a bowl and no mansion but some cell or hut or cave!"

“But my dear Sir,” said the Italian, raising his hand to his mouth to conceal a yawn, “nothing can be easier than to realize such a wish. To be poor! When I hear poor men sigh and wish they were millionaires, I laugh and sigh; but when I hear a rich man pine for a hovel and six feet of ground in which to rest his bones, I say what I take the liberty of saying to you: Why do you not retire among the hermits of Cordova? Why not exchange Suertebella for a recluse’s cell?”

And he ended as he had begun, with a hearty laugh; but he yawned again, screening it behind his white hand.

“That is it—put in that way it sounds easy enough,” said Fúcar, laughing too. “But—what of social ties—of our duties to the State, who cannot spare her most useful sons? But dear me, it strikes me—how careless I am! It is so late, and you have eaten nothing.”

“Oh! never mind—do not trouble yourself.”

“Never mind! What next? Even your sainted body must be fed.”

“On a little plain chocolate—nothing more. It is a missionary’s body and can endure much.”

“Leon,” cried Don Pedro to his friend, whom he spied passing across the next room, “I will order them to serve breakfast in the Hall of Hymen. Then you will be close to your wife: and you, Señor Paoletti, will not care for the bustle of the dining-room; all the party are breakfasting in there.... Bautista, Philidor!”

Hailing his Spanish servants and his French majordomo, the marquis made the whole household stir in the service of his guests. The multitude and zeal of the domestics resulted in a general clatter; hasty steps echoed over the inlaid floors, and on all sides the clinking of bottles and glasses was heard on metal trays, and the rattle of plates—welcome sounds to the hungry but courteous visitor, while the fragrance of stewed and fried meats pervaded the passages and rooms, as incense floats from chapel to chapel in a church.

The Hall of Hymen, so called because, in the middle of it, stood a group personifying marriage—two figures clasped in each other's arms holding two torches of which the marble flames burnt as one—was quite close to the room which we may call María's; but it did not adjoin it. A table was laid at once, and Leon and the priest sat down.

"Consommé," said Leon pointing to a tureen full of rich soup. "It will be very good for you," and he helped him to a large plateful.

"I have been thinking," said Paoletti when, after a few spoonfuls, he was recovering from the exhaustion he had been suffering under for one hour past, "that in the whole course of my life—not a short one, nor free from strange conjuncture—I never have seen such a picture as we two compose at this moment."

"What picture?"

"Ourselves—you and I eating together. Nothing is the outcome of chance; God alone knows what divine purpose our strange meeting may be destined to work out. What wonderful changes, even in the highest destinies, have been wrought before now by the meeting—apparently fortuitous—of two persons! Reflect upon it, my dear Sir: sometimes a few minutes thought, or some incidental remark may suffice to throw a vivid light into the soul, and meanwhile.—No, no, thanks; no highly flavoured dishes; none of the delicacies of modern cooking.—Have you reflected...?"

"Will you have some wine?" asked Leon much disinclined to follow the priest on the antipathetic theme of his observations.

"No, I never drink it. A little water, if you please, and God bless the giver. Any fool, seeing us sitting opposite each other, would criticise you or me—: 'Look at that wretched priest making up to a freethinker,' they would say; or 'Look at the infidel hob and nob with the parson;' not understanding that though we are eating a little bread and meat together truth can never come to a compromise with error, nor error

ever forgive truth, her bitterest foe,—Strawberries? I never taste them—since truth puts error to shame; hence she flies before truth, hiding herself blindly in her own conceits, or filling her ears with the tumult of the world.—But you are not eating!"

"I have no appetite."

Paoletti had eaten but little; Leon hardly anything. Fixing his expressive eyes on Leon's face, the Italian said with startling emphasis:

"Señor Don Leon, of all the world you seem to me the most to be pitied. Our poor Doña María is not to be pitied; no, only to be admired. If she dies she will enter the realm of the blest wearing many crowns, and among them the crown of martyrdom; if she lives she will be an example to all women. She is a fair lily, combining the graces of beauty, purity and fragrance."

"Yes. She was, no doubt, such a lily," said Leon, turning very white, while his whole being quivered with excitement.—"A lily which, in its purity and fragrance, invited Christian love and promised all the honest joys of life...."

"But it grew close by a thistle...."

"No," interrupted Leon. "A hippopotamus came and broke it down with its ruthless tread."

The padre's eyes grew bigger.

"She is a treasure of great price..." he said.

"She was a treasure of great price," said Leon, tying a knot in his napkin and drawing it very tight, "but with coarse passions and a nature at once visionary and sensual."

"A purifying hand was extended to cleanse away the dross..."

"A hand of ice—that snatched out the diamonds and left false stones instead."

"Why did the owner neglect his jewel?"

"When the thieves do not break in by the door, but mine underground, the owner

does not discover them till they have stolen his gem.—They robbed her of her love, generosity and trust, and left me nothing but cold duty and moral proprieties. She was like a crystal fountain—they dried up the spring, the water became stagnant, and when I hoped to drink nothing remained but filthy sediment. By constantly flowing, the water, though somewhat bitter, would have grown sweet. But they stopped the current and a foul swamp was the result."

"Nay, the water is sweet and of wondrous power," said Paoletti with a seraphic look. "The mystic water, freely bestowed; the very essence of the soul: Divine Love. Where so precious a fount is found on earth it is only just that God should absorb it, and break the cup."

"Nay, the cup is just what has been left for me."

"A golden cup; the only thing that can excite the cupidity of a man devoid of faith. The miserable slave of 'Matter' can never crave that precious drink; his thirst cannot be allayed by spiritual love; it is only a form of avarice and can be slaked by the possession of the golden vessel—physical beauty."

"For you who know nothing of love but through sin—for you who never felt love but only hear of it, taking in at your ears the secrets of others who love, to you much of what concerns only the heart of man must be an inexplicable mystery. You see nothing in life but duties fulfilled and sins committed. This is much, no doubt, but it is not all. Only the man who has never drank at all can enjoy the insipid draught of mysticism, or the bitter savour of sin."

"Only the man who has never drank at all, and who nevertheless is not thirsty, can, by the blessed gift of intuition—which is one of the best graces of our nature—fully enter into all the emotions of true love, from the noblest to the basest. The man who knows everything can feel for everything. You, who abuse us so roundly, might have found friends in those whom you have believed to be your enemies, and peacemakers in your married life in those whom you regard as its disturbers."

“I refuse any such co-operation.”

“What right have you to complain when you have yourself broken every tie? The mere circumstance that he chooses to consider himself outside of the pale of the Church, deprives a man of the right of complaining of the pressure of a bond which is in its nature a religious one. ‘I need no religion,’ they say—‘I abominate it, I cast it from me; but I do not allow religion to defend itself against my attacks, I do not allow it to claim its own!’”

“No—what I do not allow it to claim is mine.”

“God will have the divine part...”

“And I demand the human part...”

Neither of the men finished his sentence.

“The human part is a convenient loop-hole,” said Paoletti sharply, “through which a man sneaks into unfaithfulness and adultery, leaving the martyred wife alone and without protection.”

“But the divine part puts the martyred wife under the protection of those who drink of the spiritual fount!”

“What would become of her if it were not so? the wretched soul must become corrupt from contact with a soul already corrupt.”

“I never tried to corrupt her: I tried to save her by persuasion, almost always by kindness, sometimes by authority verging on tyranny....”

“You confess it—you confess that you were despotic!”

“Not such despotism as it might have been in vulgar hands. Some would have punished, I simply prohibited—and my prohibitions were constantly disobeyed—I could not have insisted without going to cruel lengths.”

“And the dove fled from the talons of the vulture,” said Paoletti with a sort of honeyed sarcasm.

“Yes.—And fell into those of the vampire who sucked all the sweetness out of my existence. I was teaching my treasure to trust me and you taught her to loathe me; I never argued against her beliefs, I made no objection to her having a judicious confessor—but her sanctimonious friends disgusted me. And my enemy was not a man but a whole army—a host that called itself celestial, and that has made itself formidable by gaining allies in bigots and hysterical wretches who believe themselves to be saints. I tried to fight in the dark, but in the dark I was cut in pieces. An act of hypocrisy such as has saved many a weak man, would perhaps have saved me. She, poor deluded soul, bound over to mysticism by promises of celestial joys, proposed terms of peace; nothing could be easier—: ‘Abjure your mad scepticism; come into our fold,’ she said. This was what they wanted! But I would not purchase peace by an imposture, nor try to capture the heart that was slipping away from me by false professions of faith. I would not add another to the host of hypocrites who make up the greater portion of modern society.—Time went on; the struggle had to be fought out. My sincerity exasperated my wife’s spiritual advisers: the ministers of interference and of misapplied piety.

“But after all, what does it matter? I would rather be infamous in your eyes than in my own.”

“A man who fears any eyes but those of God should never speak of such things.”

“And if we are not allowed to talk, what are we allowed to do? You pile a mountain on to a hapless wretch and may he not groan when he is crushed?”

“Lift up your hands and hold off the rock that weighs upon you.”

“I cannot, I cannot. It bears the burthen of centuries, and is formed of the bones of a thousand generations!”

“Poor insect!” said Paoletti ironically. “I declare nothing on earth moves me to pity so much as a philosopher. For my own part I can only beg you to express yourself with perfect frankness on all your feelings....”

"With frankness?"

"With perfect frankness, sparing me no hard words."

"When the storm overtakes me and lashes me and fells me to the ground, what am I to think of that terrific power? can I stop it, can I punish it, can I even insult and abuse it? What can I say that will hurt it, how can I defend myself against so formidable a foe—who is but empty air?"

"Dear Sir," said Paoletti folding his hands with an expression of compunction: "I, as a humble but outraged priest, pity you and forgive you." And then his slow, leaden step sounded across the floor as he made his way back to the sick-room.

CHAPTER XIII. ICES, HAM, CIGARS AND WINE.

The news of María's improvement flew from room to room, and down to the stable where Polito was lounging about; to the hot-houses where Telleria and Onésimo were inspecting the pines and making sapient observations on the progress of acclimatisation—which, according to Don Joaquin, must, in time, lead to a vastly increased production of taxable material; to the aviary where Milagros was lost in admiration at the piping of the little birds, an amusement very much to her taste; and was everywhere received with joy. A number of visitors besides the Tellerias had come to make enquiries, and each and all were met with the same obsequious politeness on the part of the marquis. Some only left a card and went away, but more intimate friends staid awhile to condole with Milagros, who, after making the tour of the garden, went indoors to recover from her fatigues on a sofa in the Chinese drawing-room. There, amid the bronze idols and sombre porcelains, she breathed forth her complaints and lamentations.

"That monster cannot make any objection now to my seeing my daughter.... Here!"

A footman, who was going through the room with a tray of glasses and liqueur, paused at the call.

“Bring me an ice.”

“What flavour does the Señora prefer?”

“Pineapple if you have it or banana. Pilar will you have some?”

“I have this instant been fed with some cocoanut sweetmeat—plum-pudding—sherry, and I do not know what more! That worthy stone-mason Marquis tried to be revenged on me for all my jokes by stuffing me to death. He insists that I am to dine here, to ride in his carriages, use his horses and carry off all his camellias. We know well enough that the worthy broker has a good cook, good horses, a fine garden and a tribe of bedizened servants.—The cook, I may say, is not much to boast of, an apprentice from the Trois frères Provenceaux—I declare this gingerbread palace oppresses me more than I can say; it is for all the world like a pawnbroker’s shop; or a livery coat figged out with gold lace, or.... But, my dear Milagros, do you know that we have an important part to play? Shall we go into María’s room? Shall the reconciliation be effected at once?”

The marquesa’s eyes opened wider like the revolving light when it is growing broader; but they collapsed again as she said:

“The reconciliation! Oh, that, unluckily, is not in the programme.”

“And Pepa—where is she?”

“At Madrid.”

“It would be an awkward thing if she were to come to Suertebella. But I do not understand how María came here.”

“My poor child was stricken down by a sudden attack. She was in a house where there was no furniture—no beds, nothing decent. Don Pedro had her carried here. I am truly grateful to him for his kindness! But that wretched son-in-law of mine—I cannot help it, I must just tell you.—Ah! here is the ice.”

The lady had risen to her feet with some degree of maternal and womanly dignity;

but she suddenly calmed down, and dropping into her seat again among the monsters, she proceeded to eat the ice which soon disappeared in the depths of her afflicted person.

Polito had come back to the billiard-room where he was playing with his friend Perico Nules.

“Here, Philidor,” he suddenly exclaimed. “Just be good enough to order some one to bring me a little mild-cured ham, and a glass of....”

“Of sherry?” Polito hesitated, scratching his beard.

“No—you bother me. Chateau Yquem. If I could only do without this beastly tar; but I cannot, I choke directly.... Stay, one moment mon cher Philidor, some ham for this gentleman too, or some smoked tongue and a glass of Pajarete.”

When they were alone Polito lifted his fingers significantly to his lips and said to his companion: “Smoke?”

“Yes, let us smoke,” said the other taking his pipe out of his pocket.

“No man, not your own tobacco. There is a chest full of cigars. All the produce of Vuelta Abajo is in this house.”

The worthy couple, using their cues as walking-sticks, made their way to a box which, by its insidious fragrance betrayed the superior quality and aristocratic brand of the cigars that lay packed within the cedar boards.

“Very good tobacco—capital!”

“Look here my boy, all this comes, beyond a doubt, from the wealth of the nation.... We may as well lay in a stock.” And he plunged his hand into the box.

“Come, this is going too far!” said Perico Nules somewhat scandalized at the proceeding.

“Nonsense! Let us sing like Raoul chascun per se,” and he hummed the words to Meyerbeer’s air, the Marquis de Fúcar’s store of cigars diminishing perceptibly

meanwhile.

“And, after all, what is all this that we see and touch—and smoke?” said Nules, striking a match. “What is the gorgeous and luxurious place where we now are? this magnificent room, with its fine Arabian tiles, the horses on which we were riding this afternoon, the pines in the hot-house, the pictures, flowers, carpets, vases.—What are they all? They are the juice, the savour, the very extract of our beloved native land—you understand? And as everything displaced by foul means from its natural position tends, sooner or later to return to it—just as animal organisms assimilate from nourishment the equivalent of what they lose by wear and tear, the obvious consequence....”

Here the servant came in with the ham, and his presence postponed the inference.

“And as we ourselves are the country, or an integral part of it,” said Leopoldo.

“The country is claiming its own again,” added Nules attacking the food.

This humorous youth was the originator, according to trustworthy authority, of the ribald and malicious interpretation of the pictures and texts in the chapel.

“Wealth, my dear boy,” he went on smacking his lips over the Pajarete, “works in a circle, you understand? It returns to the point it started from.—The State robs my father of half his income from Xeres in the form of taxes; Fúcar, under the happy impetus of a loan, robs the treasury of half a year’s revenue; and I drink Fúcar’s wine and smoke his cigars, thus supplying wants which my father fails to satisfy by reason of the heavy taxation. You follow me in my explanation of this circulation? But there are still a few cigars left in the case; if we leave them, the servants will smoke them.”

“Heaven forefend! Pietoso ciel!” sang Leopoldo. “That would be too much! In tal periglio estremo,” and again he hummed his Meyerbeer’s.

“Oh! what luck!” exclaimed Nules, looking out of the window. “Here are the Villa-Bojío party—mamma and two interesting daughters.” Leopoldo peeped out to

see the ladies stepping out of a landau at the front door, and his heart stirred in his breast with some little excitement—like the kernel of a "withered nut rattling within its hollow shell," as the wind sways the bough on which it hangs.

"Let us take them out for a drive," suggested Nules.

"To be sure, what fun!—Philidor," shouted Polito, "let us have a carriage out.—But come and meet them."

"We will drive them out to Leganes."

"There is nothing to see there."

"We can show them the lunatics."

CHAPTER XIV. A NOCTURNAL VISIT.

The improvement in the poor saint and martyr's condition continued all day; but in the evening she was worse again. María had a headache and became dull and melancholy. Paoletti had been with her most of the afternoon, but had talked very little, and only of unimportant trifles. Leon too, had been in her room for some length of time, and more than once.

"Listen to me," María said to him. "I do not know whether my fancy is disturbed by fever, or whether it is an illusion of the senses but I feel...."

"What do you feel?"

"As though somewhere—I do not know where, there were a number of people walking about.... It seems to me that I can hear a bustle of servants and the rattling of crockery—I even smell the steam of food which sickens me."

Leon tried to coax her out of these notions but could not succeed; she was not satisfied till Paoletti, whom she trusted as the incarnation of truth, said:

"My dear daughter, this noise and these smells are perhaps merely over-excitement...." This time the cock did not crow.

"I must pray," said María. "But do not go away Leon, stay here. Seeing me so ill, I imagine you will not laugh at me because I say my prayers. I want you to hear me, and to be silent and listen—it is your duty to do so. If you do not believe you can listen and be silent. Do not go, do not leave the room...."

"I am here."

"Sit down, and do not look at the floor, look at me. Padre Paoletti and I will pray; and you—there, close there—and keep quiet. Every word we utter will be a lash—but keep quiet and do not move, look at me—there, so; so that I can see you."

And taking hold of his hand she looked tenderly in his face.

"You ought not to try to pray," said Leon. "Our kind friend Señor Paoletti will pray—listen only, and do not exhaust yourself."

"Very well," said María taking a medal which Rafaela had brought her from under her pillow. "Now, to please me, kiss this medal."

Leon kissed it, not once but again and again. María did the same; then she murmured:

"Mother of God! save my atheist; and if he will not be saved, save me, and so long as I live enable me to be faithful."

Quite unconsciously she had revealed her whole nature in this brief supplication. The sum total of her ideas was: "Let me be saved, even if to secure my salvation I must trample underfoot the first law of married life; while I neglect every human duty in order to aspire and rise to ecstasy, let my husband, the man whom the Church has bound to me, love me devotedly and passionately, and never even look at another woman." In a word: she wanted for herself, as being in possession of the truth, the fullest liberty while he, as the slave of error, was to bear all the burthen.

The room gradually grew darker—sank into funereal gloom pierced only by the cadenced tones of the priest as he repeated the prayers. It was strange, but true; the

voice which was exquisitely modulated in conversation sounded rather harsh as he went through the droning round of Paternosters and Ave Marias.

Rafaela brought in a light just as the Padre ended, and the sudden transition from the monotonous sound to the lighter tones of conversation was like coming out of a sepulchral vault into life and day. Paoletti, after a few cheerful words to his saintly daughter, took his leave, promising to return on the morrow. Leon, bent on politeness, conducted him as far as the “Hall of Hymen.”

“God grant,” said the priest with some acrimony, “that her health may allow of my telling her the truth. This farce is ceasing to be an act of charity!”

Leon watched the confessor as he carefully descended the steps and got into a carriage, and as he heard the wheels crunching the gravelled road across the park he turned to go into the house.

“The truth—the truth!” he said to himself. “Yes, let her know it and live! It is my sincerest wish.”

The rest of the party were spending a gay evening in the tapestried drawing-room—so called because it was hung with such works of art, in which the faded hues and ghastly faces seemed to represent a world of consumptive victims. Leon had no desire to join them; he went back to his wife. During the evening nothing occurred worthy of mention, excepting that the doctor, not yet quite satisfied as to the issue, insisted more stringently than ever on complete rest, and put a positive veto on prayers and religious excitement. It was about ten o’clock when María, after a little calm sleep became restless and eager to talk. Leon in obedience to her wishes, had placed the sofa by the side of her bed and was trying to get some repose. But María began asking him a hundred questions about himself and others, mixed up with the old familiar homilies, the old impertinences that had so often annoyed him in former days: He was called an atheist, a hardened materialist, an enemy to God, a man of pride and sin—though all this vituperation was

accompanied and sweetened by María's pretty hand coaxingly stroking the infidel's beard, patting his cheek or pinching his throat, so sharply indeed, now and then, that her husband exclaimed: "Oh! you are hurting me!"

"You deserve worse than that.—But much will be forgiven you if you only do your sacred duty by me."

After this there was a long pause when both seemed to be sleeping, but suddenly María awoke with a start saying:

"Come now Leon—which of us is more worthy?"

"Why you of course; there cannot be a doubt of that."

"Help me to remember. Did I really tell you that I did not love you, and did you tell me that you did not love me?"

Leon was puzzled and did not know what to say.

"I remember nothing of it," he said at last.

"What do you mean? You do not remember? Did I dream it?"

"I do not remember. I have made it my business to cultivate oblivion."

"But do not leave me."

"I have not moved."

"Come closer—so. How pale you are and your eyes are hollow. Come quite close and lay your head by mine."

Then she fell asleep again, her hand still clutching her husband's hair, as painters represent an executioner holding the head of a traitor up to public view.

The sickly, tremulous glimmer of the night-light, in the porcelain shade with its opalescent and pearly transparency, throwing a broad quavering circle on the ceiling, gave light enough to cast ill-defined shadows of their forms and faces. The sad twilight, suggesting that which must prevail in Limbo, gave a doubtful solidity to everything in the room, and soothed the senses to a torpid state verging on stupor.

Leon lay neither waking nor sleeping; fatigue kept him from thorough wakefulness and anxious thoughts prevented sleep. The night was far advanced when he heard a slight noise in the room, and looked up much startled, for it seemed impossible that any one should come in at that hour. His blood ran chill as he saw a form, a shape, a shade slowly coming towards him. It looked no more substantial than an optical illusion caused by the mysterious light in the china shade. Happily he had no belief in ghosts. He wanted to examine the phantom, which he immediately perceived to be a living human creature, but he could not stir. María's fingers held his hair, and the slightest movement would have disturbed his wife who was sleeping peacefully. He raised his arm to gesticulate a warning as he could not express himself in any other way, but the figure paid no heed; it came up to the bed and leaned over it with evident curiosity, not unmingled with fear. Leon could feel himself enveloped, so to speak, in a gaze of melancholy pathos. His heart throbbed as violently as a maniac struggling in a strait waistcoat. He was furious—he dared not speak, dared not move to exorcise this nightmare visitation; he saw that the phantom—to give it this childish appellation—moved its head as if in reproach, or disapprobation, or despair. Then it fled hastily and incautiously, making more noise than at its entrance, and leaving a sort of chill on its passage, like that of a sudden draught of air.

María woke with a start.

"Leon, Leon," she cried, "I saw...."

"What? Do not talk wildly."

"I saw—and I heard a noise like that of a silk gown—some one running...."

"Compose yourself. No one has been in the room."

"But I saw it," said María, covering her eyes with her hands. "I thought a woman went out at that door."

"Go to sleep again, and do not see and hear things that do not exist."

"Was it Padre Paoletti?"

"How could it be my child? It is midnight.—He will come to-morrow."

"Oh! I want him to explain it to me; no one can explain it but he."

She went to sleep again with her hands piously folded, thus leaving her husband's head free. Leon, finding it impossible to sleep when his mind was in such a turmoil, feeling sure too that he heard some movement in the adjoining room, rose with the greatest caution, and walking softly and slowly left the room. As he went into the next room he heard the sound—impossible to mistake for any other—of the swift rustle of a silk dress. He followed it from room to room, but the noise fled before him—like some prowling creature that feels itself hunted and flies to hide its prey in the darkness. At last, in a room called the Incroyable, the fugitive dropped exhausted into a seat. There was no lamp or candle in the room, but through a ventilator that opened above one of the doors a broad beam of light fell from the lamp that burned all night in the corner of one of the wide corridors. This partial and somewhat romantic light, though insufficient for reading, for looking at prints, or for examining the china, was enough to recognise, or even to study a face by, if need be.

Pepa Fúcar, for it was she who was flying through her father's house like a soul in torment, sat huddled in a chair with her face hidden in her clasped hands and bent down almost to her knees. She moaned rather than spoke:

"I know what you are going to say to me—I know; do not speak to me."

"For Heaven's sake!" murmured Leon standing in front of her. "How imprudent!"

"I will not come again; I will not do it again. I know I have no right—that it is my fate to be wretched and forsaken—always forsaken. I have nothing to complain of—I can demand no explanations—I dare ask nothing. Even to love you is forbidden."

Leon sat down by her side. She did not cease her heart-broken rocking, nor take her hands down from her face. But presently, drawing herself up as though to give herself courage, and conquer her heart by trampling it down—and she even stamped

on the floor with her feet—she wiped away her tears with her trembling hands, for she was not collected enough to take out her handkerchief—nay, as a matter of fact she had lost it—and said with an effort:

"It is over—I am not wanted here—I feel so much, and I have no rights—I am a disgraced woman. Your wife might strike me and only be applauded for it.... Good-bye."

Leon pointed to the door, but he did not speak.

She looked at him with pathetic devotion, but suddenly lifting her hand she laid it on his head and with the strength of intense passion she grasped his hair and pulled him down. He was forced to bend—lower, lower; she held his head with both hands for an instant, and then she hit it—as if it were a thing she could break.

"It is my turn," she said in a broken voice—"mine, to—pull your hair!" Leon pulled himself up—half-angry, half-forgiving.

"Go," he said.

"Yes," she replied, "good-bye. I do not wish to bring disgrace upon you. I will go at once. My heart is bursting—it chokes me to cry and to run. Do not follow me."

She slipped a key into the lock of the museum door, which opened from one corner of the room they were in, and vanished in the darkness. Leon departed by the way by which he had come, returning to his post like a faithful soldier.

CHAPTER XV. LATET ANGUIS.

In the course of that afternoon Don Pedro Fúcar had invited Doña Pilar de San Salomó—whom we have seen looking on at the interesting spectacle of her friend swallowing an ice in the Chinese boudoir—to go round the hot-houses with him, and cast a glance, by the way, at the English horses he had just had sent to him from a famous stable in London. The worthy money-dealer, the "product of his century,"

the noble who derived his patent, not indeed from battles against the Moors, but at any rate from contracts with good Christians, was well aware of the small estimation in which he was held by Pilar. Still, not content with having the exchequer of both hemispheres at his feet, he was very anxious to stand in the good graces of the initiated, so he overwhelmed his guest with attentions and civilities. Besides displaying with more than usual zeal all the splendours of Suertebella, he presented to her some of the treasures it contained: exotic flowers in costly vases, rare fruits, and, to crown all, some sacred relics from the altars in his chapel. With all his habits of politeness the moneyed magnate could not conceal that each gift cost him a greater pang than the last, and at length so far forgot himself as to sigh deeply, gazing at the ground, as though he might there see written in mysterious characters—like the binomial theorem on Newton's tomb—the formula of a bargain or a loan which might bring the very earth we dwell on into the money safe of the Fúcars.

The lady, misinterpreting this disturbance of mind, ascribed it to the day's events, to Pepa's painful and compromising position, and the unexpected presence of Leon Roch and his wife. Satisfied that she was on the right scent, Pilar, as they returned to the house, expressed her thanks for all her host's attentions, and added:

"And your kindness is all the more striking when I reflect that you must just now be greatly troubled by all these rumours."

"And such rumours!" exclaimed Don Pedro with tragic emphasis. "You cannot imagine!... You may fancy what they must be to make this mountain quake!" And he laid his hand on his breast to indicate that even that rock had its hidden springs of sentiment.

At five o'clock Don Pedro took his leave, after once more placing the house and all it contained at the service of the Tellerias. He himself went to Madrid to dine with his daughter, and was not to return till the next morning. Still, if anything serious

required his presence he would come at any hour of the night. Happily María was much better and would no doubt recover. After greeting Gustavo, who had but just arrived, having been delayed by his parliamentary duties and the responsibilities of his office, he left the house.

Pilar also had intended starting for Madrid, but she was detained by Gustavo who was very anxious to tell her Heaven knows what; however, the lady listened to him eagerly, and with the keenest enjoyment of some stupendous piece of gossip of very doubtful taste, but which gratified her curiosity and her malice. They walked out together in the garden, Pilar exclaiming from time to time with a peal of laughter:

"It is like a practical joke which at the same time is a kick or a beating! It is one of those providential dispensations which make the victim cry and every one else laugh. But in this case there is no call for pity or sympathy. Merciful Heaven! What a great man you are and how unfailingly ready to help every one! Why, you intercept the progress of evil by arranging things as cleverly as a novel writer, giving us a surprise that is positively alarming—but a surprise that compels us to turn to you and cry out: 'Lord have mercy! Give us warning before you strike!'"

This profane sally was followed by another burst of laughter; then she said saucily:

"I shall go there."

"You!—what for?"

"I should like to see their faces," said Pilar stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth; and she wiped the tip of her tongue as the tip of a weapon is polished after being dipped in poison. "I will find some pretext."

It was dusk by the time Pilar called for her carriage; she ordered the coachman to drive her to the Fúcar's house in Madrid.

She went in. Don Pedro and his daughter were just sitting down to dinner with Don Onésimo and Doña Vera. Fúcar invited Pilar to join them, but she excused herself, saying that she had only just time to give them the good news of which she was the

bearer. She kissed Pepa, she gave her hand to Onésimo and then began to pet Monina.

“What is it?” asked Don Pedro.

“That María is really almost well again. And it is quite certain that a reconciliation would be effected—Milagros herself told me so. I am so glad! I cannot bear marriages that turn out badly.—My little Monina, will you not give me a kiss?”

“No,” said Monina decidedly, turning away and covering her face with her little hands.

“Oh, silly, cruel child!”

“I do not love you....”

Repulsed on this quarter Pilar turned to Pepa, and glancing at her compassionately she said:

“Good-bye dear ... you know I feel deeply for all your troubles.”

She rustled out on Don Pedro’s arm, whispering a few words in his ear which had the effect of a pistol-shot. As she parted from him at the carriage door, the lady fired a parting shot.

“I wished to warn you, that you might be on your guard. Resignation, Señor Marqués, Christian submission is what is wanting.”

Pepa meanwhile, lost in painful meditation, did not know what to think nor to what possible issue to look. Her spirit was torn by dark presentiments and wild conjectures. This news of a reconciliation had pierced her soul like a three-edged blade.

The quartette sat gloomily enough through the meal; to Pepa food was a nauseous mixture that she simply could not swallow, and her father hardly eat anything either. In the midst of her utter misery, Pepa, who had noticed her father’s strange look of worry and vexation since the day before, saw that this evening he was almost beside

himself. Don Joaquin too, the partner of all the marquis' secrets was irritable; what was happening?

"Ah!" said Pepa to herself, seizing on a notion sad enough in itself but at this moment a happy one for her; "My father must have suffered some great reverse of fortune; he is ruined perhaps, we shall be beggars."

This idea, gloomy as it was, comforted her. Her father's melancholy, in that case, had nothing to do with her personal griefs. What did she care for other interests, for all the money, all the bonds, all the securities, all the loans past, present or to come? That evening, Pepa might have passed close to all the stamped paper in the world piled up in a heap and set fire to on all four sides at once, and she would not even have cast a glance at the ruin.

After dinner, and when their friends had left them, Pepa and Don Pedro withdrew to the room where Monina slept just as the little angel, despoiled of her clothes, was being put into the rosy paradise of innocent dreams. Don Pedro took his grandchild in his arms, and kissing her with even more tenderness than usual, said:

"Poor little dove! you shall never fall into the clutches of that vulture!"

"What is the matter Papa?—What is the matter?" exclaimed Pepa, adding her more urgent embrace to the soft clasp of Monina's arms round the marquis' bull-neck.

"Nothing, my child. Nothing. Do not be uneasy, do not let yourself be agitated; trust in me, and I will put everything right."

"But will not you explain to me?..."

"Certainly not."

"Has anything gone wrong in your business?"

"No my pet, no," said Fúcar repelling this conjecture with some indignation as casting a reflection on his dignity as a man of business.

"I have made ten millions clear by the last loan. Divest your mind at once of such a

dismal idea!”

“But then....”

“It is nothing; do not worry yourself. Sleep peacefully and leave it to me to put everything right.”

“And you are going out?” said Pepa disconsolately, as her father disengaged himself from the loving arms that held him.

“Yes, I have something I must attend to this evening. The Minister of Finance expects me. This miserable country does not find the last loan enough—it wants another.”

“I am really most uneasy. What was it that Pilar said to you?”

“To me? nothing,” said the marquis a little awkwardly. “Nothing but what you heard.”

“She whispered something.”

“No—at least I do not remember it. The reconciliation of our friend Leon with poor María seems to be a settled thing—that was all. I am glad, for it is altogether wrong that two persons of the highest character—a good husband and a good wife—should quarrel about a Mass more or less. It is perfect insanity.—Good-bye sweet-heart.”

“Reconciliation!” exclaimed Pepa with flashing eyes.

The marquis, who did not happen to see her at this instant, took a few steps towards the door.

“Let us be thankful that those who are good can be brought together again,” he murmured as he left the room. “But for the wicked there can be neither peace nor pardon.—May God forgive him!”

Pepa was about to speak, but the words on her lips were so tempestuous that she restrained herself. She sat a long time without stirring. Then she grew restless, walked up and down the room, called her maid, gave some orders, contradicted

them, scolded the nurse, and wandered aimlessly about the house.

When Monina was fairly asleep Pepa locked herself into her own room: beyond a doubt some mystery was in the air, filling it with an electric tension that could be felt though not seen. But every human soul tormented by a crushing grief is disposed to imagine that the unknown woes of others must be of a similar character, and Pepa believed that her father's uneasiness must be in some way akin to her own sorrows, or at any rate that their griefs had a common origin. The magnitude of her own misery blinded her to every other; she could not think that any living soul could be troubled by another cause than this dreaded truce between Leon and María which had been so abruptly announced.

No arguments to prove that the source of our anguish may be a lie have any effect in extracting the sting; on the contrary, a syllogism is the worst forceps in the world and when it is applied to extract only a thorn it seems to increase the smart a hundred-fold. Pepa, when she tried to convince herself that Pilar's information was a fiction, only tortured herself the more. This reconciliation racked her as though a harrow were being dragged over her bleeding heart.

It was growing late, and Don Pedro, she knew, would not come till morning. His benevolence and liberality maintained more than one house in Madrid besides his own.

An idea had entered Pepa's head, and she did not hesitate to carry it out. She drove to Suertebella, crept into the house through the museum and the Incroyable drawing-room, whence she made her way through the long suites of apartments to the room she wanted to reach. As we have seen she realised her project; with regard to its issue we can only beg the reader to have patience and read on.

CHAPTER XVI. AN EXCESS OF ZEAL.

Very early on the Wednesday morning Leon went out to take a walk in the garden.

When he went in again, he sat down alone in the “Hall of Hymen,” where he was presently joined by Gustavo. Telleria had put on a face of stern severity and held his head high with an assumption of forensic dignity, and a certain ostentation and inflation of demeanour due apparently to the glow kept up inside him by the combustion of “laws human and divine;” so that he seemed ready to burst, but for the relief afforded by the crater of his mouth through which all this inflammatory ferment found an issue, mingled with the lava of his indignation. Leon saw at once that mischief was brewing.

“I have been anxiously awaiting daylight to have an opportunity of talking to you,” said Gustavo in dry tones that argued considerable annoyance.

“If you were so impatient,” replied Leon even more drily, “you might have struck a light and we could have talked at night.”

“At night? No. I feared I might disturb you in more agreeable society,” said the lawyer sarcastically.

“Then speak at once, and as briefly as you can. Forget, for once, that you are an orator, and that you spend your life among women who are never tired of talking.”

“I am sorry to disappoint you, but I must tell you that I cannot be brief.”

“So much the worse,” said Leon with sullen bitterness. “Since you must preach, begin by preaching patience.”

“You have plenty for your own evil deeds,” replied Gustavo hotly. “What I ought to preach to you now, is submission, if you were capable of it.”

“Submission? Am I not listening to you?” said Roch, who had reached a state of mind in which he found it impossible to conceal his antipathy for the whole family.

“Still you will need it—for your sceptical coolness, which is simply the corruption of your dead soul, will not stand you in stead when you hear what I have to say to you. You know that I am opposed to duelling as being contrary to all laws human

and divine."

"I defend the practice no more than you do; but I could think even duelling a good thing if the laws human and divine of which you speak are yours."

"They are mine, and they are the only true ones. I hate duelling as being absurd and sinful; still...."

"Still, under existing circumstances," said the other interrupting him, "you are willing to risk damnation for the pleasure of killing me."

"It will be no pleasure, I am a Christian."

"Speak out," said Leon growing angry. "What are you driving at? Have you come to challenge me? A duel is an absurdity which is very generally accepted; a murder depending on luck and skill which occasionally is irresistibly forced on us. I accept this challenge to murder—whenever you please; today, to-morrow, with the weapons you may select."

"No, you have quite misunderstood me," said Gustavo turning the question like a lawyer who only wishes to prolong a case. "I was saying that even though I am no advocate of duelling this would be an occasion when I might set aside my religious scruples and take up a pistol or a sword...."

"Then do so."

"No.—You have done evil enough to justify such a man as I am in trampling on every moral prejudice, on all laws human and divine, and trusting to a weapon to execute justice. But...."

"But...." said Leon mimicking his brother-in-law's tone. "Speak, my dear fellow; speak and think frankly, as I do when I say: 'I hate you.'"

"Nay. My principles do not allow me to say, 'I hate you;' but, 'I pity you.' Not, 'I will kill you;' but 'God will kill you!'"

"Then do not speak in accordance with your principles; adopt some others for the

nonce—try mine."

"If I did I should place myself in antagonism to all law, human and divine. But to conclude: a duel is out of the question, because in this case every advantage would be on my side. In the first place: I am right and you are wrong; you are the criminal and I the judge; and by all the laws of logic I am the conqueror and you are the vanquished. In the second place: I am skilled in the use of every kind of weapon, having for the sake of my health kept myself in constant practice by shooting at a mark and fencing; while you, who have given your whole time to the study of physics and geology, cannot handle either a pistol or a sword. So that even on the ground of brute force I must be the conqueror. In spite of all this, much as it may surprise you...."

"You forgive me!" exclaimed Leon controlling his rage to indulge his sarcasm. "Thanks—a thousand thanks—with your elephant-load of 'laws human and divine.'"

"I do not forgive you," said the other putting all the dramatic emphasis he could command into his fine deep voice. "In renouncing the advantages I have over you I simply renounce the task of punishing you with my own hand, and deliver you over to the arm of God, which is already raised to strike you."

"Again many thanks," repeated Leon but his irony was not unmixed with anger. "You are no doubt God's high sheriff. It is, I presume to your familiarity with God, whose apostle you are, that you owe your knowledge of his high purposes and your certainty of divine justice."

"The purposes of Providence are seen in events, of which the ordering is sometimes so clear that none but an idiot can fail to see in them the threatening gesture of that awful arm. I do not fancy myself an inspired prophet. To foretell your punishment I only needed to know a fact of which you are ignorant. That is why I refuse to fight, that is why I leave your chastisement in the Hands of One who will inflict it more

surely than I can. And that is why I say: ‘You will die!’”

“Die!” exclaimed Leon who, though he scorned his adversary, could not hear these words without a shock.

“Yes, you. You will die of rage!”

“That I think likely enough,” said Leon, thinking over the odious list of his wife’s family. “One may die too of a surfeit of relations; and when a man whose only object in life is domestic happiness, with its pure and honourable joys, finds nothing but a chamber of torture where he is martyred on the rack, it is probable that he will writhe and grow weary of it. There are poisonous herbs, and there are venomous families.”

“You will die of sheer rage,” Gustavo went on with brutal insistence. “I know it, I have seen it—I have it in my own keeping—in a sealed packet in my desk, of which every letter is a drop of the mortal poison which will be the death of you.”

“I do not understand,” said Leon, his curiosity roused at last. “What is it? A lawsuit? Do you think you can kill me with a lawsuit? You wretched law-mongers spend your lives in poisoning the human race, and you think that I shall swallow the bait of your sophistry.—I do not want to know what horrible intrigue you have been plotting against me.”

“I am plotting no intrigue—there is no intrigue in the matter.—There is nothing but justice; and even of that justice I am not the originator but the instrument. Under other circumstances I should have done nothing to abet it, but since your behaviour to my poor sister, aggravated too by the disgraceful facts that have lately come to my knowledge....”

“When?” asked Leon and his voice was like distant thunder.

“You do not know?”

“No. What are these disgraceful facts?”

“And the hypocrite can ask!—Here.”

“Here!—what?”

“You try to ignore it, but your pale face betrays your guilt, and under the pangs of awakened conscience even the hardened mask of the sceptic must blush. Quite lately I have seen you in all the naked hideousness of your nature, and the depravity of your moral sense. It is monstrous!”

“Explain yourself—or ...” and Leon’s hands were clenched as though he longed to choke some one.

“By all means. Is your connection with the mistress of this house any secret, as well as your treacherous betrayal of the most saintly, pure, and angelic woman that God ever sent into this world? However, your conduct up to this time, though a breach of every law, human or divine, has not been grossly scandalous. Though morally criminal, you have not yet fallen in the scale of wickedness to the level where it is hard to distinguish a man from a devil.”

“Pray describe to me that depth of vileness in which I might be taken for one of your friends,” said Leon, again lending his fury the guise of an acrid humour which, like absinthe, embitters and intoxicates a man while it makes him laugh.

“Why do you ask me to tell you things you full well know? But, to be sure, there are reprobate natures which like to have the mirror held up to them, and revel in the hideousness of their own image, like apes who gaze at their reflection in a puddle.”

“No more of this coarse rigmarole and sham rhetoric! Speak plainly, state facts, call things by their names; we want no special pleading and parliamentary rhodomontade; I am sick of this endless parade of words, and confusion of divine laws with human subterfuge.”

“Oh, very well,—then I will speak plainly. After reducing my unfortunate sister to the state in which she now lies, any man, however wicked, might respect her weakness, if not her innocence. In every dying human creature there is something of

the angel. You have not respected even that; while your saintly victim is lying on her death-bed, soothed perhaps by your lies, and believing you less base than you really are, you can meet your paramour in the Incroyable room. Cheating one, and making love to the other; killing one by inches, and giving the other the affection due to your wife! Well, I can understand this, Leon. I can understand falsehood and guilty passion.—What I cannot understand, because it seems to me baseness too utter for humanity; is that both crimes should be committed under the same roof. Two such deeds of infamy are too much at the same time and place."

Leon, before his accuser had ended his diatribe, had broken out into a frank fit of scornful laughter which seemed to have dissipated his indignation.

"Laugh—laugh away—I am not surprised at that. I am well aware of the audacious cynicism which lies hidden behind that mask of philosophical virtue. Your whole moral nature is like an artificial plant, which it is easy to strip of the flowers and leaves which have given it a semblance of life. That is what your moral theories are: artificial flowers; for natural flowers which have perfume and colour cannot bloom in an empty vessel, or grow from a soil of mathematical formulas and barren science. And to think that I could defend you against the accusations of my family! that I could ever have believed in your honour! Good Heavens! how could I be so deceived."

"But are you perfectly certain that I did meet Pepa while my wife was asleep?" asked Leon in a sarcastic tone which conveyed his sovereign contempt. "Did you see it? There are eyes that see falsehoods."

"I saw it. I was sitting with my mother, who, whatever her faults may be as a woman, is a tender and loving parent, and who could not tear herself away from this house where her only daughter is suffering. Not being able to see her, in consequence of your cruel and selfish prohibition, she resigned herself to weep and watch from a distance the door of María's room. I sat with her all night, to share her

grief, while my father—whose weakness in the most critical circumstances is really inexcusable—took a lamp and went to inspect a collection of curiosities to which only men are admitted by special permission from Fúcar. Polito had drunk too much, with his friend Perico Nules, and was rather noisy. He began by wandering about the passages and annoying the maid servants, till I went after him, and succeeded in locking him up,—by midnight he was sleeping like a drunken angel. My mother and I were making up accounts in the Chinese boudoir and trying to arrange our disordered affairs; afterwards she said her prayers, and I, after searching the house in vain for a book to read, also gave myself up to my devotions. Within these magnificent walls, where so many marvels are collected, where copies from the antique alternate with monstrosities of gaudy taste, representative of modern art, there is everything that man can ask for, excepting a library. Since, on entering this house one must leave one's intelligence on the doorstep, it is as well perhaps that one's senses should be kept alive to make it easier!—My mother was tired of praying but was not sleepy; she was thinking of our dear María and of some way of cheating you and seeing her daughter. She would not go to bed and treading on tiptoe, she took to wandering through the rooms. As she approached the Incroyable room she thought she heard voices. She called me, and I hastened to join her; we went forward together and listened. The first sounds we heard were sobs, as we thought, but we at once understood that they were in fact passionate kisses. It was you—and she.—We hid behind the group of Meleager and Atalanta in the corridor and heard her open the door into the museum; we afterwards heard you pass through the room, returning to hide your disgraced head, crowned, as I may say, with laurels of infamy, on the pillow of your martyred wife. The woman who was with you was Pepa; and to remove every doubt my father can confirm it, for he met her as he was returning with the lamp in his hand from the cabinet of curiosities he had been inspecting."

"And is that all?" said Leon calmly. "Has your espionage discovered no more than

that? There are creatures who cannot breathe without exhaling slander!"

"Slander! What next? Of course I know that you can give the facts an interpretation favourable to yourself. You are never at a loss for sophistries to defend yourself."

"I, defend myself! I, condescend to touch the dirt-heap of your foul suspicions, to argue about a fact that you and your mother have seen through the jaundiced spectrum of your impure imaginations!—Never!"

"The device is an ingenious one, but it fails of its effect. I am not convinced."

"I do not want to convince either you or her," said Leon with vehement fury. "Your opinion is to me so absolutely worthless that I positively feel a certain satisfaction in leaving you in your mistake. Your infernal nimbus of evil thoughts becomes you so amazingly. Do you think that I flatter myself that I can change the baseness of your souls, or by any waste of words create an idea of purity and honour in a mind tainted with the leprosy of chronic sin? Your opinions, and the opinions of all your execrable family, who repay solid benefits with slander, are to me no more than the rain which wets us but cannot blacken us. Do we quarrel with the coach-wheel which splashes us with mud? And you—the political and religious moralist, always preaching party-sermons; you—a machine for grinding out ready-made morality; you—who pound up 'laws human and divine' into a patent lozenge, to cram the world with an anodyne of sophistry and piety flavoured to each man's taste—you cannot dose me with morality packed into a sugar-plum! My faults may perhaps serve your turn as virtues, and the base sentiments that I disown and cast out, you may, if you please, pick out of the dirt and make the pride and boast of your conscience. Before preaching to me why do you not look at home? If you study yourself you must surely see that your life, your fame, and your credit would vanish like smoke if San Salomó were a man instead of a puppet."

Gustavo's lips were bloodless, his hands trembled and his eyes flashed as Leon spoke; and then, not knowing what to say, he hesitated a few minutes before he

spoke.

“You are a skilful antagonist,” he said, “and have turned the point against my own breast. Well—I do not deny it; you may learn from me at any rate the virtue of candour, the merits of confession, of which an atheist is incapable. I plead guilty; the giddy whirl of the world, the weakness of Man’s nature, the blandishments of flattery and applause have led me, I own, into antagonism to those laws, human and divine, which I acknowledge and respect. I am the first to accuse myself, as I was the first to cast a stone at the scandals of my family, and the first to defend you so long as I believed in your integrity—you know that. But there is no sort of comparison between your crime and mine, between your treachery and mine. We have both sinned; you, out of sheer cynicism and absolute ignoring of right, I out of weakness of will. In you there is nothing but evil, there is no door by which good can enter into your darkened soul; in me, though my deeds have been evil, faith is still left—a way by which good may come in. Your sin stands alone in its hideous blackness; mine has brought with it the precious grace of repentance. You are not capable of any amendment; I am. You see nothing beyond; I see salvation, because I see amendment. To me, the very idea of sin suggests that of pardon. I do not know my own destiny, but I do know that of the human race, and the fact that Heaven exists is enough for me. You know nothing, and evil has no terrors for you because you do not believe in the existence of Hell.”

“This is sophistry, and mere juggling with words. What can you know of what I think or am? Do you believe that men and souls are at the mercy of your apostolic dogmatism, of your insolent and official interpretation of the gospel by which you issue death-warrants or reprieves? You fancy yourself a sort of inspector of passports to Heaven! But do you suppose that there really is an office where our luggage is examined to see if we are smuggling tobacco—that is to say anything prohibited in your manufactories of lies where ideas are stamped and then sold, all cut and dried, to hypocrites?—Do me the favour and honour of relieving me of your

presence or I cannot answer for observing the respect due to this house and to the tie which unites us."

"You are the murderer of an angel!" bellowed Gustavo, mad with fury.

"I shall really lose patience with your follies," said Leon, taking three steps forward with so threatening a gesture that Gustavo involuntarily retreated, but he was no coward and at once made a stand. "Be silent or you will find out that my endurance has an end and see what a man can do when he can bear no more." And pointing to the window Leon extended an arm which, though by no means Herculean, was capable of exerting no small strength.

"And if you continue to provoke me, although I am no advocate of duelling, and have no practice with pistols or swords, and no skill in preaching sermons, I will promise you a pleasant half-hour. I will show you how an apostle flies out of window and no earthly power can prevent it."

"Indulge if you choose in such an abuse of brute strength!" retorted Gustavo with a glare of defiance. "You have murdered my sister as it is."

"You cannot aggravate my rage by saying that," cried Leon beside himself. "Your sister and yourself, your father and your mother, are to me no more than the birds that fly past. You have ceased to exist for me.—Now choose—the door or the window."

The dispute might have terminated in a fray and perhaps some act of violence, but the marquesa came rushing in with loud cries, and behind her Don Agustin in evident dismay and alarm.

"What is all this? Leon—Gustavo—my dear children!" cried the lady, interposing with outstretched arms.

"This man," roared Gustavo.

"Leon—what will you do next? After shutting up our darling so cruelly...."

“I—shut her up! I?” said Leon talking rather wildly. “No, there she is; I leave her to you, I make you a present of her.”

“You would not allow us to go in to see her. Thinking of that sweet martyr, I have not slept a wink all night,” said the marquis.

“Go in, all of you,” said Leon pointing to the door leading to his wife’s room. “Go in.”

And without waiting for another word, the Tellerias rushed in. A vehement sound of kissing ensued, given with a warmth and eagerness that were only natural after this enforced separation.

CHAPTER XVII. THE TRUTH.

After the first greetings were over María asked:

“Tell me, Mamma, did I dream it, or is it true that I heard Gustavo’s voice and my husband’s as if they were quarrelling?”

“We had a little discussion,” said the young man, who had not yet recovered from his pallor and nervousness, nor got rid of the lines in his forehead—that sacred tablet on which fancy might read the decalogue and the latest code.

“No, no, mere words and rubbish,” interrupted Milagros, whose one idea was the reconciliation, a thought intimately allied with the wish.

“Your respected husband, made madly savage by my accusations, proposed to settle my share in the business by flinging me over the balcony like a cigar-end,” said Gustavo, and he tried to laugh at his own wit in the belief that the effort would restore his nerves to their normal balance.

“Where was this?”

“In the ‘hall of Hymen.’”

“What is that?”

“Don’t worry yourself about it, my darling child.”

“My dearest daughter,” said her father, caressing her, “you must learn to accustom yourself to view your husband’s proceedings with indifference, and to feel that what he does, or leaves undone cannot matter to you. It is greatly to be regretted that you cannot get over certain deeply-rooted feelings, and that you are bent on being a martyr and struggling against wind and tide.”

“What are you talking about, Papa?” asked María bewildered.

“I,” continued Don Agustin, laying his hand on his burly person to attest his honour, “I am determined to bring all the energy of my character to bear on the one object of avoiding a scandal which must bring discredit on us all, and place you in the most ridiculous position.”

“Agustin,” said Milagros, unable to conceal her vexation, “you had better go and study the museum. You are not wanted here.” And she gave emphasis to the hint by nudging her husband’s elbow to convey to him that the time had not come for any display of energy or avoidance of scandal. As a woman and a mother she had understood the illusion in which Leon had chosen to leave his wife, and approving it, endeavoured to keep it up.

“What museum?” asked María more and more puzzled, and seizing at once on any clue that might strengthen her awakened suspicions.

“A museum not far off,” stammered the marquis taking his wife’s hint and acting upon it to the best of his intelligence, for with all his faults he was devoted to his daughter. “One that has lately been opened at Suertebella....”

María looked from one to another in blank astonishment, questioning them with dull bewilderment in her eyes, while her lips could hardly frame the enquiries that formed themselves in her brain.

“Suertebella—near this?” she murmured. “Tell me one thing.”

“What?”

“What is it, my child?”

“How is it that I seem to feel the stone and mortar of that house here—in my very being; I feel its walls....”

“What are you talking about my love?”

“Its walls are crushing me.”

“Good Heavens! do not talk so wildly!”

“What delirious fancies are these! It is much to be regretted that your sound judgment....”

“This house....”

“Is a house ... you know, a building....”

At this instant Polito flew into the room with outspread arms and flung them round his sister exclaiming: “Mariquilla, so at last your blessed husband will allow us to see you! He is a gaoler, a bandit, a wretch! I was in the court-yard looking on at a fight between two dogs and fourteen rats when they told me I might see you. I rushed up.—And your husband is out there too, looking like a statue, and more stony than the group of Hymen. Dear little woman, you are quite well now, are you not?—you will get up and get away from this place?”

Milagros almost skinned her elbow driving it against her son’s ribs, but without putting a check on this torrent of indiscretion.

“There is a strange and horrible look of fear on all your faces,” said María, gazing at them all in turn. “You look as if you longed to tell me, but at the same time wanted to hide some dreadful fact.”

“My darling child, you are still far from strong,” said the marquis stroking her hair. “When you are quite well again and can come home with us....”

“The poor child fancies things that have no existence,” said Milagros anxiously. “It

would be far better if you would all go and leave us to ourselves."

"You are deceiving me, you are in league to deceive me!" cried María with sudden frenzy. And raising the Crucifix that lay upon her pillow, she said:

"Dare to tell a falsehood in the face of this."

They all were silent except Gustavo, and he, extending an oratorical and legislative hand towards the sacred image, said, with grandiloquent emphasis:

"I abhor falsehood, and I believe that it can never under any circumstances be wrong or injurious to speak the truth."

Milagros seized him as if to thrust him out of the room; but he went closer to his sister and, patting her cheeks, bent over her to say:

"But you are worrying yourself about trifles. Your saintliness and virtue have given you a position so exalted that you can afford to look down with contempt on a man who deserves nothing else from you. You are better already, and before long we will take you home, to our house, where you will be better cared for than ever, where we shall appreciate your worth and adore you as you deserve to be adored.... Rejoice instead of sorrowing, and give thanks for your recovered freedom. Poor martyr!"

Gustavo did not mean to be perverse, but he was possessed with a perfectly fanatical form of what is called public virtue.

"Poor martyr." María repeated sadly, fixing her eyes on vacancy, on a remote spot where there was absolutely nothing to be seen, nothing but the vague projection of her own thought. After a short silence she said in a voice that became weaker as she spoke:

"I dreamed it. I dreamed the truth, and falsehood cheated me when I awoke."

Then, suddenly sitting up in bed, she cried out: "Where is my husband?"

"He will come this moment, my sweet," said her mother kissing her fondly. "Compose yourself, or you will make yourself ill again."

"Who was it but you that filled my mind with jealousy?" the martyr went on, turning indignantly on her mother. "Why should you try to soothe me now? Fetch my husband and Padre Paoletti.—Every one else must go; leave me with them."

She put her hand to her forehead with a sharp cry.

"What is it? Merciful Heaven!"

"A pain in my head," she murmured closing her eyes. "A pain that pierces and burns my brain.—That woman! Mamma, do you see her? That woman has driven a red hot nail into my head."

They all stood dumb with horror.

"Help me, help me!" cried María fairly raving. "Do you not see her coming towards me? Will no one have the charity to drive her away, to throttle her? Jesus, Saviour of my soul—protect me!"

There was a solemn and terrified silence, broken only by the marquis, who indulged in a smothered fit of coughing. Milagros was crying, kissing her daughter, and appealing to her with tender words. But María did not answer; her eyes were shut and her speechless stupor was like the silence of death.

They were rushing for the doctor when he came in. He immediately pronounced the patient to be in a very critical state; he was excessively angry, saying that he would take no responsibility, as his orders had not been obeyed, and ordered every one out of the room with exasperated indignation.

Heroic remedies could alone avail. The battle which had seemed to be won, would yet be lost but by the grace of God. His utmost powers must be put forth to make up for this sudden desertion on the part of Nature; she had gone over to the enemy's camp, leaving science single-handed and almost desperate.

After his dispute with his brother-in-law, Leon had remained quiet for a little while; then he was seized with that craving for violent exercise which comes over us in

certain states of mind, as though a skein of suffering were wound round us and we must walk far to release ourself.

For above an hour he paced about the grounds. When he came in again, as he was passing through the “Hall of Hymen,” he perceived, on a chair, a broad brimmed black hat. Seated on the divan which surrounded the pedestal of the marble group, he discovered the diminutive person of Padre Paoletti, looking smaller than ever in his hunched-up attitude. Out of the little black mass came his pleasant face and those eyes which sparkled so vividly, as he slowly uncurled himself like a snail creeping out of its shell. It was a strange fact, but in his present state of mind the presence of the priest seemed to comfort Leon.

“They told me as I came in,” said Paoletti in evident distress, “that Doña María was suddenly very much worse. You see how useless our deceit has been. Is the time come for the truth?”

“Perhaps,” said Leon holding the door for Paoletti to go into the room first.

They arrived just as Moreno was applying the last resources of his skill. Paoletti at once retired to pray in the chapel, which was ablaze with tapers; the husband and the physician remained to watch with infinite anguish and pity the drama of a diseased brain where ideas—or intangible fluids—and organic life—or a mysterious essence—were going the circuit of the nervous centres in a bewildering round, their obscure struggle hastening on the divorce which we call death. Everything was done that lay in human power to avert immediate danger and divert the mischief from the centre to the extremities. But no remedy availed to rouse the reaction that might have expelled the enemy. It progressed triumphantly, like a desperate invader who has burnt his ships. They tried everything and each trial only confirmed them in despair.

All day the sufferer lay in a state of alternate delirium and prostration. The physician announced with solemn decision that the end could not be far off.

"What remains to be done," he said, "is in the hands of the physician of the soul."

Later in the day María seemed to wake up and her mind was clear; she was quite herself again, and enjoying that brief interval of lucidity which nature almost always grants in such cases, as though to allow those who are about to pass into the other world to cast a parting glance on this which they are quitting.

"Pray leave me alone with my spiritual director," said María in feeble accents, and the husband and doctor at once left the room. There was no further need for science or earthly love.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE BATTLE.

María fixed her eyes on Paoletti's face with a softened gaze. The circumstances were so solemn that even the good little priest, accustomed as he was to melancholy and emotional scenes, was deeply moved. Controlling himself however, he went up to the bed, and taking the fevered white hand that she held out to him, said with mystical enthusiasm:

"We are alone, my beloved daughter—my sister and friend, whom I love most truly; alone with our spiritual thoughts and sacred fervour. Fear has no place here; joy reigns alone. Arise, pure conscience, fear not; appear in all your brightness, rejoice in your own beauty, and instead of dreading the hour of release look forward to it eagerly. Oh Triumph! do not disguise thyself under a false semblance of defeat."

María, less eager than usual to swallow the sweet droppings of this mystical honeycomb, was thinking, in fact, of something else. It was with bitterness as well as sadness that she said:

"I have been deceived."

"With a pious purpose," replied Paoletti promptly. "The alarming state of your health required the concealment of the painful truth. Forgive me if I too lent myself

to the deception which was, as I repeat, a deed of Christian charity. I saw how necessary it was to second your husband's beneficent plan...."

"And he has kept me, and is keeping me, under that woman's roof," she exclaimed, half-choking.

"It was through no fault of his. There was no other house within reach where you could have the requisite medical attendance and be properly taken care of. I entirely approve of your having been brought here. A life in imminent peril is not a thing to be lifted and carried about like a sack. The best thing that could happen to you was to be here."

"And I dreamed it—and when I woke they denied it." She was too weak to speak more than a few words at a time, and it is impossible to give any idea of the feeble, extinct, quavering tones of her voice. It was like that of a forsaken child, wearied out with calling and crying for its mother.

"And my husband and that woman," she went on, "will meet hour after hour in this house to embrace and to count ..." again her voice failed her, and Paoletti himself felt a lump rising in his throat.

"To count the minutes I have left to live—as I count the beads of my rosary."

There was a pause, during which the confessor tried to regain his composure.

"My dearest friend in the Lord," he began, "this is really a monstrous invention of your fancy. Listen to me while I tell you the exact facts, the truth to which I bear witness as a servant of God. The truth can do no harm to a noble soul like yours; a conscience so brave and so blameless will not be unhinged by a revelation of human weakness which cannot in any way affect it, any more than the dust blown up from the highway can affect the purity and whiteness of the clouds in the sky. You shall hear the whole truth, with nothing kept back and nothing added. Don Leon, it is true, loves this lady; he himself owned as much to me; and as he did not tell me under the seal of confession, I may and ought to tell you. But at the same time, I solemnly

declare to you that the lady is not now at Suertebella, but that your husband himself begged and desired her to leave. Decency I may say required it, which is the outward sign of the grace of modesty. Your unhappy husband is, of course, incapable of any moral feeling; but, thanks to a cultivated mind, he has the religion of appearances, and can always assume that superficial guise of virtue which we term chivalry."

María made no reply. Her white hand, which had not, during her brief illness, had time to grow thin and retained its delicate roundness, was playing with the fringe of the counterpane. Not far from this restless hand was the small bullet-head of the Italian; his face pale and lifeless when he sat with his eyes cast down, though, when he looked up, they glittered with a flash that suggested the sparkling of fireworks.

"I cannot believe," said the priest fixing María with the fascination of that glance, "that a spirit so fortified by divine love as yours is, can allow these facts to disturb it. I know you well, and I cannot imagine that beautiful soul fettered and dragged down by trivial anxieties like any ordinary woman, or detaching its thoughts from the sublime ideal spheres to wander through the murky paths of worldly disputations, like idle minds that find time too long. Am I right my beloved daughter? Am I mistaken in thinking that those eyes, accustomed to the splendours of Heaven, can no longer deign to look down on the feebler lights of earth?"

"I am jealous," said María the tone in which we state a pathetic truth. And just as the centurion gave the Redeemer a sponge dipped in vinegar for refreshment when he was athirst, the priest poured honey and vinegar into María's parched soul.

"Jealous!" he said. "Jealous, when you have fired your heart with the love that is never unrequited! Unless I have failed to enter into the feelings of my illustrious penitent, she must have fortitude, and grace, and a sense of divine love which will raise her above such base anxieties. Jealous—of whom? Of another woman, and for the sake of a man; jealous, of nothing in a creature who is nothing and who is worth

nothing!—Some radical change must have taken place in your mind, my dear daughter. What has occasioned it?"

"Jealousy," murmured María from the depths of her anguish.

Then, by slow degrees, frequently pausing to rest, María related all that had happened since Pilar de San Salomó had told her of Leon's infidelities, until she lost consciousness. She told the priest everything, omitting nothing of importance, nor any interesting detail.

"Excepting your outbursts of indignation, your sacrifice to worldly prejudice in the matter of dress, and your overhasty action, there is nothing reprehensible in your conduct," said Paoletti as he sat with his head resting on his hand and his eyes cast down on the floor—like a weapon laid by in its sheath, listening to her story, word by word, drop by drop like an extract distilled from an alembic. María breathed a sigh of relief.

"I thought I had sinned heavily," she said.

"You have sinned no doubt, in the way I have said; but it is no mortal sin. I see in your visit nothing more than a woman's natural impulse to prevent the rupture of a sacred tie. I have told you already, many times, that your pure desire to cultivate the spiritual life, and his deep contempt for the faith cannot exempt either of you from the duties of married life. So long as you both live, you are bound together by the sacrament of marriage, and when one strove to burst the bonds it was only natural and right that the other should fly to prevent it; nay to tighten the tie if that were possible. Ah! my most precious daughter, how often have we talked it over!"

María nodded affirmatively and fixed her eyes on the ceiling.

"When my object was to give a fixed purpose to your beautiful life, I have often said this," continued Paoletti, not lifting his gaze from the ground, but staring at the carpet, as if he did not know where to look. "Many times as you know, I have quieted your mind on this point when you were disturbed by scruples. 'No,' I have

said, ‘God cannot require a married woman to close her mind to every consideration of what she owes to her husband.’ He, even though he may have erred in spiritual things, has a right which cannot be abrogated even though his ideas and principles may be in direct opposition to those of his wife. Although, seeing his contumacious incredulity it is impossible that you should give him an atom—I say an atom since I must perforce use a material image—an atom, I say, of your exquisite spirit, of those graces which are claimed by their Creator; although you cannot have any single idea in common, nor that confidence which might fill him with vain hopes that he could ever turn his wife out of the path of perfection in which she is walking—still, all that is not of the spirit is his; all that is essentially of the flesh and world. You have confided to me all your most intimate thoughts, all the tender secrets of your soul—all your husband’s expressions and opinions; I have fully appreciated him and on my knowledge of the facts I laid down for you a scheme of life to which you have perfectly conformed until now, when I find you distraught and wandering from the path. But remember all we have said about it, and my arguments which will set everything in its right light; and never confuse spiritual things with what is merely human, or that which is of God with the things of the flesh.”

María said nothing, but turned herself wearily on her pillow.

“Speak to me, my dear and precious lamb.”

“My husband said a great deal....” she murmured.

“Yes; and you know that in our delightful discussions I was always able to confute his sophistical arguments; you always saw I was right—you were always convinced.”

“But then I was not jealous—and jealousy—I know it now as surely as I know God—jealousy is my way of loving.”

“Yes, you loved him!” said Paoletti a good deal confused, as he glanced up for a moment and then looked down again, “because you took an interest in him, and did

not wish him to suffer; and in this I supported you—always supported you."

"But still, he said a great deal," repeated María in the same weary tone of an unhappy child. "He said that you...."

"Well, that I?"

"That you, by constantly pruning my affections to concentrate them on God, by pruning my ideas, from a terror of atheism, by robbing him of my heart and leaving nothing but duty, had left him nothing of his wife but the slave of his desires."

"Oh! woman, woman!" exclaimed Paoletti eagerly and not without some dignity. "How often have I refuted this argument, which is terrible only in appearance, and left you soothed and reassured!"

"But can you refute the fact...."

"What fact?"

"That I am jealous, envious; that now I long for what is no longer mine."

The worthy priest looked up and raised his head: nay, not content with this, but wishing, it would seem, to let the light of his eyes shine forth like a beacon to guide the wandering seaman, he rose to his feet and stood looking down on his penitent. He was in fact uncomfortable, ill at ease, and, if the truth must be told, not entirely pleased with himself.

"My dear lady," he went on, piercing her with his glance as an angel might pierce with his sword, "I shall be compelled to speak to you with a severity which ill accords with the friendship—Friendship, do I say?—respect, veneration, which I feel for you; for indeed your many and great perfections have made me cease to regard you as a penitent or even as a friend in the Lord; I have learnt to think of you as a saint, as a pure and exquisite creature, far above myself in every respect. And now...!"

There was a pause. María, moved by this appeal, folded her white hands and

exclaimed fervently:

“O Lord! and my precious brother! come both of you and help me!”

“Call upon them with a heart purified from all baser affections, which are, as I may say, the rust of the soul,” said Paoletti, feeling the fount of his eloquence unsealed. “If you call upon them so, they will respond. A fervent spiritual impulsion, my sweet friend,” and he pressed his hand to his heart as though he were clutching it. “A deep yearning from the soul, an afflatus arising from two aspirations: the desire to cast off this foul body and the craving to fly up and away to the radiant and serene realm above, never to return. Courage, beautiful soul—on whose wings we may already see the pearly reflections of the glorious day of Paradise—courage! and let not your wings droop. You are near the goal. Gaze upwards,” and he suited the action to the word, “do not look down; that will make you giddy—look up, and you will see the loveliness and splendour that lies before you, infinitely beyond anything that your fancy can dream of in its most rapturous flights. There you will hear celestial strains, and feel that exquisite and joyful ease which will wrap you in ecstasy, in a robe of ravishment, and in heavenly contemplation. Do not look back, seraphic soul, I entreat you; for your own sake and for ours who look on you as an example, for the Glory of God who made you so perfect as His crowning work, for His own pleasure and glory; on my knees I beseech you—I a humble priest of no worth, of no account, but that it has been my privilege to lead you in the path to eternal joys, oh beatific soul! Thus winning some small merit which is as nothing by the side of yours.”

There was a silence. Paoletti was a man of entire good faith and meant all he said; he knelt down and clasped his hands.

“You—on your knees,” murmured María. “No no—not that. I will do as you desire me. But how am I to escape from the feelings that possess me?”

“Feel something different,” said the Italian rising. “You must know it well; you who

have schooled your heart and mind with the care and watchfulness of a saint. Do you experience any diminution in the fervour or depth of your love to God, in your pious zeal?"

María waved her hand in negation. Then, turning her head towards Paoletti that he might hear her better, she said:

"And if I do not cast out—what you bid me cast out, will it delay my salvation?"

"Nay, angel of goodness! Never for an instant have I doubted of your salvation. What, can a soul so full of merits be lost? Never.—There is no need for you to tell me that these feelings which have come to agitate you are untainted by rancour, and will not prevent your full forgiveness of those by whom offences have come. Am I wrong?"

María shook her head.

"Then your salvation is sure. If I try to eradicate this insignificant weed it is only because I long to see so lovely a soul absolutely spotless—because I cannot be satisfied with a victory, but crave a triumph and long to see you wear the crown, not merely of virtue but of sanctity. What I desire," he added enthusiastically, "is that you should rise to Heaven bathed in light and glory, hailed by rejoicing angels and that you should not look back from the everlasting threshold of star-sown sapphire, even to cast a glance of contempt at this world. What I desire to see in you, is absolute purity, the celestial essence of love!"

"All this I can have without being able to free myself from earthly griefs. If I can be saved as I am, God may take me as I am."

Paoletti was silent; suddenly he said:

"My dear daughter, do you, with all your heart, forgive those who have sinned against you?"

A pause.

"Yes," said María, when the priest had given up all hope of a reply. "I forgive my husband whose infidelity has killed me." And as she spoke the tears flowed down her cheeks.

"And her, too—the woman who has robbed you of your husband's affection.—Do you forgive her?"

Paoletti stood waiting with his eyes fixed on the dying woman's face. María closed hers in deep abstraction. The priest thought it was the end; he bent over her in great alarm. But presently he heard a sob which said: "Yes—her, too."

"Then my beloved and noble daughter, if you forgive—which is the only way to expel the evil leaven from your soul, you will enter the gates of Heaven in triumph," said the Padre in a voice of dramatic solemnity.

There could be no doubt that he held the key of those gates. Suddenly, inspired as it seemed by the supernatural influence the priest exercised over her, María rallied her strength and particularly her powers of voice. Even her pale cheeks recovered a tinge of colour which gave fresh brilliancy and eagerness to her eyes.

"Your words have given me new life!" she said, without difficulty. "I had a cloud, a veil before my eyes, and it has vanished; I see clearly—so clearly that I can only marvel at the mercies the Lord has vouchsafed to me in shedding this light on my soul, and know not how to thank Him. He has shown me the path by which I may go to Him, and called me with the voice of His loving kindness. I will follow—I come, I come, my God, Father and Redeemer, I clasp thy cross!"

"This, this is what I longed for, my beloved penitent and friend," exclaimed the enraptured priest, while tears started to his eyes and ran down his cheeks. "Soon your spirit will dwell in the realms of eternal bliss. How blessed is it, my daughter, to have no fear of death, but, on the contrary, to look forward with joy to the moment when the last spark of this miserable existence is lost in the first radiance of a life of endless glory! Sweetest soul, purified by prayer, by unfailing piety, by

heroic mortification of the evil within, by incessant absorption into the divine idea—spread your wings, whiter than sunlit clouds—fear not, soar upwards, fix your eyes on the goal, open your ears to the hymn that greets you, inhale the ineffable fragrance of Paradise, be bold to enter the fatherly presence of the Creator of the sun and stars—who will welcome you with the smile which gave birth to light itself, and receive you as a martyr and a saint."

"Yes—" said María folding her hands calmly across her bosom. "I feel myself float upwards, and I can find no words to express my happiness. I feel as if I had already forgotten the language of this world and could not speak it. My last words still shall be that I forgive with all my heart, those who have sinned against me."

There was a pause during which the priest murmured a prayer.

"Father," said María letting her hand fall on the bed to rouse him from the mystic trance into which he seemed to have fallen: "It strikes me that I ought to tell my husband that I forgive him."

"It is unnecessary, but you can do so."

"Who knows but that a few words spoken in such a solemn moment may not have an awakening effect on his perishing soul."

"Yes, indeed; it is an idea worthy of your lovely character.—We will tell him."

"At such a moment," added María recurring to the ideas which Paoletti regarded as beneath her, and talking with nervous eagerness, "he cannot contradict me. Ah! he is so ready with his answers when I accuse him that he sometimes confounds me. Once...."

She paused a minute and then went on. "Once he came to me very melancholy and weary. It was a very wet night—and the poor fellow, having lent his carriage to a friend who was ill, was wet to the skin. The same day a friend had died, to whom he was very much attached, a well-known atheist, who, as you know, had constantly shared my poor Leon's studies and opinions. Yes—he was very sad.—I pitied him

as I saw him come in, but I was at my prayers, and I could not interrupt them. He changed his clothes, but he shivered just as much in his dry things as in his wet ones; he was trembling with fever. I ordered the servants to prepare some warm tea for him, and then went on with my prayers, beseeching God that He would touch his heart—but He never heard me!—Suddenly Leon came and sat down by me on a low stool almost at my feet, and took my hand and kissed it; his lips were burning: 'I want to love and to be loved,' he said. 'Living like this, we are like two thistles growing each by itself in a field.' It was all I could do not to listen to him. I was obliged to put down my prayer-book, but I went on praying without it, and kept my eyes fixed and my mind concentrated on holy things, so as to keep out all other thoughts. That very day you and I had talked together for a long time about the tactics employed by an infidel mind to entrap the godly. I fortified myself by recalling your words and let the electric current of affection that came from me to him pass by. I remained a perfect statue; I knew that I ought to be angry, so I was, and I flung his atheism in his teeth. He shivered with his chill and said: 'Well, as my home is empty for me, I will go to some asylum.' What things he said! 'I want to love and to be loved,'—he said that again and again. He would laugh and pay me compliments like a boy; then he would talk about the house, and the children we never had.—But I was firm and as cold as ice, for if I had shown him the least tenderness, how elated he would have been, and I utterly humiliated!—And I should have felt that my humiliation was the abasement of the Christian Faith and Church. My plan was traced out for me—and how wisely! I rose from my knees: 'Be converted and then I will listen to you,' I said, and I left him alone.—How well I remember that night. I remember that as I went into my own room, I was quite grieved to see him so cold, and I took a cloak down from the door. I had begun my prayers again in my room when I heard him say: 'Curses on those who made you what you are!'"

"But my beloved daughter," said Paoletti, "you are agitating yourself unduly with

these reminiscences."

"I think I can see him now!" she went on with an ecstatic fire in her eye. "He was so pale, and his eyes were full of a desolate melancholy—he looked like a hungry child that puts out its arms to seek its mother's breast and finds a stone.—I fancy I can still feel the rough touch of his beard on the back of my hand, and the weight of his weary head on my knees. I did not let it rest there, but I looked at him, asking myself why God had allowed materialism and disbelief to find a place in such a handsome head. And there is something fascinating in his black eyes—the grasp of his hand is so firm and manly—he has a combination of gravity and brightness—strength that does not detract from the beauty...."

"Friend of my soul," interrupted Paoletti, "I conclude that when you dwell at length on his perfections, it is only to wonder how the Omnipotent in his supreme wisdom could join them to a blind soul, spiritually dead."

"Just so, just so.—But these memories crowd upon me and I cannot shake them off. They are too strong for me.—I remember one day, after several days of disagreement, he came into the room quite furious. It was the first time I ever saw him in a passion, and it frightened me excessively. He spoke very violently, took my hand and shook it as if he wanted to wrench it off. I fell on my knees.—I fancy I can feel his hand now with a grip like a vice; oh! if I really felt it I believe it would make me wish to live!—He said cruel things to me, but even though he was so angry, he could not be brutal. This sudden fit of rage was in fact a joy to me, for it showed me how much he loved me; but as I had no doubts of his fidelity I did not choose to make any show of affection. I knew very well that he would not hurt me, so I said to him: 'You may kill me if you like, I do not care; but give me an hour—I am dividing my clothes among the poor.' That was the truth; above a hundred poor wretches were waiting at the door. I was so proud of my charitable action that I could afford to despise the tyrant.—And he said: 'It is horrible to have a wound aching in one's

soul and not to be able to return blow for blow, to take the smallest revenge, to kill or even to punish....' But ah! he was splendid in his wrath."

"Enough of this," said the priest with sudden decision "I cannot allow another word of these memories which imperil your soul. You, who could then struggle to keep your spirit pure, will surely not succumb now."

"No, I will not succumb"—said María, but there was a look of anguish in her white face which betrayed what it cost her to break the mysterious chains that held her even in this supreme hour. "I have mortified myself indeed, and fought many battles to divest my mind of the sense of his attractions, and see the bare and hideous skeleton of the man. It was you who advised me to think of him as a skeleton—and it has been my salvation.—For my soul would inevitably have been lost.—Father, would it not?—if I had yielded to his persuasions. It would have led me into sin—Father, would it not?—He would have triumphed over me spiritually speaking and have led my soul astray—Father, would he not?" And at each question, betraying her doubts and inward struggle, the priest replied by an emphatic sign of assent. "I said to him: 'I am yours in all indifferent matters, but my spirit you shall never subdue.'—Sometimes I forced myself to pass weeks without saying a word to him—I was right, was I not?"

"My poor unfortunate friend," said Paoletti with a sigh, "you are asking me things you have asked a thousand times before. Let us turn over this gloomy page which we have amply discussed already, and discourse of God and of forgiveness...."

"Of forgiveness!" said María raising her head without moving her body. "Of what forgiveness?"

Her eyes had the wild glare that prognosticates delirium; she suddenly sat up in bed and clasping her hands to her head, exclaimed:

"I do not forgive, I do not forgive—I cannot—my husband only—I forgive him. Leon I will forgive you if you will return to me.—Not her, not her...." She could say

no more; she threw up her arms and fell back as if she were dying.

Paoletti gazed at her in horror; María kept her eyes fixed on his with a crazy glare. The priest felt the cold sweat start on his brow, and his heart beat as though it would burst his ribs. Presently María closed her eyes; the crisis wore itself out in exhaustion, sighs, and sobs. Paoletti said in tones which he meant to be awful:

“Thou Soul! that I believed to be victorious, and that art yet yielding to the Foe: God will not forgive those who show no forgiveness!” And falling on his knees, he took the crucifix between his hands and prayed in silence. He was in truth in deep distress—a shepherd striving to save his favourite lamb. For some time María neither spoke nor moved. At length, with a deep sigh, she said in accents of despair: “I am a miserable sinner and cannot hope to be saved.”

The hapless tortured soul was struggling like a shipwrecked wretch, one hand stretched up to Heaven and the other feeling for earth.

“I am overwhelmed with grief,” said Paoletti looking up, and his face was wet with sincere tears. “The soul that I believed I had won to fill a glorious throne in Heaven, has suddenly fallen into the abyss....”

“Into the abyss,” echoed María with a heart-breaking sob.

“And still I beseech the Lord that he will save it—that he will save this most precious soul; that he will not condemn it, that he will have mercy upon it.—Oh! Merciful Saviour I have seen her Thine, wholly Thine, and to see her now, given over to Satan!—Is she not a pearl of great price? How canst Thou bear that she should fall into the pit of everlasting punishment? Hast Thou not purified and tried her as a jewel to be worn by Thee throughout eternity? Hapless soul,” he went on, turning to María, “listen to my last appeal if you hope not to see the robe of purity and beatitude turned into one of agonizing flames. Return to a better mind; to that sweet and elect state which affords greater delights than the most exquisite perfumes, the most delicious food, and the loveliest sights on earth. Save thyself yet,

if not from this world, at least from Hell!”

This vigorous allocution produced its effect; the reverend orator continued to pour out his poetical eloquence, not without feeling though somewhat theatrical and full of figurative rhetoric; and lavishly adorned with “celestial splendour, seraphic choirs, divine love, and white-robed spirits.” When he had ended, María, kissing the crucifix that her pastor put into her hands, shed a few bitter tears as she said:

“I resign all to Thee, blessed Redeemer—there is no leaven in my soul of baser affections. I resign them all with my life and cast them into the fire. Still, one thing remains; but you, Father, who can do everything, can pluck out this last thorn from my heart.”

“What is that?”

“Prove to me that Pepa’s child is not my husband’s.”

“How can I prove that, unfortunate woman?” cried Paoletti thunderstruck. “How should I know the secrets of hearts? It may be so, my child—and it may not.” And then the worthy man, knowing only the surface of human nature and not the depths of the heart, added in perfect good faith: “She is a pretty little girl.”

This was seizing a spear to pierce the heart and shorten the agony. María writhed in her bed.

“Noble and beautiful soul,” exclaimed Paoletti rising to his feet with glowing looks and an uplifted hand: “Throw off this last earthly anxiety, cast away these dregs of life, and keep the vessel pure to receive the precious water of eternal glory.”

“I want to be saved,” murmured María, who now looked more dead than alive.

“Then free yourself, purge your soul completely, and forgive.”

“I do—I will—I forgive....” The words sounded like the faint mysterious whisper of a soul escaping, and dying on the lips of the speaker.

“Forgive, and your salvation is assured.” The priest seemed to grow taller with his

solemn and mystical enthusiasm. María's was mingled with a superstitious terror which made her hair stand on end, and hang dishevelled like grass swept down by the swift rush of a passing train.

"Kiss this sacred image," said Paoletti, "and forget the world—totally, absolutely."

"I do," murmured María from the depths of the gulf of self-mortification into which she had fallen.

"That there is such a thing as a man or woman in it."

"I do," said the voice, more softly, as though from a lower depth.

"Let it be quite indifferent to you whether your body is at Suertebella or in your own house. Mortify your self-love to a conviction that the temporal triumphs of the wicked cannot affect you. Divest yourself of every feeling of aversion for this house, and remember that the chapel here is dedicated to St. Luis Gonzaga, whose very image and portrait our beloved Luis was."

This reminiscence seemed to rouse María.

"Yes—I am reconciled to the place. The mere sound of your name, my most blessed brother, fills me with joy. May your glorified spirit come to succour mine."

"Amen, amen!" María kissed the crucifix.

"I wish all I possess—if I possess anything—to be given to the poor. You and my husband will agree about that. I wish to be buried by my brother's side, and let Masses be said over my body at the altar of the saint I most venerate: St. Luis Gonzaga."

"Yes, my beloved daughter. It cannot matter to so noble a soul that the altar is at Suertebella."

"Nothing matters, I forgive with all my heart.—I am reconciled to my Saviour and can hope!"

Paoletti with outstretched hands and half-closed eyes solemnly, slowly pronounced

absolution.

“Now that you are reconciled to God,” he said with some emotion, “you can receive the Holy Sacrament.”

CHAPTER XIX. VULNERANT OMNES, ULTIMA NECAT.

The ceremony took place at dusk with great pomp and unction. The palatial house of Suertebella was admirably suited to the ostentatious display of a splendid ceremonial, the tribute of worldly wealth to an august mystery. Exquisite flowers, and tapers innumerable are thought the most proper offerings to do honour to the Lord of Lords. Amid such dazzling accessories even the works of human hands showed to greater advantage; as though they too borrowed a reflection of glory from the presence of the Deity. The sounds of weeping which were audible here and there—in a corner of the Chinese boudoir, or from behind some Greek statue, whose majestic features looked like an embodiment of the perfect balance of spirit and matter—added to the melancholy solemnity of the scene. Piety and dread, the one founded on reverence and the other on the approach of Death, were blended into a single emotion.

The priest of Polvoranca brought the sacred Host from the church in a carriage sent for the purpose and followed by a long train in slow procession. The very horses seemed to understand that they ought to make no noise and step quietly. The portico was crowded with people, under the ruddy glare of the torches they held, in liveries and in plain dress—masters and servants, all alike on their knees.

The little bell with its mysterious sound of consolation and awe, echoes through the long corridors rousing the marble figures from their stony dreams. Comic or grave, the works of art seem to put on a semblance of Christian reverence; the polished floors reflect the gleam of tapers; flowers and tapestries seem to bow in silent

worship. Footsteps sound heavily on the boards; they might be the distant roll of muffled funeral drums. Presently they fall more dully on the carpets, suggesting a subterranean procession. At last they come to a standstill—there is silence as of the grave: the procession has reached the chamber of death. Then for a while the whole house is deserted; all the inhabitants have collected in the immediate vicinity of the closing scene. Those who cannot actually witness it can fancy themselves in that room, filled with light and suffering, and they sob and revel in the picture, imagining what they cannot see. It is easily conjured up, and their spirits quake before it. In the halls and passages, all deserted and all blazing with tapers, the still air gives an impression of suspended breath, speechless and awe-stricken. There is not a sound—except that in some remote corner there is a rustle—as it were a whisper—of a woman's dress that stealthily hastens by and is lost in the distance.

Time goes on. Then at first a murmuring drone is heard, steps again—the servants reappear with their heavy tapers—the noise grows louder—the shadows of the living fall on the painted figures on the walls and across the waxed floors—the procession closes with a gaudy array of liveries and dresses of every colour, men and women of every degree; some quite callous faces, others really sad or pitiful—the whole with its accompaniment of prayer and response from the priest and his acolytes. This procession, in which some walk with a sort of rapture of grief while others are chilled with dread, makes its way to the sound of a bell rung by a boy—the very boy known to Monina as Guru—and goes out again through the hall and portico where some kneel to see it depart and others still follow with bared heads.—Within, the scent of the flowers hangs about the house as though it were the mysterious breath of the invisible Guest who has passed through it.

"I am the Way and the Life and the Truth."

All the family had been present; the marquesa prostrate on the floor in her anguish, unable even to kneel, while her husband and sons were bitterly and sincerely

grieved. When the Sacrament was ended they separated, all closely attended by their most intimate friends. Milagros entirely lost consciousness; she was carried to a sofa in the Chinese room where her kind friends plied her with restoratives and sought to give her consolation. The marquis, forgetting his interest in the art and curiosities of the house, fled from his importunate comforters, and begged to be left alone. He buried himself in a recess in the tapestried room, behind a marble Satyr, and gave himself up to meditations on the vanity of human grandeur. Gustavo devoted himself to his mother and submitted to the jeremiades of the poet of "pious raptures" and "white souls." Leopoldo did nothing but sigh; he was nervous and tremulous, for the cold hand of death had come so near to him that he fancied he could feel its touch.

Numbers of visitors were departing, and in the park stood rows of carriages, the coachmen addressing each other by their master's name: "Garellano! You there?"—"Cerinola, you're wanted."—"Lepanto, move on a little."

It was a beautiful night, calm and clear, lighted by a pallid, full moon; the distant horizon looked deceptively like a calm sea. The smaller stars sank into insignificance, but the larger ones shone brightly, trembling rather than twinkling. Nature was lovely and seemed to breathe forth peace and love. It was an hour to be born in, rather than to die in.

Nothing can make man feel so dwarfed as the contemplation of the sublime indifference of the skies to all the woes of earth. The most disastrous moral revolution could never give rise to the tiniest film of cloud. All the tears of weeping humanity will never form a single drop of water in infinite space.

Leon came out of his wife's room to express his thanks to the master of the house.

"My dear friend," said Fúcar, wringing his hands, "accept the sincere condolences of a much troubled man. I myself am the victim of a very serious misfortune."

"Is any one ill?"

“No, no; we will discuss it another day—this is not the time.—Nay, nay, you have nothing to thank me for; it was no more than my duty. As you see I ordered them to decorate the house properly—suitably for so solemn a ceremony, and as befits my firm religious convictions. I had all the camellias brought in from the green-house, and all the rhododendrons and orange-trees in those heavy wooden tubs ... but there are occasions when I grow reckless, when I think even exaggeration is not out of place.... You shall know all in good time ... we will talk it over....”

He went off to Madrid in his carriage, reflecting on the catastrophe in his house, on the bad government of a nation which, the day after issuing one loan, found it necessary to start another.

Leon went back to his wife’s room. The end was at hand. Rafaela, Paoletti, Moreno Rubio and himself gathered round María who, since the last words of confession she had uttered had been rapidly sinking, and looked every moment more like death. Her face, which nature had moulded on a type of ideal beauty, looked even more perfect at this moment, when physical vitality was almost extinct; and its fixity and whiteness, the immobility of that calm repose on the pillow, the sculpturesque stillness of every feature and muscle betraying no sign of suffering, made her look like some marble image of Death—noble and dignified, with nothing vulgar in its details—aristocratic, if so to speak, and wrought to grace the monument of some great lady. She lay motionless; she was privileged to enter the dark realm with tranquil deliberation and free from bodily pain, as we pass from one scene to another in the varying phases of a dream.

Her half-closed eyes, under their black lashes, were fixed on her husband’s gloomy and rigid face. Leon stood by the bed, gazing sadly at the loveliness to which Death was lending a sublimer beauty, and reflecting in a vein of sentimental philosophy on this transformation of his wife into a statue. The solemnity of the scene, the silence, broken only by her breathing which grew more difficult every moment, the sad

fixity of those dying eyes, fastened on him like a mysterious tendril that could not be torn away, filled his brain with thoughts of himself and of her,—two beings who called themselves husband and wife, and between whom there was no link but that gaze. He sounded the depths of his soul, trying to find in it some faded remnant of love, that he might offer it as a last blossom of conjugal devotion to the woman who lay there dying in the cold solitude of mysticism; but he sought in vain—he could find none. All the wealth of love and regard that his heart had once contained had been diverted from its legitimate centre, and been stored and hidden in another part of his nature.

But though he found no affection, the beautiful creature who had been the pride of his earlier life filled him with such deep and keen pity that he could, in that hour of grief, have mistaken it for love. As he watched the ebb of that life which might have been the crown and joy of his own, Leon felt the tears rise to his eyes and a tight grip on his heart. “Unhappy woman!” he thought to himself. “May God forgive you for all the ill you have done me; I mourn for you as if I had loved you; and I pity you,—not so much for dying young but for the cruel disappointment in store for you when you learn—and you must learn it soon—that the love of God is only a sublimer development of love for those whom he has created!”

He went closer to her, attracted by her eyes which had opened a little wider; he looked at the soft, almost invisible down that shaded her lip, the bright light in her eye, with its tawny hazel iris; he felt the warmth of her breath—now scarcely perceptible.—Poor soul, poor soul! There are no words to describe the pathos which she could not utter in words, but only by the last gleam of those eyes that were almost extinct.

Behind the external calmness of her attitude and the steady gaze of her eye, who knows what anxieties, what torments, nay what petty worries may not have been racking her and dull jealousies vaguely stirring in the depths of her dying

soul—since there was no physical means of giving them utterance! but the surface betrayed nothing, just as the frozen surface of a river prevents our hearing the swift and noisy flow of the deeper current.

Leon understood this. He saw a tear glittering in each of María's eyes: the last and only means of expression for the one surviving human feeling of her soul, brought from the unsounded depths to which the world still clung by a slender root of desire. Two half-formed tears, that did not overflow, were all that came to light from that hidden fount. Leon bent down and pressed his lips firmly to her cold forehead; as he did so he heard a sigh of satisfied longing. A strong shudder ran through her frame and in a steady voice she said: "Ah! Thanks!"

There was silence—an awful silence, while María Egyptiaca was tossing on the threshold of the invisible land, like a grain of sand flung up by the waves on to a shore where human ken cannot penetrate. The bystanders murmured with a sigh that she was dead—they might speak aloud now. Leon closed her eyes with a timid hand—he was afraid of hurting her.

The priest on his knees prayed in silence, his eyes tightly shut, like a prisoner whose dungeon windows are closed with double shutters. Leon stood for a few minutes, gazing at the remains of one of the most beautiful women of her day—with the added reputation of being the most saintly of her native city; and he shuddered with grief as he remembered the past, and realized what his present feelings were. How sad was the stillness of those limbs not yet cold, of the features in which beauty so masked death, that it would not have been hard to call death life and life death.

Deeply agitated, and with his heart oppressed with intense pity, he quitted the room, feeling as if he had left his youth behind him. The devout watchers and some of the servants remained there; Paoletti withdrew to the chapel. The news flew through the house; there was a sound of weeping, the bustle of attendants rushing for restoratives, the sighs and lamentations of friends coming and going. Leon took

refuge in the hall of Hymen, where he threw himself on a couch and lay staring at an antique clock, which bore an inscription on a semicircle above the dial, like a frowning brow: Vulnerant omnes, ultima necat.

CHAPTER XX. IN THE INCROYABLE DRAWING-ROOM.

He called together the servants and a few faithful friends, and having made all the necessary arrangements he withdrew to the end of the house nearest to his own room. He felt he must be alone. In the midst of his regrets he felt a certain satisfaction in having fulfilled his duty to his wife to the last hour of her life. He ordered his servant on no account to allow any one to disturb him, and he locked himself in the Incroyable drawing-room.

At last he could enjoy the solitude he longed for; he could think over the course of events, his own position and the state of his mind; he cast a glance at the past, and another at the future.

The painful struggle which he had carried on for so long with an ideal differing from his own was now over. He was free. But his freedom was tainted with sorrow, for it had been granted him by death; and he had been released from his fetters by a beautiful and melancholy being, whom he could by no means hate but only pity and respect. The obstacle that death had removed, and which dwelt not merely in his memory but in his heart, had won his tender sympathy by the mere fact of her pathetic end. It lent her the halo of innocence, and the radiance of an angel.

Still dwell as he might on this image—an interesting and touching one if not actually beloved—he could not help feeling an impulse of happiness. The future was before him. A door stood open—the door to a new life, where perhaps he might find the realisation of the dream he had indulged in so vainly in the past life which was now buried in a peaceful grave. The sense of recent loss made him afraid to contemplate

the future and kept his fancy so far chastened that he did not rush into visions of rapturous days nor build castles in the air, either in the sunny regions of the probable, or the darker chaos of the purely imaginary. It was with real pain that he felt the homage of pious respect to the past chequered by visions of the future. But hope, like remorse, is so inevitably a part of the logic of events that it can be considered part and parcel of our conscience. We cannot lock the door on remorse when that intruder knocks and insists on admittance; and in the same way, we cannot turn away hope when it comes, walks in, calls us, invades us, takes possession, settles itself deliberately, and unrolls the enchanting panorama of happiness to come. No wilful blindness will avail to prevent our gazing on the horizon of life which is lighted up by hope; nay, there is not a moment, however painful, which is not linked with those hoped-for moments still remaining in store in the unknown future. Life is a constant anticipation of something remote and before us; indeed, nature herself has understood this law, for none of the superior creatures have eyes behind them.

Thus he sat debating and suffering, not choosing to let his thoughts wander whither they inevitably tended, and taking a morbid pleasure in trying to relink his broken chain. He felt a certain pride in setting aside every thought of his own advantage, however legitimate, and tried to force his fancy to a dignified indifference to the more pleasing aspect of the events of the night. But though the spirit has wondrous sails that bear it onward, and without which it could make no way, it no less needs that ballast which is called egoism. Egoism is indispensable; without it the sails would flap idly, and man would be the toy of the hurricane. With it, and bereft of sails, he would be no better than a hulk. The perfect vessel is one in which the sails and the ballast are rightly proportioned.

As he reflected thus, Leon Roch made up his mind that he could not be a hulk. Nay—he had just flung all his ballast overboard to sail, as swift as lightning, over the waters of a bright ideal when he heard a noise—a sound that made him thrill as

the rope of the topmast vibrates before a rising storm—the rustle of a woman's dress and the murmur of a sigh. He looked up and Pepa Fúcar stood before him.

Her aspect startled him, he could not ask her any questions. Her face was like that of a corpse that has risen from the grave in sheer terror of death. Her teeth chattered as though she were cold. Tragedy itself looked out of her eyes; in her hand she held a paper.

With a great effort Leon said:

"For God's sake leave me in peace—my poor wife is dead."

"And I ..." but she could not speak; she was trembling, as though the chill of the grave had fallen on her. At last she finished her sentence:

"I came, some time since, to tell you that my husband is alive."

Leon sat as if he had not heard; it was his conscience which cried out:

"Your husband!"

"Is alive."

She put her hand to her head, feeling as if all the blood in her body were surging there.

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes, and I should have died of fear if it had not been that you are here to protect me against that ruffian!"

These words roused Leon from a sort of stupor.

"I—what have I to do with it?" he exclaimed as though trying to fight his way out of this terrible nightmare by some hypocrisy of dignity. "Leave me. Have I anything to do with your husband—or with you either?"

In his soul a storm was raging which he was trying to quell by decency, honour—walls of sand which broke down at a touch. His brain was in a whirl, and conscious of no desire but that he could hate instead of loving her, he ordered Pepa

to leave the room. Giving way to an impulse—whether of disgust or of honour he hardly knew, he said:

“Leave me—I desire you to leave me. Do not disturb me. I do not want you. I cast you from me—I turn you out....”

“You are not in your right mind,” said Pepa sadly, “you can turn me out of the room—but not out of your heart.”

“Did you come here to mock me?” he went on wildly, “when I most deserve your respect.... What you have told me is a lie.”

“Ah! would to God it were!” said the poor woman clasping her hands. “My father told me the dreadful news this morning; but I did not think he would dare to appear before me. But this evening, I was sitting in my room, and I heard a noise in the garden—I went to the window—I saw a man—it was he. The light from the hall lamp fell on his hated face—I saw him and knew him. I thought the earth would open and swallow me—I was shivering with cold and fear. I could not help running—running all over the house, and fancying I heard him close behind me and felt his hand on my shoulder. I rushed out of the back door—if there had been no door I must have jumped out of the window. I went into the yard—I could not stop—out into the street. There I took a hackney carriage and flew here to tell you. I waited a long time in the museum; then I was out of patience....”

“And the child?”

“She is not at home. I should have brought her with me if she had been; but Papa had taken her this evening to see Countess Vera. I had intended to go too—but I knew what was going on here and I could not bear to go into company; I said I was not well enough.”

“And what a time for coming here!” exclaimed Leon bitterly. “You cannot even comfort me.”

“Why, what do you object to in my presence?”

“It is a profanation, a scandal! I have no words for it; it fills me with a horror that I cannot overcome.”

“I am not to blame for what has happened.—It is God’s will and ordering.—But do not let us lose time in lamentations; let us consider, let us decide what we are to do.”

“Who?”

“We—you and I.—Will you abandon me to my fate in this unequal struggle? Do you know what that wretch means to do?—My father told me all about it. He has been two days in Madrid staying in his uncle’s house on purpose to spy me and watch me.—I do not know who can have told him, his uncles I suppose. Gustavo is his lawyer, and he is going to bring a charge against me.—And the base wretch could write to my father this morning, declaring that he had repented of all his wickedness, and imploring his forgiveness.—Inside that letter there was a note for me. Read it.”

Leon’s first impulse was to refuse to look at the letter; but he snatched it out of Pepa’s hand, he knew not how or why; and read as follows:

“A man who is dead has no right to expect fidelity in the wife who survives him. Happily for me, the Almighty saw fit to save my precious life. As the moment draws near when I may hope to embrace my wife and child, I have the honour of informing the first of those beloved beings that I have made up my mind to forgive her, provided she hastens to submit to my authority as a husband, seeing that my supposed departure from this world is some excuse for her delinquency. At the same time if the above-mentioned beloved being persists in believing that I am still food for the fish in the Gulf of Mexico, I hereby take the liberty of assuring her that I shall avail myself of the rights granted to me by law. My dear daughter cannot be allowed to grow up in the lap of such a mother. I am sure that the lady whose husband I have the honour to be will not prefer the delights of a criminal attachment to the sweet duties of motherhood—but, if she should, I shall bring an action in due

form, having an abundance of witnesses who can prove the preliminary information required by law, and I shall claim my daughter, since the law will place her in my paternal care as soon as she is three years old.

“In order that my estimable wife may fully appreciate the strength of my position as an injured husband, I would beg her to spend an hour in her father’s library, and there, in the third book-case, on the second shelf, she will find the last edition of the code, in which interesting work I would advise her to study Act 20, cap. I, clause II.

“F. Cimarra.”

“That is the man, all over!” exclaimed Leon crumpling up the paper. “His style, his insolence, his mean irony, his absolute lack of decency and feeling. I know the hand that strikes me—God in Heaven! If such an attack, from such a villain, is not enough to justify a man in trampling on all law and custom, in forgetting his dignity nay, and his conscience—if this is not an excuse for rebellion and fury, I do not want to live!—life is not worth having!” He flung the paper on the floor and Pepa set her foot on it.

“And I will do the same to you, vile wretch, and your latest Code!” she exclaimed. Then she dropped on the sofa and bursting into tears she went on:

“And to think of my baby, my little Monina in the hands of that ruffian. Monina, who is my only joy, snatched away from you and me! The mere thought of such a thing drives me mad.”

Leon looked at the floor with stern determination.

“A bold stroke on my part may save us yet,” said Pepa, looking up with a resolute flash.

“Hush—wait—” said Leon anxiously putting up his hand. “Listen.”

They were silent, holding their breath even.

And they heard in the corridor the slow solemn steps of many men carrying some

heavy burden. The sound came nearer, passed, and died away. Pepa and Leon each in the attitude of holding the other back, listened in reverent silence to the procession that passed so near to them. Their beating hearts seemed to throb in unison. When silence had once more fallen on the house Leon looked at Pepa who had bent her head and whose eyes were full of tears.

“Are you praying?” he said.

“Oh! God!” exclaimed Pepa clasping her hands over her heart. “She is at peace,—I am tortured with grief and anxiety; she is enjoying eternal bliss as the reward of her virtues, and I am pointed at as a guilty creature, threatened with persecution, and my wretched heart is to be made the sport of the tricks of the law.—No, merciful Lord! I never prayed that she might die in order that I might triumph and be happy—that I never asked. I was not so wicked, and I do not deserve such punishment.—I hated her sometimes it is true, but not now, not now. I do not know whether I am afraid of her now, or whether it is only reverence that keeps her always in my thoughts—I see her before me wherever I turn, dead, and yet living.”

“She is happy!” said Leon in dull tones.

“But we have no time to be melancholy. We must decide, and act at once. Listen, I have a plan; the best, the only plan....”

“A plan.”

“Yes, I will tell you. First I must fetch my child. I feel as if they wanted to take her from me, as if you and she and I were in danger....”

“Fetch her now, at once.”

“It is only ten o’clock. There is time to go and return quickly. I have spoken to Lorenzo, our best coachman, and the carriage is waiting. Will you promise to wait here till I return?”

“Yes, I promise,” said Leon looking at her but beyond her. “Fly and fetch Monina;

bring her quickly; I too am afraid....”

“Till then do not stir from hence....”

She went away through the museum.

Leon for a long time could not restore order in his mind. Before deciding on any definite course of action it was necessary to form a clear idea of the situation in its true aspect and proportions, without regarding it as better or as worse than it really was. But in spite of every effort he could not think with any kind of lucidity; all mental discipline was lost to him. His utter physical exhaustion and the moral chaos that had come upon him had resulted in a sort of lethargy, in which his brain was lulled to sleep while his senses ran riot in feverish disorder. We have once before seen him in a similar mood.

The room seemed to assume a circular shape, for his eyes were incapable of taking exact note of what they saw, and the walls spun round him and with them in a giddy whirl the objects that adorned them. These were for the most part engravings, plates, jars, medals and plaster reliefs of the time of the French Directoire, when a revolution in taste took place as a trivial corollary to the revolution in politics. After cutting off heads the mania for innovation set to work to reform hats. Industry had no mind to retire in favour of liberty, and on the top of the mound of skulls piled up during the reign of terror, it stuck a dress-maker’s doll.

There were men tightly buttoned into impossible coats, choked in yards of neck-cloth, and crowned with incredible hats. Some carried knotted sticks, others twisted canes; they were curled like the Furies and shod like dancing-masters. Some had huge chains with seals like bell-clappers hanging from their pockets; in some it was difficult to distinguish their legs from their skirts, or where the man ended and his clothes began. They looked like objects in a nightmare, chimeras, the distorted metamorphosis of human beings into long-legged wading birds with glasses on their bills and buskins on their feet. The women displayed more than their ankles in

tightly-drawn stockings, and on their heads wore towers of felt, fur and feathers, buckram, and ribbands; mounds, weather-cocks, pagodas, spires or tubs. If a crowd of witches had set up for being fashionable they might have appeared in such a guise.

All these figures seemed to be flying in a mad race round the room. They were a motley rabble, a whirling tornado of cudgels, legs, noses, eyeglasses, petticoats, fans and hats, whence proceeded whistling, shouts, scoffing and laughter. All humanity rammed into a cannon as large as the world, and fired off into the air in a million fragments, could not have covered the sky with a more hideous cloud.

Leon saw a figure step out of the circle and come towards him, and he suddenly felt an impulse of rage, just like that which he had felt in the morning against his brother-in-law—a rage which now no consideration of respect interfered to quell. The hateful figure that approached him was the most grotesquely monstrous of all that crazy rout; his mean smile was an insult to human reason, to decency, to virtue, to everything that distinguishes man from brutes.

“Horrible wretch!” Leon cried—or fancied he cried, rushing upon him, and seizing him by the collar. “Do you think I am afraid of you? Why do you take her from me? Yours! do you say she is yours? But I will give you a lesson and rid society of your vile presence....”

He clutched his victim with all his strength, saying:

“You have rights? I trample them under foot. You have ties? I break them. You shall soon see what I care for your rights and ties—no more than for your life, which is full of evil and disgrace. I loathe you as the embodiment of all the wickedness on earth.—Respect you? Respect the law, the sacrament which you represent as I respected them in her who is no longer of this world?—How dare you name her in the same breath with yourself? In her I respected the austerity of virtue, of exalted piety, honour, innocence, weakness and beauty. But what is there in you but

corruption, lies and foulest vice?—It is in vain for you to crave my pity: pity was not made to bestow on venomous reptiles. Do not ask me to let you have your child.—Shall an angel be thrown to the dogs?—Your child loathes you, your wife hates you, I—I will murder you!”

He felt as though he were rolling down a precipice in the dark, with his victim in his grasp. Then he unconsciously sank into a troubled slumber that lasted some time. He woke in a calmer frame of mind; though still confused, he could make out surrounding objects, and by degrees saw them more distinctly. The figures on the walls were in their places, as insolently lifelike as ever, not more hideous or more pleasing than of old. Leon heard not a sound; everything was still. He looked at his watch; it was half-past eleven.

His first clear idea was that he must at once quit the house and go to his own home.

He thought of María dead, and of Pepa living,—he saw them as though they had been standing side by side in front of him; and at the same moment, as if his thought had evoked her presence, Pepa came into the room from the museum with Monina in her arms.

CHAPTER XXI. IMPOSSIBILITIES.

“Here she is!” she said with pride. “You see I have had to carry her.”

She was quite out of breath and could scarcely speak.

The poor little child, sleepy and cross, allowed Leon to take her in his arms and laid her head on his shoulder only to fall asleep again.

“Have you nothing to say to him?” said Pepa, caressing one of her little hands. “Mona, my pretty one, tell him what I said to you.”

The little one shut her eyes, murmured a few words and gave herself up to sleep, without a fear or a care, on the very brink of the gulf that yawned at her deluded

mother's feet.

"She is asleep," said Leon gently drawing the curly head to a more comfortable position on his shoulder. "We must talk very softly, since the force of circumstances compels us to meet and to speak."

"We cannot stay here: we should be overheard from the corridor," said Pepa taking him by the hand. "Besides, I must show you something which is in another part of the house. Come with me."

He obeyed her. Pepa opened the door into the museum. There was a candle which she lighted; she led the way through a room full of old pictures, into a second and a third one, Leon carrying Monina, followed her without a word. At last he saw where he was.

"Here we shall not be disturbed by intruders, or by that mob of simpletons who have invaded the house," she said.

They went into the very room where Monina had lain ill with the croup. A woman was there prepared to take Pepa's orders; she was the wife of one of the men about the place whom Pepa could trust, and as her own maids were at Madrid, she had got this woman to attend to Mona, who was at once put to bed. Teresa sat down by the bed, strictly enjoined to call out if any one came into the room; then Pepa led Leon into the next room.

"This is my own room," she said, "no one can hear us here. And now for my secret. Sit down. Mercy how pale you are!—And I?"

"You are pale, too," said Leon sitting down wearily.

"We reflect each other," she said, trying to sweeten by a slight jest the gall they both had to drink. Leon was in no mood to notice the elegance of the bedroom, in which the magnificence of the decorations was such as, in the days of faith, was lavished on chapels and altars. He paid no heed to the handsome tables and wardrobes of ebony inlaid with marbles, to the monumental bed, also of ebony, which, with its

vast spread of mattresses and pillows, covered with some curious dark-hued cloth of gold, looked singularly like a catafalque; he did not glance at the religious pictures in their silver frames—some like those that his wife had loved—nor at the elegant lamp that had just been lighted and shed a discreet and moon-like light in the room. At any other time its splendour would have attracted his attention, but not now.

“Your secret? What is your secret?” he said impatiently.

“My secret,” repeated Pepa sadly, “it is that we will fly, fly—you have only to consent, and we will go at once—we three, without being seen by a soul.”

“Fly! What mad folly!” he exclaimed, striking his forehead with his hand. “And at such a moment! Your conscience, my own, our very love itself rises up in protest against such an idea. Can you forget what has this moment taken place under this roof?—Good Heavens! You expect me to be devoid of the respect and consideration due to the dead! You ask me, when these hands have scarcely closed her eyes—! What should I be if I could consent! I should deserve to fall even lower than those calumniators who are so ready to call me María’s murderer.—I cannot conceive that you could love me if you should see me suddenly fall into such depths of baseness, if I were capable of anything so hideously iniquitous and immoral.”

Every word was a twist to the rope that was strangling the hapless Pepa. They both were silent for some time, without looking at each other. Suddenly she laid her hand on his arm, gazing at him with haggard eyes, and said in a voice he never before had heard from her:

“Very well—then I will go to my husband.”

“What! What do you mean?”

“There is nothing for it but to submit to him. Can I put it more plainly. Either I fly with you, or I go into the wild beast’s cage.” Leon felt an internal shock; his soul seemed to leap up within him, to bound from its central seat.

“Plainer still?” she went on, going close up to him and leaning over him so that he

might mark the angry glare of her small eyes. “Gustavo can give you the fullest details. Gustavo came to Papa this morning to explain to him my husband’s claims. Federico is his client; the creature has entrusted the defense of his rights to that man.”

“Now I understand why he threatened me with some mysterious punishment.—And were you present at his interview with your father?”

“Yes.—My father had just been telling me that it was this resurrection of the enemy that had been troubling him so much—he had heard that Federico had returned. Pilar told him last night that he was here.—The shock had quite taken away my breath, when in came the pompous lawyer. He came, he said, as the friend of both parties, and most anxious to compromise matters rather than bring them into court. The hypocrite! His roundabout speeches gave us the sensation of the jarring of a machine that wants oiling, which tortures one’s nerves and makes one’s head ache.... My father and he went on for ever so long, beating about the bush with high-flown phrases that made me furious. I should have turned the lawyer out of the house. But you can imagine his ponderous emphasis and the complacent twaddle with which he tormented me—and after talking for an age, he explained that he had already drawn up a statement of the case.”

Pepa paused to take breath and recruit her moral energies, of which she seemed to have an inexhaustible supply.

“My father,” she went on, “put forward a great many arguments and considerations. I said that the man who was brave enough to take my child from me, might come and drag her out of my arms. I believe that in my indignation I said very rude things to Gustavo. He apologized for his interference, alleging that he was merely an agent. All he wished was that we should come to an agreement, that the best course would be a friendly compromise, so as not to give rise to a scandal. I tried to defend myself against the horrible insinuations as to my own character, but an uneasy conscience

checked me; I blundered and hesitated, and in trying to prove myself innocent I believe I did the very reverse."

"And what more did the raving moralist say?"

"He went on for about half an hour quoting laws," said Pepa, again trying to infuse a drop of humour in her bitter cup. "He began with Deuteronomy, went on to the Germans and Tacitus, and then referred to various modern authorities; finally, thinking he had not bored us enough, he quoted sections, chapters, schedules—what not? I really was amused as I listened to him...."

"You were amused?"

"Yes,—I thought what fun it would be to put him in the middle of our big pond and let him declaim to the frogs and fishes.—He was extremely tedious, telling me in the most elaborate and polite terms that the law was entirely on his client's side, and that nothing could be easier than to prove me guilty. He has plenty of witnesses."

"Witnesses? To what? Oh! I do not believe they can prove anything in spite of his malice. But they can calumniate you, disgrace you, drag your name and character in the mire; and you may lose your child when she has reached the age prescribed by law. If we fly we shall only be helping them to prove their case, and then you would be sure to lose the child."

"But if we went a long way off?"

"Do not take a panic. Do not think of flight, which would condemn you unheard. While he brings an action against you, you must invoke the intervention of the law, to prevent him from exercising his paternal authority, on the ground of his extravagance, of misappropriation of moneys, forgery—a whole catalogue of crimes that it will be easy to prove if your father will support you."

"I see what you mean. But you are under a delusion. You do not know the worst."

"What is that?"

“You think, no doubt, that my father warmly took my part?”

“Of course.”

“But you are mistaken. Alas for me—and for you, too, dear friend of my soul—we are alone and undefended; everything, every one, is against us: religion, laws, relations—the good and the evil alike—the whole world. When the great Gustavo enlarged on the legal advantage his client had over me I flew into a rage—still, I controlled myself to say that Federico could not insist on exercising paternal authority, and that if he was determined on a quarrel I would accuse him of the things you know of. My father listened to all this very calmly; I saw him ready to yield to all sorts of odious compromises.... He stuttered and stammered, and made speeches that turned my heart cold: ‘My daughter will be reasonable—we must all make some sacrifice—I, if Federico will meet me half way—well, we must see—perhaps we can do everything he wishes—the first point is to avoid a scandal.’—And this point of avoiding a scandal, which he recurred to at least twenty times, showed me that he is not prepared to defend me as I should wish.—A compromise! And with what a man! Good God! Then he talked of coming to terms with Federico’s uncles, two very worthy men whom you know; one is a judge in the supreme court and the other president of the examining body—What will come of it all? What do you think of it—what can you say to it?”

“That if your father deserts you, you must fight alone.”

“Just so, and I will fight alone. Thank you for that. You restore my courage which my father crushes entirely with his extraordinary antipathy to ‘exaggeration,’” exclaimed Pepa with eager vehemence. ”If when you know what my weapons are!—It was to show you those that I brought you here. You shall see.”

In one corner of the room Leon observed an inlaid cabinet which Pepa now pointed to; it was not very large, of elegant workmanship, but evidently solidly constructed. She went up to this bureau, and opening the outer doors revealed a whole series of

smaller doors, pigeon-holes and drawers. She touched a spring and a secret division flew open.

“This part of the cabinet,” she said with a smile, “is the Ark of sorrows.—Now, do you know that?”

“It is a letter of mine.”

“You wrote it to me when you were at college, preparing for the School of Mines.... Read it and meditate on what you wrote to me then: ‘That you were madly in love with me....’ You may laugh now, if you can, at your youthful folly.—Why did you not treasure up my letters as I did yours? I did not say that my love was a madness, but it filled my soul and moulded my nature, as everything does that is an eternal part of it.—And this; do you know this?”

“It is a tie-pin,” he said taking it up. “It was mine.”

“Yes—you dropped it in our house one day when you came to dinner. You were engaged then to that poor soul, but I still hoped you would not marry her.—I found it lying on the carpet and I kept it.—And these flowers?”

“They are some camellias I gave you once on your fête day—San José.”

“Yes, and the next evening you came to see me in my box and I saw you looking with the greatest interest at....”

“Poor flowers!—I did not think to see them again, or that they could speak to me as they do now, reminding me of all the feelings and dreams of my life. Do you know they are not dried up as I should have expected them to be after such a length of time?”

“My kisses have embalmed them and kept them fresh—kisses that I have given them so often!—But we must not delay. Give me all that.”

She replaced the objects in their little nook, with as reverent a touch as though they had been the most precious relics.

“Stay there in your melancholy little sleep, poor little treasures,” she said. Then she went on: “Now that you have seen the Ark of Sorrows I will show you the Chamber of Horrors!”

She opened a concealed drawer and took out a packet of papers tied together with red tape, like lawyers’ letters. Leon took it, understanding what it must contain, and they sat down to examine it.

“Here,” said Pepa with a shudder, at the sight of this record of disgrace, “here is the evidence of the martyrdom I have suffered as the wife of that reprobate: vile secrets that he confided to me under pressure of circumstances, when he wanted money. Every page is the record of some act of villainy that I concealed with the greatest care; the evidence of crimes that I succeeded in frustrating, or which remained hidden among the rubbish of some government office. Look at them, and you will see that I have ample means of proving that my husband is disqualified not merely for exercising paternal rights, but even for holding a place in anything like decent society.”

Leon looked through the packet with considerable curiosity, glancing over some things, and reading others with care. There were letters to and from well-known firms, private contracts, memoranda, accounts, papers with government seals, pages which had evidently been extracted from important documents, and a judicial decision which had obviously been signed under a false impression or in a moment of surprise.—When he had examined them all, he returned the packet to Pepa.

“Burn it,” he said.

“What?” she exclaimed, holding out her hand, but not taking it in her astonishment. “Shall I find them of no use?”

“No,” said Leon.

“How is that? Can I do nothing with them?”

“You can certainly—but....”

“Well?”

“In such painful circumstances it is best to speak quite plainly.—We owe each other the truth, though it may crush the being we love best in the world.”

“I do not understand.”

“Burn all this.”

“Why?”

“Burn it,—because you must not use it. It is a two-edged sword which will wound you when you use it. Forgive my entire frankness; with this in your hand you could triumphantly attack your husband. Under the feeblest rule of justice there is enough here to throw a man into prison.—But if you achieve that the wretch would meet his fate in good company....”

“In good company?”

“The fact is that, in Spain, men of a certain stamp are never put into prison even if they deserve it. This horrible revelation might easily heap disgrace....”

“On others?”

“Yes, and on one whom you truly love and could not bear to injure. Burn them all, Pepa, for God’s sake.” The poor woman pressed her hand tightly to her eyes to check her tears. But with a fresh flash of her unquenchable spirit, she took up the packet and replaced it in the Chamber of Horrors, which she locked, saying:

“I will burn them at another time.” Then turning to Leon she said in a low voice:

“Then I can do nothing legally to incapacitate my husband?”

“Nothing.”

“Is it impossible that I should take legal measures against him?”

“Impossible. I understand now your father’s hesitancy, his weak submission, which is neither more nor less than fear—the fear of going to law with an enemy who has been his accomplice. It is altogether out of the question, my dearest.”

"Quite, quite.—Why should we try to find crooked ways of escape? My friend, my lover—husband—all in all, the only soul to which my soul is kin, dare as much as I can dare!" she exclaimed with that fervid courage which sometimes made her so beautiful. "The straight and easy way lies before us, the only way: Flight. The carriage is waiting; there is nothing to stop us, we want nothing. You are rich—I am even richer—everything favours us, urges us to act...."

"Impossible! Madness!" said Leon gloomily.

"Madness? It seems so, I admit, but it is not mad really.—It seems monstrous and scandalous, and yet to me—knowing the danger and knowing the foe we have to deal with it is perfectly natural. Do you suppose I would propose such a thing to you if it were not necessary? You do not know, you do not see that I and Monina and you are in imminent danger. I dread some insult—a duel—a murder.—Every moment is precious. He respects nothing. I expect every instant to see him come in...."

"No, and again no," repeated Leon with a determination that was almost cruel.

Pepa, who with all her temerity was still under his dominion, dared no longer protest against this resolute pride, and insist on taking the only path to happiness that lay open to her. She was afraid that her obstinacy might provoke further difficulties, and she stood looking at the Sphinx, hoping that a solution of the problem might suggest itself, instead of that which to her looked so easy. At length, tired of waiting, she said:

"Then if everything is impossible I must do as my father desires me, and receive the wretch with open arms."

"You, in the power of that brute!" exclaimed Leon; the cord, stretched to the utmost, snapped asunder. "Before that can happen I must have lost every drop of blood in my body."

"Well, if the monster can be gorged with the Code," said Pepa sarcastically, "I will

fling my child to him and come to live with you."

"Part with the child?"

"You see,—that is still more impossible. Whichever way I turn I see nothing but impossibilities."

"Nay, there is one point," said Leon meditating, "from which we can look and see something besides the impossible."

"And where is it?"

"You shall know in good time; but first I must talk to your father, and to your husband."

"You?"

"Yes. I will speak with him—or with his uncles who are honourable and respectable men. Can you imagine no way in which the matter may be settled without flying, or going to law?"

"By my going to him?"

"Without even that."

"I know of none."

"But I do."

"Then you know of some way of working miracles.—No, no miracle will do here. The only real miracle is flight."

"No."

"Then we must fight it; we will fight him together, you and I."

"You and I? Then we should lose, and your child would be taken from you without fail."

"Well then; as you close every way of escape, open another; it is the least you can do."

“To-morrow!” said Leon sadly and looking at the floor: “I will open the only way there is.”

“To-morrow!” cried Pepa with a gesture of indignant impatience, and then relapsing into dejection as a glowing cinder suddenly becomes mere ashes. “Your to-morrows kill me!”

“Then you insist on the idea of flying?”

“I insist, because every minute you stay here, that I and my child stay here, but increases the peril for all of us. This night, which to you is one of mourning, is the turning point of my fate. He is capable—how can I tell! I fear the worst and tremble at every sound. I am so miserably afraid.—I know that if he heard of your being here, he would come and insult you,—fancy your fighting with him!—I am afraid of his insulting her, of his coming before me face to face. He always hated you.... I am afraid even that he might assassinate you.—I feel as though every conceivable horror were closing round me—I seem to see blood.—And it would be so easy now to step out of this circle of terrors. Oh! take me away and give me shelter in your house.”

“Everything in good time.”

“Will you wait for me there?”

Leon was on the point of replying, when he thought he heard steps and talking behind one of the doors.

“Where does that door lead to?” he asked in a low voice.

“Into a room opening into the Chinese boudoir.”

“You see; they are watching all we do, listening to all we say. Those are the witnesses preparing their evidence.”

“God knows who they may be! Suppose it were my husband....” said Pepa in Leon’s ear, like thief talking to thief in the silence of the room they have robbed. “Suppose

he were to come in here. He might kill us both and hardly be blamed for it. The law would protect him; you are in his wife's room."

A cold shiver ran through every vein in Leon's body.

"Hush," he whispered to Pepa. "Some one is spying us. But the voices are those of inquisitive women and stupid men servants. They have no weapons but their tongues."

"And we are here that the witnesses may rehearse their parts!" exclaimed Pepa starting away from him and rushing to the door, like a lioness at bay. "Who is there, listening, prying, watching me, with his ear to my keyhole? I am at home, in my own house, and those who treat me with disrespect shall suffer for it!" Then turning to Leon she went on: "And still you doubt! Danger surrounds us—I tremble for your life, for everything I hold dear."

Outside the door there was silence; they heard the soft footfall of women creeping away.

"You hear those cat-like steps," he said. "Cowards like that do not kill, but they will scratch our faces."

As he spoke they both started with alarm at hearing some one come into Monina's room. It was the Marquis de Fúcar. He was much agitated.

"I must speak to my daughter," he said to Leon very solemnly. "What would become of her if an anxious father.... And then a few words with you, Leon. No, it will be better that I should talk to you first.... It is a most delicate subject.—I have just come—my dear Pepa, one moment. Leon and I have two words to say to each other. We will go into the child's room."

Pepa was left alone; she could hear the voices of her father and her friend, but could distinguish no words. In a few minutes Don Pedro came back to Pepa alone; she looked anxiously at the door for Leon's return; but, as her father told her, they had agreed that Leon should not be present at the interview between the father and

daughter.

Leon withdrew to the room he had been quartered in, not far from the Incroyable room, and spent a night of cruel anxiety and internal struggle. At first it was like a violent argument between two contending parties. Then the turmoil in his soul took the form of crucial questions which had to be answered. Should he fly with her at once? This was not even to be thought of.

Fly with her by-and-bye? He could not decide.

Leave her to the tender mercies—perhaps almost to the brutality—of that other? Out of the question.

For the moment mere decency required him to quit Suertebella, and withdraw to his own house, where he might further consider what remained to be done. This was the obvious thing; but even more obvious was it not to abandon her who so valiantly tried to defend herself. If there was danger for both of them at Suertebella he could do no less than remain there in defiance of the world's opinion. The comments of others on any business of his had become a matter of indifference to him, and he decided to act on the dictates of his conscience, and to defy the judgment of the multitude. By remaining he might baffle the painful impression left by the visits he would be forced to receive next day from his friends and acquaintances—a crowd anxious to offer condolences under any circumstances. Everybody knew what was going on, and it was quite certain that even his slightest acquaintance would come to see him here on the scene of his misfortune and of this exciting piece of scandal. At first he thought he would decline to receive any one; then he came to a contrary conclusion. No, he would boldly face the intolerable nuisance of curiosity and impertinence. Why not? The social swarm, living on the sweets of their own sins flavoured with the criticism of the sins of other people—he could only despise and not fear them. Besides all this, Don Pedro had begged him to remain and lend his assistance in carrying out a beneficent project which he was turning over in his

mind, and which was sure to turn out well though it was neither a contract nor a loan.

CHAPTER XXII. VISITS OF CONDOLENCE.

Leon was awake and fighting his mental battle till daybreak; then he felt very weary, and locking himself into his room, he slept for some hours with that deep sleep which is apt to visit the condemned wretch on the last morning, a sort of intoxication produced by violent and long-continued sorrow.

It was about ten o'clock when he called his servant to help him dress, gaining much interesting information meanwhile. The señora's body had been carried into the chapel by the kind permission of Don Pedro, and Padre Paoletti had watched by it all night, and would remain there all day and the night to come, praying incessantly. Padre Paoletti, with the parish priests of Polvoranca and the neighbouring village, had performed Mass early that morning at the altar of St. Luis Gonzaga.

Then Paoletti made his appearance to discuss various pious legacies left by the deceased. To all this Leon gave his most anxious attention, and he gave further orders to the priest so that whatever remained to be done might be carried out with all magnificence. The marquis himself came in, and they sat talking for a long time, without excitement or hard words, gloomy and calm like a couple of diplomatic envoys from conquered nations who in the midst of disaster are anxious to checkmate a victorious usurper.

"It all rests with you," said Don Pedro again and again, with a melancholy expression. "You are master of the situation."

But even after these words the conversation continued for some little time longer, growing more and more grave and gloomy, till the last sentences sounded almost like a funeral chant. The conference, like some on which the fate of nations has turned, ended in a breakfast. But on this occasion it was eaten in silence and hardly

touched, a thing which never happens in politics.

In the afternoon visitors began to arrive. Leon saw a melancholy procession of black coats and heard a succession of sighs which announced the comers like vocal visiting cards. Some with warm and genuine sympathy, and others with total indifference, expressed their sorrow at the event of the previous day; but without mentioning what, thus offering an opportunity for a satirical explanation. Some shook their heads, expressing: “What a world we live in!” Others squeezed his hand as much as to say: “You have lost your wife! When shall I have such a piece of luck!” Two hundred black-gloved hands pressed his in turn. To him, feeling giddy and stunned and paying no attention to their monotonous formulas, all they could say sounded like a hiss and hum of irony. If the Incroyables themselves had taken up their parable, speaking through the mass of neckcloth that almost covered their mouths, it could not have produced a more discordant mockery of woe. Some, of course, had come out of sincere regard; some to witness this extraordinary scene, this scandal above scandals; to look close at the widower who, after killing his wife with neglect, flaunted his connection with a married woman under the very roof where the innocent victim had died only a few hours since. This idea lurked perhaps in only a few minds, but it did in some. After paying their respects to the mourner, several went into the chapel to gaze at the dead—beautiful even in death.

At last the dismal crowd grew thinner—only three were left—two—one. He was one of Leon’s most intimate friends and he stayed some time. Then Leon was alone.

“Can I speak to you?” he heard a voice say at the door and he started on seeing Gustavo.

“If you will speak briefly and plainly,” he replied.

His brother-in-law slowly approached.

“We are quitting this house,” he said, “which to us is the abode of sorrow and sin. You, I presume, will remain here, bound to it as you are by interest and passion. We

are glad to be free from you. My mother desires me to beg that you will not attempt to see her and take leave of her."

"I had already made up my mind to forego that honour," said Leon coldly. "Pray be good enough to make that clear to all your family."

"Very good.—I can only congratulate myself on being the very opposite to you," said the lawyer laying his hand on his breast. "I answer your ironical philosophy with Christian charity, and announce to you that my mother, my father, all of us forgive you."

"Thank them in my name. I am edified and delighted by such Christian conduct."

"We forgive you, not merely for the sad end...."

"What! again?"

"Not merely for the sad end to which you have brought my sister, but for the insult you have offered to her sainted remains."

Leon sat silent, dignified and sad.

"Do you protest? Do you deny it?" said Gustavo.

"I deny nothing. I have the pleasure, on the contrary, of leaving you undisturbed in the unenviable enjoyment of your base imaginings."

"Then we will drop this odious subject. We are convinced, you are impenitent; each must hold his own.—Before we part for ever I am anxious to have you understand that I have done nothing to encourage Cimarra, or to incite him to attack you. He came to my house, and consulted me; I advised him and drew up his case. All the rest is your own doing."

"Be quite easy. Do not torment your conscience about that man; while defending his lawful rights, you may possibly guide him into the path of salvation."

"Your atheistical mockery cannot disturb my conscience, which, though it is far from spotless, at any rate can see what is just and right. Whether Federico's

repentance is sincere or not I cannot tell. But it is against all sound doctrine to reject a man who confesses his sins and declares he is resolved to act rightly for the future. If he is brought to profess repentance, he may be led to desire it; and the desire is half-way to the accomplishment of the fact. In this respect this man's form of evil has an advantage over your hardened disbelief, since you can never confess nor repent."

"I do beg you," said Leon "to spare me the soporific treatment of your sermons. The strangest thing about them is that they are in fact grossly heterodox. A pretty apostle the Church can boast of!—Polito might have come to announce the forgiveness of the family, and he would not have preached to me."

"He wished to come, but mamma would not allow it. His impetuous nature fills her with alarm. We all hope that as he is about to undertake the sobering duties of married life he may settle down, and break himself of the vices which scandalize us."

"Leopold is going to be married? Allow me to congratulate the lady, though I have not the pleasure of knowing her."

"The difficulties between my family and the Villa Bojios were all removed last night when the young lady's mother came to call and was most lavish in her affectionate condolences. The Villa Bojios have lately lost a son, and the mothers mingled their tears; it was agreed that Leopold and Susana should be married as soon as we are out of mourning."

"Congratulate your mother for me—I wish her every success."

"The covert satire of your tone is worthy of your utter disregard of our sorrow.—I have had nothing whatever to do with this business, and you yourself know very well that I have bewailed from my heart all the disgrace which has fallen on the family in consequence of my father's misdemeanours, my mother's folly and Polito's vices. You, when I believed you to be honest and honourable, were the

confidant of my griefs. Now, when we recoil from you with invincible repugnance, I feel I must tell you that I cannot eat a morsel of bread in peace until we have repaid to the uttermost farthing a man who does not deserve to be our creditor."

"If you mean me, I look for no indemnification. I am sufficiently repaid with ingratitude."

"That is all very fine," said Gustavo sarcastically. "What I have said I have said. Now, we meet no more. My last word is to acknowledge that I was mistaken in saying that you would die of rage: You will live on cynicism.—I know, the carriage is waiting and the trunks packed for a theatrical flight in defiance of social decency and the laws of morality. Well, well; it is no more than might be expected of you.—Bon voyage, son of Satan...."

"Your penetration and information as to my proceedings are really remarkable!—Now, if you please we will part."

"It is my desire."

"And I insist upon it. Good-bye."

Not long after, peeping through the blinds, he watched the departure of what had been his family. The marquis, feeble and crushed, was almost carried by the poet who was still in attendance. His wife, really broken-hearted, was a pathetic object. Polito, his throat muffled up in voluminous wraps, gave one arm to the young lady who was to be his wife, while in the other he held a dog. Milagros was supported and almost lifted into the carriage by Pilar and Señora de Villa Bojío.—Whips cracked, the horses pawed, and one, two, three, four coaches rolled across the park bearing away the dozen or so of human creatures, to whom the solemnity of a recent sorrow lent factitious respectability.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE VICTIMIZED HUSBAND.

As evening drew on Leon went into the room where his wife had died. There were a variety of objects left there which he wished to collect and remove. The house was deserted; he could hear the echo of his own steps, and the few lights cast deep shadows. He thought he perceived a figure coming in from the portico to the principal corridor, walking stealthily and softly like a thief, listening to every sound and keeping a sharp look-out. The first flash of suspicion followed by a noiseless explosion of hatred, as the shot follows the match, so startled Leon that his immediate impulse was to hide himself, and watch the intruder unseen. He shrunk behind a hanging and saw him creep by: It was He. Leon perceived it more from an instinctive loathing than by seeing him; just as, in a different sense, a spirit of divination is born of lofty and passionate love.

Cimarra passed him with a cat-like step, prying about cautiously as he went. He turned down a carpeted gallery where the walls were covered with a valuable collection of political caricatures from the comic papers and broadsheets of every country, displayed in a chronological series—the history of a century in mockery and laughter. In the corners were four old-fashioned screens covered with water-colours for which there had been no room on the walls. Leon slipped behind the nearest and watched the intruder, who sat down on a large divan in the middle. To account for what followed it is necessary to explain that, on arriving at Suertebella, the new-comer had held a colloquy with one of the under-servants on whom he could depend.

“Be so good,” he said, “as to go to the chapel and say to Padre Paoletti that I have come here to speak with he knows whom; and that I will wait for him in the gallery of caricatures. Show him the way up the stairs to the tribune, across the old picture-room, and down the little passage.”

Soon Leon heard the familiar leaden shuffle. The door of the little passage opened and the priest came in. Leon could see him perfectly, because the gallery had glass

doors to the entrance hall which was always brilliantly lighted up at night.

Cimarra hastened forward to meet the confessor; they sat down side by side.

“Your respected uncles,” the priest began, “sent me word last evening that you wished to speak with me; but I did not suppose that it would be to-night, or in this house, but later, and in the confessional.”

“I have things to discuss with you later and in the confessional,” replied the other. “But you understand that here, and to-night, I have something else to talk about. That is to say, dear Señor Paoletti, that there are two subjects to be discussed—one of considerable interest, and the other very urgent.”

“Then begin with what is urgent, and leave what is merely interesting till a future opportunity.”

“To begin with what is urgent—I take it for granted that you know all the secrets of this house; I do not of course mean the secrets of the confessional.”

“I know none whatever,” said the priest drily.

“That merely means that I have no claim on your confidence. But, in short, do you not know what my wife proposes to do? I hear she intends to fly with her lover.”

“Sir,” said Paoletti sternly, “I know nothing whatever of what you expect me to tell you; I never intrude where I am not invited, and it is a matter of perfect indifference to me whether the guilty persons escape or no. I am here to watch and pray by the body of a sainted daughter and friend, whose spiritual director I had the honour to be.”

“I know it.—But you are respected and esteemed by all. Don Pedro highly appreciates you; my wife is very religious, and when she is in trouble she likes to talk about the Virgin del Cármen, and the saints. It might have happened that she should have sent for you to console and strengthen her this morning, and this evening you might—how can I tell? You might have known things of which I am

ignorant, and you might—you might, just possibly, have been able and willing to give me some information and extricate me from my position of uncertainty."

"I know nothing; nor, if I did, could I lower myself to play the part of the spy and tale-bearer, which you seem to expect," exclaimed Paoletti rather hotly. "You do not know me; your worthy uncles have failed to explain to you the sort of man I am. My office is to console the afflicted and reprove the erring; I have no concern with worldly affairs. Those who need me will find me nowhere but in the confessional. Good-night, Caballero."

He rose to go. Cimarra detained him, holding his robe.

"But I have much to explain to you," he said. "Do not judge me so hastily. If I were to confess, if I were...."

The priest sat down again.

"No, I cannot confess here and now. To you it would be an act of sheer hypocrisy. Such a farce would ill-beseem me. I wish to speak the truth, even though the truth that comes from my lips should deal ruin and terror like ball from a cannon. Allow me, in the first place, to tell you something about myself, that you may the better understand the urgency of my claims.

"I must begin by saying that I always was fully conscious of my own slender merit, and that the moral world was to me a citadel with closed and barred gates. I never had any wish to expose myself to the labour of besieging the citadel or scaling its walls. It was my fortune—or misfortune, which, it is hard to decide—not to believe in God or in anything beyond this atrocious barred dungeon in which we are confined; and with this comfortable lack of creed I enjoyed a tranquil frame of mind which lulled my spirit to lethargy and enabled me to remain supremely indifferent to the good or bad opinion of others."

The priest, really horrified at hearing such an appalling profession of faith, again turned to go, saying that he was open to confession, but did not profess to tame

monsters; but Federico only smiled, and detaining the Italian he went on:

“But stay. I have something to say that may perhaps please you better.—I am weary of it all. I have been rich, and poor; powerful, and a beggar; I have seen all that is to be seen and enjoyed all that is to be enjoyed. With regard to women, I may say that on the whole I despise them; and I have no belief in anybody’s virtue. If you ask my opinion of men I can only say with the sceptical poet: ‘Plus je connais les hommes plus j’aime les chiens.’”[A]

[A] The better I know men, the better I love dogs.

“Allow me to advise you to go and live in the company of dogs, or to found a canine colony where you will feel more at your ease,” said Paoletti with grim irony. “I am only waiting to see if any spark of light will flash from the horrible blackness of your soul. But I see none.”

“I am coming to a delicate point. You know all about my wife.—When I was supposed to be dead she fell in love with another man. I believe she had loved him long before. Pepa hated me from the day she married me. In point of fact I did everything to justify her hatred. I treated her ill, I degraded her, I compromised her again and again by my pecuniary delinquencies; I spent her money on other women; my language was not refined, any more than my behaviour; I looked upon her as a useful piece of property, neither more nor less.”

“Enough of this!” exclaimed the priest, starting away from him as though he were some loathesome vermin. “If this is a confession of sin I will listen to it; but if it is merely an outrageous display of hardened cynicism I cannot—I cannot bear it.”

“You have interrupted me at the most important point. I was just going to say that now my wife to a certain extent commands my respect; that I acknowledge myself guilty towards her, and in every way her inferior, that I deserve her contempt; that it is only natural, and even legitimate in theory—I may warn you that I too have theories—and I admit that, in theory, it is only natural that Pepa should love another

man: as natural as that the birds should build their nests in the branches of trees rather than in the jaws of foxes."

"It never can be natural and legitimate for a married woman to love any man but her husband," said Paoletti very gravely. "What would have been natural and legitimate is that your wife, instead of listening to the addresses of a married man and contributing to the martyrdom of a perfect angel, should have dedicated to God the affections you have ceased to deserve."

"Mysticism is a figurative fount which cannot satisfy the thirsty. She did not crave to love a phantom but a man. I have reasons for believing that she has loved him from her childhood. In one of our violent quarrels, which used to be of daily occurrence, she said: 'You are not my husband and never have been; my husband is there....' and she tapped her forehead. Another time she said: 'Marrying you was a deliberate act of self-degradation.' In short, respected father, at this moment I confess to a grain of respect for the wretched soul who has been my victim. As a woman I do not care a straw for her. She does not appeal to my heart, to my imagination, or to my senses. So far as love goes, I could almost let her go, let her break one tie to form the other; but my pride rebels. Another thing I may tell you is that I hate the man; I have hated him ever since we were at college together; I believe that my aversion and her love have run in parallel grooves till an unlucky moment when they came into collision, and broke out in conflict,—and I must conquer—I must conquer."

"You have only to assert your rights. But this is no concern of mine; I plead not for law but for virtue."

"I am coming to that point. We have here an alliance of virtue and law, and both are on my side," Cimarra went on with increased vehemence. "I am the stronger and she the weaker party; I am the defendant, and they are the criminals. I am protected alike by religion and morality; by God and his laws, by the Church and by public opinion.

Nothing, no one, can protect them. The ground on which I stand is solid earth, the best suited to my purposes, desiring as I do to be reconciled to the powers that rule the world, and to become a useful wheel in the social machine. Feeling secure in my position, and upheld both by human Justice, and by what you call divine laws, I intended to prosecute them on legal grounds, to exhaust every means, to worry them out of their lives and give them no peace nor breathing time; to cover them with dishonour, heap disgrace on them ... to attack them with the code in one hand and the anathemas of the Church in the other. These were my weapons; but, you must know, that my worthy uncles and my respected father-in-law have spent this whole day in concocting a compromise. Oh! my illustrious father-in-law is an eminently practical man, with an intense horror of exaggeration. He is as fond of me as he might be of the toothache. Unfortunately for him, this man, who is all-powerful in society, and who has a right to treat Spaniards as if they were slaves he had bought or could sell, can do nothing to hurt me. The arm of the law, if he used it to attack me, would turn and wound him too."

"And you say that Don Justo Cimarra and Don Pedro Fúcar have been planning a compromise?" said Paoletti, who, in spite of his resolution, was yielding a little to curiosity.

"An amicable separation.—But as yet there is nothing proved, my dear sir. All must depend on our philosopher, geologist, cave-hunter.—Gustavo told me that everything was prepared for their flight, and I believe him—I must confess that I should do the same in their place!"

"So far as I am concerned I can only say that the matter does not interest me in the least," said Paoletti, subduing his curiosity. "You are talking of law-suits, not of a case of conscience."

"I will go on to speak of my wife. You know that I have a daughter?"

"Yes," and again the priest felt the prick of curiosity.

“Monina is my child. Well, señor cura, the only being in the world who can rouse my soul to anything like an emotion, the only creature who, now and then, makes me think and feel unlike my habitual self, for whom a smile still lingers in that dark, unfathomed region which we call the soul—for lack of any other name, is my little daughter. I do not know what comes over me; when I was at the point of death in that horrible ship with its cargo of petroleum, everything vanished from my mind but the sense of danger, and in the midst of that danger that little golden head rose up before my eyes. I fancied that I clung to it to save myself in that wretched leaky boat which seemed every moment to be sinking. You will smile at my folly.—I used to play with her, to make her laugh that I might laugh too....”

“At last, at last,” said Paoletti with satisfaction. “Here is the spark I was looking for.”

“No—do not suppose there is any particular virtue in it; it is only that my little fair-haired child—or toy—with her angel’s eyes, has a wonderful charm for me. I fancy I love her, and should love her more if I had her more constantly with me. I hear she was near dying of croup. I long to have her in my arms. What do you say to this?”

“I say that there is no soil, however barren, from which no flower can spring.”

“This has nothing to do with flowers.—What I want to tell you is that as I passed through New York, I saw, in a shop window, a little toy carriage full of dolls and pulled by a string, and I bought it to bring to her.”

Paoletti smiled.

“I see all your pride, your indifference to your wife, your hatred of your rival, the law-suit and possible compromise; I see your atrocious atheism, your passions, your inhuman cynicism,—your love for the child, and the little carriage pulled by a string,”—Cimarra had it in his hand.—“But I do not see what I can do in the matter.”

“Now we have come to the point, to what, as I said, is urgent. I am most anxious to know what they are plotting.—Is he here to-night? I was told he had some friends to see him. I am perfectly convinced that you know it; my wife is sure to have told you.”

“To have told me? I believe the lady has a particular dislike to me.”

“You must know through the Condesa de Vera, who is my wife’s most intimate friend; she, if I mistake not, is one of your flock.”

“I know nothing, and they have told me nothing,” said the priest with some asperity. “And even if I knew....”

“Oh! you need not be afraid that in case of their attempting to fly, I should go in for high tragedy, and make a scene. I do not challenge or kill. I am more philosophical than all your philosophers put together.”

“I can only repeat that I know nothing and want to know nothing.”

“It is impossible that such a man as you should have come to the house two days in succession and not know everything that goes on in it.”

“But I am not a friend in this house—I am a foe.”

“Then as you cannot satisfy my curiosity,” said the intruder sadly, “you cannot help me I suppose?”

“In what?”

“To see the child.”

“It is vain to ask me a favour which is altogether out of my sphere. Nothing on earth would induce me to take a step beyond this room. Apply to the servants.”

“No one will do a thing for me for fear of Fúcar. My affectionate father-in-law has given strict orders that I am not to be admitted. All the way from the gate I only found one servant who would take a bribe. Even the dogs hate me here.”

“Steal in like a thief.”

“I am afraid of being seen.”

“Go in as a father.”

“I cannot, at any rate at this hour.”

“Much less can I.”

“If the Countess de Vera is here and you say only two words to her—if you only tell her with your usual eloquence what I want, what I wish—she will not refuse you. I solemnly swear to you that I have no evil intention whatever. I only want to give my child three good kisses....”

“Vade retro. I do not trust your intentions which may be what you describe them, or may be utterly vile.”

“I will not insist. At any rate I have the grace not to be an obstinate beggar.—The only important subject of our interview may be regarded as disposed of. You will forgive my boldness.”

“It is forgiven.”

“The other question of interest which I proposed to discuss with you, and which can be postponed, is closely connected with what I have been saying. Supposing my wife is subdued by the threat of the law, controls her passion and sends the geologist about his business.... In a short time it will be quite easy for you to become Pepa’s spiritual director.”

“I do not go where I am not bidden.”

“Pepa has many friends who are your daughters in the Church, who form, if I may say so, your spiritual family. The Condesa de Vera in particular....”

“Yes, I am her director; she honours me by her friendship.”

“Just so. Then if you chose you could be Pepa’s. Her lonely life would predispose her to mysticism. The mind of a poor weak woman, when her illusions are past, turns to the altar.”

”Well, you may have a really good and honest purpose in suggesting this. If what you desire is that I should interfere to make the best of an unhappy marriage, and snatch back to God two souls that the Devil claims, the idea seems to me a good one. But to that end, you must begin by abjuring your atrocious opinions, and become a sincere Catholic.”

“So far as that goes, I have no wish to disturb the general concord. I am most anxious to be reconciled to society, to show my respect for its venerable institutions, to settle down and give rise to no scandals, above all not to set a bad example to the lower orders, who, if they see a man in broad-cloth neglect going to church, think that they may commit robbery and murder. I have no intention of starting afresh with a map in my hand, or of toiling in business to accumulate a fortune for myself. I am sure that I shall get on and that even Fúcar, who thinks himself a little Almighty, will cease to call me a ruffian and even agree at last to make bargains and do business with me. The present generation has a powerful gift of forgetfulness. It is very easy to rehabilitate oneself in a society like ours, a medley of the most dissimilar elements—all bad, and governed by the worst—the love of show. In quite half of the households of a certain class we see the ménage à trois; public administration ought to be called public prevarication; high and low are distinguished by nothing on earth but the different clothes under which they hide their grossly scandalous conduct; politics are a system of pillage; the people are ruined in taxes and enrich themselves by lotteries; justice is the curse of fools and the blessing of the knowing; and if two or three agree to call some puppet a remarkable man, every one believes them. Nothing is easier than to make a robe of honour and put it on, to become a distinguished patriot and public character, and see your portrait on the penny match-boxes. I would undertake, if I gave my mind to it, to make people think I was worthy to be canonized within a couple of years. But I am not prepared to turn bigot just yet.—As to our marriage do not worry yourself with trying to patch that up—it is past remedy; but if she, from an honest instinct,

packs off her lover, then make a saint of her, and you will comfort her greatly. I should be glad to see my wife devout, pious and good; I like your edifying folks. Leave me to recover my own footing in society in my own way. What I ask of your goodness and Catholic feeling is that, after you have gained the control of Pepa's mind—without any idea of bringing us together, for which I do not care in the least—you will induce her to allow me to see the child. There would be no need for my coming here; I would rather not, I have always hated Suertebella; but some one could bring her to see me—you, for instance. Let us say she should come and dine with me twice a week, or once a week: nothing more than that."

"What depths of utter apathy!" exclaimed Paoletti with intense bitterness. "I have seen many men of such temper in society in Spain; but you, with your detestable pessimism, could give them points and beat them all."

"I at any rate say what I mean."

"The long and short of it is, Señor Cimarra, that you are in my eyes so abominable that I cannot see my way to gratifying the only legitimate desire which lurks, almost invisible, in the blackness and barrenness of your soul. Do not count upon me for anything. If your wife repents and dismisses her lover, and if I am called in—which is no doubt, very possible—to direct her conscience, my first task will be to cure her of her sinful griefs; and then I will turn her thoughts to God, who is the only refuge of those poor women who have been so rash as to love unworthy men. What joy for me to win a fresh battle against Satan. You—you do not exist, you are nothing to me! Do not keep me any longer; let me return to watch by the beloved dead."

"I shall not go into the chapel; I have a horror of dead people. Pardon me for having disturbed you, reverend Father."

"I will not neglect to pray for you."

"I do not refuse—on the contrary, I thank you."

"I look forward to the day of your repentance."

“Thank you; you are most kind. It is more than I deserve. Good-bye, a thousand apologies.”

The little priest went softly away; his heavy steps died away in the passage which led to the chapel. Cimarra went out the same way; but he went down the steps and not into the little sanctuary where the illumination of mortuary torches filled him with more dread than respect. He crossed the deserted park, shrinking into the shadow of the trees when, now and again, he heard footsteps. Every now and then he felt his pocket to be sure that he had not lost the toy for Monina.

Presently, in the course of his nocturnal expedition, he saw Fúcar’s carriage drive in at the gates, and from his safe distance he addressed him in thought rather than in words: “Ah! my friend, what eyes I caught you making this afternoon in the street at the fair American who came with me from the States. Jupiter! you wished she was for you I’ll wager.”

He saw the marquis get out of the carriage with another man, and muttered to himself: “My uncle is with him! What is up I wonder. Oh! dread curiosity! Why do you torment me as if you were jealousy?”

CHAPTER XXIV. THREE AGAINST TWO.

The next evening, at the hour fixed by Don Pedro, Leon made his way to Pepa’s sitting-room. She was there with her father and a third person. Monina, who had been dancing and skipping round her mother, was condemned to retire to bed; a banishment involving floods of tears, but against which there is no appeal for the little ones when their elders have business to discuss. The marquis half-buried in a deep arm-chair, with his fat chin resting on his shirt front, his lips sticking out as if too much flesh had gone to the making of his face, his brows knit under a labyrinth of wrinkles—the scars, as it were, won in a hundred fights against “all exaggeration,” was an impressive personage. The third of the trio was an old man

with white hair, a dry thin face, and excessively short-sighted, to judge from the strong concavity of his gold-mounted spectacles which were astride on a nose that, for size and curve, was more like a pelican's bill than anything else in creation. His manners had the gravity of a student mixed with the patriarchal frankness of a man of good birth. They were all in mourning, and the grief of Pepa's heart overflowed her eyes.

"Here he is," said Don Pedro taking his daughter's hand caressingly.

"So I see," said Pepa looking up at Leon and then looking away. "And now he is to repeat what my father told me, and I would not believe."

"My dearest child," said Fúcar, "this is a case of honour, of duty, of social decency, of morality—both in the true and in the more customary sense. Consider.—You cannot have everything you want."

"I know it, I know it," murmured Pepa, fixing a stony gaze on the table-cloth before her.

"Much as it costs me," said Leon feeling that brevity was most to the purpose. "I must declare that I see it to be an inexorable duty to part from the woman I love, and give up every hope of ever making her mine."

No one said a word in reply. Pepa let her head drop on her father's shoulder and closed her eyes. Leon took one of her hands, which she passively surrendered, and said with much feeling:

"It is the greatness of a crisis that tests greatness of soul."

Again there was a pause; then Don Pedro, swallowing half his words and twisting his mouth nervously, began as follows:

"And I declare that we have come to this peaceable and happy compromise on the strength of an agreement concluded between Don Justo Cimarra and myself, by which my respected friend undertakes that his nephew will withdraw his action...."

Don Pedro fairly choked. Don Justo came to the rescue.

“And renounce the rights he might legally assert.”

“Just so, he renounces all use of the weapon that the law places within his reach, on condition that he, who by every theory of law, morality, and religion is out of place in this miserable conjunction of three persons where there should be but two, shall disappear completely.—My dear friend,” he went on, turning to Leon with a conciliatory smile, “you, by retiring from a position untenable by law and morality—impossible, in fact, but for the corruption and laxity of modern society—you have saved us from a disgraceful scandal. I can only thank you with all my heart, and....”

Again Don Pedro cast an appealing glance at his friend.

“The circumstances of the case,” Don Justo went on emphasizing his speech with his forefinger, “are exceptional. For my part, I am thankful that the quarrel should be made up. I was the first to advise my nephew to withdraw from it, if we could only insure the permanent absence of this gentleman...” and the finger pointed at Leon. “But as the circumstances of the case are so exceptional—I must repeat it—and as the very small moral worth of my nephew himself would seem to justify that rebellion against his authority which we are anxious to avert...” and the finger pointed in mute accusation to Pepa. “I was, as I say, the first to advise the concessions demanded by this gentleman...” again the finger indicated Leon, “and which, I admit, are quite in the spirit of true judicial prudence. In view, then, of all these facts I thought it well to draw up in concert with my friend here...” the finger after wavering like the needle of a compass turned to the marquis—“the articles of an honourable peace, I pledged my word of honour that my nephew should accept the condition proposed by Señor Don Leon and fulfil his part of the compact.”

The worthy gentleman, who paused now and then in his speech to give it greater emphasis, here stopped for a moment, and then went on:

"The condition laid down by this gentleman, and agreed to, by proxy, by what I am obliged to term the innocent party—in the eyes of the law—is that this lady shall live with her father and her daughter, here at Suertebella; and that my nephew shall never, under any pretence, cross the boundary line of the estate, thus effecting a separation which, without being hostile, shall be absolute and complete."

"And everything has been settled in a satisfactory manner," said Don Pedro, relaxing his frown and stroking his daughter's hair with his heavy hand, while she said not a word, and did not even open her eyes. "Time, time," he said, "time is the remedy for all things.—Do you not think so, Leon?"

"I, for my part," said Leon, "do not expect time to give me what it has not got to bestow. I hate to forget—it is the death of the heart. My feelings will be the same that they are now to my dying day—but at a distance, where I can never be troubled by a wretch whom I have always despised, and always shall despise. I have spent my life in the pursuit of an ideal—the ideal Christian family: the centre of peace and corner-stone of virtue; the stepping-stone to moral perfection; the fount in which each and all may be baptised and purified. Such a home is an education; it compels us to grow to a higher standard and rubs off the asperities of our nature, giving us the most precious lessons by placing in our care the men of the future, that we may train them from the cradle to years of discretion.—And all this has been, and must ever be, to me no more than a dream. Two women have crossed my path, Religion gave me the first, and religion, wrongly understood, tore her from me. The second would have given me herself—gave me her heart and soul; and I took the gift; but the law deprives me of it, and I have no choice but to resign it. All my attempts to achieve the lovely reality will be no less ill-fated. Society threw this woman into the arms of another man, and if I claim her I condemn her and myself to a life of unqualified disgrace, on a level with the basest of those I most abhor. Nay, and our dishonour becomes a legacy to innocent creatures, guiltless of the errors committed before they were born, but nevertheless coming nameless and dishonoured into the

world."

He kissed Pepa's hand which she had left in his, and then went on:

"The presence of these two persons, who will be scandalized, no doubt, by my words, shall not prevent my expressing my feelings.—To me, this woman is mine, mine by the divine law of love. I, radical as I am, bow to this law of the heart; but when I wish to put these anarchical views into practice, I tremble and dare not. The fierce rebellion lingers in my soul and cannot venture forth. Those who cannot transform the world and uproot its errors, must respect them. Those who cannot see the mysterious limit-line between legality and iniquity, must yield to the law with the patience of slaves. Those whose souls rise with cries and struggles in a revolt which seems legitimate, are nevertheless incompetent to place a sounder constitution in the place of that which crushes them, and can only suffer in silence."

"We are all slaves to the laws of the age we live in," said Don Justo sternly.

"That is true," Leon said; he was evidently speaking for Pepa's benefit alone. "Our spirits are but a part of the spirit that made those laws; we are so far responsible for their defects that we must accept the consequences. If every one who felt injured by the machine in which we move—the majority in lazy indifference—if the sufferers, I say, were to set to work to alter it and could not repair it, what a world this would become! We must submit to be torn and mangled, secretly bewailing our misery, and only wishing we could live to see new machinery at work. But even that, I have no doubt, would hurt some one, since every improvement in one phase of human life brings some fresh form of suffering. Life is an aspiration—a thirst which revives as soon as it is quenched. If we could conceive of immortality under no other aspect, we could imagine it as consisting in seeing ourselves constantly under the dominion of—whether in small actions or in great ones—and constantly enchanted by the lovely vision of that distant horizon we call perfection.—If you, poor soul, could only know how I have fought with myself since we last talked together. I

reconsidered every impossible alternative. It would be so easy to escape from this maze by simply following the impulse of my heart, and shielding myself behind theoretical and selfish arguments which no one but myself could follow and which even I could not distinctly marshall.—You were ready to come, the carriage was waiting, all the means of flight were ready, there was not an obstacle in sight and we could have afforded to think lightly of the opinion of society.—To be off and happy in some distant land! How easy and pleasant it seemed! You—not my wife—I your lover; both living in the practice of social anarchy, our illicit connection an outrage on the noblest and most necessary institution of human society; I haunted by a ghost, and you by a living man, who on every possible occasion would proclaim and urge his rights; neither of us having any claims against others while the whole world would have claims against us. Your daughter, again, growing up with this horrible example before her innocent eyes; and on what moral ground could you damn me if one day she felt inclined to become the mistress of the first man who fell in love with her? When once we break the bounds, we have no choice but to cast off all the ties that give order and stability to the world.—Yes, I thought over everything that could be said on either side. Then I considered whether I could not stay here, and soothe my anxieties with the satisfaction of being near you, even though I should neither see you nor speak to you. But that again cannot be. If I stay within reach of you, some time or other, almost without intending it, we should be certain to meet. Then that man I loathe would interfere—I should be unable to control my hatred, and I know, I feel, it would end in bloodshed. If I do not go away—far away, and soon—I know how that baleful impulse would grow stronger in me; it is like some hideous bidding to kill. Under my calmer reason turbid springs seethe in my soul, surging up to sweep away every obstacle. There is that within me which urges me to violence and rebellion; but I lack courage, for I reflect that nothing permanent, right, or moral, can be built up on anarchy or on blood. I take refuge in my conscience, and I have decided to go. I go to save your honour and the happiness of your child."

Pepa did not lift her head nor open her eyes and she spoke with bitter despair.

“I am incapable of argument; I seek one, but in vain; I look into my soul and I find nothing but love.”

Then she slowly raised herself and opened her hot and aching eyes; but she looked at no one as she added:

“I am punished. When I see that the fetters which link me to a villain cannot be broken, I cannot help remembering that the fault is all my own.—Yes, mine; for in a fit of jealous pique I bound myself for life to a worthless wretch. I flung myself into evil; degrading myself and my father, and turning marriage into a wicked and hideous farce.—Why had I no patience? I rushed into marriage with a strange impulse towards martyrdom. It was the mad vanity of anguish which seeks to add to its tortures.—Then, when you thought I was free, why did you seek me? We both made a cruel mistake in binding ourselves with intolerable bonds. As soon as you were free, I was suddenly caught again, and in that fatal pillory; but I hoped some chivalrous hand might dash it to pieces.”

“There was no way but bloodshed,” Leon said hastily.

Pepa made no answer.

“I am the victim,” she exclaimed after a painful silence. “And I cannot bear to die—it is grief and punishment. I hate to be sacrificed; it is misery, utter misery, even if it is right and just—even if I deserve it. Here, before me, I see two respectable men—my father and a judge. Well, before them, and before you.—The man I claim....” And she fixed her eyes on Leon’s with an indescribable expression of love and reproach; she gasped for air and hardly seemed to have breath enough to speak: “You are mine—and before you all three I declare that this desertion...” she burst into tears and added feebly: “is cowardly.”

Don Justo lifted up his calm persuasive voice.

“Try,” he said, “to see the immediate details in their true proportions, and fix your

thoughts on broad and eternal facts. The soul may grow to the dignity of its sorrows and borrow from them a sort of majesty to rule the spirit."

"True," said Leon sadly. "Our very wounds reveal a secret and ineffable fount of compensation. Pepa—my darling, my heart's wife—wife, I say, by an unwritten law on which we may not act, which can never be of any avail; but which lurks in my soul like the germ of truth, a holy seed buried in the depths of being.—Look into your soul and you will see yourself nobler and more worthy in your sorrow than in the satisfaction of your passion. Though we are conquered and humiliated by the crushing necessity that parts us—a mysterious mixture of something dignified and venerable with iniquity and injustice, a horrible and unnatural coalition, we may enjoy the noblest form of triumph. You are religious; and I believe in the immortality of the soul, in eternal justice, in final perfection: a brief creed but a grand and firm one. We are conquered; we are victims and martyrs. But Hope has no limits. It is a grace which links us to the unknown and calls to us from afar, beautifying life and giving us strength to stand firm and walk onward. We will not be so criminal as to cut the thread which guides us forward to a goal which, though remote, is not invisible to eyes that are not bound by an evil conscience. Conquer despair, rise superior to it; resign yourself, and hope."

"Hope? Have I not said that I should die hoping?" said Pepa bitterly, recurring to an old idea. "It is my punishment; my heart told me long since that its name was Hope. And if I die?"

"It matters not."

"It matters not?" she said, for Leon's fervent spirituality did not meet her mood. He would have said more, but he was at an end of his arguments, and the suggestions of consolation and hope with which he tried to do battle were, he saw, of no more avail than weapons which break in the hand in the heat of a fray. He knew not what to say. Feeling, which can sometimes be quelled by reason, and which he had

studiously endeavoured to subdue and control, rose in revolt, snatched up its despotic sceptre and asserted its dominion. He rose.

“Now—so soon?” said Pepa rushing into his arms with a sudden overflow of passion.

”Heaven forgive me!” cried Leon choked with emotion. “With my wretched arguments, I am belabouring myself with my own logic. It is a horrible farce a mockery of morality and cannot bind me.”

Pepa clasped her hands as if in prayer and preparing for death, and Leon was on the point of uttering some wildly subversive ideas which came boiling from his heart like the lava from a volcano, when the maid rushed in who had charge of Monina. She was pale and trembling.

“What is the matter?” said the marquis.

“The man—there!”

“Who?”

“A man. He came in suddenly—he is kissing the child.”

“It is he!” exclaimed Fúcar much agitated.

“He!”

“But it was agreed that he was not to come!”

“He—he is here?” cried Leon suddenly losing logic, reason, prudence and self-command, and flaring up in frenzy. “Let him dare to come in! Does he presume to desecrate these walls? I am glad to meet him here—I will tear him limb from limb like a foul beast!”

He turned to the door, where a man was standing. Pepa, with a piercing shriek, fell senseless. Don Pedro threw his strong arms round Leon to hold him back, and the older gentleman rushed forward indignantly to check his nephew’s further advance.

“For mercy’s sake!—in the name of all the Saints!” exclaimed Don Pedro.

“Stand back!” said Don Justo. “Do not stir a step forward.”

“What business have you here?” cried Leon with contemptuous insolence.

“Go,” said the magistrate. “Have you forgotten our agreement?”

“No. The agreement is not yet in force,” replied Cimarra, not moving an inch, and fixing his eyes on Leon with the glare of a wild tiger. “I came to see my little girl for the last time. I will not contravene the compromise, if others adhere to it. I have no desire to come here unless you are here.”

“I entreat you to go away,” said Don Pedro to Federico.

“He must go first.”

But the gloomy, surly figure in the door-way made no sign of moving.

“He must go first,” echoed Cimarra.

“Yes—I first—wretch!—So it must be,” said Leon.

Meanwhile Don Pedro and a maid had lifted Pepa and carried her to a sofa.

“You first,” Federico insisted, his cynicism yielding for a moment to an impulse of real dignity. “If not, I....”

“Nay; I will go first,” said Leon bitterly. “It is but right.”

He went up to the senseless form lying pale and dumb on the sofa, and gazed at her for a moment; he looked up at Cimarra, and bending over Pepa, kissed her cheek with tender passion. Then, fixing his eyes on her husband, he said:

“Bully! Thus I take leave of the woman you claim as your wife. If it is a crime, kill me; you have a right to do so.—Have you a weapon?”

“Yes,” said Federico sullenly, and putting his hand into his breast-pocket. It seemed as though a spark of honour, vigour and dignity had suddenly flashed into being in this abject creature—a corpse returned from the grave—as the will-o’-the-wisp suddenly flickers up from a foul morass. He stood face to face with his foe, a pistol in his hand, with a dull roar in his voice, and a sinister light in his eye. Leon waited

calmly. But Don Pedro and his friend seized Federico and held his arms. After a violent struggle, they succeeded in pulling him back; Leon remained standing with his arms folded, in the middle of the room.

“Leave the house!” cried Don Justo to his nephew.

“I will answer for the other,” said Don Pedro.

Don Justo dragged Federico away, not allowing him to pause an instant till he was fairly out of the house.

Leon sadly but steadily quitted the room by the other door. Fúcar accompanied him as far as the Chinese room, where he left him, stretched like a lifeless body on a divan.

“Go” he said, “leave us, and put an end to this misery.” And he went back to his daughter.

CHAPTER XXV. THE END.

Leon lay there a long time, unconscious of the flight of time. His scattered faculties slowly recovered their power of calmly contemplating the situation, though he found no peace. He rose to leave the house, and wandered vaguely from one room to another, seeking his way to the hall. When at length he reached it, he thought he heard strange voices, and stood still to listen; then, turning away, he descended a flight of back stairs that led to the basement floor, and tried to find his way out into the garden. After going in and out for some time in the endless and tortuous corridors of the servant’s premises, he saw a door which he opened.

All the blood in his body rushed in a cold tide to his heart and gave him a shock like a sudden fall, as he found himself in the chapel, lighted up by innumerable flambeaux. He took off his hat and gazed with open eyes. He was too much startled to do anything for some time but stand motionless at the door; he hardly seemed to

breathe, and his bewildered mind was aware only of a mountain of light, for so it appeared to him: a mass of ruddy slender flames which stretched their quivering tongues to the very roof, rising from the melting wax that dropped in yellow streams. In the midst, as a base to this blazing pyramid, a funereal object filled, as it were the throne of honour; white drapery and two marble hands were all that could be distinguished.

It needed all his manly courage to carry him nearer. Before stepping forward he glanced round him. No one was there; he could not hear a sound, not even a living breath, was audible; the cold remains of a human being, robed in the garments of a saintly death, seemed guarded by silence. The statue of a pallid youth stood upon the altar; his eyes, painted like life, shone across the chapel, to watch all who entered, and say: “Beware! Touch her not!”

Leon advanced slowly, treading softly that he might not hear the sound of his own steps. Reverence, the sanctity of the spot, his agonising hesitancy between the wish to approach and the instinct to withdraw, caused him to go through half a dozen separate states of mind in the course of the twenty steps between the door and the altar: anxiety and curiosity, nay fear—or superstition. He had time to assure himself that it was awe that held him back, and the audacious curiosity of that very awe which urged him forward.

He saw her. There she lay, before him, on the ground, and at the very threshold, as it were, of the realm where her immortal soul might find complete repose. Her spirit, selfish rather than generous, had already passed, with a sigh perhaps of surprise and awe, into the unknown land where love is the only wisdom, and where good and evil are more exactly appreciated and understood.

After once looking at her, and the first shock of reverence and pain over, he remained gazing thus; hearing the throbbing in his own temples and the rush of the blood in his veins, like the roar of an internal tide.

She was covered with a white robe, laid over her limbs by pious friends, with severe purity. Ample folds lay in straight lines from her neck to her feet, broken only by the marble hands which held a crucifix. A semi-transparent veil was over her face, neither concealing it nor too plainly revealing the outline, but letting it be seen vaguely, remotely as it were, through a mist of clouds, like the image that survives from a dream in eyes but half-awake. He would have liked to see more clearly what remained of her unequalled beauty, which, under the hand of death, was fading like some withered violet-tinted flower. In that face, blind and dead as it was, there was still some trace of expression. Leon found himself gazing into the depths of that vacant mystery, made deeper by the clouds of gauze, and recognised the look he had last seen on her features—a look less of love than of irony.

His brain was busy with all the solemn thoughts that besiege a man in the great crises of life: he reflected on the wide distance that divides us from true happiness—a distance that mind cannot measure, and that man has no means of shortening. Suddenly his meditations were interrupted by a commonplace and intrusive sound—a cough. He looked round. He and the dead were not alone. In a corner of the chapel sat a watcher. It was the little priest, seated on a bench with his eyes fixed on his prayer-book. Leon could not help admiring the fidelity of the spiritual friend who, having been her guide during life, had constituted himself her guardian in death. Without lifting his head, the Italian raised his eyes and looked for a few seconds at Leon fixedly—very fixedly. Then he looked down again and went on reading. This simple, calm drooping of the eyes was expressive of the most sovereign contempt imaginable. Paoletti murmured on, as though not a soul were present: “Ego sum vermis et non homo, opprobium hominum et abjectio plebis.”

Why was it that, as he left the chapel—no less reverently than he had entered it—Leon felt in his soul a soothing sense of consolation?—He had seen, face to face the worst terrors of the moral and physical world, and the struggle to which the contemplation had given rise had left his soul surrounded by melancholy ruins.

Impavidum ferient ruinae, as a heathen said! But though he was crushed, alone, exiled and injustly judged, what could he care while his conscience was free in the sunshine that brightens it when it is sure of having acted rightly.

On returning to his empty house he found his servant busy packing in obedience to his orders given a few hours since. The man expressed great joy at seeing him, and when Leon enquired as to the cause of his eager satisfaction, the faithful fellow replied:

“At the Señora Marquesa’s, and in all the houses where you are known, they said you would be brought home with a bullet through your brains to-night. They were so sure of it that I could not help crying.”

Leon smiled sadly.

“And so, when I came in to pack, the first thing I did was to hide your pistols, in case you should kill yourself here if you had not done it before.”

“Where have you put them? Are they loaded?” said Leon hastily.

“Oh! Master, do not kill yourself!” cried the terrified man.

“Nay, be easy, my friend,” said Leon pointing to his forehead. “This brain is not bent on suicide.—As to the pistols, if they are loaded you had better drop them into the street, for the first fool to experiment upon.”

“Throw them away! They are beauties!”

“Well, keep them yourself then; keep them till you marry.”

“You forget, Sir; I am married.”

“Well then, till you are a widower.”

“From Marqués de Fúcar to Marqués de Onésimo.

“Madrid, December 1st.

“Before leaving London via Hamburg to purchase the twenty bales of tobacco, sell all the Rio Tinto shares, and the foreign consols. Buy at once Paris Gas, and Spanish

crédit mobilier. The loan—the third State loan this year—is getting on capitally. I want an investment here to enable me to propose to the Government to pay off part of the foreign coupons to English holders, which will promote the affair here very effectually; the profits I anticipate from this are incalculable. For everything else act on my instructions of November 23rd. Do not forget my orders for taking every advantage of the Hamburg tobacco merchants; no backwardness; business is good, so you need not run up to extravagant prices.

“My daughter keeps well. Very sad, very lonely, in fairly good health, resigned and calm. She never leaves Suertebella. Mona, sweeter every day, sends you three kisses. The wretch holds to his bargain and never molests us. He has turned stock-broker, and they tell me he watches the market with great patience and judgment, and is making a huge fortune. He is clever enough, there is no doubt of that.

“I expect you to eat your Christmas dinner at Suertebella.

“Yours as ever,

“P. Fúcar.

“P. S. If you should come across that queer fellow give him my kind regards—but only mine.”

The End.

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“‘Good God! how beautiful she looked there, twice... with her eyes cast down, and her head and throat jealously guarded by a veil of white silk flowing over her shoulders. Dressed simply in a robe of some half-woollen, half-silken stuff, made with loose sleeves, and large folds descending gracefully from her hips: a white kerchief just covering the nape of her neck, but no other trimming or superfluous adornment to disguise the curves of her perfect form, Madonna Fiordalisa seemed a very miracle of grace and beauty. The head crowned with chestnut tresses, and the profile of that delicately-tinted face, both displayed such purity of outline, combined with such sweetness of expression, that it seemed to Spinello that he had never before beheld anything to compare with them.’”—Literary World, Boston.

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“He had started in live in extreme poverty but with a great love in his heart; and the goal he had set before his eyes was wealth and distinction, but still for the sake of love. Now, wealth and distinction were his—but the love he had lost on the way.

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the ear of the latter Prusias whispers the real purpose of his coming to Italy. He is an Armenian and in league with Mithridates for the reduction of Roman rule. The unity which the Senate has tried to extend to the freshly-conquered provinces of Italy is a thing of slow growth. Prusias by his strategy and helped by Mithridates's gold, hopes to organize slaves and disaffected provincials into a force which will oblige weakened Rome to make terms, one of which shall be complete emancipation and equality of every man before the law. His harangues are in lofty strain, and, save that he never takes the coarse, belligerent tone of our contemporaries, these speeches might have been made by one of our own Abolitionists. The one point that Prusias never forgets is personal dignity and a regal consideration for his friends. But after all, this son of the gods is befooled by a woman, a sinuous and transcendently ambitious Roman belle, the second wife of the dull and trustful prefect of Capua; for this tiny woman had all men in her net whom she found it useful to have there.

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Transcriber's Notes:

Obvious printing mistakes have been corrected.

Variations in spelling, hyphenation, and accents remain as in the original unless noted below.

Title page, "PEREZ" changed to "PÉREZ." Page 6, "archepiscopal" changed to "archiepiscopal" ("to a deputy who held the archiepiscopal throne"). Page 12, 14, 37, 69, 183, "Maria" changed to "María." Page 22, "Solomó" changed to "Salomó" ("The Marquesa de San Salomó was talking"). Page 63, "mement" changed to "moment" ("said Leon after a moment's hesitation"). Page 85, "sicence" changed to "science" ("to help science to the best of our little power"). Page 86, "cemetries" changed to "cemeteries" ("the pantheons of our cemeteries"). Page 90, "deen" changed to "been" ("it would have been difficult to refuse"). Page 148, "wakfulness" changed to "wakefulness" ("kept him from thorough wakefulness"). Page 167, "rigimarole" changed to "rigmarole" ("this coarse rigmarole and sham rhetoric"). Page 184, "christian" changed to "Christian" ("a deed of Christian

charity"). Page 211, "utterence" changed to "utterance" ("means of giving them utterance"). Page 270, "Leen" changed to "Leon" ("and the finger pointed at Leon"). Page 287, "Fucar" changed to "Fúcar" ("Yours as ever, P. Fúcar.").

The following changes were made:

Page 34, "eat" changed to "ate" ("her absence the marquesa ate"). Page 168, superfluous "a" removed in "nature is like an artificial plant." Page 280, "Leon" changed to "Federico" ("said Don Pedro to Federico").

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