BARR AMELIA E.

REMEMBER THE ALAMO

Amelia Barr

Remember the Alamo

Barr A.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I. THE CITY IN THE WILDERNESS

"What, are you stepping westward?" "Yea."

Yet who would stop or fear to advance,
Though home or shelter there was none,
With such a sky to lead him on!"

—WORDSWORTH.

"Ah! cool night wind, tremulous stars,
Ah! glimmering water,
Fitful earth murmur,
Dreaming woods!"

—ARNOLD.

In A. D. sixteen hundred and ninety-two, a few Franciscan monks began to build a city. The site chosen was a lovely wilderness hundreds of miles away from civilization on every side, and surrounded by savage and warlike tribes. But the spot was as beautiful as the garden of God. It was shielded by picturesque mountains, watered by two rivers, carpeted with flowers innumerable, shaded by noble trees joyful with the notes of a multitude of singing birds. To breathe the balmy atmosphere was to be conscious of some rarer and finer life, and the beauty of the sunny skies—marvellous at dawn and eve with tints of saffron and amethyst and opal—was like a dream of heaven.

One of the rivers was fed by a hundred springs situated in the midst of charming bowers. The monks called it the San Antonio; and on its banks they built three noble Missions. The shining white stone of the neighborhood rose in graceful domes and spires above the green trees. Sculptures, basso-relievos, and lines of gorgeous coloring adorned the exteriors. Within, were splendid altars and the appealing charms of incense, fine vestures and fine music; while from the belfreys, bells sweet and resonant called to the savages, who paused spell-bound and half-afraid to listen.

Certainly these priests had to fight as well as to pray. The Indians did not suffer them to take possession of their Eden without passionate and practical protest. But what the monks had taken, they kept; and the fort and the soldier followed the priest and the Cross. Ere long, the beautiful Mission became a beautiful city, about which a sort of fame full of romance and mystery gathered. Throughout the south and west, up the great highway of the Mississippi, on the busy streets of New York, and among the silent hills of New England, men spoke of San Antonio, as in the seventeenth century they spoke of Peru; as in the eighteenth century they spoke of Delhi, and Agra, and the Great Mogul.

Sanguine French traders carried thither rich ventures in fancy wares from New Orleans; and Spanish dons from the wealthy cities of Central Mexico, and from the splendid homes of Chihuahua, came there to buy. And from the villages of Connecticut, and the woods of Tennessee, and the lagoons of Mississippi, adventurous Americans entered the Texan territory at Nacogdoches. They went through the land, buying horses and lending their ready rifles and stout hearts to every effort of that constantly increasing body of Texans, who, even in their swaddling bands, had begun to cry Freedom!

At length this cry became a clamor that shook even the old viceroyal palace in Mexico; while in San Antonio it gave a certain pitch to all conversation, and made men wear their cloaks, and set their beavers, and display their arms, with that demonstrative air of independence they called los Americano. For, though the Americans were numerically few, they were like the pinch of salt in a pottage—they gave the snap and savor to the whole community.

Over this Franciscan-Moorish city the sun set with an incomparable glory one evening in May, eighteen thirty-five. The white, flat-roofed, terraced houses—each one in its flowery court—and the domes and spires of the Missions, with their gilded crosses, had a mirage-like beauty in the rare, soft atmosphere, as if a dream of Old Spain had been materialized in a wilderness of the New World.

But human life in all its essentials was in San Antonio, as it was and has been in all other cities since the world began. Women were in their homes, dressing and cooking, nursing their children and dreaming of their lovers. Men were in the market-places, buying and selling, talking of politics and anticipating war. And yet in spite of these fixed attributes, San Antonio was a city penetrated with romantic elements, and constantly picturesque.

On this evening, as the hour of the Angelus approached, the narrow streets and the great squares were crowded with a humanity that assaulted and captured the senses at once; so vivid and so various were its component parts. A tall sinewy American with a rifle across his shoulder was paying some money to a Mexican in blue velvet and red silk, whose breast was covered with little silver images of his favorite saints. A party of Mexican officers were strolling to the Alamo; some in white linen and scarlet sashes, others glittering with color and golden ornaments. Side by side with these were monks of various orders: the Franciscan in his blue gown and large white hat; the Capuchin in his brown serge; the Brother of Mercy in his white flowing robes. Add to these diversities, Indian peons in ancient sandals, women dressed as in the days of Cortez and Pizarro, Mexican vendors of every kind, Jewish traders, negro servants, rancheros curvetting on their horses, Apache and Comanche braves on spying expeditions: and, in this various crowd, yet by no means of it, small groups of Americans; watchful, silent, armed to the teeth: and the mind may catch a glimpse of what the streets of San Antonio were in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and thirty-five.

It was just before sunset that the city was always at its gayest point. Yet, at the first toll of the Angelus, a silence like that of enchantment fell upon it. As a mother cries hush to a noisy child, so the angel of the city seemed in this evening bell to bespeak a minute for holy thought. It was only a minute, for with the last note there was even an access of tumult. The doors and windows of the better houses were thrown open, ladies began to appear on the balconies, there was a sound of laughter and merry greetings, and the tiny cloud of the cigarette in every direction.

But amid this sunset glamour of splendid color, of velvet, and silk, and gold embroidery, the man who would have certainly first attracted a stranger's eye wore the plain and ugly costume common at that day to all American gentlemen. Only black cloth and white linen and a row palmetto hat with a black ribbon around it; but he wore his simple garments with the air of a man having authority, and he returned the continual salutations of rich and poor, like one who had been long familiar with public appreciation.

It was Dr. Robert Worth, a physician whose fame had penetrated to the utmost boundaries of the territories of New Spain. He had been twenty-seven years in San Antonio. He was a familiar friend in every home. In sickness and in death he had come close to the hearts in them. Protected at first by the powerful Urrea family, he had found it easy to retain his nationality, and yet live down envy and suspicion. The rich had shown him their gratitude with gold; the poor he had never sent unrelieved away, and they had given him their love.

When in the second year of his residence he married Dona Maria Flores, he gave, even to doubtful officials, security for his political intentions. And his future conduct had seemed to warrant their fullest confidence. In those never ceasing American invasions between eighteen hundred and

three and eighteen hundred and thirty-two, he had been the friend and succourer of his countrymen, but never their confederate; their adviser, but never their confidant.

He was a tall, muscular man of a distinguished appearance. His hair was white. His face was handsome and good to see. He was laconic in speech, but his eyes were closely observant of all within their range, and they asked searching questions. He had a reverent soul, wisely tolerant as to creeds, and he loved his country with a passion which absence from it constantly intensified. He was believed to be a thoroughly practical man, fond of accumulating land and gold; but his daughter Antonia knew that he had in reality a noble imagination. When he spoke to her of the woods, she felt the echoes of the forest ring through the room; when of the sea, its walls melted away in an horizon of long rolling waves.

He was thinking of Antonia as he walked slowly to his home in the suburbs of the city. Of all his children she was the nearest to him. She had his mother's beauty. She had also his mother's upright rectitude of nature. The Iberian strain had passed her absolutely by. She was a northern rose in a tropical garden. As he drew near to his own gates, he involuntarily quickened his steps. He knew that Antonia would be waiting. He could see among the thick flowering shrubs her tall slim figure clothed in white. As she came swiftly down the dim aisles to meet him, he felt a sentiment of worship for her. She concentrated in herself his memory of home, mother, and country. She embodied, in the perfectness of their mental companionship, that rarest and sweetest of ties—a beloved child, who is also a wise friend and a sympathetic comrade. As he entered the garden she slipped her hand into his. He clasped it tightly. His smile answered her smile. There was no need for any words of salutation.

The full moon had risen. The white house stood clearly out in its radiance. The lattices were wide open and the parlor lighted. They walked slowly towards it, between hedges of white camelias and scarlet japonicas. Vanilla, patchuli, verbena, wild wandering honeysuckle—a hundred other scents—perfumed the light, warm air. As they came near the house there was a sound of music, soft and tinkling, with a rhythmic accent as pulsating as a beating heart.

"It is Don Luis, father."

"Ah! He plays well—and he looks well."

They had advanced to where Don Luis was distinctly visible. He was within the room, but leaning against the open door, playing upon a mandolin. Robert Worth smiled as he offered his hand to him. It was impossible not to smile at a youth so handsome, and so charming—a youth who had all the romance of the past in his name, his home, his picturesque costume; and all the enchantments of hope and great enthusiasms in his future.

"Luis, I am glad to see you; and I felt your music as soon as I heard it."

He was glancing inquiringly around the room as he spoke; and Antonia answered the look:

"Mother and Isabel are supping with Dona Valdez. There is to be a dance. I am waiting for you, father. You must put on your velvet vest."

"And you, Luis?"

"I do not go. I asked the judge for the appointment. He refused me. Very well! I care not to drink chocolate and dance in his house. One hand washes the other, and one cousin should help another."

"Why did he refuse you?"

"Who can tell?" but Luis shrugged his shoulders expressively, and added, "He gave the office to Blas-Sangre."

"Ah!"

"Yes, it is so—naturally;—Blas-Sangre is rich, and when the devil of money condescends to appear, every little devil rises up to do him homage."

"Let it pass, Luis. Suppose you sing me that last verse again. It had a taking charm. The music was like a boat rocking on the water."

"So it ought to be. I learned the words in New Orleans. The music came from the heart of my mandolin. Listen, Senor!

"'Row young oarsman, row, young oarsman,
Into the crypt of the night we float:
Fair, faint moonbeams wash and wander,
Wash and wander about the boat.
Not a fetter is here to bind us,
Love and memory lose their spell;
Friends that we have left behind us,
Prisoners of content,—farewell!'"

"You are a wizard, Luis, and I have had a sail with you. Now, come with us, and show those dandy soldiers from the Alamo how to dance."

"Pardon! I have not yet ceased to cross myself at the affront of this morning. And the Senora Valdez is in the same mind as her husband. I should be received by her like a dog at mass. I am going to-morrow to the American colony on the Colorado."

"Be careful, Luis. These Austin colonists are giving great trouble—there have been whispers of very strong measures. I speak as a friend."

"My heart to yours! But let me tell you this about the Americans—their drum is in the hands of one who knows how to beat it."

"As a matter of hearsay, are you aware that three detachments of troops are on their way from Mexico?"

"For Texas?"

"For Texas."

"What are three detachments? Can a few thousand men put Texas under lock and key? I assure you not, Senor; but now I must say adieu!"

He took the doctor's hand, and, as he held it, turned his luminous face and splendid eyes upon Antonia. A sympathetic smile brightened her own face like a flame. Then he went silently away, and Antonia watched him disappear among the shrubbery.

"Come, Antonia! I am ready. We must not keep the Senora waiting too long."

"I am ready also, father." Her voice was almost sad, and yet it had a tone of annoyance in it —"Don Luis is so imprudent," she said. "He is always in trouble. He is full of enthusiasms; he is as impossible as his favorite, Don Quixote."

"And I thank God, Antonia, that I can yet feel with him. Woe to the centuries without Quixotes! Nothing will remain to them but—Sancho Panzas."

CHAPTER II. ANTONIA AND ISABEL

"He various changes of the world had known,
And some vicissitudes of human fate,
Still altering, never in a steady state
Good after ill, and after pain delight,
Alternate, like the scenes of day and night."

"Ladies whose bright eyes
Rain influence."

"But who the limits of that power shall trace,
Which a brave people into life can bring,
Or hide at will, for freedom combating
By just revenge inflamed?"

For many years there had never been any doubt in the mind of Robert Worth as to the ultimate destiny of Texas, though he was by no means an adventurer, and had come into the beautiful land by a sequence of natural and business-like events. He was born in New York. In that city he studied his profession, and in eighteen hundred and three began its practice in an office near Contoit's Hotel, opposite the City Park. One day he was summoned there to attend a sick man. His patient proved to be Don Jaime Urrea, and the rich Mexican grandee conceived a warm friendship for the young physician.

At that very time, France had just ceded to the United States the territory of Louisiana, and its western boundary was a subject about which Americans were then angrily disputing. They asserted that it was the Rio Grande; but Spain, who naturally did not want Americans so near her own territory, denied the claim, and made the Sabine River the dividing line. And as Spain had been the original possessor of Louisiana, she considered herself authority on the subject.

The question was on every tongue, and it was but natural that it should be discussed by Urrea and his physician. In fact, they talked continually of the disputed boundary, and of Mexico. And Mexico was then a name to conjure by. She was as yet a part of Spain, and a sharer in all her ancient glories. She was a land of romance, and her very name tasted on the lips, of gold, and of silver, and of precious stones. Urrea easily persuaded the young man to return to Mexico with him.

The following year there was a suspicious number of American visitors and traders in San Antonio, and one of the Urreas was sent with a considerable number of troops to garrison the city. For Spain was well aware that, however statesmen might settle the question, the young and adventurous of the American people considered Texas United States territory, and would be well inclined to take possession of it by force of arms, if an opportunity offered.

Robert Worth accompanied General Urrea to San Antonio, and the visit was decisive as to his future life. The country enchanted him. He was smitten with love for it, as men are smitten with a beautiful face. And the white Moorish city had one special charm for him—it was seldom quite free from Americans, Among the mediaeval loungers in the narrow streets, it filled his heart with joy to see at intervals two or three big men in buckskin or homespun. And he did not much wonder that the Morisco-Hispano-Mexican feared these Anglo-Americans, and suspected them of an intention to add Texan to their names.

His inclination to remain in San Antonio was settled by his marriage. Dona Maria Flores, though connected with the great Mexican families of Yturbide and Landesa, owned much property in San

Antonio. She had been born within its limits, and educated in its convent, and a visit to Mexico and New Orleans had only strengthened her attachment to her own city. She was a very pretty woman, with an affectionate nature, but she was not intellectual. Even in the convent the sisters had not considered her clever.

But men often live very happily with commonplace wives, and Robert Worth had never regretted that his Maria did not play on the piano, and paint on velvet, and work fine embroideries for the altars. They had passed nearly twenty-six years together in more than ordinary content and prosperity. Yet no life is without cares and contentions, and Robert Worth had had to face circumstances several times, which had brought the real man to the front.

The education of his children had been such a crisis. He had two sons and two daughters, and for them he anticipated a wider and grander career than he had chosen for himself. When his eldest child, Thomas, had reached the age of fourteen, he determined to send him to New York. He spoke to Dona Maria of this intention. He described Columbia to her with all the affectionate pride of a student for his alma mater. The boy's grandmother also still lived in the home wherein, he himself had grown to manhood. His eyes filled with tears when he remembered the red brick house in Canal Street, with its white door and dormer windows, and its one cherry tree in the strip of garden behind.

But Dona Maria's national and religious principles, or rather prejudices, were very strong. She regarded the college of San Juan de Lateran in Mexico as the fountainhead of knowledge. Her confessor had told her so. All the Yturbides and Landesas had graduated at San Juan.

But the resolute father would have none of San Juan. "I know all about it, Maria," he said. "They will teach Thomas Latin very thoroughly. They will make him proficient in theology and metaphysics. They will let him dabble in algebra and Spanish literature; and with great pomp, they will give him his degree, and 'the power of interpreting Aristotle all over the world.' What kind of an education is that, for a man who may have to fight the battles of life in this century?"

And since the father carried his point it is immaterial what precise methods he used. Men are not fools even in a contest with women. They usually get their own way, if they take the trouble to go wisely and kindly about it. Two years afterwards, Antonia followed her brother to New York, and this time, the mother made less opposition. Perhaps she divined that opposition would have been still more useless than in the case of the boy. For Robert Worth had one invincible determination; it was, that this beautiful child, who so much resembled a mother whom he idolized, should be, during the most susceptible years of her life, under that mother's influence.

And he was well repaid for the self-denial her absence entailed, when Antonia came back to him, alert, self-reliant, industrious, an intelligent and responsive companion, a neat and capable housekeeper, who insensibly gave to his home that American air it lacked, and who set upon his table the well-cooked meats and delicate dishes which he had often longed for.

John, the youngest boy, was still in New York finishing his course of study; but regarding Isabel, there seemed to be a tacit relinquishment of the purpose, so inflexibly carried out with her brothers and sister. Isabel was entirely different from them. Her father had watched her carefully, and come to the conviction that it would be impossible to make her nature take the American mintage. She was as distinctly Iberian as Antonia was Anglo-American.

In her brothers the admixture of races had been only as alloy to metal. Thomas Worth was but a darker copy of his father. John had the romance and sensitive honor of old Spain, mingled with the love of liberty, and the practical temper, of those Worths who had defied both Charles the First and George the Third. But Isabel had no soul-kinship with her father's people. Robert Worth had seen in the Yturbide residencia in Mexico the family portraits which they had brought with them from Castile. Isabel was the Yturbide of her day. She had all their physical traits, and from her large golden-black eyes the same passionate soul looked forth. He felt that it would be utter cruelty to send her among people who must always be strangers to her.

So Isabel dreamed away her childhood at her mother's side, or with the sisters in the convent, learning from them such simple and useless matters as they considered necessary for a damosel of family and fortune. On the night of the Senora Valdez's reception, she had astonished every one by the adorable grace of her dancing, and the captivating way in which she used her fan. Her fingers touched the guitar as if they had played it for a thousand years. She sang a Spanish Romancero of El mio Cid with all the fire and tenderness of a Castilian maid.

Her father watched her with troubled eyes. He almost felt as if he had no part in her. And the thought gave him an unusual anxiety, for he knew this night that the days were fast approaching which would test to extremity the affection which bound his family together. He contrived to draw Antonia aside for a few moments.

"Is she not wonderful?" he asked. "When did she learn these things? I mean the way in which she does them?"

Isabel was dancing La Cachoucha, and Antonia looked at her little sister with eyes full of loving speculation. Her answer dropped slowly from her lips, as if a conviction was reluctantly expressed:

"The way must be a gift from the past—her soul has been at school before she was born here. Father, are you troubled? What is it? Not Isabel, surely?"

"Not Isabel, primarily. Antonia, I have been expecting something for twenty years. It is coming."

"And you are sorry?"

"I am anxious, that is all. Go back to the dancers. In the morning we can talk."

In the morning the doctor was called very early by some one needing his skill. Antonia heard the swift footsteps and eager voices, and watched him mount the horse always kept ready saddled for such emergencies, and ride away with the messenger. The incident in itself was a usual one, but she was conscious that her soul was moving uneasily and questioningly in some new and uncertain atmosphere.

She had felt it on her first entrance into Senora Valdez's gran sala—a something irrepressible in the faces of all the men present. She remembered that even the servants had been excited, and that they stood in small groups, talking with suppressed passion and with much demonstrativeness. And the officers from the Alamo! How conscious they had been of their own importance! What airs of condescension and of an almost insufferable protection they had assumed! Now, that she recalled the faces of Judge Valdez, and other men of years and position, she understood that there had been in them something out of tone with the occasion. In the atmosphere of the festa she had only felt it. In the solitude of her room she could apprehend its nature.

For she had been born during those stormy days when Magee and Bernardo, with twelve hundred Americans, first flung the banner of Texan independence to the wind; when the fall of Nacogdoches sent a thrill of sympathy through the United States, and enabled Cos and Toledo, and the other revolutionary generals in Mexico, to carry their arms against Old Spain to the very doors of the vice-royal palace. She had heard from her father many a time the whole brave, brilliant story—the same story which has been made in all ages from the beginning of time. Only the week before, they had talked it over as they sat under the great fig-tree together.

"History but repeats itself," the doctor had said then; "for when the Mexicans drove the Spaniards, with their court ceremonies, their monopolies and taxes, back to Spain, they were just doing what the American colonists did, when they drove the English royalists back to England. It was natural, too, that the Americans should help the Mexicans, for, at first, they were but a little band of patriots; and the American-Saxon has like the Anglo-Saxon an irresistible impulse to help the weaker side. And oh, Antonia! The cry of Freedom! Who that has a soul can resist it?"

She remembered this conversation as she stood in the pallid dawning, and watched her father ride swiftly away. The story of the long struggle in all its salient features flashed through her mind; and she understood that it is not the sword alone that gives liberty—that there must be patience before

courage; that great ideas must germinate for years in the hearts of men before the sword can reap the harvest.

The fascinating memory of Burr passed like a shadow across her dreaming. The handsome Lafayettes—the gallant Nolans—the daring Hunters—the thousands of forgotten American traders and explorers—bold and enterprising—they had sown the seed. For great ideas are as catching as evil ones. A Mexican, with the iron hand of Old Spain upon him and the shadow of the Inquisition over him, could not look into the face of an American, and not feel the thought of Freedom stirring in his heart.

It stirred in her own heart. She stood still a moment to feel consciously the glow and the enlargement. Then with an impulse natural, but neither analyzed nor understood, she lifted her prayer-book, and began to recite "the rising prayer." She had not said to herself, "from the love of Freedom to the love of God, it is but a step," but she experienced the emotion and felt all the joy of an adoration, simple and unquestioned, springing as naturally from the soul as the wild flower from the prairie.

As she knelt, up rose the sun, and flooded her white figure and her fair unbound hair with the radiance of the early morning. The matin bells chimed from the convent and the churches, and the singing birds began to flutter their bright wings, and praise God also, "in their Latin."

She took her breakfast alone. The Senora never came downstairs so early. Isabel had wavering inclinations, and generally followed them. Sometimes, even her father had his cup of strong coffee alone in his study; so the first meal of the day was usually, as perhaps it ought to be, a selfishly-silent one. "Too much enthusiasm and chattering at breakfast, are like too much red at sunrise," the doctor always said; "a dull, bad day follows it"—and Antonia's observation had turned the little maxim into a superstition.

In the Senora's room, the precept was either denied, or defied. Antonia heard the laughter and conversation through the closed door, and easily divined the subject of it. It was, but natural. The child had a triumph; one that appealed strongly to her mother's pride and predilections. It was a pleasant sight to see them in the shaded sunshine exulting themselves happily in it.

The Senora, plump and still pretty, reclined upon a large gilded bed. Its splendid silk coverlet and pillows cased in embroidery and lace made an effective background for her. She leaned with a luxurious indolence among them, sipping chocolate and smoking a cigarrito. Isabel was on a couch of the same description. She wore a satin petticoat, and a loose linen waist richly trimmed with lace. It showed her beautiful shoulders and arms to perfection. Her hands were folded above her head. Her tiny feet, shod in satin, were quivering like a bird's wings, as if they were keeping time with the restlessness of her spirit.

She had large eyes, dark and bright; strong eyebrows, a pale complexion with a flood of brilliant color in the checks, dazzling even teeth, and a small, handsome mouth. Her black hair was loose and flowing, and caressed her cheeks and temples in numberless little curls and tendrils. Her face was one flush of joy and youth. She had a look half-earnest and half-childlike, and altogether charming. Antonia adored her, and she was pleased to listen to the child, telling over again the pretty things that had been said to her.

"Only Don Luis was not there at all, Antonia. There is always something wanting," and her voice fell with those sad inflections that are often only the very excess of delight.

The Senora looked sharply at her. "Don Luis was not desirable. He was better away—much better!"

"But why?"

"Because, Antonia, he is suspected. There is an American called Houston. Don Luis met him in Nacogdoches. He has given his soul to him, I think. He would have fought Morello about him, if the captain could have drawn his sword in such a quarrel. I should not have known about the affair had not Senora Valdez told me. Your father says nothing against the Americans."

"Perhaps, then, he knows nothing against them."

"You will excuse me, Antonia; not only the living but the dead must have heard of their wickedness. They are a nation of ingrates. Ingrates are cowards. It was these words Captain Morello said, when Don Luis drew his sword, made a circle with its point and stood it upright in the centre. It was a challenge to the whole garrigon, and about this fellow Houston, whom he calls his friend! Holy Virgin preserve us from such Mexicans!"

"It is easier to talk than to fight. Morello's tongue is sharper than his sword."

"Captain Morello was placing his sword beside that of Don Luis, when the Commandant interfered. He would not permit his officers to fight in such a quarrel. 'Santo Dios!' he said, 'you shall all have your opportunity very soon, gentlemen.' Just reflect upon the folly of a boy like Don Luis, challenging a soldier like Morello!"

"He was in no danger, mother," said Antonia scornfully. "Morello is a bully, who wears the pavement out with his spurs and sabre. His weapons are for show. Americans, at least, wear their arms for use, and not for ornament."

"Listen, Antonia! I will not have them spoken of. They are Jews—or at least infidels, all of them!—the devil himself is their father—the bishop, when he was here last confirmation, told me so."

"Mother!"

"At least they are unbaptized Christians, Antonia. If you are not baptized, the devil sends you to do his work. As for Don Luis, he is a very Judas! Ah, Maria Santissima! how I do pity his good mother!"

"Poor Don Luis!" said Isabel plaintively.

"He is so handsome, and he sings like a very angel. And he loves my father; he wanted to be a doctor, so that he could always be with him. I dare say this man called Houston is no better than a Jew, and perhaps very ugly beside. Let us talk no more about him and the Americans. I am weary of them; as Tia Rachella says, 'they have their spoon in every one's mess.'"

And Antonia, whose heart was burning, only stooped down and closed her sister's pretty mouth with a kiss. Her tongue was impatient to speak for the father, and grandmother, and the friends, so dear to her; but she possessed great discretion, and also a large share of that rarest of all womanly graces, the power under provocation, of "putting on Patience the noble."

CHAPTER III. BUILDERS OF THE COMMONWEALTH

"Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep and shaking her invincible locks. Methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth and kindling her undazzled eye in the full mid-day beam."
—MILTON.

"And from these grounds, concluding as we doe,
Warres causes diuerse, so by consequence
Diuerse we must conclude their natures too:
For war proceeding from Omnipotence,
No doubt is holy, wise, and without error;
The sword, of justice and of sin, the terror."

—LORD BROOKE.

It is the fashion now to live for the present but the men of fifty years ago, the men who builded the nation, they reverenced the past, and therefore they could work for the future. As Robert Worth rode through the streets of San Antonio that afternoon, he was thinking, not of his own life, but of his children's and of the generations which should come after them.

The city was flooded with sunshine, and crowded with a pack-train going to Sonora; the animals restlessly protesting against the heat and flies; their Mexican drivers in the pulqueria, spending their last peso with their compadres, or with the escort of soldiers which was to accompany them—a little squad of small, lithe men, with round, yellow, beardless faces, bearing in a singular degree the stamp of being native to the soil. Their lieutenant, a gorgeously clad officer with a very distinguished air, was coming slowly down the street to join them. He bowed, and smiled pleasantly to the doctor as he passed him, and then in a few moments the word of command and the shouting of men and the clatter of hoofs invaded the enchanted atmosphere like an insult.

But the tumult scarcely jarred with the thoughts of his mind. They had been altogether of war and rumors of war. Every hour that subtile consciousness of coming events, which makes whole communities at times prescient, was becoming stronger. "If the powers of the air have anything to do with the destinies of men," he muttered, "there must be unseen battalions around me. The air I am breathing is charged with the feeling of battle."

After leaving the city there were only a few Mexican huts on the shady road leading to his own house. All within them were asleep, even the fighting cocks tied outside were dozing on their perches. He was unusually weary, he had been riding since dawn, and his heart had not been in sympathy with his body, it had said no good cheer to it, whispered no word of courage or promise.

All at once his physical endurance seemed exhausted, and he saw the white wall and arched gateway of his garden and the turrets of his home with an inexpressible relief. But it was the hour of siesta, and he was always careful not to let the requirements of his profession disturb his household. So he rode quietly to the rear, where he found a peon nodding within the stable door. He opened his eyes unnaturally wide, and rose to serve his master.

"See thou rub the mare well down, and give her corn and water."

"To be sure, Senior, that is to be done. A stranger has been here to-day; an American."

"What did he say to thee?"

"That he would call again, Senor."

The incident was not an unusual one, and it did not trouble the doctor's mind. There was on the side of the house a low extension containing two rooms. These rooms belonged exclusively to him. One was his study, his office, his covert, the place to which he went when he wanted to be alone with his own soul. There were a bed and bath and refreshments in the other room. He went directly to it, and after eating and washing, fell into a profound sleep.

At the hour before Angelus the house was as noisy and busy as if it had been an inn. The servants were running hither and thither, all of them expressing themselves in voluble Spanish. The cooks were quarrelling in the kitchen. Antonia was showing the table men, as she had to do afresh every day, how to lay the cloth and serve the dishes in the American fashion. When the duty was completed, she went into the garden to listen for the Angelus. The young ladies of to-day would doubtless consider her toilet frightfully unbecoming; but Antonia looked lovely in it, though but a white muslin frock, with a straight skirt and low waist and short, full sleeves. It was confined by a blue belt with a gold buckle, and her feet were in sandalled slippers of black satin.

The Angelus tolled, and the thousands of Hail Maries! which blended with its swinging vibrations were uttered, and left to their fate, as all spoken words must be. Antonia still observed the form. It lent for a moment a solemn beauty to her face. She was about to re-enter the house, when she saw a stranger approaching it. He was dressed in a handsome buckskin suit, and a wide Mexican hat, but she knew at once that he was an American, and she waited to receive him.

As soon as he saw her, he removed his hat and approached with it in his hand. Perhaps he was conscious that the act not only did homage to womanhood, but revealed more perfectly a face of remarkable beauty and nobility. For the rest, he was very tall, powerfully built, elegantly proportioned, and his address had the grace and polish of a cultured gentleman.

"I wish to see Dr. Worth, Dona."

With a gentle inclination of the head, she led him to the door of her father's office. She was the only one in the Doctor's family at all familiar with the room. The Senora said so many books made her feel as if she were in a church or monastery; she was afraid to say anything but paternosters in it. Isabel cowered before the poor skeleton in the corner, and the centipedes and snakes that filled the bottles on the shelves. There was not a servant that would enter the room.

But Antonia did not regard books as a part of some vague spiritual power. She knew the history of the skeleton. She had seen the death of many of those "little devils" corked up in alcohol. She knew that at this hour, if her father were at home he was always disengaged, and she opened the door fearlessly, saying, "Father, here is a gentleman who wishes to see you."

The doctor had quite refreshed himself, and, in a house-suit of clean, white linen, was lying on a couch reading. He arose with alacrity, and with his pleasant smile seemed to welcome the intruder, as he stepped behind him and closed the door. Antonia had disappeared. They were quite alone.

"You are Doctor Robert Worth, sir?"

Their eyes met, their souls knew each other.

"And you are Sam Houston?"

The questions were answered in a hand grip, a sympathetic smile on both faces—the freemasonry of kindred spirits.

"I have a letter from your son Thomas, doctor, and I think, also, that you will have something to say to me, and I to you."

The most prudent of patriots could not have resisted this man. He had that true imperial look which all born rulers of men possess—that look that half coerces, and wholly persuades. Robert Worth acknowledged its power by his instant and decisive answer.

"I have, indeed, much to say to you. We shall have dinner directly, then you will give the night to me?"

After a short conversation he led him into the sala and introduced him to Antonia. He himself had to prepare the Senora for her visitor, and he had a little quaking of the heart as he entered her room. She was dressed for dinner, and turned with a laughing face to meet him.

"I have been listening to the cooks quarrelling over the olla, Roberto. But what can my poor Manuel say when your Irishwoman attacks him. Listen to her! 'Take your dirty stew aff the fire then! Shure it isn't fit for a Christian to ate at all!'"

"I hope it is, Maria, for we have a visitor to-night."

"Who, then, my love?"

"Mr. Houston."

"Sam Houston? Holy Virgin of Guadalupe preserve us! I will not see the man."

"I think you will, Maria. He has brought this letter for you from our son Thomas; and he has been so kind as to take charge of some fine horses, and sell them well for him in San Antonio. When a man does us a kindness, we should say thank you."

"That is truth, if the man is not the Evil One. As for this Sam Houston, you should have heard what was said of him at the Valdez's."

"I did hear. Everything was a lie."

"But he is a very common man."

"Maria, do you call a soldier, a lawyer, a member of the United States Congress, a governor of a great State like Tennessee, a common man? Houston has been all of these things."

"It is, however, true that he has lived with Indians, and with those Americans, who are bad, who have no God, who are infidels, and perhaps even cannibals. If he is a good man, why does he live with bad men? Not even the saints could do that. A good man should be in his home. Why does he not stay at home."

"Alas! Maria, that is a woman's fault. He loved a beautiful girl. He married her. My dear one, she did not bless his life as you have blessed mine. No one knows what his sorrow was, for he told no one. And he never blamed her, only he left his high office and turned his back forever on his home."

"Ah! the cruel woman. Holy Virgin, what hard hearts thou hast to pray for!"

"Come down and smile upon him, Maria. I should like him to see a high-born Mexican lady. Are they not the kindest and fairest among all God's women? I know, at least, Maria, that you are kind and fair"; and he took her hands, and drew her within his embrace.

What good wife can resist her husband's wooing? Maria did not. She lifted her face, her eyes shone through happy tears, she whispered softly: "My Robert, it is a joy to please you. I will be kind; I will be grateful about Thomas. You shall see that I will make a pleasant evening."

So the triumphant husband went down, proud and happy, with his smiling wife upon his arm. Isabel was already in the room. She also wore a white frock, but her hair was pinned back with gold butterflies, and she had a beautiful golden necklace around her throat. And the Senora kept her word. She paid her guest great attention. She talked to him of his adventures with the Indians. She requested her daughters to sing to him. She told him stories of the old Castilian families with which she was connected, and described her visit to New Orleans with a great deal of pleasant humor. She felt that she was doing herself justice; that she was charming; and, consequently, she also was charmed with the guest and the occasion which had been so favorable to her.

After the ladies had retired, the doctor led his visitor into his study. He sat down silently and placed a chair for Houston. Both men hesitated for a moment to open the conversation. Worth, because he was treading on unknown ground; Houston, because he did not wish to force, even by a question, a resolution which he felt sure would come voluntarily.

The jar of tobacco stood between them, and they filled their pipes silently. Then Worth laid a letter upon the table, and said: "I unstand{sic} from this, that my son Thomas thinks the time has come for decisive action."

"Thomas Worth is right. With such souls as his the foundation of the state must be laid."

"I am glad Thomas has taken the position he has; but you must remember, sir, that he is unmarried and unembarrassed by many circumstances which render decisive movement on my part a much more difficult thing. Yet no man now living has watched the Americanizing of Texas with the interest that I have."

"You have been long on the watch, sir."

"I was here when my countrymen came first, in little companies of five or ten men. I saw the party of twenty, who joined the priest Hidalgo in eighteen hundred and ten, when Mexico made her first attempt to throw off the Spanish yoke."

"An unsuccessful attempt."

"Yes. The next year I made a pretended professional journey to Chihuahua, to try and save their lives. I failed. They were shot with Hidalgo there."

"Yet the strife for liberty went on."

"It did. Two years afterwards, Magee and Bernardo, with twelve hundred Americans, raised the standard of independence on the Trinity River. I saw them them{sic} take this very city, though it was ably defended by Salcedo. They fought like heroes. I had many of the wounded in my house. I succored them with my purse.

"It was a great deed for a handful of men."

"The fame of it brought young Americans by hundreds here. To a man they joined the Mexican party struggling to free themselves from the tyranny of old Spain. I do not think any one of them received money. The love of freedom and the love of adventure were alike their motive and their reward."

"Mexico owed these men a debt she has forgotten."

"She forgot it very quickly. In the following year, though they had again defended San Antonio against the Spaniards, the Mexicans drove all the Americans out of the city their rifles had saved."

"You were here; tell me the true reason."

"It was not altogether ingratitude. It was the instinct of self-preservation. The very bravery of the Americans made the men whom they had defended hate and fear them; and there was a continual influx of young men from the States. The Mexicans said to each other: 'There is no end to these Americans. Very soon they will make a quarrel and turn their arms against us. They do not conform to our customs, and they will not take an order from any officer but their own.'"

Houston smiled. "It is away the Saxon race has," he said. "The old Britons made the same complaint of them. They went first to England to help the Britons fight the Romans, and they liked the country so well, they determined to stay there. If I remember rightly the old Britons had to let them do so."

"It is an old political situation. You can go back to Genesis and find Pharaoh arguing about the Jews in the same manner."

"What happened after this forcible expulsion of the American element from Texas?"

"Mexican independence was for a time abandoned, and the Spanish viceroys were more tyrannical than ever. But Americans still came, though they pursued different tactics. They bought land and settled on the great rivers. In eighteen twenty-one, Austin, with the permission of the Spanish viceroy in Mexico, introduced three hundred families."

"That was a step in the right direction; but I am astonished the viceroy sanctioned it."

"Apodoca, who was then viceroy, was a Spaniard of the proudest type. He had very much the same contempt for the Mexicans that an old English viceroy in New York had for the colonists he was sent to govern. I dare say any of them would have permitted three hundred German families to settle in some part of British America, as far from New York as Texas is from Mexico. I do not need to tell you that Austin's colonists are a band of choice spirits, hardy working men, trained in the district schools of New England and New York—nearly every one of them a farmer or mechanic."

"They were the very material liberty needed. They have made homes."

"That is the truth. The fighters who preceded them owned nothing but their horses and their rifles. But these men brought with them their wives and their children, their civilization, their inborn love of freedom and national faith. They accepted the guarantee of the Spanish government, and they expected the Spanish government to keep its promises."

"It did not."

"It had no opportunity. The colonists were hardly settled when the standard of revolt against Spain was again raised. Santa Anna took the field for a republican form of government, and once more a body of Americans, under the Tennesseean, Long, joined the Mexican army."

"I remember that, well."

"In eighteen twenty-four, Santa Anna, Victoria and Bravo drove the Spaniards forever from Mexico, and then they promulgated the famous constitution of eighteen twenty-four. It was a noble constitution, purely democratic and federal, and the Texan colonists to a man gladly swore to obey it. The form was altogether elective, and what particularly pleased the American element was the fact that the local government of every State was left to itself."

Houston laughed heartily. "Do you know, Worth," he said, "State Rights is our political religion. The average American citizen would expect the Almighty to conform to a written constitution, and recognize the rights of mankind."

"I don't think he expects more than he gets, Houston. Where is there a grander constitution than is guaranteed to us in His Word; or one that more completely recognizes the rights of all humanity?"

"Thank you, Worth. I see that I have spoken better than I knew. I was sitting in the United States Congress, when this constitution passed, and very much occupied with the politics of Tennessee."

"I will not detain you with Mexican politics. It may be briefly said that for the last ten years there has been a constant fight between Pedraza, Guerrero, Bustamante and Santa Anna for the Presidency of Mexico. After so much war and misery the country is now ready to resign all the blessings the constitution of eighteen twenty-four promised her. For peace she is willing to have a dictator in Santa Anna."

"If Mexicans want a dictator let them bow down to Santa Anna! But do you think the twenty thousand free-born Americans in Texas are going to have a dictator? They will have the constitution of eighteen twenty-four—or they will have independence, and make their own constitution! Yes, sir!"

"You know the men for whom you speak?"

"I have been up and down among them for two years. Just after I came to Texas I was elected to the convention which sent Stephen Austin to Mexico with a statement of our wrongs. Did we get any redress? No, sir! And as for poor Austin, is he not in the dungeons of the Inquisition? We have waited two years for an answer. Great heavens Doctor, surely that is long enough!"

"Was this convention a body of any influence?"

"Influence! There were men there whose names will never be forgotten. They met in a log house; they wore buckskin and homespun; but I tell you, sir, they were debating the fate of unborn millions."

"Two years since Austin went to Mexico?"

"A two years' chapter of tyranny. In them Santa Anna has quite overthrown the republic of which we were a part. He has made himself dictator, and, because our authorities have protested against the change, they have been driven from office by a military force. I tell you, sir, the petty outrages everywhere perpetrated by petty officials have filled the cup of endurance. It is boiling over. Now, doctor, what are you going to do? Are you with us, or against us?"

"I have told you that I have been with my countrymen always—heart and soul with them."

The doctor spoke with some irritation, and Houston laid his closed hand hard upon the table to emphasize his reply:

"Heart and soul! Very good! But we want your body now. You must tuck your bowie-knife and your revolvers in your belt, and take your rifle in your hand, and be ready to help us drive the Mexican force out of this very city."

"When it comes to that I shall be no laggard."

But he was deathly pale, for he was suffering as men suffer who feel the sweet bonds of wife and children and home, and dread the rending of them apart. In a moment, however, the soul behind his white face made it visibly luminous. "Houston," he said, "whenever the cause of freedom needs me, I am ready. I shall want no second call. But is it not possible, that even yet—"

"It is impossible to avert what is already here. Within a few days, perhaps to-morrow, you will hear the publication of an edict from Santa Anna, ordering every American to give up his arms."

"What! Give up our arms! No, no, by Heaven! I will die fighting for mine, rather."

"Exactly. That is how every white man in Texas feels about it. And if such a wonder as a coward existed among them, he understands that he may as well die fighting Mexicans, as die of hunger or be scalped by Indians. A large proportion of the colonists depend on their rifles for their daily food. All of them know that they must defend their own homes from the Comanche, or see them perish. Now, do you imagine that Americans will obey any such order? By all the great men of seventeen seventy-five, if they did, I would go over to the Mexicans and help them to wipe the degenerate cowards out of existence!"

He rose as he spoke; he looked like a flame, and his words cut like a sword. Worth caught fire at his vehemence and passion. He clasped his hands in sympathy as he walked with him to the door. They stood silently together for a moment on the threshold, gazing into the night. Over the glorious land the full moon hung, enamoured. Into the sweet, warm air mockingbirds were pouring low, broken songs of ineffable melody. The white city in the mystical light looked like an enchanted city. It was so still that the very houses looked asleep.

"It is a beautiful land," said the doctor.

"It is worthy of freedom," answered Houston. Then he went with long, swinging steps down the garden, and into the shadows beyond, and Worth turned in and closed the door.

He had been watching for this very hour for twenty years; and yet he found himself wholly unprepared for it. Like one led by confused and uncertain thoughts, he went about the room mechanically locking up his papers, and the surgical instruments he valued so highly. As he did so he perceived the book he had been reading when Houston entered. It was lying open where he had laid it down. A singular smile flitted over his face. He lifted it and carried it closer to the light. It was his college Cicero.

"I was nineteen years old when I marked that passage," he said; "and I do not think I have ever read it since, until to-night. I was reading it when Houston came into the room. Is it a message, I wonder?—

"'But when thou considerest everything carefully and thoughtfully; of all societies none is of more importance, none more dear, than that which unites us with the commonwealth. Our parents, children, relations and neighbors are dear, but our fatherland embraces the whole round of these endearments. In its defence, who would not dare to die, if only he could assist it?"

CHAPTER IV. THE SHINING BANDS OF LOVE

"O blest be he! O blest be he!
Let him all blessings prove,
Who made the chains, the shining chains,
The holy chains of love!"

—*Spanish Ballad.*

"If you love a lady bright,
Seek, and you shall find a way
All that love would say, to say
If you watch the occasion right."

—*Spanish Ballad.*

In the morning Isabel took breakfast with her sister. This was always a pleasant event to Antonia. She petted Isabel, she waited upon her, sweetened her chocolate, spread her cakes with honey, and listened to all her complaints of Tia Rachela. Isabel came gliding in when Antonia was about half way through the meal. Her scarlet petticoat was gorgeous, her bodice white as snow, her hair glossy as a bird's wing, but her lips drooped and trembled, and there was the shadow of tears in her eyes. Antonia kissed their white fringed lids, held the little form close in her arms, and fluttered about in that motherly way which Isabel had learned to demand and enjoy.

"What has grieved you this morning, little dove?"

"It is Tia Rachela, as usual. The cross old woman! She is going to tell mi madre something. Antonia, you must make her keep her tongue between her teeth. I promised her to confess to Fray Ignatius, and she said I must also tell mi madre. I vowed to say twenty Hail Marias and ten Glorias, and she said 'I ought to go back to the convent.'"

"But what dreadful thing have you been doing, Iza?"

Iza blushed and looked into her chocolate cup, as she answered slowly: "I gave—a—flower—away. Only a suchil flower, Antonia, that—I—wore—at—my—breast—last—night."

"Whom did you give it to, Iza?"

Iza hesitated, moved her chair close to Antonia, and then hid her face on her sister's breast.

"But this is serious, darling. Surely you did not give it to Senor Houston?"

"Could you think I was so silly? When madre was talking to him last night, and when I was singing my pretty serenade, he heard nothing at all. He was thinking his own thoughts."

"Not to Senor Houston? Who then? Tell me, Iza."

"To—Don Luis."

"Don Luis! But he is not here. He went to the Colorado."

"How stupid are you, Antonia! In New York they did not teach you to put this and that together. As soon as I saw Senor Houston, I said to myself: 'Don Luis was going to him; very likely they have met each other on the road; very likely Don Luis is back in San Antonio. He would not want to go away without bidding me good-by,' and, of course, I was right."

"But when did you see him last night? You never left the room."

"So many things are possible. My heart said to me when the talk was going on, 'Don Luis is waiting under the oleanders,' and I walked on to the balcony and there he was, and he looked so sad, and I dropped my suchil flower to him; and Rachela saw me, for I think she has a million eyes,—and that is the whole matter."

"But why did not Don Luis come in?"

"Mi madre forbade me to speak to him. That is the fault of the Valdez's."

"Then you disobeyed mi madre, and you know what Fray Ignatius and the Sisters have taught you about the fourth command."

"Oh, indeed, I did not think of the fourth command! A sin without intention has not penance; and consider, Antonia, I am now sixteen, and they would shut me up like a chicken in its shell. Antonia, sweet Antonia, speak to Rachela, and make your little Iza happy. Fear is so bad for me. See, I do not even care for my cakes and honey this morning.

"I will give Rachela the blue silk kerchief I brought from New York. She will forget a great deal for that, and then, Iza, darling, you must tell Fray Ignatius of your sin, because it is not good to have an unconfessed sin on the soul."

"Antonia, do not say such cruel things. I have confessed to you. Fray Ignatius will give me a hard penance. Perhaps he may say to mi madre: 'That child had better go back to the convent. I say so, because I have knowledge.' And now I am tired of that life; I am almost a woman, Antonia, am I not?"

Antonia looked tenderly into her face. She saw some inscrutable change there. All was the same, and all was different. She did not understand that it was in the eyes, those lookouts of the soul. They had lost the frank, inquisitive stare of childhood; they were tender and misty; they reflected a heart passionate and fearful, in which love was making himself lord of all.

Antonia was not without experience. There was in New York a gay, handsome youth, to whom her thoughts lovingly turned. She had promised to trust him, and to wait for him, and neither silence nor distance had weakened her faith or her affection. Don Luis had also made her understand how hard it was to leave Isabel, just when he had hoped to woo and win her. He had asked her to watch over his beloved, and to say a word in his favor when all others would be condemning him.

Her sympathy had been almost a promise, and, indeed, she thought Isabel could hardly have a more suitable lover. He was handsome, gallant, rich, and of good morals and noble family. They had been much together in their lives; their childish affection had been permitted; she felt quite sure that the parents of both had contemplated a stronger affection and a more lasting tie between them.

And evidently Don Luis had advanced further in his suit than the Senora was aware of. He had not been able to resist the charm of secretly wooing the fresh young girl he hoped to make his wife. Their love must be authorized and sanctioned; true, he wished that; but the charm of winning the prize before it was given was irresistible. Antonia comprehended all without many words; but she took her sister into the garden, where they could be quite alone, and she sought the girl's confidence because she was sure she could be to her a loving guide.

Isabel was ready enough to talk, and the morning was conducive to confidence. They strolled slowly between the myrtle hedges in the sweet gloom of overshadowing trees, hearing only like a faint musical confusion the mingled murmur of the city.

"It was just here," said Isabel. "I was walking and sitting and doing nothing at all but looking at the trees and the birds and feeling happy, and Don Luis came to me. He might have come down from the skies, I was so astonished. And he looked so handsome, and he said such words! Oh, Antonia! they went straight to my heart."

"When was this, dear?"

"It was in the morning. I had been to mass with Rachela. I had said every prayer with my whole heart, and Rachela told me I might stay in the garden until the sun grew hot. And as soon as Rachela was gone, Don Luis came—came just as sudden as an angel."

"He must have followed you from mass."

"Perhaps."

"He should not have done that."

"If a thing is delightful, nobody should do it. Luis said he knew that it was decided that we should marry, but that he wanted me to be his wife because I loved him. His face was shining with

joy, his eyes were like two stars, he called me his life, his adorable mistress, his queen, and he knelt down and took my hands and kissed them. I was too happy to speak."

"Oh, Iza!"

"Very well, Antonia! It is easy to say 'Oh, Iza'; but what would you have done? And reflect on this; no one, not even Rachela, saw him. So then, our angels were quite agreeable and willing. And I —I was in such joy, that I went straight in and told Holy Maria of my happiness. But when a person has not been in love, how can they know; and I see that you are going to say as Sister Sacrementa said to Lores Valdez—'You are a wicked girl, and such things are not to be spoken of!'"

"Oh, my darling one, I am not so cruel. I think you did nothing very wrong, Iza. When love comes into your soul, it is like a new life. If it is a pure, good love, it is a kind of murder to kill it in any way."

"It has just struck me, Antonia, that you may be in love also."

"When I was in New York, our brother Jack had a friend, and he loved me, and I loved him."

"But did grandmamma let him talk to you?"

"He came every night. We went walking and driving. In the summer we sailed upon the river; in the winter we skated upon the ice. He helped me with my lessons. He went with me to church."

"And was grandmamma with you?"

"Very seldom. Often Jack was with us; more often we were quite alone."

"Holy Virgin! Who ever heard tell of such good fortune? Consuelo Ladrello had never been an hour alone with Don Domingo before they were married."

"A good girl does not need a duenna to watch her; that is what I think. And an American girl, pure and free, would not suffer herself to be watched by any woman, old or young. Her lover comes boldly into her home; she is too proud, to meet him in secret."

"Ah! that would be a perfect joy. That is what I would like! But fancy what Rachela would say; and mi madre would cover her eyes and refuse to see me if I said such words. Believe this. It was in the spring Luis told me that he loved me, and though I have seen him often since, he has never found another moment to speak to me alone, not for one five minutes. Oh, Antonia! let me have one five minutes this afternoon! He is going away, and there is to be war, and I may never, never see him again!"

"Do not weep, little dove. How can you see him this afternoon?"

"He will be here, in this very place, I know he will. When he put the suchil flower to his lips last night he made me understand it. This afternoon, during the hour of siesta, will you come with me? Only for five minutes, Antonia! You can manage Rachela, I am sure you can."

"I can manage Rachela, and you shall have one whole hour, Iza. One whole hour! Come, now, we must make a visit to our mother. She will be wondering at our delay."

The Senora had not yet risen. She had taken her chocolate and smoked her cigarito, but was still drowsing. "I have had a bad night, children," she said full of dreadful dreams. "It must have been that American. Yet, Holy Mother, how handsome he is! And I assure you that he has the good manners of a courtier. Still, it was an imprudence, and Senora Valdez will make some great thing of it."

"You were in your own house, mother. What has Senora Valdez to do with the guest in it? We might as well make some great thing about Captain Morello being present at her party."

"I have to say to you, Antonia, that Morello is a Castilian; his family is without a cross. He has the parchments of his noble ancestry to show."

"And Senor Houston is an American—Scotch-American, he said, last night. Pardon, my mother, but do you know what the men of Scotland are?"

"Si!, They are monsters! Fray Ignatius has told me. They are heretics of the worst kind. It is their special delight to put to death good Catholic priests. I saw that in a book; it must be true."

"Oh, no, mother! It is not true! It is mere nonsense. Scotchmen do not molest priests, women, and children. They are the greatest fighters in the world."

"Quien sabe? Who has taught you so much about these savages?"

"Indeed, mother, they are not savages. They are a very learned race of men, and very pious also. Jack has many Scotch-American friends. I know one of them very well"; and with the last words her face flushed, and her voice fell insensibly into slow and soft inflections.

"Jack knows many of them! That is likely. Your father would send him to New York. All kinds of men are in New York. Fray Ignatius says they have to keep an army of police there. No wonder! And my son is so full of nobilities, so generous, so honorable, he will not keep himself exclusive. He is the true resemblance of my brother Don Juan Flores. Juan was always pitying the poor and making friends with those beneath him. At last he went into the convent of the Bernardines and died like a very saint."

"I think our Jack will be more likely to die like a very hero. If there is any thing Jack hates, it is oppression. He would right a beggar, if he saw him wronged."

"Poco a poco! I am tired of rights and wrongs. Let us talk a little about our dresses, for there will be a gay winter. Senora Valdez assured me of it; many soldiers are coming here, and we shall have parties, and cock-fights, and, perhaps, even a bull-feast."

"Oh!" cried Isabel clapping her hands enthusiastically; "a bull-feast! That is what I long to see!"

At this moment the doctor entered the room, and Isabel ran to meet him. No father could have resisted her pretty ways, her kisses, her endearments, her coaxing diminutives of speech, her childlike loveliness and simplicity.

"What is making you so happy, Queridita?"[1]

"Mi madre says there is perhaps to be a bullfeast this winter. Holy Virgin, think of it! That is the one thing I long to see!"

With her clinging arms around him, and her eager face lifted to his for sympathy, the father could not dash the hope which he knew in his heart was very unlikely to be realized. Neither did he think it necessary to express opposition or disapproval for what had as yet no tangible existence. So he answered her with smiles and caresses, and a little quotation which committed him to nothing:

"As, Panem et Circenses was the cry
Among the Roman populace of old;
So, Pany Toros! is the cry of Spain."

The Senora smiled appreciatively and put out her hand. "Pan y Toros!" she repeated. "And have you reflected, children, that no other nation in the world cries it. Only Spain and her children! That is because only men of the Spanish race are brave enough to fight bulls, and only Spanish bulls are brave enough to fight men."

She was quite pleased with herself for this speech, and finding no one inclined to dispute the statement, she went on to describe a festival of bulls she had been present at in the city of Mexico. The subject delighted her, and she grew eloquent over it; and, conscious only of Isabel's shining eyes and enthusiastic interest, she did not notice the air of thoughtfulness which had settled over her husband's face, nor yet Antonia's ill-disguised weariness and anxiety.

On the night of the Valdez's party her father had said he would talk with her. Antonia was watching for the confidence, but not with any great desire. Her heart and her intelligence told her it would mean trouble, and she had that natural feeling of youth which gladly postpones the evil day. And while her father was silent she believed there were still possibilities of escape from it. So she was not sorry that he again went to his office in the city without any special word for her. It was another day stolen from the uncertain future, for the calm usage of the present, and she was determined to make happiness in it.

[1] Little dear.

When all was still in the afternoon Isabel came to her. She would not put the child to the necessity of again asking her help. She rose at once, and said:

"Sit here, Iza, until I have opened the door for us. Then she took a rich silk kerchief, blue as the sky, in her hand, and went to the wide, matted hall. There she found Rachela, asleep on a cane lounge. Antonia woke her.

"Rachela, I wish to go into the garden for an hour."

"The Senorita does the thing she wants to, Rachela would not presume to interfere. The Senorita became an Americano in New York."

"There are good things in New York, Rachela; for instance, this kerchief."

"That is indeed magnificent!"

"If you permit my sister to walk in the garden with me, I shall give it to you this moment."

"Dona Isabel is different. She is a Mexicaine. She must be watched continually."

"For what reason? She is as innocent as an angel."

"Let her simply grow up, and you will see that she is not innocent as the angels. Oh, indeed! I could say something about last night! Dona Isabel has no vocation for a nun; but, gracias a Dios! Rachela is not yet blind or deaf."

"Let the child go with me for an hour, Rachela. The kerchief will be so becoming to you. There is not another in San Antonio like it."

Rachela was past forty, but not yet past the age of coquetry. "It will look gorgeous with my gold ear-rings, but—"

"I will give you also the blue satin bow like it, to wear at your breast."

"Si, si! I will give the permission, Senorita—for your sake alone. The kerchief and bow are a little thing to you. To me, they will be a great adornment. You are not to leave the garden, however, and for one hour's walk only, Senorita; certainly there is time for no more."

"I will take care of Isabel; no harm shall come to her. You may keep your eyes shut for one hour, Rachela, and you may shut your ears also, and put your feet on the couch and let them rest. I will watch Isabel carefully, be sure of that."

"The child is very clever, and she has a lover already, I fear. Keep your eyes on the myrtle hedge that skirts the road. I have to say this—it is not for nothing she wants to walk with you this afternoon. She would be better fast asleep."

In a few moments the kerchief and the bow were safely folded in the capacious pocket of Rachela's apron, and Isabel and Antonia were softly treading the shady walk between the myrtle hedges. Rachela's eyes were apparently fast closed when the girls pased{sic} her, but she did not fail to notice how charmingly Isabel had dressed herself. She wore, it is true, her Spanish costume; but she had red roses at her breast, and her white lace mantilla over her head.

"Ah! she is a clever little thing!" Rachela muttered. "She knows that she is irresistible in her Castilian dress. Bah! those French frocks are enough to drive a man a mile away. I can almost forgive her now. Had she worn the French frock I would not have forgiven her. I would never have yielded again, no, not even if the Senorita Antonia should offer me her scarlet Indian shawl worked in gold. I was always a fool—Holy Mother forgive me! Well, then; I used to have my own lovers—plenty of them—handsome young arrieros and rancheros: there was Tadeo, a valento of the first class: and Buffa—and—well, I will sleep; they do not remember me, I dare say; and I have forgotten their names."

In the mean time the sisters sat down beneath a great fig-tree. No sunshine, no shower, could penetrate its thick foliage. The wide space beneath the spreading branches was a little parlor, cool and sweet, and full of soft, green lights, and the earthy smell of turf, and the wandering scents of the garden.

Isabel's eyes shone with an incomparable light. She was pale, but exquisitely beautiful, and even her hands and feet expressed the idea of expectation. Antonia had a piece of needlework in her hand.

She affected the calmness she did not feel, for her heart was trembling for the tender little heart beating with so much love and anxiety beside her.

But Isabel's divination, however arrived at, was not at fault. In a few moments Don Luis lightly leaped the hedge, and without a moment's hesitation sought the shadow of the fig-tree. As he approached, Antonia looked at him with a new interest. It was not only that he loved Isabel, but that Isabel loved him. She had given him sympathy before, now she gave him a sister's affection.

"How handsome he is!" she thought. "How gallant he looks in his velvet and silver and embroidered jacket! And how eager are his steps! And how joyful his face! He is the kind of Romeo that Shakespeare dreamed about! Isabel is really an angel to him. He would really die for her. What has this Spanish knight of the sixteenth century to do in Texas in the nineteenth century?"

He answered her mental question in his own charming way. He was so happy, so radiantly happy, so persuasive, so compelling, that Antonia granted him, without a word, the favor his eyes asked for. And the lovers hardly heard the excuse she made; they understood nothing of it, only that she would be reading in the myrtle walk for one hour, and, by so doing, would protect them from intrusion.

One whole hour! Isabel had thought the promise a perfect magnificence of opportunity{.??} But how swiftly it went. Luis had not told her the half of his love and his hopes. He had been forced to speak of politics and business, and every such word was just so many stolen from far sweeter words—words that fell like music from his lips, and were repeated with infinite power from his eyes. Low words, that had the pleading of a thousand voices in them; words full of melody, thrilling with romance; poetical, and yet real as the sunshine around them.

In lovers of a colder race, bound by conventional ties, and a dress rigorously divested of every picturesque element, such wooing might have appeared ridiculous; but in Don Luis, the most natural thing about it was its extravagance. When he knelt at the feet of his beloved and kissed her hands, the action was the unavoidable outcome of his temperament. When he said to her, "Angel mio! you are the light of my darkness, the perfume of all flowers that bloom for me, the love of my loves, my life, my youth, my lyre, my star, had I a thousand souls with which to love, I would give them all to you!" he believed every word he uttered, and he uttered every word with the passion of a believer.

He stirred into life also in the heart of Isabel a love as living as his own. In that hour she stepped outside all of her childhood's immaturities. She became a woman. She accepted with joyful tears a woman's lot of love and sorrow. She said to Antonia:

"Luis was in my heart before; now, I have put him in my soul. My soul will never die. So I shall never forget him—never cease to love him."

Rachela faithfully kept her agreement. For one hour she was asleep to all her charge did, and Isabel was in her own room when the precious sixty minutes were over. Happy? So happy that her soul seemed to have pushed her body aside, as a thing not to be taken into account. She sang like a bird for very gladsomeness. It was impossible for her to be still, and as she went about her room with little dancing, balancing movements of her hands and feet, Antonia knew that they were keeping their happy rhythmic motion to the melody love sang in her heart.

And she rejoiced with her little sister, though she was not free from a certain regret for her concession, for it is the after-reckoning with conscience that is so disagreeably strict and uncomfortable. And yet, why make an element of anger and suspicion between Isabel and her mother when there appeared to be no cause to do so? Don Luis was going away. He was in disgrace with his family—almost disinherited; the country was on the point of war, and its fortunes might give him some opportunities no one now foresaw. But if Isabel's mother had once declared that she would "never sanction the marriage," Antonia knew that, however she might afterwards regret her haste and prejudice, she would stand passionately by her decision. Was it not better, then, to prevent words being said which might cause sorrow and regret in the future?

But as regarded Isabel's father, no such reason existed. The happiness of his children was to him a more sacred thing than his own prejudices. He liked Don Luis, and his friendship with his mother, the Senora Alveda, was a long and tried one. The youth's political partialities, though bringing him at present into disgrace, were such as he himself had largely helped to form. Antonia was sure that her father would sympathize with Isabel, and excuse in her the lapse of duty which had given his little girl so much happiness. Yes, it would be right to tell him every thing, and she did not fear but Isabel would agree in her decision.

At this moment Rachela entered. The Senora wished her daughters to call upon the American manteau-maker for her, and the ride in the open carriage to the Plaza would enable them to bow to their acquaintances, and exhibit their last new dresses from New Orleans. Rachela was already prepared for the excursion, and she was not long in attiring Isabel.

"To be sure, the siesta has made you look charming this afternoon," she said, looking steadily into the girl's beaming, blushing face, "and this rose silk is enchanting. Santa Maria, how I pity the officers who will have the great fortune to see you this afternoon, and break their hearts for the sight! But you must not look at them, mark! I shall tell the Senora if you do. It is enough if they look at you. And the American way of the Senorita Antonia, which is to bow and smile to every admirer, it will but make more enchanting the becoming modesty of the high-born Mexicaine."

"Keep your tongue still, Rachela. Ah! if you strike me, I will go to my father. He will not permit it. I am not a child to be struck and scolded, and told when to open and shut my eyes. I shall do as my sister does, and the Holy Mother herself will be satisfied with me!"

"Chito! Chito!! You wicked one! Oh, Maria Santissima, cast on this child a look of compassion! The American last night has bewitched her! I said that he looked like a Jew."

"I am not wicked, Rachela; and gracias a Dios, there is no Inquisition now to put the question!"

Isabel was in a great passion, or the awful word that had made lips parch and blanch to utter it for generations would never have been launched at the offending woman's head. But its effect was magical. Rachela put up her hands palm outwards, as if to shield herself from a blow, and then without another word stooped down and tied the satin sandals on Isabel's restless feet. She was muttering prayers during the whole action, for Isabel had been quick to perceive her advantage, and was following it up by a defiant little monologue of rebellious speeches.

In the midst of this scene, Antonia entered. She was dressed for the carriage, and the carriage stood at the door waiting; but her face was full of fear, and she said, hurriedly:

"Rachela, can you not make some excuse to my mother which will permit us to remain at home? Hark! There is something wrong in the city."

In a moment the three women were on the balcony, intently, anxiously listening. Then they were aware of a strange confusion in the subtle, amber atmosphere. It was as if they heard the noise of battle afar off; and Rachela, without a word, glided away to the Senora. Isabel and Antonia stood hand in hand, listening to the vague trouble and the echo of harsh, grating voices, mingled with the blare of clarions, the roll of drums, and the rattle of scattering rifle-shots. Yet the noises were so blended together, so indistinct, so strangely expressive of both laughter and defiance, that it was impossible to identify or describe them.

Suddenly a horseman came at a rapid pace towards the house, and Antonia, leaning over the balcony, saw him deliver a note to Rachela, and then hurry away at the same reckless speed. The note was from the doctor to his wife, and it did not tend to allay their anxiety. "Keep within the house," it said; "there are difficulties in the city. In an hour or two I will be at home."

But it was near midnight when he arrived, and Antonia saw that he was a different man. He looked younger. His blue eyes shone with the light behind them. On his face there was the impress of an invincible determination. His very walk had lost its listless, gliding tread, and his steps were firm, alert and rapid.

No one had been able to go to bed until he arrived, though Isabel slept restlessly in her father's chair, and the Senora lay upon the couch, drowsing a little between her frequent attacks of weeping and angry anticipation. For she was sure it was the Americans. "Anything was possible with such a man as Sam Houston near the city."

"Perhaps it is Santa Anna," at length suggested Antonia. "He has been making trouble ever since I can remember. He was born with a sword in his hand, I think."

"Ca! And every American with a rifle in his hand! Santa Anna is a monster, but at least he fights for his own country. Texas is not the country of the Americans."

"But, indeed, they believe that Texas is their country"; and to these words Doctor Worth entered.

"What is the matter? What is the matter, Roberto? I have been made sick with these uncertainties. Why did you not come home at the Angelus?"

"I have had a good reason for my delay, Maria. About three o'clock I received a message from the Senora Alveda, and I visited her. She is in great trouble, and she had not been able to bear it with her usual fortitude. She bad fainted."

"Ah, the poor mother! She has a son who will break her heart."

"She made no complaint of Luis. She is distracted about her country, and as I came home I understood why. For she is a very shrewd woman, and she perceives that Santa Anna is preparing trouble enough for it."

"Well, then, what is it?"

"When I left her house, I noticed many Americans, as well as many Mexicans, on the streets. They were standing together, too; and there was something in their faces, and in the way their arms were carried, which was very striking and portentous. I fancied they looked coldly on me, and I was troubled by the circumstance. In the Plaza I saw the military band approaching, accompanied by half a dozen officers and a few soldiers. The noise stopped suddenly, and Captain Morello proclaimed as a bando (edict) of the highest authority, an order for all Americans to surrender their arms of every description to the officials and at the places notified."

"Very good!"

"Maria, nothing could be worse! Nothing could be more shameful and disastrous. The Americans had evidently been expecting this useless bombast, and ere the words were well uttered, they answered them with a yell of defiance. I do not think more than one proclamation was necessary, but Morello went from point to point in the city and the Americans followed him. I can tell you this, Maria: all the millions in Mexico can not take their rifles from the ten thousand Americans in Texas, able to carry them."

"We shall see! We shall see! But, Roberto, you at least will not interfere in their quarrels. You have never done so hitherto."

"No one has ever proposed to disarm me before, Maria. I tell you frankly, I will not give up a single rifle, or revolver, or weapon of any kind, that I possess. I would rather be slain with them. I have never carried arms before, but I shall carry them now. I apologize to my countrymen for not having them with me this afternoon. My dearest wife! My good Maria! do not cry in that despairing way."

"You will be killed, Roberto! You will be a rebel! You will be shot like a dog, and then what will become of me and my daughters?"

"You have two sons, Maria. They will avenge their father, and protect their mother and sisters."

"I shall die of shame! I shall die of shame and sorrow!"

"Not of shame, Maria. If I permitted these men to deprive me of my arms, you might well die of shame."

"What is it? Only a gun, or a pistol, that you never use?"

"Great God, Maria! It is everything! It is honor! It is liberty! It is respect to myself! It is loyalty to my country! It is fidelity to my countrymen! It is true that for many years the garrison has fully protected us, and I have not needed to use the arms in my house. But thousands of husbands and

fathers need them hourly, to procure food for their children and wives, and to protect them from the savages. One tie binds us. Their cause is my cause. Their country is my country, and their God is my God. Children, am I right or wrong?"

They both stepped swiftly to his side. Isabel laid her cheek against his, and answered him with a kiss. Antonia clasped his hand, stood close to him, and said: "We are all sure that you are right, dear father. My mother is weary and sick with anxiety, but she thinks so too. Mother always thinks as you do, father. Dear mother, here is Rachela with a cup of chocolate, and you will sleep and grow strong before morning."

But the Senora, though she suffered her daughter's caresses, did not answer them, neither did she speak to her husband, though he opened the door for her and stood waiting with a face full of anxious love for a word or a smile from her. And the miserable wife, still more miserable than her husband, noticed that Isabel did not follow her. Never before had Isabel seemed to prefer any society to her mother's, and the unhappy Senora felt the defection, even amid her graver trouble.

But Isabel had seen something new in her father that night; something that touched her awakening soul with admiration. She lingered with him and Antonia, listening with vague comprehension to their conversation, until Rachela called her angrily; and as she was not brave enough for a second rebellion that night, she obediently answered her summons.

An hour afterwards, Antonia stepped cautiously within her room. She was sleeping, and smiling in her sleep. Where was her loving, innocent soul wandering? Between the myrtle hedges and under the fig-tree with her lover? Oh, who can tell where the soul goes when sleep gives it some release? Perhaps it is at night our angels need to watch us most carefully. For the soul, in dreams, can visit evil and sorrowful places, as well as happy and holy ones. But Isabel slept and smiled, and Antonia whispered a prayer at her side ere she went to her own rest.

And the waning moon cast a pathetic beauty over the Eden-like land, till dawn brought that mystical silence in which every new day is born. Then Robert Worth rose from the chair in which he had been sitting so long, remembering the past and forecasting the future. He walked to the window, opened it, and looked towards the mountains. They had an ethereal hue, a light without rays, a clearness almost polar in its severity. But in some way their appearance infused into his soul calmness and strength.

"Liberty has always been bought with life, and the glory of the greatest nations handseled with the blood of their founders." This was the thought in his heart, as looking far off to the horizon, he asked hopefully:

"What then, O God, shall this good land produce
That Thou art watering it so carefully?"

CHAPTER V. A FAMOUS BARBECUE

"So when fierce zeal a nation rends,
And stern injustice rules the throne,
Beneath the yoke meek virtue bends,
And modest truth is heard to groan.
But when fair Freedom's star appears,
Then hushed are sighs, and calmed are fears.
And who, when nations long opprest,
Decree to curb the oppressor's pride,
And patriot virtues fire the breast,
Who shall the generous ardor chide?
What shall withstand the great decree,
When a brave nation will be free?

It is flesh and blood that makes husbands and wives, fathers and children, and for the next few days these ties were sorely wounded in Robert Worth's house. The Senora was what Rachela called "difficult." In reality, she was angry and sullen. At such times she always went early to mass, said many prayers, and still further irritated herself by unnecessary fasting. But there are few homes which totally escape the visitations of this 'pious temper' in some form or other. And no creed modifies it; the strict Calvinist and strict Catholic are equally disagreeable while under its influence.

Besides, the Senora, like the ill-tempered prophet, thought she "did well to be angry." She imagined herself deserted and betrayed in all her tenderest feelings, her husband a rebel, her home made desolate, her sons and daughters supporting their father's imprudent views. She could only see one alternative before her; she must choose between her country and her religion, or her husband and children.

True, she had not yet heard from her sons, but she would listen to none of Rachela's hopes regarding them. Thomas had always said yes to all his father's opinions. How could she expect anything from John when he was being carefully trained in the very principles which everywhere made the Americans so irritating to the Mexican government.

Her husband and Antonia she would not see. Isabel she received in her darkened room, with passionate weeping and many reproaches. The unhappy husband had expected this trouble at the outset. It was one of those domestic thorns which fester and hamper, but to which the very best of men have to submit. He could only send pleasant and affectionate messages by Rachela, knowing that Rachela would deliver them with her own modifications of tone and manner.

"The Senor sends his great love to the Senora. Grace of Mary! If he would do a little as the most wise and tender of spouses wishes him! That would be for the good fortune of every one.

"Ah, Rachela, my heart is broken! Bring me my mantilla. I will go to early mass, when one's husband and children forsake them, who, then, is possible but the Holy Mother?

"My Senora, you will take cold; the morning is chill; besides, I have to say the streets will be full of those insolent Americans."

"I shall be glad to take cold, perhaps even to die. And the Americans do not offend women. Even the devil has his good points."

"Holy Virgin! Offend women! They do not even think us worth looking at. But then it is an intolerable offence to see them standing in our streets, as if they had made the whole land."

But this morning, early as it was, the streets were empty of Americans. There had been hundreds of them there at the proclamation; there was not one to be seen twelve hours afterwards. But at the

principal rendezvous of the city, and on the very walls of the Alamo, they had left this characteristic notice:

"To SANTA ANNA:
"If you want our arms-take them.
"TEN THOUSAND AMERICAN TEXANS."

Robert Worth saw it with an irrepressible emotion of pride and satisfaction. He had faithfully fulfilled his promise to his conscience, and, with his rifle across his shoulder, and his revolvers and knife in his belt, was taking the road to his office with a somewhat marked deliberation. He was yet a remarkably handsome man; and what man is there that a rifle does not give a kind of nobility to? With an up-head carriage and the light of his soul in his face, he trod the narrow, uneven street like a soldier full of enthusiasm at his own commission.

No one interfered with his solitary parade. He perceived, indeed, a marked approval of it. The Zavalas, Navarros. Garcias, and other prominent citizens, addressed him with but a slightly repressed sympathy. They directed his attention with meaning looks to the counter-proclamation of the Americans. They made him understand by the pressure of their hands that they also were on the side of liberty.

As he did not hurry, he met several officers, but they wisely affected not to see what they did not wish to see. For Doctor Worth was a person to whom very wide latitude might be given. To both the military and the civilians his skill was a necessity. The attitude he had taken was privately discussed, but no one publicly acted or even commented upon it. Perhaps he was a little disappointed at this. He had come to a point when a frank avowal of his opinions would be a genuine satisfaction; when, in fact, his long-repressed national feeling was imperious.

On the third morning, as he crossed the Plaza, some one called him. The voice made his heart leap; his whole nature responded to it like the strings of a harp to the sweep of a skilful hand. He turned quickly, and saw two young men galloping towards him. The foremost figure was his son—his beloved youngest son—whom he had just been thinking of as well out of danger, safe and happy in the peaceful halls of Columbia. And lo! here he was in the very home of the enemy; and he was glad of it.

"Why, Jack!" he cried; "Why, Jack, my boy! I never thought of you here." He had his hand on the lad's shoulder, and was gazing into his bright face with tears and smiles and happy wonder.

"Father, I had to come. And there are plenty more coming. And here is my other self—the best fellow that ever lived: Darius Grant. 'Dare' we call him, father, for there is not anything he won't venture if he thinks it worth the winning. And how is mi madre and Antonia, and Iza? And isn't it jolly to see you with a rifle?"

"Well, Dare; well, Jack; you are both welcome; never so welcome to Texas as at this hour. Come home at once and, refresh yourselves."

There was so much to tell that at first the conversation was in fragments and exclamations, and the voices of the two young men, pitched high and clear in their excitement, went far before them as if impatient of their welcome. Antonia heard them first. She was on the balcony, standing thoughtful and attent. It seemed to her as if in those days she was always listening. Jack's voice was the loudest, but she heard Dare's first. It vibrated in midair and fell upon her consciousness, clear and sweet as a far-away bell.

"That is Dare's voice—HERE."

She leaned forward, her soul hearkened after the vibrations, and again they called her. With swift steps she reached the open door. Rachela sat in her chair within it.

"The Senorita had better remain within," she said, sullenly; "the sun grows hot."

"Let me pass, Rachela, I am in a hurry."

"To be sure, the Senorita will have her way—good or bad."

Antonia heeded her not; she was hastening down the main avenue toward the gateway. This avenue was hedged on each side with oleanders, and they met in a light, waving arch above her head. At this season they were one mass of pale pink blossoms and dark glossy leaves. The vivid sunshine through them made a rosy light which tinged her face and her white gown with an indescribable glow. If a mortal woman can ever look like an angel, the fair, swiftly moving Antonia had at that moment the angelic expression of joy and love; the angelic unconsciousness of rapid and graceful movement; the angelic atmosphere that was in itself a dream of paradise; rose-tinted, divinely sweet and warm.

Dare saw her coming, and suddenly ceased speaking{.??} He was in the midst of a sentence, but he forgot what he was saying. He forgot where he was. He knew nothing, felt nothing, saw nothing, heard nothing but Antonia. And yet he did not fall at her feet, and kiss her hands and whisper delightful extravagances; all of which things an Iberian lover would have done, and felt and looked in the doing perfectly graceful and natural.

Dare Grant only clasped both the pretty hands held out to him; only said "Antonia! Antonia!" only looked at her with eyes full of a loving question, which found its instant answer in her own. In that moment they revealed to each other the length and breadth, the height and the depth of their affection. They had not thought of disguising it; they made no attempt to do so; and Robert Worth needed not the confession which, a few hours later, Grant thought it right to make to him.

When they entered the house together, a happy, noisy group, Rachela had left her chair and was going hurriedly upstairs to tell the Senora her surmise; but Jack passed her with a bound, and was at his mother's side before the heavy old woman had comprehended his passing salutation.

"Madre! Mother, I am here!"

The Senora was on her couch in her darkened room. She had been at the very earliest mass, had a headache, and had come home in a state of rebellion against heaven and earth. But Jack was her idol, the one child for whose presence she continually pined, the one human creature to whose will and happiness she delighted to sacrifice her own. When she heard his voice she rose quickly, crying out:

"A miracle! A miracle! Grace of God and Mary, a miracle! Only this morning, my precious, my boy! I asked the Holy Mother to pity my sorrows, and send you to me. I vow to Mary a new shrine. I vow to keep it, and dress it for one whole year. I will give my opal ring to the poor. Oh, Juan! Juan! Juan I am too blessed."

Her words were broken into pieces by his kisses. He knelt at her knees, and stroked her face, and patted her hands, and did all with such natural fervor and grace, that anything else, or anything less, must have seemed cold and unfilial.

"Come, my beautiful mother, and see my friend. I have told him so much about you; and poor Dare has no mother. I have promised him that you will be his mother also. Dare is so good—the finest fellow in all the world; come down and see Dare, and let us have a real Mexican dinner, madre. I have not tasted an olla since I left you."

She could not resist him. She made Rachela lay out her prettiest dress, and when Jack said "how beautiful your hair is, mother; no one has hair like you!" she drew out the great shell pins, and let it fall like a cloud around her, and with a glad pride gave Rachela the order to get out her jewelled comb and gilded fan and finest mantilla. And oh! how happy is that mother who has such pure and fervent admiration from her son; and how happy is that son to whom his mother is ever beautiful!

Jack's presence drove all the evil spirits out of the house. The windows were thrown open; the sunshine came in. He was running after Isabel, he was playing the mandolin; his voice, his laugh, his quick footstep, were everywhere.

In spite of the trouble in the city, there was a real festival in the house. The Senora came down in her sweetest temper and her finest garments. She arranged Jack's dinner herself, selected the dishes and gave strict orders about their serving. She took Jack's friend at once into her favor, and Dare thought her wonderfully lovely and gracious. He sat with her on the balcony, and talked of

Jack, telling her how clever he was, and how all his comrades loved him for his sunny temper and affectionate heart.

It was a happy dinner, lengthened out with merry conversation. Every one thought that a few hours might be given to family love and family joy. It would be good to have the memory of them in the days that were fast coming. So they sat long over the sweetmeats, and fresh figs, and the pale wines of Xeres and Alicante. And they rose up with laughter, looking into each others' faces with eyes that seemed to bespeak love and remembrance. And then they went from the table, and saw not Destiny standing cold and pitiless behind them, marking two places for evermore vacant.

There was not much siesta that day. The Senora, Isabel and Jack sat together; the Senora dozed a little, but not enough to lose consciousness of Jack's presence and Jack's voice. The father, happy, and yet acutely anxious, went to and fro between his children and his study. Antonia and Dare were in the myrtle walk or under the fig-tree. This hour was the blossoming time of their lives. And it was not the less sweet and tender because of the dark shadows on the edge of the sunshine. Nor were they afraid to face the shadows, to inquire of them, and thus to taste the deeper rapture of love when love is gemmed with tears.

It was understood that the young men were going away in the morning very early; so early that their adieus must be said with their good-nights. It was at this hour that the Senora found courage to ask:

"My Juan, where do you go?

"To Gonzales, mi madre."

"But why? Oh, Juan, do not desert your madre, and your country!

"Desert you, madre! I am your boy to my last breath! My country I love with my whole soul. That is why I have come back to you and to her! She is in trouble and her sons must stand by her."

"Do not talk with two meanings. Oh, Juan! why do you go to Gonzales?"

"We have heard that Colonel Ugartchea is to be there soon, and to take away the arms of the Americans. That is not to be endured. If you yourself were a man, you would have been away ere this to help them, I am sure."

"ME!! The Blessed Virgin knows I would cut off my hands and feet first. Juan, listen to me dear one! You are a Mexican."

"My heart is Mexican, for it is yours. But I must stand with my father and with my brother, and with my American compatriots. Are we slaves, that we must give up our arms? No, but if we gave them up we should deserve to be slaves."

"God and the saints!" she answered, passionately. "What a trouble about a few guns! One would think the Mexicans wanted the wives and children, the homes and lands of the Americans. They cry out from one end of Texas to the other."

"They cry out in old England and in New England, in New York, in New Orleans, and all down the Mississippi. And men are crying back to them: 'Stand to your rifles and we will come and help you!' The idea of disarming ten thousand Americans!" Jack laughed with scornful amusement at the notion. "What a game it will be! Mother, you can't tell how a man gets to love his rifle. He that takes our purse takes trash; but our rifles! By George Washington, that's a different story!"

Juan, my darling, you are my last hope. Your brother was born with an American heart. He has even become a heretic. Fray Ignatius says he went into the Colorado and was what they call immersed; he that was baptized with holy water by the thrice holy bishop of Durango. My beloved one, go and see Fray Ignatius; late as it is, he will rise and counsel you.

"My heart, my conscience, my country, my father, my brother, Santa Anna's despotism, have already counselled me."

"Speak no more. I see that you also are a rebel and a heretic. Mother of sorrows, give me thy compassion!" Then, turning to Juan, she cried out: "May God pardon me for having brought into this world such ingrates! Go from me! You have broken my heart!"

He fell at her feet, and, in spite of her reluctance, took her hands—

"Sweetest mother, wait but a little while. You will see that we are right. Do not be cross with Juan. I am going away. Kiss me, mother. Kiss me, and give me your blessing."

"No, I will not bless you. I will not kiss you. You want what is impossible, what is wicked."

"I want freedom."

"And to get freedom you tread upon your mother's heart. Let loose my hands. I am weary to death of this everlasting talk of freedom. I think indeed that the Americans know but two words: freedom and dollars. Ring for Rachela. She, at least, is faithful to me."

"Not till you kiss me, mother. Do not send me away unblessed and unloved. That is to doom me to misfortune. Mi madre, I beg this favor from you." He had risen, but he still held her hands, and he was weeping as innocent young men are not ashamed to weep.

If she had looked at him! Oh, if she had but once looked at his face, she could not have resisted its beauty, its sorrow, its imploration! But she would not look. She drew her hands angrily away from him. She turned her back upon her suppliant son and imperiously summoned Rachela.

"Good-by, mi madre."

"Good-by, mi madre!"

She would not turn to him, or answer him a word.

"Mi madre, here comes Rachela! Say 'God bless you, Juan.' It is my last word, sweet mother!"

She neither moved nor spoke. The next moment Rachela entered, and the wretched woman abandoned herself to her care with vehement sobs and complainings.

Jack was inexpressibly sorrowful. He went into the garden, hoping in its silence and solitude to find some relief. He loved his mother with his strongest affection. Every one of her sobs wrung his heart. Was it right to wound and disobey her for the sake of—freedom? Mother was a certain good; freedom only a glorious promise. Mother was a living fact; freedom an intangible idea.

Ah, but men have always fought more passionately for ideas than for facts! Tyrants are safe while they touch only silver and gold; but when they try to bind a man's ideals—the freedom of his citizenship—the purity of his faith—he will die to preserve them in their integrity.

Besides, freedom for every generation has but her hour. If that hour is not seized, no other may come for the men who have suffered it to pass. But mother would grow more loving as the days went by. And this was ever the end of Jack's reasoning; for no man knows how deep the roots of his nature strike into his native land, until he sees her in the grasp of a tyrant, and hears her crying to him for deliverance.

The struggle left the impress on his face. He passed a boundary in it. Certain boyish feelings and graces would never again be possible to him. He went into the house, weary, and longing for companionship that would comfort or strengthen him. Only Isabel was in the parlor. She appeared to be asleep among the sofa cushions, but she opened her eyes wide as he took a chair beside her.

"I have been waiting to kiss you again, Juan; do you think this trouble will last very long?"

"It will be over directly, Iza. Do not fret yourself about it, angel mio. The Americans are great fighters, and their quarrel is just. Well, then, it will be settled by the good God quickly."

"Rachela says that Santa Anna has sent off a million of men to fight the Americans. Some they will cut in pieces, and some are to be sent to the mines to work in chains."

"God is not dead of old age, Iza. Santa Anna is a miraculous tyrant. He has committed every crime under heaven, but I think he will not cut the Americans in pieces."

"And if the Americans should even make him go back to Mexico!"

"I think that is very possible."

"What then, Juan?"

"He would pay for some of his crimes here the rest he would settle for in purgatory. And you, too, Iza, are you with the Americans?"

"Luis Alveda says they are right."

"Oh-h! I see! So Luis is to be my brother too. Is that so, little dear?"

"Have you room in your heart for him? Or has this Dare Grant filled it?"

"If I had twenty sisters, I should have room for twenty brothers, if they were like Dare and Luis. But, indeed, Luis had his place there before I knew Dare."

"And perhaps you may see him soon; he is with Senor Sam Houston. Senor Houston was here not a week ago. Will you think of that? And the mother and uncle of Luis are angry at him; he will be disinherited, and we shall be very poor, I think. But there is always my father, who loves Luis."

"Luis will win his own inheritance. I think you will be very rich."

"And, Juan, if you see Luis, say to him, 'Iza thinks of you continually.'"

At this moment Rachela angrily called her charge—

"Are you totally and forever wicked, disobedient one? Two hours I have been kept waiting. Very well! The Sisters are the only duenna for you; and back to the convent you shall go to-morrow. The Senora is of my mind, also."

"My father will not permit it. I will go to my father. And think of this, Rachela: I am no longer to be treated like a baby." But she kissed Juan 'farewell,' and went away without further dispute.

The handsome room looked strangely lonely and desolate when the door had closed behind her. Jack rose, and roughly shook himself, as if by that means he hoped to throw off the oppression and melancholy that was invading even his light heart. Hundreds of moths were dashing themselves to death against the high glass shade that covered the blowing candles from them. He stood and looked at their hopeless efforts to reach the flame. He had an unpleasant thought; one of those thoughts which have the force of a presentiment. He put it away with annoyance, muttering, "It is time enough to meet misfortune when it comes."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.