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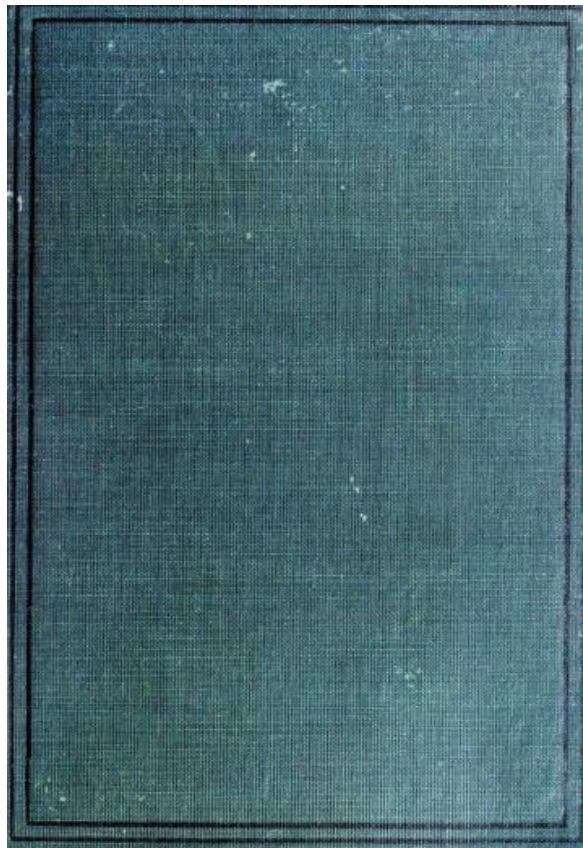
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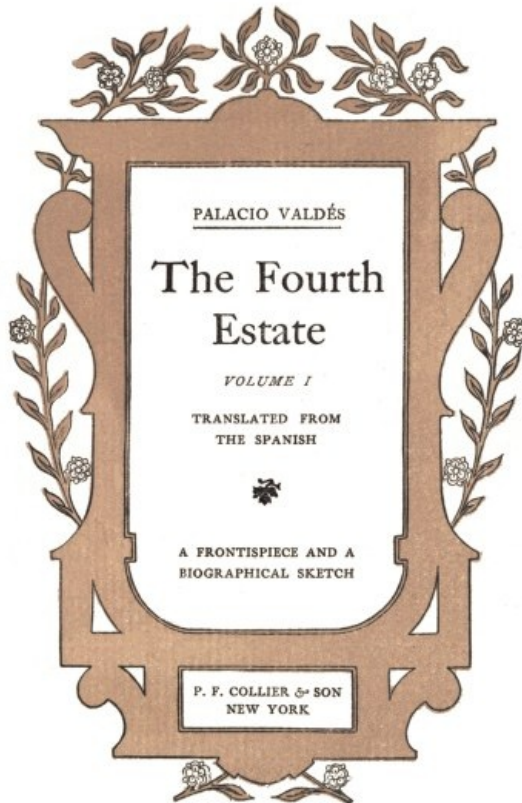
*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE FOURTH ESTATE, VOL. 1 ***





THE CITY OF SANTANDER, SPAIN
THE "SARRIO" OF THE FOURTH ESTATE

The Fourth Estate Vol. 1



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BRENTANO'S

The Fourth Estate

THE FOURTH ESTATE
VOLUME ONE

CONTENTS

	PAGE
LIFE OF VALDÉS	5
CHAPTER I	
THE CURTAIN RISES	9
CHAPTER II	
THE PERFORMANCE CONTINUES	20
CHAPTER III	
SAFE ARRIVAL OF THE "BELLA PAULA"	34
CHAPTER IV	
THE BETROTHAL	48
CHAPTER V	
PLANNING THE HOME	61
CHAPTER VI	
THE CHIEF RESIDENTS OF SARRIO AT THEIR CLUB	80
CHAPTER VII	
BURGLARS	115
CHAPTER VIII	
CECILIA'S TROUSSEAU	134
CHAPTER IX	
A CHANGE OF HEART	156
CHAPTER X	
TWO TRAITORS	173
CHAPTER XI	
MEETING IN SUPPORT OF THE FOURTH ESTATE	191
CHAPTER XII	
THE STORY OF A TEAR	218
CHAPTER XIII	
"THE LIGHT OF SARRIO"	249
CHAPTER XIV	
VIOLENT RECRIMINATIONS	274
CHAPTER XV	
GONZALO MARRIES	288
CHAPTER XVI	
MARTIAL DOINGS	304

LIFE OF VALDÉS

THE early writings of this distinguished native of Asturias partake of a peculiar interest, strongly appealing to one's human sympathies. On his thirtieth birthday Señor Valdés married a young lady scarcely more than half his age. She was very frail, and after eighteen months of tenderly devoted love on both sides, the husband was left alone with an infant son. The charming and pathetic little tale "The Idyl of an Invalid" describes the earlier portion of the author's brief wedded life, and in fact was written during that happy period. The year after his wife's death he published "Riverita," in which novel his late partner was made to appear as a child, and in the sequel to "Riverita," "Maximina," published still a year later, we find her depicted as ripening to womanhood. Thus, out of Valdés's early novels three bear this melancholy yet attractive personal quality.

His beginning in the field of fiction, Armando Palacio Valdés made in 1881, with "Young Mr. Octavio," following it up, in 1883, with "Martha and Mary." Then, between "The Idyl of an Invalid" and "Riverita" came "José." The novel here offered, a specimen of his work combining pathos with humor, was printed the year after "Maximina," that is to say, in 1888.

When "The Fourth Estate" was brought out Valdés was thirty-five. He was born on the 4th of October, 1853, in a little village called Entralgo, where his family owned a summer villa. The greater part of the year they spent at Avilés, at which place young Armando first went to school. He continued his studies at Oviedo, and then went to Madrid, with the object of graduating as a lawyer.

His real bent, that of authorship, however, soon declared itself, so that while yet occupied with his legal studies he contributed articles on philosophical and theological subjects to the Spanish "Revista Europea"—of which periodical he eventually joined the staff and became the editor. In this capacity he earned a national reputation as a censor of literature, his articles and sketches pertaining to literary criticism being collected in several volumes. But after 1881 he devoted little time to commenting on other people's books, preferring to bend his main energies to creative endeavor.

Seven of his novels have been mentioned above, and among those subsequently produced seven more complete the list of his novels best known to the Spanish public. These are "Sister Saint Sulpice," "Foam," "Faith," "The Grandee," "The Origin of Thought," "The Dandies of Cadiz," and "The Joy of Captain Ribot."

In a letter sent a few years ago to an English literary friend Señor Valdés wrote as follows:

"Since my wife died my life has been tranquil and melancholy, dedicated to work and to my son. During the summers I live in Asturias, and during the winters in Madrid. I like the company of men of the world better than that of literary folks, because the former teach me more. I am given up to the study of metaphysics. I have a passion for physical exercises, for gymnastics, for fencing, and I try to live in an evenly balanced temper, nothing being so repugnant to me as affectation and emphasis. I find a good deal of pleasure in going to bull-fights (although I do not take my son to the Plaza dressed up like a miniature bull-slayer, as an American writer declares I do), and I cultivate

the theatre, because to see life from the stage point of view helps me in the composition of my stories."

THE FOURTH ESTATE

CHAPTER I

THE CURTAIN RISES

SARRIO, the well-known town on the Cantabrian coast, boasted some years ago of a theatre neither bright, light, nor commodious, but quite good enough to afford entertainment to the pacific, industrious residents during the long winter evenings.

It was built, as such places usually are, in the form of a horseshoe, and it consisted of two floors besides the ground floor. On the first were the boxes—goodness knows why they were so called, for they were nothing but a few benches stuffed with goat's hair and upholstered with scarlet flannel, placed behind a balustrade. To take one of these places, a push had to be given to the back, which raised the seat with a spring, and once the person was in it readjusted itself, and he was as comfortable as a human being can be on an instrument of torture. On the second floor all the rabble vociferated, scuffled, and pushed, irrespective of social distinctions between the well-to-do seaman, the poor mussel-picker from the rocks and pier, and Amalia, the respected dealer, and the sellers in the streets. This part of the house was called the gallery. The stage-boxes were of the same wretched style as the others, and the upholstering seemed to be the same, as far as one could see. Beyond them came the "front rows," reserved, according to the old-fashioned way, for certain handicraftsmen, who, from their calling, their position as employers, or for any reason, were averse to going up into the gallery and mixing with the common herd. From the roof hung a prismatic cut-glass chandelier, lighted with fish oil, which was subsequently replaced by petroleum; but that reform I never saw. Under the staircase leading to the boxes there was an alcove, enclosed by a curtain, which went by the name of "Don Mateo's box." Of this Don Mateo more anon.

Then you must know that in this provincial theatre the same dramas and comedies were played as in the capital, and the same operas given as at La Scala in Milan. Incredible as it seems, it is perfectly true. There the narrator of this story heard for the first time the famous lines:

"When you hearken to a story of shipwreck,
All on earth, e'en to love, is forgotten."

They certainly struck him as splendid, and the theatre a marvel of luxury and good taste. Everything in the world depends on imagination. Would that mine were as fresh and vivid as it was in those days, so as to be able to give you a few hours' pleasant amusement!

There it was I saw "Don Juan Tenorio," with its flour-whitened corpses, its commander gliding away on a door pulled with cords, its infernal regions made of lighted spirits of wine; and its apotheosis of paper, stuffing, and packing-cases made such an impression on me that I never slept that night. In the auditorium the same things went on more or less as in the grandest houses of the capital. However, more attention was given to the performance here than in Court theatres, because we had not arrived at that high state of culture in which behavior is in direct contradiction to the place—swearing and chattering in playhouses, laughing and giggling in church, and silence and sedateness at the promenade, after the delightful fashion in Madrid. Even now I do not know if they have attained to this state of culture in Sarrio.

But it must not be thought that there were not some enlightened spirits who were sufficiently advanced to give a sample of correct manners at the theatre. Pablito de Belinchon was one of these. With three or four kindred spirits he had a season ticket for one of the stage-boxes, and from thence they spoke across to other gentlemen, older men, who subscribed to the opposite stage-box. They cracked jokes, they turned the soprano or bass into ridicule, and they threw sweets and pellets of paper. The people in the gallery, not yet conversant with this advanced stage of refinement, loudly insisted on silence. The families of importance arriving, as usual, after the curtain had risen, came in with as much fuss as if they were passing into the dress-circle of the Royal Theatre, and, be it said, with much more noise, for it is impossible to imagine the horrible sounds with which the backs of the boxes were pushed back, and the seats dropped, as if on purpose to attract attention.

The party now making its pompous entry into one of these boxes remains standing until all wraps are removed, while the eyes of the audience are instantly turned from the stage and fixed upon the newcomers until they are seated. They are the Belinchons. The head of the family is a tall, spare gentleman, with bent shoulders, bald head, small sharp eyes, a large mouth, wreathed with a Mephistophelian smile, disclosing two long even rows of teeth, the masterpiece of a certain dentist, recently established in Sarrio; he has whiskers and mustache, and his age is about sixty.

He is reported to be the richest merchant in the town, being one of the chief importers of codfish on the Biscayan coast. For many years he had the entire monopoly of the wholesale trade of this commodity, not only in the town, but in the provinces, and had thus amassed a considerable fortune.

His wife, Doña Paula—but why does her arrival excite so much talk in the theatre? The good lady, hearing it, trembles, looks confused, and, being unable to collect herself sufficiently to take off her cloak by herself, she is relieved of it by her daughter, who says in her ear:

"Sit down, mama."

Doña Paula sits down, or, to speak more correctly, she drops into a seat, and casts an anxious look at the audience, while her cheeks are suffused with crimson. In vain she tries to collect and calm herself, but the more she tries to

keep the blood from rushing to her face the more it mounts to that prominent position.

"Mama, how red you are!" said Venturita, her younger daughter, trying not to laugh.

The mother looked at her with a pained expression.

"Hush, Ventura, hush," said Cecilia.

Doña Paula then murmured: "The child delights in upsetting me," and nearly burst into tears.

At last the audience, wearied of tormenting her with their glances, smiles, and whispers, turned their attention to the stage. Doña Paula's distress gradually diminished, but the traces remained for the rest of the evening.

The cause of the excitement was the velvet mantle, trimmed with fur, that the good lady had donned. It was always like this whenever she appeared for the first time in any fine article of apparel. And this for no other reason than because Doña Paula was not a lady by birth.

She had belonged to the cigarette-maker class. Don Rosendo had made love to her when she was quite a young girl, and then came the birth of Pablito. However, Don Rosendo let five or six years elapse without marrying, not wishing to hear of matrimony, but continuing to pay court to her and assisting her with money, until finally, vanquished more by the love of the boy than the mother, and more than all by the admonitions of his friends, he decided to offer his hand to Paulina.

The town knew nothing of the marriage until it had taken place, secrecy being considered the safest course. From thenceforth the life of the cigarette-maker can be divided into different epochs. The first, which lasted for a year, dated from the time of her marriage until the "mantilla appeared." During this epoch she did not go out much, nor was she often seen in public. On Sundays she attended early mass, and the rest of the time she was shut up in the house. When she decided to don the aforementioned mantilla and attend eleven o'clock mass she was the cynosure of all eyes, in church as well as on her way through the streets; and the event was talked about for eight days afterward.

The second epoch, which lasted three years, was from the "mantilla episode" to that of "the gloves." The sight of such an adornment on the large dark hands of the ex-cigarette-maker produced an indescribable sensation in the feminine element of the neighborhood; in the streets, in church, and on visits, the ladies met each other with the question:

"Have you seen?"

"Yes, yes; I have seen."

And then the tongues were loosed in cruel remarks.

Then came the third epoch, which lasted four years, and ended with the silk dress, which gave almost as much cause of complaint as the gloves, and produced universal indignation in Sarrio.

"Do you really mean to say so, Doña Dolores?"

"Who would have thought it?"

Doña Dolores lowered her eyes with a despairing gesture.

Finally the last epoch, the longest of all, for it lasted six years, terminated (oh horror!) with "the hat." The shudder of disgust that went through the town of Sarrio when Doña Paula appeared one holiday afternoon at the Promenade with a little hat on her head beggars description. It caused quite a sensation: the women of the place made the sign of the cross, as they saw her pass, and remarks were uttered in loud tones so as to reach the person concerned.

"Look, girl, do for goodness' sake, look at the Serena, and see what she has got on her head."

Mention must be made that Doña Paula's mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother had all gone by the name of Serena. It is needless to add that even when the cigarette-maker attained to the dignity of señora, she was never by any chance given her proper name.

When the ladies of Sarrio met each other in the street the following day there were no words to express their horror; they could only raise their eyes to heaven, make convulsive gesticulations, and utter, with a groan, the word "Hat!"

So at that deed of daring, only comparable to those of heroes of antiquity, like Hannibal, Cæsar, and Genghis Khan, the town remained crushed and dumfounded for some months. Nevertheless, whenever Doña Paula appeared in public with the abhorred hat upon her head, or with any other departure from her old attire, she was always greeted with a murmur of disapproval. The fault of the matter lay in her never having resented, in public or in private, or even in the sanctum of her own feelings, this malignant treatment of her fellow-townfolk. She considered it natural and reasonable, and it never occurred to her that it ought not to have been; her ideas of conventionality had never prompted her to rebel against the tyranny of public opinion. She believed in all good faith that in adopting the gloves, the mantilla, or the hat, she had committed a breach of laws both human and divine, and that the murmurs and mocking glances were the just retribution for the infraction. Hence her terror and dismay every time she appeared at the theatre or promenade overwhelmed her with confusion.

"Why, then," it will be said, "did Doña Paula dress herself thus?"

Those who ask such questions are not well versed in the mysteries of the human heart; Doña Paula put on the mantilla, gloves, and hat with the full knowledge of the retribution to come, just as a boy stuffs himself from the sideboard, knowing that he will be punished for the act. Those who have not been brought up in a little town can never know how ardently the hat is desired by the artisan.

It was so with Doña Paula, old, faded, and withered as she was. As a young girl, she had been pretty, but years, her secluded life, to which she could never accustom herself, and, above all, her struggle against public opinion in the adoption of appropriate attire, had prematurely aged her; but she still had beautiful black eyes set in regular and pleasing features.

The first act was nearly over. A fantastic melodrama, the name I do not remember, was being performed, and the company had brought into play all the scenic apparatus at its disposal. The audience was impressed, and received every change of scene with enthusiastic applause.

Pablito, who had spent a month in Madrid the previous year, made light of the performance and winked knowingly at his friend in the front row of the stalls. Then, to show how boring he found it all, he ended by turning his back on the stage, and leveling his opera-glass at the local beauties. Every time that the Russian-leather lorgnette was turned

on one of the fair sex the girl trembled slightly, changed her position, and raised her hand, which slightly shook, to adjust her hair, smiled meaninglessly at her mama or sister, settled herself afresh, and fixed her eyes on the stage with insistence and decision, but a quick shy glance was soon raised to those round, bright glasses directed at her, and she ended by blushing.

Then Pablito, having carried his point, turned his attention to another beauty. He knew them all as well as if they were his sisters, he thee'd and thou'd the majority of them, and to several he had even been engaged; but he was as light and inconsistent in his love affairs as a feather in the air; the girls had all had to undergo the painful process of disillusion, and finally, wearied of courting his neighbors, he proceeded to exercise his charms on some of the visitors to Sarrio, only, of course, to throw them over, if they imprudently stayed more than a month or two in the town.

There were weighty reasons for Pablito's power to thus make havoc at his own sweet will in the hearts of all the girls of the place, as well as of those from other parts.

He was a very aristocratic-looking young fellow of four or five and twenty, of a handsome, manly countenance, and slight well-formed figure. Then, he rode splendidly, and drove a tilbury or drag and four with an ease only seen in Sarrio among coachmen. When wide trousers were worn, Pablito's looked like skirts, and when tight ones were the fashion his legs looked as slender as a stork's. When high collars were in vogue, Pablito went about half-strangled with his tongue hanging out, and when low ones came in, he had them cut down to his breastbone.

These and other striking characteristics made him irresistible. Perhaps some people will not quite credit the universal admiration he excited, but I am certain that the girls of the province who read this story will testify to the truth of the fact.

CHAPTER II

THE PERFORMANCE CONTINUES

WHEN the curtain fell, a bent old man with spectacles and a long white beard crept, rather than walked, to the Belinchons' box.

"Don Mateo! You never miss a performance," exclaimed Doña Paula.

"Well, what would you have me do at home, Papulina?"

"Tell your beads and go to bed," said Venturita.

Don Mateo smiled benignantly and answered the pert remark by giving the girl an affectionate tap on her cheek.

"It is true I ought to do so, my child—but what is to be done? If I go to bed early I do not sleep—and then I can not resist the temptation of seeing you pretty little dears."

Venturita's coquettish expression betrayed her satisfaction at seeing herself admired.

"Now, if you were a handsome young man!"

"I have been one."

"In what year was that?"

"How naughty! how naughty the child is!" exclaimed Don Mateo, laughing; but he was here interrupted by a fit of coughing which lasted for some minutes.

Don Mateo, an old man, and decrepit not only with age, but with infirmities brought on by a dissipated life, was the delight of the town of Sarrio. No festivity and no public or private entertainment could take place without him. He had been president of the Lyceum, a dancing club, for many years, and nobody thought of having him supplanted. He was also president of an academy of music, of which he was the founder; he was treasurer of the artisans' club; the rebuilding of the theatre now mentioned was due to him; and as an acknowledgment of the time and money he spent on it, the company permitted him to have the box, already alluded to, in the alcove under the staircase, enclosed with curtains.

He lived on his pension as colonel; he was married, and had a daughter over thirty years of age, who still went by the name of "the child." It must not be thought by this that Don Mateo was a skittish old man. If he had been, the weaker sex would not have been so profuse in their sympathy and respect for him. His sole pleasure was to see other people amused and happy about him, and he spared himself neither trouble nor efforts in getting up any fresh entertainment. Once his mind was set upon a new idea, his energy never flagged. Sometimes he organized a country ball; another time he had a stage put up in the large room of the Lyceum, and got up a play; and he occasionally chartered a mountebank or musical company. If a week went by without Sarrio having some entertainment or other, Don Mateo was in a great state of mind, and had no rest until he had started something.

Thanks to him, we can safely say that at this period there was no place in Spain where life was rendered so easy and pleasant as at Sarrio, for a constant round of simple amusements engenders union and friendliness among the townsfolk. Moreover, Don Mateo was a professional peace-maker, for he made a point of smoothing away all the bad feelings and misunderstandings that always crop up in a town. Unlike bad persons who delight in fanning the flame of dissension, he found delight in repeating to people all the pleasant things he heard of them.

"Pepita, do you know what Doña Rosario said just now about the dress you have on?—that it is most elegant, exquisite, and tasteful."

Whereupon Pepita, filled with pride as she sat in her box, cast quite an affectionate glance at Doña Rosario, little as she liked her.

Then, again, "How well you managed Villamor's chocolate business for the widow and children, friend Eugenio—you did, indeed. Don Rosendo was just telling me he let the business slip through his fingers like a fool."

As Don Rosendo was the best man of business in the town, Don Eugenio could not help feeling flattered at these words.

After chatting for some little time with the Belinchon family, Don Mateo took leave, to prosecute, as usual, his visits to the other boxes; but before going he turned to Cecilia, and said:

"When does he arrive?"

The young girl flushed slightly, and replied:

"I can not tell you, Don Mateo."

Then Doña Paula, smiling mischievously, came to her daughter's rescue, by saying:

"He ought to arrive in the 'Bella Paula,' which sailed from Liverpool."

"Oh! then we shall be having him here to-morrow or next day. You have prayed a good deal to the Virgin de las Tormentas—the Virgin of the Storms—eh?"

"She has actually had a *nones*—six candles have been burning for days before the image," said Venturita.

Cecilia's blush deepened, and she smiled. She was a young woman of twenty years of age, neither beautiful in face nor graceful in figure; the harmony of her features was spoiled by her nose being too aquiline. Without this drawback she would not have been plain, for her eyes were extremely good—so soft and expressive that few beauties could rival them. She was neither tall nor short, but rather thin, and her shoulders slightly bent. Her sister Venturita was sixteen years of age, and as full of grace and beauty as a lovely flower. Her oval cheeks seemed made of roses and pinks; she was somewhat small, but so perfectly made that she looked like a wax model. Her jasmine-like hands and her fairy-like feet were the talk of Sarrio.

The softness and smoothness of her skin were like mother-of-pearl and alabaster; her creamy forehead, high and narrow as that of a Greek Venus, was shaded by fair curls; and rich, abundant golden tresses covered her shoulders and fell below her waist.

"You may laugh at your sister, little one; but it will not be long before you do the same!" said Don Mateo.

"I pray for a man! You are getting imbecile, señor."

"It won't be long before I hear of it," returned the old man, as he passed on to another box to greet the Señores de Maza.

At that moment Pablito joined his family, accompanied by his faithful friend, who merits special notice.

He was the son of the *picador*, the famous bull slayer, of the place, and the cast of the lad's features was such as would have been the delight of the spectators at a circus. His face would have required no addition in the way of powder, rouge, or dye to convert him into a clown. The nose, highly colored by nature, the narrow slits of eyes, the lack of any mustache or whiskers, the thick lips, the excessive width of his shoulders, the bow of his legs, and, above all, the facial contortions which accompanied every word he uttered, were provocative of mirth without the aid of paint or wig. Piscis, for so he was called, was aware of this peculiarity, and resented it so intensely that he resolved to counteract the ludicrous cast of his features by determining never to laugh, and he religiously kept to his decision. Moreover, he, for the same reason, interspersed his remarks with the sharpest, strongest interjections of the vernacular, varied by those of his own invention. But this, instead of producing the desired effect, only added to the amusement he provoked among his acquaintances.

The only person who ever took him seriously—up to a certain point—was Pablito. Piscis and Pablito were born to inspire each other with mutual love and admiration. The point of union between the two kindred spirits was "the cult of the horse-god." Piscis, through his father, was an adept in that line from a child; and as the best mount in Sarrio, he was the object of Pablito's warmest admiration, and the son of Don Rosendo being the richest young fellow of the place, there was, according to Piscis, no person in the world more deserving of respect and admiration.

Nobody knew when this friendship had begun; Pablito and Piscis had always been inseparable from the time they were children, and the difference of their social positions did not separate them as they grew up to manhood. Don Rosendo's stable was their constant place of meeting; from thence, after a long and erudite conference, partly theoretical, partly practical on the horses, they proceeded to betake their presence and their profound knowledge to the town, where they took a few turns, sometimes on high-spirited horses, and at other times in a smart trap, with Pablito driving, and Piscis absorbed in affectionate contemplation of the backs of the animals. On some occasions, however, they gave the town a lesson of humility by perambulating on their own legs. Pablito now came up to his family party convulsed with laughter.

"What has come over you?" asked Doña Paula, smiling in sympathy.

"We just followed Periquito to the gallery, and there we found him hand in hand with Ramona," whispered the young man into his sister Venturita's ear.

"Well, what did he say?" she asked with great curiosity.

"He said"—and here a burst of laughter interrupted him for some minutes—"he said, 'Ramona, I love you.'"

"Ave Maria! and an anchovy seller, too!" exclaimed the girl, joining in the laugh, and making the sign of the cross.

"If you could have heard the trembling voice in which he said it, and the way in which he turned up the whites of his eyes— Ah! here is Piscis, who was also witness of it."

Piscis gave vent to a corroborative grunt. At that moment Periquito, a pallid, lean lad, with blue eyes and a little, thin red beard, appeared in one of the stage boxes; the eyes of the whole Belinchon family were at once turned on him with mocking and smiling glances, Pablito and Venturita evincing particular delight at the sight of the young man. Periquito raised his head and saluted them, and the Belinchon family responded to the greeting without ceasing laughing. He raised his eyes two or three times, but those continual mocking glances so confused him that he at last retired into the narrow foyer. The curtain then rose again: the scene now represented caverns in the infernal regions, although it was not impossible for them to be mistaken for the hold of a ship.

The act opened with a prelude by the orchestra, worthily conducted by Señor Anselmo, the cabinet-maker of the town.

Señor Matias, the sacristan, and Señor Manola, the barber, took part in the performance as bassoon-players. Don Juan, the "old salt," as he was nicknamed, and Prospero, the carpenter, played the clarinets; the trumpet-players were Mechacan, the shoemaker, and Señor Romualdo, the undertaker; Pepe de la Esquila, the lawyer's clerk, and Maroto, "the watchman," were the cornet-players; and the fiddle was played by Señor Benito, the violinist of the church and a clerk in a business house; while the minor accompanists consisted of four or five apprentice youths of

the town.

Instead of a bâton, Señor Anselmo held in his hand an enormous bright key, which was that of his shop, and served to conduct the music.

The prelude was very sad and mournful, suggestive of a fitting state of mind for the infernal regions. The audience preserved absolute silence, and in anxious expectation of what was to come all eyes were fixed on the open trap-doors in the stage floor. A discordant note suddenly broke in upon the soft, mysterious music. Señor Anselmo turned and cast a reproachful look at the offending musician, who colored up to his eyes; and there came a loud, prolonged murmur of disapproval from the audience, while from the gallery a voice cried:

"It was Pepe de la Esquila!"

All eyes were then directed to the delinquent, who, drawing the mouthpiece from his cornet, shook it with assumed indifference while his face became redder and redder.

"Those who can not play should go to bed," cried the same voice.

Then the abashed and ashamed Pepe de la Esquila was fraught with fury. He threw his instrument upon the floor, rose from his seat with his eyes aflame with rage, shook his fist at the gallery, and cried:

"I'll settle you when we get out, see if I don't."

"Sh! sh! Silence, silence!" exclaimed the audience in a breath.

"What is there to settle, man? Get on and play the cornet better."

"Silence, silence! Shame!" cried the audience again, and all eyes were then turned to the mayor's box.

He was a man of sixty or seventy years of age, short of stature and very high-colored; his hair was still thick and quite white, his cheeks were shaven, his nose Roman, his eyes large, round, and prominent. He looked like a courtier of the time of Louis XV, or a coachman of some grand house.

Don Roque, for such was his name, turned round in his seat, and called out in a stentorian voice:

"Marcones."

Whereupon an octogenarian official approached the door of the box with his shiny, peaked, blue cloth cap in his hand.

The mayor conferred with him for some minutes; and then Marcones ascended the gallery, and reappeared holding a young man in sailor dress by the arm. They both approached the mayor's box, and then Don Roque proceeded to rebuke the offender in a voice which he only partially succeeded in modulating, for, from time to time, one overheard such remarks as: "Disturber of the peace! Have you no manners whatsoever! You are a belligerent animal! Do you think you are in a tavern?"

The sailor received the reprimand with his eyes on the ground.

A voice cried from the pit:

"Let him be taken to prison."

Then another voice from the gallery immediately returned:

"Let Pepe de la Esquila be taken too."

"Silence! Silence!"

The mayor, after having sharply rebuked Percebe, let him return to his seat, to the great delight of the gallery, who received him back with hurrahs and applause.

The orchestra, silenced for a time, now resumed the prelude to the infernal regions, and before it was finished a dozen devils were seen emerging through the trap-doors on to the stage with masks, enormous tow wigs, the inevitable tails, and with lighted torches in their hands. Then, when they were all assembled on the boarded floor and the trap-doors were conveniently closed, they began the fantastic dance befitting the occasion. But it is known of old that four demons can not join together in a dance without getting excited. The spectators followed their swift, measured movements with extreme interest. A child began to cry, and the audience made its mother withdraw him from the house.

But, lo and behold! with so much passing to and fro of Beelzebub's ministers in that not very spacious place, a torch ignited the tow wig of one of the party. The poor devil, in ignorance of the fact, continued the dance with most diabolical energy; the audience went into fits of laughter awaiting the issue of the accident. Eventually, when he felt his head grow hot, he promptly tore off the wig and mask, and disclosed the countenance of Levita, distorted with terror.

"Levita!" cried the delighted audience.

The owner of this nickname, deprived of his demoniacal disguise, retired from the scene, covered with confusion.

In a short time another wig was set on fire. Fresh cries of excitement at the approaching metamorphosis of the demon. There was not long to wait, for in a few minutes the wig and the mask flew through the air like a flaming comet.

"Matalaosa!" was the universal cry, and a shout of laughter rang through the theatre.

"Matala, don't be afraid that you will catch cold," said a voice from the gallery.

Matalaosa retired, discomfited, like his companion Levita.

Two or three more wigs were set on fire, exposing to shame as many more well-known faces of townfolk who acted as supers at the theatre. The dance finally terminated without further mishap.

The demons who had escaped any catastrophe being once more relegated to the infernal regions, there appeared on the scene a fine young fellow, who, to judge from the skin which hung from his shoulder, was evidently a shepherd, with a pretty young girl of the same profession, and, according to the old rule which obliges every shepherd to be in love, and every shepherdess to be coquettish, the dialogue began, in which the affectionate entreaties and tender reproaches of the man contrasted strongly with the light laughter and jokes of the girl.

Everybody was pleased and delighted, the gallery as well as the pit, with the touching scene enacted, when a loud voice was heard at the theatre door saying:

"Don Rosendo, the 'Bella Paula,' is coming in."

The effect that this unexpected news produced was indescribable, for not only did Don Rosendo jump up, as if he

were pulled by a spring, and hasten to put on his cloak with a trembling hand, but such excitement pervaded the whole gathering that the pastoral dialogue was all but interrupted. The patrons of the "front rows" rushed with one accord into the street, all the sailors made their exit from the gallery with a great clatter, and many people also left the stalls and boxes. In a few minutes there was hardly anybody in the theatre but women.

Cecilia remained motionless and pale, with her eyes fixed on the stage. Her mother and sister looked at her with a smile on their faces.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she exclaimed, turning round suddenly and blushing violently, whereupon Doña Paula and Venturita burst out laughing.

CHAPTER III

SAFE ARRIVAL OF THE "BELLA PAULA"

THE crowd of people ran through the streets in the direction of the port. Foremost, accompanied by six or eight sailors, his son Pablo and several friends, came Don Rosendo, silent and preoccupied as he listened to his companions' remarks, uttered in voices panting from exertion.

"Don Domingo is in luck to get in at nearly high tide," said a sailor, alluding to the captain of the "Bella Paula."

"How do you know he is coming in? He may have cast anchor this afternoon," remarked another.

"Where?"

"You ask 'where?' you fool! Why, in the Bay, of course," replied the other in a rage.

"If so, we should see her, Uncle Miguel."

"How could we see her, you idiot? Why shouldn't she have dropped anchor behind the Corvera Rock?"

"The flag of the 'Bella Paula' would float higher than the rock, Uncle Miguel."

"Whatever do you know about it?"

"What cargo does she carry?" asked a bystander of the owner.

"Four thousand hundredweight."

"From Scotland?"

"No, all from Norway."

"Is the Señorita de las Cuevas on board?"

Don Rosendo did not reply; but after a few more quick steps he turned round, saying:

"Don Melchor must be told that the 'Bella Paula' is coming in."

"I'll go," said a sailor, detaching himself from the crowd, and turning back to the town.

They arrived at the mole. The night was starless, the wind had sunk, the sea was calm. They passed the little old mole, and directed their steps to the end of the new mole, which had been recently built, and stretched some little distance out to sea. Lights from the moored boats shone here and there in the darkness; the thick network of riggings was scarcely discernible, and the hulks looked like formless black masses.

The newcomers did not at first perceive another group of people at the end of the mole until they came upon them. They were all silent, with their eyes fixed on the sea, trying to make out the lines of the ship in the mist. The waves breaking monotonously against the rocks near by occasionally shimmered in the darkness.

"Where is she?" asked several of the comers from the theatre, as they cast their eyes around.

"There!"

"Where?"

"Don't you see a little green light there to the left? Follow my hand."

"Ah! Yes, now I see."

Don Rosendo went on to the second stage of the mole, and there ran against Don Melchor de las Cuevas. He was an old, very tall, wiry man; he wore his beard sailor fashion, that is to say, he let it hang round his neck like a bag. He had a stronger reason for doing this than the majority of the people of Sarrio who do so, for he belonged to the honored profession of the navy, although he was now on the retired list. But in seaport towns, and particularly when the place is small like that of which we are speaking, the maritime element preponderates, and so permeates the place that the inhabitants, unintentionally, and in spite of themselves, adopt certain sailor customs, words, and fashions.

The Señor de las Cuevas had been a gallant, fine fellow when he was young, and now at seventy-four he was still a vigorous, active man, with bright, penetrating eyes, aquiline nose, a fine, open countenance, and a bearing full of energy and decision.

He was standing on one of the seats fixed against the wall of the mole, with an enormous telescope turned toward the little green light which shone intermittently in the distance. He was by far the tallest figure in the group of spectators.

"Don Melchor, you here already! I have just sent a messenger to your house."

"I have been here for an hour," returned the Señor de las Cuevas, taking his glass from his eye. "I saw the ship from the observatory a little after sunset."

"Who would have thought it? How is it that nothing at sea escapes your observation?"

"I have better sight than when I was a lad of twenty," said Don Melchor in a loud, decided voice for all to hear.

"I believe it, I believe it, Don Melchor."

"I can see a little launch tack twenty miles off."

"I believe it, I believe it, Don Melchor."

"And if I were put to it," continued the old officer, in a louder tone, "I could count the masts of the frigates that pass the Ferrol."

"Draw it mild, Don Melchor," said a voice. There was a round of suppressed laughter in the dark, for Señor de las Cuevas inspired all the sea-folk with profound respect.

The old sailor turned his head angrily in the direction of the jeering remark, and, after silently trying to pierce the gloom, he said in a severe tone:

"If I knew who that was who said that I would chuck him into the sea."

Nobody dared say a word, nor was a sign of a smile seen, for it was well known in Sarrio that the Señor de las Cuevas was quite equal to fulfilling his threat.

He had served more than forty years in the navy, and had won the reputation of being a brave, punctilious officer; but his severity bordered on cruelty. When no commander of a ship exercised the old maritime laws, Don Melchor still strove to keep them in practise. It was told with horror in the town that a sailor was drowned through his making him pass three times under the keel according to the old punishment for certain transgressions; and more than a hundred men had been crippled by his blows, or had had the skin taken off their backs by his use of the rope.

However, there was no pilot or sailor who could be compared with him in his knowledge of all pertaining to the sea, the weather, ships, and all the secrets of navigation.

The little green light continued its slow approach until the form of the "Bella Paula" was visible to the naked eye, and, moreover, two or three black spots could be seen hovering around her from different sides. They were the pilot's launch and the auxiliary boats, ready to tow the ship when necessary. Sail was crowded on the ship, as there was scarcely any wind. However, it was too near the breakwater not to be dangerous. At least Don Melchor thought so, for he began to swear under his breath, and to seem uneasy. At last, no longer able to restrain himself, although he knew he was not within earshot, he cried out:

"Furl the maintopsail, Domingo! What are you waiting for?"

He had scarcely uttered these words when the almost imperceptible forms of the sailors were seen on the mastheads.

"We shall be all right now," exclaimed Don Melchor.

"Don Domingo would snap his finger at you," murmured the sailor who had incurred the old officer's wrath, under his breath.

The hulk of the ship, painted black, with a line of white on the upper decks, now stood out clearly from the dark background.

The eyes of the spectators, grown accustomed to the gloom, could discern perfectly all that was passing on board.

Two figures were on the quarter-deck, the captain and the coasting pilot, and at the bow stood the ship pilot.

"And the gaff-sail?" shouted Don Melchor again.

The sail of the mizzen-mast fell, as if in obedience to his voice. The wind was insufficient to fill the lower sails, and the canvas hung from the mast, limp and dilapidated as a draggled ball-dress. Soon all sails were furled and the ship was motionless until it slowly made way when taken in tow by the two boats. The figures of the rowers moved measuredly on the benches and the voices of the coxswains singing out, "Pull ahead; pull ahead!" broke the silence of the night.

But the rowers were so feeble in comparison to the bulk in tow that the ship made but slow way. When at the end of a quarter of an hour she managed to get some thirty lengths off the head of the mole, a rope was thrown from one of the boats on to the sea wall to help tack the ship.

"Captain, captain!" cried a stentorian voice from the crowd.

"What is it?" they replied from the ship.

"Is the Señorita de las Cuevas on board?"

"Yes."

"Then as long as the Señorita de las Cuevas is all right, all the rest may go to the devil."

The joke provoked much merriment in the crowd, until silence again reigned.

The ship now began to tack, being dragged ashore by the rope, which creaked with the tension of the hold; the people on the mole began talking with those on board, but they were silent and taciturn, being more concerned with the management of the ship than the questions directed to them. Then came a fresh ebullition of the jocose spirit of the sailors of the place, and fun was poked at those on board, more especially at a certain fellow who looked like a heap of skins, and whom they nicknamed Bruin, as he moved from one side to another with the awkwardness of a bear, handling the ropes and casting grunts of scorn at the crowd.

"I say, Bruin, you will be glad to have a dish of fish, eh?"

"Rejoice, O Bruin, for there is cider in Llandone's cellar."

"Is it hot in Norway?"

"Too hot for a rogue like you," growled Bruin, as he furled a sail.

This remark was received by the sailors with shouts of laughter.

"Keep clear," called the pilot from the quarter-deck.

"Hold there, on board!" returned the sailor who held the slack end of the rope.

The rope fell into the sea and dashed against the side of the ship. She was now close to the breakwater. The tide was not high enough to anchor by the old mole. The captain called out to the pilot:

"Sound."

The pilot said to the sailor at his side:

"Drop anchor."

The anchor fell into the sea with a strident sound of chains. Then the windlass was heard at work.

"Are you going to moor the ship, Domingo?" asked Don Melchor.

"Yes, señor," returned the captain.

"It is not necessary; you can warp ahead with two anchors. In an hour you will be able to get in."

"One way is as good as another for me," said the officer in a low voice, shrugging his shoulders, and then, in a loud tone, he added:

"Drop a second anchor," whereupon a second anchor fell into the sea with the same harsh sound as the first.

"How are you, uncle?" cried a clear boyish voice from the ship.

"Hello, Gonzalito! arrived all right, my boy?"

"Perfectly; here I come."

And with great agility the young fellow swung himself down by a rope into the boat.

"Let us go and meet him," said Don Rosendo, taking a step or two forward.

But Señor de las Cuevas caught the merchant by the arm and held him like a vise.

"Where are you going?"

"What is it?" asked the cod-merchant, in alarm. "Ah! it is true I did not recollect that this was the lower stage, the darkness—such a long time here, the dizziness from keeping one's eyes on the ship. My God! what would have become of me if you had not caught hold of me?"

"Nothing, you would only have been stunned on the stones below."

"Holy Virgin!" exclaimed Don Rosendo, turning dreadfully pale, while a cold sweat bathed his brow, and his legs trembled.

"Don't be alarmed at what is past and gone, but let us go down and meet Gonzalito!"

So they went to the end of the mole, where a manly, tall, red-haired, fine young fellow had just landed, dressed in a cloak which nearly reached down to his heels.

"Uncle!"

"Gonzalo!"

The two tall men then fell into each other's arms. Don Rosendo also received the young man with effusion. But he was so taken up with the narrow escape he had just had from losing his life, that he soon relapsed into his gloomy and melancholy mood, and he could hardly reply to the dock-yard master's questions as to the disposition of the captain's cargo.

They then started off to Don Melchor's house, which was situated in the highest part of the town, commanding an extensive view of the sea. During the walk Gonzalo left his uncle to go on in front, while he diffidently asked Don Rosendo a few questions about his family.

"How is Doña Paula? Is she as smiling as ever? And Pablo? Is he still as fond of horses? And Venturita? I suppose she has grown a big girl now?" Pause. "And Cecilia, is she well?" he finally asked abruptly.

But the Señor de Belinchon only gave monosyllabic answers to all these questions.

"Do you know, Gonzalo," he said, stopping suddenly, "that I might have killed myself just now?"

"How?"

He then gave a full account of the incident of the mole, and when the story was ended, he again relapsed into a state of profound melancholy.

"I suppose the family is in bed," said Gonzalo, after he had sufficiently sympathized (at least in his own opinion) with the late peril of the merchant.

"No, they are at the theatre—one never knows what may happen, eh?"

"So you've got a theatrical company here, eh?"

"Yes, for some days past. Do you know I thought I should have been killed, Gonzalo?"

"Tush! You might, perhaps, have broken a leg, or at the worst, a rib or two."

"Well, that would have been bad enough!" exclaimed the Señor de Belinchon, with a sigh.

By this time they had proceeded some distance into the town, and arriving at a certain street, Don Rosendo took leave of the uncle and nephew. He held out his hand in a sad way, saying:

"I must go and fetch my family from the theatre. Until to-morrow, and a good night's rest to you, Gonzalo."

"Until to-morrow—kind regards to all."

Then the Señor de las Cuevas and his nephew went on together to their house; and the traveler had to undergo a torrent of questions not relative to his visit to England, but concerning particulars of the voyage home.

"What wind did you have? Pretty blusterous, eh? I suppose it hardly sank once? The ship didn't pitch much, eh? She was well loaded. You never sailed with all that canvas, eh? You had to reef on leaving Liverpool, eh? I know the course well."

Gonzalo replied to the questions in an absent-minded manner, for he really hardly took them in, as he was walking along in a state of abstraction, with his head down.

"What is the matter, Gonzalito? You seem low-spirited."

"I? Bah! no, señor."

"I know you are."

They proceeded some distance in silence, and Don Melchor, striking his forehead, exclaimed:

"I know what it is!"

"What?"

"You are longing for the sea again. I have gone through just the same. I used to leap ashore after any voyage, and then I was seized with a fit of depression and a strong desire to return to the ship! This lasted two or three days, until I got accustomed to it. The fact is, I longed to get into port, but once there, I wished to be on board again. I don't know what there is so attractive in the sea, eh? That air so pure! The motion! The freedom! I know you are longing to return to the ship, eh?" he concluded, with a mischievous smile, to show his perspicacity.

"Bother it all! what I am longing for, uncle, is to go and see my sweetheart."

Don Melchor was dumfounded.

"Is that true?"

"Of course it is."

The Señor de las Cuevas reflected a minute, and then said:

"All right; perhaps you would like to go and meet her at the theatre? In the meanwhile I will go and see if Domingo has improved."

"How can he improve? He is a first-rate fellow," returned the youth, smiling.

The uncle, oblivious of the irony, looked at him with scorn.

"Get along! I see you return as silly as you went. I will wait supper for you."

"Don't wait for me, uncle," replied Gonzalo, already some distance off. "Perhaps I shall not want supper."

Then, without running, but with extraordinary swiftness, thanks to his unusually long legs, he strode through the streets, lighted here and there by oil lamps, in the direction of the theatre. Any one meeting him just then would have taken him for one of the many Englishmen who occasionally come to Sarrio on shipping business, to reconnoitre mining districts, or to start some industry. His colossal height and his stout, robust appearance are not characteristic features of the Spanish race, although one comes across them in the north; then that long coat, those double-soled boots, and strange-shaped hat denoted the foreigner. A glance at the face completed the illusion, for it was fair; and the long red beard, and blue, or, more properly called, azure eyes are almost always seen in the northern races.

CHAPTER IV

THE BETROTHAL

THE family of Las Cuevas, to which Gonzalo belonged, had from time immemorial been huge in stature, and seafaring by profession. His father had been a sailor, his grandfather a sailor, his uncles sailors, and the sons of these uncles also sailors. Gonzalo when not eight years of age was left orphaned of both father and mother, and possessed of a considerable fortune, managed by his uncle and guardian, Don Melchor, in whose care he had been left by his father at his death. The old sailor greatly wished his ward to continue the uninterrupted course of the Cuevas with regard to a profession. To awaken in him a love of the sea, or to make him take a fancy to it, he bought him a beautiful sailing boat, in which they both took trips, or went on fishing expeditions. But the good man's plans could not prevail against his nephew's predisposition for the land. He cared for nothing to do with the sea, but the fish out of it, and that only when dressed and steaming on the table. However, he managed sometimes to enjoy himself with a kettle, cooking an impromptu meal in some out-of-the-way spot on the coast, seated on a rock whence bubbled beautiful fresh drinking water. At fourteen Gonzalo had grown into a fine young fellow in the second class of the private college of Sarrio, which sent him up to the Capital every year for the examination, where he generally won the qualification "good," and once and again, but very rarely, that of "highly commended."

He was much liked by his schoolfellows for his open, frank disposition, while he was respected for his ability to deal powerful blows. The gentlefolk of the town made much of him on account of his position and the family to which he belonged, and the sailors and other people of the place loved him for his frank, equable nature.

After graduating as bachelor of arts, he remained three years in Sarrio without doing anything. He got up late, and spent the greater part of the day at the casino playing billiards, in which game he became an expert. In spite of being the spoiled child of the place, he visited at few houses, preferring the stupid, demoralizing life of the café, to which he had become accustomed. Nevertheless, as he was not wanting in intelligence, and being of a naturally active turn of mind, he sometimes turned his attention to the study of some branch of science. He liked mineralogy, and many afternoons he left the casino and the billiards to repair to the suburbs of the town, in search of minerals and fossils, until he had quite a valuable collection. Then he took up the microscope for a time, and after sending for a costly one from Germany he devoted himself to the examination of diatomaceæ, and he arranged them admirably well upon the little crystals, which he cut himself. Finally, a book upon brewing having fallen into his hands, he devoted himself enthusiastically to its study. He ordered several works on the subject from England, and began to think that this unpractised industry might be started with advantage in Sarrio. He seriously thought of opening a brewery, but, confiding the project to his uncle, the old man was furious, and gave vent to a series of inarticulate grunts, all beyond the normal diapason, which ended with the exclamation:

"What! a Cuevas start a brewery! The son of a captain, the nephew of a rear-admiral! Impossible! You are off your head, Gonzalo. It is well said that idleness is the mother of every vice. If you had passed through the naval college, as I advised you, you would have been first lieutenant by now, and would not be running about with such mad ideas."

Gonzalo was silent, but he did not cease reading his treatises on the industry. He soon saw that, without visiting the chief breweries, and without studying the subject seriously, he could never attain any real knowledge of it, and so he determined to go to England and learn the business of a civil engineer. When he ventured to broach the subject to his uncle, the sailor did not object to the word engineer, but the attributive adjunct of civil aroused the same storm of invectives as the brewery had called forth.

"Civil, civil! nowadays everything shady is called civil. Be a straightforward engineer of roads, and bridges or mines."

At this time he knew, or, to speak more correctly, for everybody knows each other in Sarrio, he became acquainted with, the Señorita de Belinchon. One day his uncle sent him to the rich merchant's house to ask him if he could give him a bill of exchange on Manila. Don Rosendo was not in his office, which was on the ground floor of the house, but as the business was urgent, Gonzalo decided to go upstairs. The maid who opened the door was very alert.

"Come this way, Don Gonzalo; the Señorita Cecilia will tell you where the master is."

He was taken into an untidy room, with heaps of clothes upon the floor and on the table, at which the eldest daughter of the Belinchons was ironing a shirt, in a costume not befitting her station, for it was a scanty, narrow

skirt, an apron tied round her waist like a workwoman, and her feet in shabby slippers. She did not blush at the young man finding her in such an attire and engaged in such a menial occupation, nor did she exclaim, as many girls would have done in her place: "Goodness, what a state you find me in!" putting her hands to her hair and her throat.

Nothing of the sort; she suspended her task for a minute, smiled sweetly, and waited to hear what the youth had to say.

"Good-evening," he said with a blush.

"Good-evening, Gonzalo," she returned.

"Can I see your father?"

"I do not know if he is at home; I will go and see," replied the girl, leaving the ironing upon the table, and passing in front of him.

When she had proceeded a few steps she turned back and said:

"Is your uncle well?"

"Yes, señora, yes—I mean no; for some days he has not left his bed—he has a dreadful cold."

"It is nothing serious?"

"I think not, señora."

The girl went on her way smiling; she was pleased at Gonzalo calling her señora, for she was not sixteen, and he spoke as if she were over twenty. They knew each other like brother and sister, but they had never hitherto behaved like grown-up people. They met every day in the street, at the promenade, at the theatre, or at church. When they were quite little, Cecilia recollected that one afternoon at the Elorrio Fair, when dancing the giraldilla with some other little girls of her own age, some rough boys began teasing them, pulling their hair, pushing them about, and running in the way so as to spoil their dance, and upset them. Gonzalo, then a boy of thirteen, seeing this rude conduct, ran to the little girls' assistance; and with a kick here, a push there, and a few blows all round, he soon dispersed the rude boys. The eyes of the little dancers gazed at him in admiration, and an undying feeling of gratitude toward the heroic lad filled those tender hearts of five to ten years.

Another time, years afterward, on St. John's Day, Gonzalo lent his boat to her and her family, for a little sea trip, as all the boats and launches were full on that occasion.

But neither of these circumstances had constituted much intercourse between the young people. If they met face to face, Gonzalo would raise his hand to his hat; if not, they would pass as if they did not see each other, in spite of the acquaintance, if not intimate friendship, existing between his uncle and Señor Belinchon. For the Bohemian life of the café, his rare association with girls, had made Gonzalo a shy, retiring youth.

"Come this way, Gonzalo; papa is waiting for you in the dining-room," said the girl, when she reappeared. "I hope your uncle will get better."

"Many thanks," he returned abruptly, and being so tall, he knocked against the lamp hanging in the hall so that it nearly fell to the ground.

He cast an agonized look at it, and quickly steadied it, while his face grew red with confusion.

"Has it hurt you?" asked Cecilia, anxiously.

"No, indeed, señora—on the contrary, dear me! I nearly broke it."

And he became more and more confused.

Our young friend was at that time of life when he would fall in love with a broom. He was rather late in reaching this susceptible stage, as is often the case when the physical organism overbalances the nervous. Therefore, Señorita de Belinchon, with no claim to prettiness, suddenly aroused a sort of feeling in him easily mistaken for love, and the result of that short interview was that Gonzalo henceforth went out of his way to pass the house of the De Belinchons, with his longing eyes fixed on the windows for a chance glimpse of the young lady; he went on Sunday to eight o'clock mass at St. Andrew's Church, because Doña Paula and her family went there; at the theatre he ventured to cast many a glance in her direction, and he occasionally dared to raise his hat to her, but when he did so, he blushed violently and cast furtive looks around, trembling lest he should have betrayed the nascent feeling of his heart.

Innocent Gonzalo! Long before he was aware himself of his state of mind the whole town knew of it. Nothing could be hidden, especially anything to do with a young man and woman, from the sharp eyes of the gossips of a place so small as Sarrio. And not only did they know what was going on, but they made up their minds that the marriage was certain to come off sooner or later.

Nevertheless, months went by and the matter did not advance one step. However, Gonzalo continued to give the same signs of his fancy for the girl, and he spent a long time every day after dinner in walking up and down in front of the rich merchant's house on his way to the casino. Cecilia would be at the window sewing; he would raise his hat and then go to the billiard table, and so it was the next day. Don Melchor sent him twice on messages to Don Rosendo, but he always had the good luck to find him in his office. We say good luck because Gonzalo trembled at the idea of going upstairs and meeting Cecilia.

He was now twenty years of age. The idea of qualifying himself as a civil engineer and taking up some occupation occasionally crossed his mind in this idle life. A friend at this time returning from a military academy, a conversation with an English engineer, the tone of contempt in which those who have no occupation were spoken of in the casino, suddenly awoke in him a desire for work. At last he told his uncle that, with his permission, he would go to England to study something and see the world.

As Don Melchor could make no objection to this just and laudable suggestion, Gonzalo a few days later appeared at several houses of relations and friends, where he had not set foot for years, to take his leave of them, and on a beautiful, balmy spring afternoon he embarked with great pomp on the big "Vigia" for England.

Did he recollect Cecilia? We do not know. Temperaments like those of our friend are a long time falling a prey to passion—great havoc as it may make in the end.

Three years went by. He finished his course as an engineer, which is brief and practical in England, and then made up his mind to visit the factories of England, Spain, and Germany. During the time of his studies the recollection of Cecilia occasionally occurred to him without arousing any very deep feeling. But in the spring, when

the blood circulates more freely in the veins, and Mother Nature gives her lesson in the verdure of the fields, the vivid colors of the flowers, the effects of sunshine, the soft, balmy air, and above all in her more faithful interpreters, the birds, Gonzalo's thoughts turned to matrimony. And whenever the idea crossed his mind, it was accompanied by the image of the eldest daughter of the De Belinchons.

"This way, Gonzalo; papa is waiting for you. Have you hurt yourself?"

The words still rang in his ears, and the recollection of the kind tone in which they were said filled his young heart with a feeling of love. The girl was not beautiful, but her eyes were, and her modest, pleasant manner and the tone of her voice were all full of the charm so attractive in her sex.

"I should not mind marrying her," he said with a sigh to himself, as he thought how impossible it would be for him to breathe a word of love in her ears, or in those of any girl.

One day, when writing to a great friend in Sarrio, he suddenly thought of asking if Cecilia Belinchon were married. In reply, he learned that she was still single, and that, although young men frequented the house, probably more attracted by De Belinchon's money than his daughter's charms, it was not known that she had so far listened to any one of them.

On reading this letter the blood mounted to the cheek of the civil engineer, and he was foolish enough to think (will the reader think him very conceited?) that if Cecilia turned the cold shoulder on her admirers it was, perhaps, because she was prepossessed in his favor. Then he formed the plan of declaring his feelings in a letter, for he thought it would be less awkward to do it thus while far away.

Nevertheless, he hesitated, and when he took the pen in his hand to write the first line he dropped it at the thought of the surprise of the girl on the receipt of the letter. Some days elapsed. He could not get rid of the idea. At last, by dint of much subtle reasoning, he determined to write the letter. If she laughed at him, what of it? He would not be there to see, for in that case he would stay away from Sarrio; and if perchance he ever returned, he would manage to keep clear of her.

So at last the letter was written, but terrified at the idea of posting it, he kept it in his writing-case for some days. A few glasses of spirits were required to give him courage to post it, and when slightly elevated by the potion he took the letter from his writing-case, rushed into the street and dropped it into the first letter-box he came across.

"My God! What have I done?"

The effects of the libation had suddenly vanished, and he colored up to the roots of his hair, as if the mocking eyes of all the people of Sarrio were gazing at him through the gaping mouth of the letter-box.

He put his fingers into the aperture, in the vain attempt to withdraw the ill-fated epistle, but a shark could not have swallowed it more effectually, and the mouth of the box looked gaping and ready for more. For one moment he thought of going to the post-office to reclaim it, but the thought of the particulars which would have to be given so alarmed him that he preferred leaving the matter to fate rather than undergo such an ordeal.

Eight days of trembling suspense went by. By the time he could expect an answer his anxiety was overwhelming, and he even began to think he might see his own bold, ugly handwriting returned to him in an envelope.

A week, and then a fortnight, elapsed, but still no answer came.

He calmed himself with the vague hope of the non-arrival of his letter at its destination; then he fancied that Cecilia might have torn it up, without mentioning it to anybody. But, lo and behold, when he had given up all hope, he found on his plate, at breakfast-time, a letter from Spain, in an unknown lady's writing. His excitement at the sight was indescribable. He turned as white as the mantelpiece—his heart seemed to jump into his mouth. He opened the envelope with a trembling hand.

"Ah-a-a!" he sighed, with relief, after devouring the contents in two seconds. He then put his hand to his side, wiped the sweat from his brow with his pocket-handkerchief, took up the letter again, and reread it quietly.

It was really from Cecilia; it was slightly ironical in tone—however, it was not a rebuff.

What fancy could have seized him for her after four years' absence? Her parents—who had opened the letter before she did—were equally surprised, and thought it was a rash act, peculiar to youth—a passing idea, of which he had probably already repented. She quite coincided with their opinion, although she had consented to follow their advice of writing to him, as they had always maintained friendly relations with his family. This letter filled him with delight; it was not the scornful refusal he had expected. Then he grew sad, and then cheerful, as he read and reread the letter in search of a clear meaning. Was it kind—or was it unkind? He hastened to reply, imploring forgiveness for his boldness, and confirming his previous declaration with renewed and more vehement protestations.

The girl wrote again in a few days, in a kinder and more affectionate manner, and then Gonzalo sent another letter. An interchange of photographs followed, and sometimes Doña Paula enclosed a few lines in the letters sent by her daughter.

In time the young people were formally engaged, and the marriage was arranged.

Don Melchor corresponded with his nephew on the subject, and he called upon Don Rosendo. It was at last settled that Gonzalo should return in the spring, when the wedding was to take place.

CHAPTER V

PLANNING THE HOME

THE rest of the audience was leaving the theatre, and as Gonzalo met the people pouring from the door, many of them recognized him, and he was soon surrounded by old friends who were all warm in their welcome.

The first to throw his arms around his neck was Don Mateo; then came Don Pedro Miranda; then the mayor, Don Roque; then Don Victoriano and his wife, Doña Rosario, and their three daughters.

Thus a circle soon gathered round the young man, who responded effusively to the greetings, embraces, and hand-pressures which reached him from all sides.

The sailors and women of the place also joined the señores in this demonstration of affection, and nothing was heard but exclamations of delight and admiration.

"How stout you have grown, Gonzalito!"

"You are a fine young man!"

"Why don't you grow like that, Periquito?"

"Don Gonzalo, you are a head taller than all the other fellows of Sarrio!"

"Grow! He has not grown; he has doubled his height. Come here, Grenadier, and embrace me directly."

A shipmaster declared that the youth was as like the Prince of Wales as two drops of water, although Gonzalo might be taller.

The tall figure of the youth certainly towered above the group, and he reached his hand over the heads of those about him to the friends who could not get close to him, and his fine, open countenance beamed on all.

Don Mateo, on tiptoe, pulled him by the arm so that he bent down, and then he whispered in his ear:

"What a performance you have lost, Gonzalo! It is a pity you did not arrive in the afternoon. The soprano sings like an angel! And the dancing! The dancing! I tell you, boy, they don't have better in Bilbao or Corunna. But never mind, I will have the performance again before the company leaves—or it won't say much for my influence."

But Gonzalo paid little heed to these words. With his eyes fixed on the door, he was waiting in breathless expectation for the appearance of the De Belinchon family, which, as one of the first and most patrician of the place, always waited behind to avoid mixing with the plebeians. At last, by the light of the lamp burning under the archway of the entrance, he caught sight of the face of Doña Paula, followed by that of Cecilia, and he tremulously advanced to greet them.

The girl turned as red as a poppy. This was natural, but for the mother to do so also was less natural. What was he to her? Why was she to blush as much as the daughter? But it was what she did to perfection. The voices of all three trembled, and after inquiring after each other's health, their tongues seemed tied. The looks of curiosity from the people added to their embarrassment. Fortunately, Pablito now approached with Venturita, and our young friend greeted the former affectionately and gave a ceremonious bow to the latter.

Pablo smiled.

"Don't you know her? She is my sister, Venturita."

"Oh! How could I know her? She is a woman. How do you do, Ventura?"

The girl gave him her hand with a mocking, roguish expression that quite confused him.

They then all turned toward home. Venturita ran in front, dragging her brother with her. Doña Paula, Cecilia, and Gonzalo walked behind. Don Rosendo closed the procession with his old friend, Don Pedro Miranda. The streets were dark, for it was only at the corners that there were lamps.

The distance between the three groups of people gradually increased.

Gonzalo made desperate efforts to sustain conversation with his bride-elect and future mother-in-law; but the girl never opened her lips, and Doña Paula was very far from being a Madame de Staël, and as the young man had never consulted the manual of conversation, he could not be called brilliant. In their letters they had arrived at the confidential stage. Doña Paula had put post-scripts into Cecilia's epistles, to which Gonzalo had replied with little jokes; he had sent stamps and caricatures for Ventura, and in every way had comported himself as a member of the family. But now the three were quite embarrassed, for our young friend had never before spoken to the Señora de Belinchon, and to Cecilia he had only addressed the words that we have recorded.

But there in front was Venturita, laughing with her brother; and the engaged couple were quite certain that the merriment was at their expense. Nevertheless, by the time they reached the house they were more at home with each other, and there were signs of increasing friendliness between them. The party collected together on reaching the door of the De Belinchons' abode, which was situated in the Rua Nueva, the best street in Sarrio, and, like all the houses in that quarter, it was large and handsome.

As Gonzalo had not yet supped, Don Rosendo asked him to join them at their evening meal; and the invitation was given so cordially, that the young man, who wished for nothing better, willingly accepted it.

Señor Miranda and his son then took leave, and the Belinchon family, with the newcomer who was soon to be one of them, entered the house.

In the anteroom the ladies took off their cloaks and hats.

The light seemed to make the affianced pair shy. Gonzalo was now well able to see his betrothed, who had not improved with years. She was taller, but also thinner—love affairs don't make girls grow plump; her nose seemed a trifle sharper; but her beautiful eyes, so soft and intelligent, still shone like two stars.

He was greatly struck with the change in Venturita, the child he had seen skipping to school on the arm of a schoolfellow.

She was now a woman, a full-grown woman, not so much from her height as from the roundness and fulness of her figure, and a certain directness of look touched with a dash of coquetry.

They cast a rapid look at each other, as if they met for the first time; and Gonzalo said in a low voice to Doña Paula:

"How Venturita has improved! She is a beautiful girl."

Low as it was, the girl overheard the remark; she pouted disdainfully and went straight to the dining-room, without betraying the gratification his spontaneous admiration had given her.

The table was laid, a patriarchal provincial board, abundant and clean, without flowers or any of the elegant accessories which are now the fashion. All Gonzalo's shyness vanishing at the sight of the meal, he soon felt quite at home. A feeling of cheerfulness pervaded them all. They exchanged remarks and smiles; Gonzalo took Pablito by the arm and asked him after his horses; Doña Paula arranged the order of the places; Venturita, who was already seated, began eating olives and throwing the stones at her sister, with knowing winks, while Cecilia, her cheeks aflame, put her finger on her lip to call her to order. Don Rosendo had returned from putting on his jacket and smoking cap, as he could not eat supper without them. His wife now invited the visitor to take the chair next to Cecilia, but she had taken her seat at the other end of the table.

"What are you about? Why don't you come to your proper place?" asked Doña Paula in surprise, whereupon the girl, without replying, quietly rose and blushing took the chair next to her betrothed.

The classic dish of buttered eggs was already steaming on the table.

"Come, help Gonzalo—serve him first," said Doña Paula to her daughter, with the benign smile befitting a wife whose ideas were in accord with those given by Saint Paul in his celebrated epistle.

Cecilia hastened to obey, and filled the plate of her future husband. He always had an excellent appetite, fitting for his great size, but now, sharpened by the sea air and some hours' fasting, he was voracious. He ate everything that was put before him, without stopping a moment, and without leaving a morsel, and Cecilia, as we can suppose, was indefatigable in serving him.

Directly he began to eat Gonzalo lost his shyness, for the pressing necessity of satisfying his enormous appetite was all-absorbing. Cecilia, on the contrary, hardly touched her food. Seeing two little pieces of ham about the size of two filberts on her plate, the young man said:

"Whom is that plate for—the parrot?"

"No; it is for me."

"And are you not afraid it will give you indigestion?"

It was the first joke that he had ventured to make with his bride-elect. She smilingly returned:

"I never eat more than that."

Doña Paula whispered into Venturita's ear:

"Don't you think they are very stiff with each other?"

Venturita repeated the remark in an undertone to Pablo, and he passed it on to his father. All four began laughing and casting glances at the engaged couple, who looked confused, asking with their eyes the reason of the sudden merriment.

"Mama, do you want me to tell them what we are laughing at?"

"Tell them."

"Then, señores, we were thinking that you might be less stiff with each other."

The bride and bridegroom-elect hung their heads and smiled.

The good spirits of the supper party now broke forth in laughter and jokes. Pablito asked his future brother-in-law questions about horse racing, skating rinks, and other more or less enthralling topics of the kind.

Only Cecilia was silent in the intensity of her happiness, shown in the brilliant scarlet of her cheeks, the heat of which she tried in vain to cool with the back of her hand.

When she thought she was unobserved she cast long, loving looks at her fiancé, whose fine, insatiable appetite, the sign of life and energy, surprised and captivated her; and she gazed at him in adoring admiration as a splendid type of masculine strength.

But these long, ecstatic looks did not escape Venturita, who managed by signs to draw the attention of Pablo and her mother to them. Gonzalo acknowledged the attentions of his fiancée with a rapid "Many thanks" without looking at her, for fear of blushing. When he did look up to speak to Pablo, his eyes always encountered Venturita's, and her smiling, mocking glance somewhat disconcerted him.

At last they left the table and dispersed. Don Rosendo and Ventura, disappeared, and Pablo, after a few minutes, following their example.

Doña Paula and the engaged couple remained alone in the dining-room, and all three sat on low chairs in a corner together. Soon nothing but soft whispers were audible, as if they were at the confessional. The three chairs were close together, and with their heads almost touching, they began an animated conversation.

Doña Paula soon broached the all-important question.

"This is the twenty-eighth of April. There are only four months from now to the first of September," and here she cast a long, knowing glance at the couple.

If it had been possible for Cecilia to get redder, she would have done so.

Gonzalo's lips wreathed in a meaningless smile, and he lowered his eyes.

After looking at them for a minute, as if enjoying their confusion, Doña Paula continued:

"It is necessary to think of the trousseau."

"Heavens! It is early for that," exclaimed the girl in dismay, while her heart leaped into her mouth.

"It is not so, Cecilia; you do not know the time the embroideresses take in such matters. Nieves took a month to embroider two petticoats for Doña Rosario's daughter—and Martina is slower than she."

"Nieves embroiders very well."

"There is no embroideress in the town to hold a candle to Martina. She has hands of gold."

"I prefer the embroideries of Nieves."

"Then, if you wish it, let her embroider your clothes, but I—" said Doña Paula, looking at her daughter in an offended, haughty sort of way.

"I don't say so," returned the girl in alarm; "I only say I like the work of Nieves better than Martina's."

The trousseau soon became the subject of conversation. It was discussed from every point of view, and with the gravity and the care it deserved.

To whom should they entrust the hemming of the linen sheets? To whom the common ones? Who should make the underlinen? Where should the mantles be bought, etc.? All these questions were discussed, weighed, and considered. Doña Paula gave her opinion; Cecilia affected to contradict, but in reality what did she care?

Her whole soul was so filled with the thought of her approaching marriage that her voice trembled with emotion, and she could hardly speak, while her eyes glowed with rapture, and shone like two fine stars on a soft summer night.

"How hot it is!" she exclaimed every now and then, putting her hands upon her flaming cheeks.

Gonzalo assented with an inane smile to what was said, and frequently changed the position of his long legs, which

were cramped from the lowness of his chair.

When they had discussed the linen of the trousseau, they passed on to the dresses, and the conversation became more animated, and Cecilia saw her betrothed without looking at him, and the eyes of Doña Paula, as she gazed at them both, grew softer and softer, their breath mingled, and the shoulders of the future bride and bridegroom touched each other.

The soft whispers, the lowered light of the lamp, which scarcely reached them, the frequent contact with the arm of her beloved, all combined to fill Cecilia with overwhelming emotion. Quite overcome, she got up two or three times and kissed her mother warmly; when she did this the third time, Doña Paula saw what it betokened and, with a compassionate, smiling glance, said:

"Poor little thing! My poor little thing!"

Cecilia covered her eyes with her hands, and remained so for some time.

"What is the matter?" said Doña Paula at last.

"Nothing, nothing."

But she kept her eyes covered.

"But what is the matter, my daughter?"

"Nothing," she replied at last, taking her hands from her face, and she smiled, but her eyes were wet.

"I know, I know," returned the mother. "You want the salts; you feel faint."

"No, I am not faint; I am quite well."

The conversation was then renewed, and Doña Paula expressed her wish that Gonzalo should come and live with them. This he rather objected to at first, as he knew his uncle would not like it, nevertheless he ended by conceding to the entreaties of both ladies. It was so natural that they should not want to be separated! "You can both be quite independent, I will take care of that. There is the large room, the blue one, you know, Cecilia; it has a large alcove; then you only want the study for Gonzalo. But I have thought of that. Just by the large room there is the wardrobe-room, that opens on the courtyard; it is nice and light. It is all in disorder now, but, with a little trouble, it could be turned into a very nice room. Would you like to see it, Gonzalo?"

The young man replied that it was not necessary, that he believed all she said, and that he had as good as seen it; but the lady insisted on it, and, taking a flat candlestick, she escorted him to the other end of the house.

"This is the room—large, is it not? Two windows. The alcove is large enough for two beds, let alone for one," she added, with a glance at her daughter, who turned aside to shut a window.

"Let us go and see the wardrobe-room—"

And leaving the apartment, crossing a passage, and turning round a corner, they entered another room full of cupboards and lumber.

"Don't mind about the distance, for it is really next to the large room; it only wants a door of communication to be made between."

Gonzalo turned to his intended and said softly:

"Why does not mama thee and thou me as your papa does? Ask her from me—I do not like to."

Then Cecilia approached her mother's ear and said in a soft voice, which trembled with shyness:

"Gonzalo would like you to thee and thou him."

"What do you say, child?" asked Doña Paula, putting her hand to her ear.

Cecilia, with a great effort, raised her voice a little:

"Gonzalo asks why you do not thee and thou him as papa does?"

"Ah! I am glad the suggestion comes from him, otherwise I should not have ventured. Very well, then, when a door is made here in the wall, you will be able to go from the large room into this one without crossing the passage—do you like the room? Is it large enough?"

"Too large; my business at the present moment does not require much space."

Cecilia looked anxious, as if something were on her mind. She opened her mouth several times as if about to speak, and then lacked courage. At last, after a long pause, she ventured to say:

"One thing is wanting, mama."

"What?"

The girl hesitated, as if to gain courage, and then, in a trembling voice, she said:

"There is no dressing-room for Gonzalo."

"That's true. I never thought of that. Where was my head? There is no room about here—wait a moment—wait. We might put the pantry downstairs, and then there would be that little room, which, nicely furnished, would perhaps do. The only thing is, it does not communicate with the other rooms; he will have to cross the passage."

"What does that matter?"

They then returned to the dining-room, and to the same seats in the corner. Presently Venturita came in, in a white peignoir, cut so as to show her alabaster throat and part of her beautiful neck; her hair hung loose over her shoulders, and her feet were shod with gorgeously embroidered Eastern slippers. She came to say "Good-night" before retiring to rest, and, approaching her mother, she gave her a kiss, making teasing faces at her sister the while, which Gonzalo could not see.

"Well, good-night," she said, giving Gonzalo her hand.

"Good-night," he returned, with an admiring glance, and in a tone of admiration not unnoticed by the girl.

She was just going away when a coquettish feeling made her turn back at the door and say to Cecilia:

"Where did you put the shoe-horn? I had to come in with slippers, as I could not find it."

Then she took the opportunity of showing her pretty foot.

"But it is there in the table drawer."

"If you only knew how sleepy I am," she said, advancing a step, and putting her hand on the head of her sister—"Do you know what I ought to do for it?" she added, with a smile. Gonzalo looked at her attentively. She was really

a perfect creature; the more he looked at her, the more he admired her particular charms. Her skin was soft, and shining as silk; her complexion pink and white; her mouth like a budding rose; her lips red and full enough to show two rows of even teeth; her hair golden, silky, and abundant; a drawing-room magazine would say that it fell over her shoulders like a cascade of sunbeams, or something to that effect.

Her only imperfection was her height. If she had taken after her mother in this respect, nobody could have found any fault with her excepting, perhaps, her friends.

Seeing she was an object of admiration, she went on walking about, turning herself round to be seen from all sides, posing in affected attitudes, asking impertinent questions of her sister, then laughing aimlessly and covering her with kisses, or pinching her unmercifully.

"Let me alone, Venturita; how wild you are to-day!" exclaimed Cecilia, with her kind, frank smile as she tried to get away from her.

"Go to bed!" said Doña Paula.

"I am going."

But instead of going, she embraced Cecilia again, and, tickling her, she managed to whisper into her ear:

"How are you enjoying yourself, you rogue? Don't make those large eyes at him, or you will frighten him. Good-by, good-by, Señores," she said in a louder voice, "and leave something for to-morrow, eh?"

"What a little silly!" cried Cecilia, blushing.

Doña Paula and Gonzalo smiled, and he said in a low voice:

"What lovely hair!"

Ventura overheard him, and shaking her locks, she said:

"It is false."

They all burst out laughing.

"Don't you believe it?" she asked in a serious tone, and approaching nearer.

"Pull it, and you will see it will come off in your hand."

The young man did not dare to comply, and continued to smile.

"Pull, pull," she insisted, turning her back to him, and holding her hair before his face.

Gonzalo raised his hand to the hair, but he only ventured to touch it caressingly.

"What! it has not come off! That is because it is well tied on."

And she ran out of the room.

The private conclave was prolonged for some time, and many more points of their future life were touched upon; and as Cecilia listened to her mother descanting upon what they should do when once they were married, she could hardly conceal the tremor of emotion that possessed her. She had taken her mother's hand, and she pressed it and caressed it in a nervous way; sometimes she raised it to her lips and kissed it passionately.

Doña Paula looked at her with sympathy, and smiled kindly at the joy that filled her daughter's heart.

The clock in the dining-room struck half-past twelve.

"Oh, how late! What will Don Rosendo say?"

"He never goes to bed before this time," replied Cecilia.

"Yes; but you know he takes some time to lock up," returned Doña Paula.

Cecilia was silent. Gonzalo shook hands with them warmly, promising to come the following day. Then he went to Señor Belinchon's study to take leave of him.

The mother and daughter went on talking in the same corner on the same theme, the former being the object of countless embraces and fervent kisses.

"These are not for me," said the lady, in a tone of mingled joy and sadness.

"Yes, mama; yes!" replied the girl, embracing her with still greater effusion.

In the meanwhile Don Rosendo was bringing the arduous and complicated task of locking and bolting the doors and windows to a successful termination.

He was not contented with locks and iron bars, but, to insure the non-violation of the sanctuary of his dwelling during the night, the rich merchant was in the habit of gumming pieces of paper over all the locks. These he examined carefully in the morning, to be quite certain that nobody had tampered with them. Then he put various bottles and pots upon the doorstep, so that if thieves came they would fall over them.

CHAPTER VI

THE CHIEF RESIDENTS OF SARRIO AT THEIR CLUB

DON MELCHOR DE LAS CUEVAS rose from the table, lighted a cigar and, offering one to his nephew, said:

"Let us go and have coffee."

Gonzalo was about to put the cigar in his pocket, not having hitherto been permitted to smoke in his uncle's presence; but the old man touched his arm, saying:

"Light it, my boy, light it; you are not a yunker now."

So the young fellow took out a match and began puffing at the Havana with enjoyment, and the men then left the house together, and proceeded slowly down the street with the air of utter comfort worn by powerful-looking men after a heavy meal. They were as silent and majestic as two magnificent cedars unruffled by a breeze. The women at work in their doorways looked after them with interest and admiration.

"Who's the young man with Don Melchor?"

"What! don't you know? 'Tis his nephew, Señor Gonzalo, who arrived last night in the 'Bella Paula.'"

"He is a fine, strapping fellow."

"Like his father, Don Martos, God rest his soul."

"And like his grandfather, Don Benito," added an old woman. "What a noble, fine-looking family they are!"

At the top of a street which commanded a view to the sea, Señor de las Cuevas stopped a minute to cast his eye over the waters.

"Fine weather at sea! a slight breeze coming up! Do you see them?" he added, with an expression of triumph after a minute.

"What?"

"The launches, man, the launches. Don't you see them?"

"I see nothing," returned Gonzalo, fixing his eyes on the horizon.

"You are just as you were; you see nothing but the soup in your plate," said the uncle, with a sarcastic smile.

The Café de la Marina was already full of people. The clatter of conversation and disputes, the clink of the glasses, the ring of the domino pieces on the marble table, made a deafening noise. The place was situated in the small square formed by the junction of the Rua Nueva with the harbor, and one side of the house looked on to the sea. Most of the captains and pilots who stopped at Sarrio on their cruises resorted thither, as did the majority of the residents, who, without being sailors, had a partiality for what was maritime.

The entrance of our friends was hailed with delight from different tables. Don Melchor was the most popular and the most highly respected frequenter of the café.

He had to greet all the assembled company, and take Gonzalo up to each of them.

The jolly fellows were all delighted with the young man, and wrung his hand almost to dislocation, while they were eager and hearty in their offers of a glass of wine or maraschino; and when this was refused on the plea of taking coffee upstairs, a profound gloom overspread their countenances.

As a matter of fact, Don Melchor was accustomed to have his coffee in the small saloon, which was a room on the first floor of the house, communicating with the café by an iron staircase, which the uncle and nephew finally ascended.

There the chief residents of the town were congregated, seated on a circular sofa, with little Japanese tables in front of them, on all of which coffee was served.

Through one of the doors, which was generally left open, could be seen the billiard room, where the same people always played, with the same on-lookers. When Don Melchor and his nephew entered a project was in course of discussion for keeping the poor women who sell vegetables and milk from intemperance.

And Gonzalo recollected that on a certain occasion, when he came thither to see his uncle before going to England, the same matter was then under discussion. The themes varied little in that assembly. The town continued its tranquil even course in the midst of its daily work. The only events that occasionally shook it from its lethargy were the arrival or departure of some important ship, the death of a well-known person, a dishonored bill, the paving of some street, the tax on some merchandise, the lightening of contraband goods, or the bad state of the harbor.

The women and young people were too much taken up with their own affairs to trouble about outside matters. But the arrival of any handsome young stranger caused a great sensation among the marriageable girls; and if any young man walked for the first time with Margarita at the Promenade, it was looked upon as a settled affair; if Severino of the ironmongery administered a beating to his wife, what could she expect after marrying such a drunken fellow? and the dress that a certain young girl wore on the Day of Our Lady made quite an excitement.

"You say it came from Madrid! What Madrid? Why, I saw it cut out at Martina's myself!"

The subscription dance announced at the Lyceum formed a great topic of discussion.

"I don't believe there will be a ball; the young men fight too shy of expense."

But the grave elders who frequented the Club despised these themes, albeit they sometimes condescended to touch upon them.

Gonzalo had seen Don Rosendo, Don Mateo, Don Pedro Miranda, and the mayor the previous evening. But Gabino Maza, Don Feliciano Gomez, M. Delaunay, the French engineer, Alvaro Peña, Marin, Don Lorenzo, Don Agapito, and five or six other men whom he had not yet seen, were there, and they all rose to embrace the young man.

Don Pedro Miranda, whom we have already mentioned, was a man considerably past seventy, small and insignificant looking, with a smooth bald head, large solemn eyes, and of a retiring disposition.

He was the richest landowner in the place, and no titled person in the town could have been a better representative of the aristocracy, in virtue of his own descent from an old family of landowners.

To this distinction, however, he attached but small importance. He was an unpretentious, courteous man, who consorted with all his neighbors regardless of his superior rank; and he was always extremely particular not to allude to money, or to be in any wise dictatorial or antagonistic to anybody.

But if he entirely waived the respect due to his birth, he was very jealous of his rights as a landowner.

Never was there a proprietor more proprietary than Don Pedro Miranda.

The institutions of ancient as well as modern law, the universities, the army and navy, the political constitution, and religion itself had no other excuse for existence in his eyes but that of contributing, directly or indirectly, to the preservation of his seigniorial rights.

The marvelous microcosm of the universe was designed for the support of his indisputable claim to the full possession of Praducos, a hamlet two miles from the town, and to his right of an annual fee of a hundred and fifty ducats in consideration of his title to the land at the mouth of the river.

This very clear sense of his rights engendered, from very excess of clearness, several disputes. A laborer would come to him and say:

"Señor, Joaquim the martin-breeder cut to-day some of the branches of your walnut tree which hung over into his garden."

"But the walnut tree was mine," exclaimed Don Pedro, crimson with rage and surprise.

"Yes, señor, but it hung over into his garden."

"What! The fellow dared to touch anything which is *mine—mine!*"

Thereupon a little lawsuit ensued, which, of course, he lost. He lost dozens of these lawsuits in the course of his life, without growing any wiser on the subject.

Don Roque de la Riva, the mayor of Sarrio, whom we had the honor of comparing, when we first saw him at the theatre, to a courtier of the time of Louis XV, or a coachman of some great house, was not distinguished for clearness of speech, for it was so indistinct and confused that his interlocutors had great difficulty in understanding him. We do not know whether the mutilation of his words took place in his mouth, throat, or nose, but it is a fact that they usually came forth transformed into such mysterious, vague, chaotic utterances that they were completely unintelligible. More especially was it impossible to talk with him after dinner, and this for no other reason, according to report, than because Don Roque would insist on patronizing a wine called Rivero, so strong that nobody could touch it without fear of getting intoxicated.

This head of the corporation used to leave home every afternoon, apparently alone, but in reality with an escort. His enormous shaven face was very red, and the color was accentuated in his huge Roman nose; his eyes, bloodshot and half closed, as if unable to bear the weight of his eyelids, looked slowly into every corner of the street with an expression of physical comfort; his ponderous, slow, vacillating step showed the sympathetic state between his psychical and physical faculties. Don Roque only had to come across some official, sweeper, watchman, or stone-breaker of the municipality to make his enjoyment complete.

When from afar he espied one, his eyelids were quickly raised and his nostrils quivered like those of a tiger at approach of prey. Suppose the fellow, scenting the approach of the tiger, passed into another street or tried to hide himself! Don Roque shouted to him, with a voice of thunder:

"Juan, Juaan, Juaaan!"

The victim heard and bowed his head.

"Have you taken the message to Don Lorenzo?"

"Yes, señor."

"Have you told the secretary that he must let the matter of the cemetery stand over?"

"Yes, señor."

"Have you taken the documents to the petty court of San Martin?"

"Yes, señor."

"Have you told Don Manuel that he must take away that rubbish in front of his house?"

In fact, he went on asking questions until the poor official came to a negative answer.

Then the loud voice of the mayor was heard all down the street, and even to the end of the town; his eyes became more inflamed, and his apoplectic face grew quite alarming. It was impossible to understand what he said. His ejaculations alone would have made his discourse incomprehensible, but these were enunciated in such a chaotic fashion that the "h" alone was distinguishable.

The scolding never lasted less than fifteen or twenty minutes; he required no less time to let off the superfluous spleen which had accumulated since the previous afternoon. Just as there are people who put their fingers down their throats in the morning to make themselves ill, so Don Roque was not happy until he had had this ebullition of wrath. He had only one interjection in his vocabulary, but this he used in such abundance that quantity atoned for quality.

The neighbors came out of their doors to hear him, but with a smile on their faces, as if accustomed to such scenes.

"Don Roque is giving it hot to-day," said one to another in a loud voice.

"See how Juan is behaving." In fact, every time the mayor turned his back the clerk put up his thumb and made a long nose at him.

Don Roque liked to come upon a road-sweeper or a stone-breaker at his work. For he would cautiously approach him from behind and, catching him by the collar, exclaim:

"Ah! so that's the way you sweep, is it!—ah! Do you think I pay you to leave half the dirt between the stones?—ah! Is this gratitude?—ah! It is shameful!—ah!"

Once the zeal for his office led him to seize the broom and give the man an object-lesson in the art of sweeping.

The townsfolk, the few passers-by in the street, and also some young ladies whom the noise had brought to a window went into fits of laughter. The sweeper himself, in spite of his awkward position, could not help smiling at the energy with which the figure, with its coat-tails flying, made erratic and angry dashes at the ground.

"Is that the way you sweep?—ah!" (Terrible bang with the broom.) "That is the way—ah!" (another bang). "That is the way to sweep!—ah!"

Not until worn out, heated, and nearly falling from fatigue, did the mayor hand back the broom, and take up his tasseled stick again.

Having thus relieved his noble heart of the superfluous ah's which weighted it, he resumed his way, and arrived at the Club in a very happy state of body and mind.

Gabino Maza was a man of about five-and-forty years of age, a naval officer who had retired some years before from the service, his ungovernable temper being unable to brook professional discipline.

He had an olive complexion, and small bright eyes, with dark lines underneath which showed his bilious temperament. He was tall, wiry, and masculine, and his hair and beard were of a blue-black hue; his gestures were always nervous and violent; his voice was indefinable, sometimes quiet, but when he was at all agitated, which was almost always the case when he began to speak, it was loud and shrill, and of such a discordant falsetto that it was deafening.

With his little income, and a tiny pension, he was able to support his family in Sarrio with the comfort of a gentleman at ease, which in the capital of the province would have been impossible.

A born disputant, he brought into every question, trivial as it might be, an amount of passion and violence that was

truly alarming, so anxious was he to contradict whatever was said, although it might be as clear as noonday. He judged people in such a severe and pessimistic spirit that he never believed in the pure motive of a kind action, however noble and honorable it might seem; and his spite and malignity bordered on madness. Nevertheless, this man was not so much disliked by his neighbors as might have been expected. The intimacy of a village or little town gives greater scope for learning the true character of each individual than is possible in large places, where a merely superficial intercourse may permit many cold, selfish, bad-tempered men to disguise their true selves with a sympathetic veneer, and polite words, courteous manners, and an insinuating smile win the encomium, "nice, agreeable sort of a person."

But in the country that all goes for naught, and, on the contrary, excessive amiability and very sweet smiles excite distrust. The character of everybody is as ruthless and as minutely examined as if it were a bundle of nerves under the dissector's knife; so that many people are hated who seemed at first attractive; and others liked who were at first sight considered aggressive, hard, and violent.

Dissimulation, so much practised in great towns, is never tolerated in the provinces, albeit it is the prevailing vice of all social relationships. Quick tempers and excitable natures do not arouse mistrust, as they are at least "clear and aboveboard." There is always a sense of justice in such people which, distorted and overbalanced by passion as it may be, does not make them disliked. Besides, as quick temper and excitability are a constant cause of self-suffering and discomfort, both physical and moral, it is justly considered that men of this temperament reap their own retribution.

Gabino Maza was neither disliked nor very much liked; those who were offended by him grumbled at him and kept him at a distance, terming him a malignant, sharp-tongued fellow; and the others laughed at his exaggerated style, and enjoyed a conversation with him without professing any great regard for him.

Another of the characters frequenting this café was Don Feliciano Gomez, a retail merchant in ultramarine goods, and also the owner of three or four vessels and several smacks which traded along the Biscayan coast, the largest sometimes going even as far as Seville. He was of middle height; his head, destitute of hair, was pyramidal in form; his waxed mustaches were turned up to his nose, and his voice was almost always hoarse. He was a cheerful, kind, optimistic sort of fellow; he was a confirmed bachelor, and lived with his three elder sisters, whom he had made real "señoras" by dint of his own hard work and economy. The reward they gave him, according to public report, was to keep him in hand like a child, admonish his slightest faults, and worry and torment him in every imaginable way. Nevertheless, he was never heard to utter a single word of complaint against them.

M. Delaunay, the Belgian engineer, arrived at Sarrio a few years before our story opens, with the object of managing a mining district for an imposing English company. The working was a failure, and the company deprived him of his post and his pay. But Delaunay, who was a born speculator, undertook seven or eight other commercial enterprises. First he started a manufactory of paper, then one of French nails, then he conceived the idea of cultivating oysters, then he tried a cheese factory, and ice factory; and finally he thought of turning to account some large, uncultivated tracts of land near Sarrio.

All the enterprises had failed without anybody knowing why. Delaunay was certainly intelligent, clear-headed, and industrious. He was complete master of every trade that he entered into; he ordered all the apparatus from England, set it up, and it worked well and produced very satisfactory results. He attributed his failures to the lack of means of transport. The last of his famous enterprises, which died before it came into practise, brought more discredit on him than any other.

In one of his excursions in the environs of the town he noticed close to a little river some uncultivated land, which he thought could easily, with a little trouble, be cultivated; he computed its value, drew out a plan, and when, a few months later, he found himself compelled to close the ice factory and to dismiss the workmen, he recollected this low land and mentioned it to Don Rosendo Belinchon, Don Feliciano Gomez, and two West Indians, so that they might aid him in his grand scheme. They replied that it would be necessary to see the district, and an expedition was arranged. One morning they set off on horseback, and took the direction of the river Orleo, six miles from Sarrio. Arriving there, they left the horses and ascended the hill on foot, from whence they could see the marsh land.

What was Delaunay's shame and confusion, when he saw the tract that he intended to cultivate covered with maize, beautifully green and flourishing. In fact, it had been under cultivation for more than six years; and his mistake arose from having seen it in December, when it dies down.

The party returned to the town, and one can imagine what a joke was made of the incident.

He was ruined at last, and he found himself obliged to live in a wretched fashion.

But his rage for speculation increased instead of being dampened by failure, and this to such a degree that there was not a single capitalist in Sarrio whom he had not tried to inveigle into some of his enterprises.

At one time it was a road to the capital, another a port of refuge, or stone moles, and another time a grand hotel. Some West Indians, certainly only a few, fell victims to his persuasions, and paid for their innocence with the loss of some thousands of pesetas.

However, Delaunay was a man of talent, and studious, and he was well informed in all the improvements of science, so to depreciate him would be injustice.

The harbor-master, Alvaro Peña, a young fellow thirty years of age, dark, with large black eyes, and a mustache like King Victor Emmanuel's, was noted for his profound, implacable hatred against the ecclesiastical profession, and all who represented it, even to his own brother.

Without any taste for science or literature, he owned a rather extensive library, consisting exclusively of books against religion and its ministers. He was a contributor to two or three periodicals, known by their anti-clerical opinions; and it was said that he had been occupying himself for some years past collecting data for a book that he thought of publishing under the title "Religion, the Most Retrograde of Sciences," of which several of his acquaintances had been introduced to different portions. He was cheerful and straightforward, and loved stories and jokes in which some priest or monk played the chief part.

Don Jaime Marin, the owner of four hundred acres of land which, with the tax, realized six thousand pesetas, would have been a great scoundrel, a fast, bad man, if he had not had Doña Brigida for a wife. This important lady managed, with laudable energy, to prevent her husband ruining the whole family, and being turned out of doors. Before he finished making ducks and drakes of the property she succeeded in depriving him judicially of its control,

and having it made over to her.

It is not easy to describe the firmness with which Doña Brigida took the reins of management. No Roman patrician was ever imbued with a greater sense of the *sui juris* of the sacred rights with which "the city" had invested her. From the time of this occurrence Don Jaime, who was then over fifty years of age, dropped into being a mere *thing* in her hands, according to the law's decree. In his character of *alieni juris* he had to submit to the direct and constant sway of his lord and master, and to bow in all ways to her universal will.

Farewell to sumptuous suppers of shellfish and Rueda wine in the Café de la Marina! Farewell to hunting the hare with Fermo the butcher and Mercelino the engraver! Farewell to delightful nights of tresillo! Farewell to afternoons of peace and happiness on the lake of Sebastian de la Puente! Farewell! The obdurate lady put three pesetas in his hand every Sunday, neither more nor less. It was all the pocket money he had to spend on his pleasures for the week, with the exception of smoking, which she took in hand herself, buying the cigars and all. When he required a hat, she bought it for him; when he needed a suit of clothes, or a pair of boots, she told the tailor or shoemaker to call and measure him. She even prevented his going to the barber's for fear he should spend the two reales, and so the barber came on Saturdays to shave him. It sometimes happened that the barber came when Don Jaime was still asleep.

"What am I to do?" he asked of Doña Brigida.

"Shave him," returned the inexorable señora.

Obedient to the command, the barber approached the bedside, covered the face with soap and quietly shaved Don Jaime while still half asleep, and on his finally rousing himself, he said to the servant who brought him his chocolate:

"To-day is Saturday; let the barber be brought."

"You ass, you silly, that no priest can shrive," replied his sweet consort from her room, "don't you see you are shaved already?"

"Ah so I am," returned the good señor, feeling his face.

At first he asked his friends or acquaintances at the café for money with which to play tresillo, and he drank coffee on trust at the café. But the friends soon left off obliging him, and the proprietor of the establishment declined to even trust him for a peseta, for Doña Brigida almost knocked him downstairs when he one day brought her a bill for a hundred and twenty reales.

So Don Jaime was reduced to spending hours in watching the game of tresillo and in giving advice to the players, which was not wanted. The winners sometimes rewarded him with a glass of rum.

He occasionally played drafts with Don Lorenzo, but as the latter declined to play "for love," Marin had to find something to play for which was not money. He finally decided to have for a stake one of the cigars that his wife gave him in the morning; when he lost it, he had to spend the evening without smoking; sometimes, trying to get his revenge, he lost two or three more, and so he had to hand them over to his opponent on the ensuing days. In the meanwhile he went from friend to friend begging a little tobacco to appease his insufferable longing for a smoke. Poor Marin!

Doña Brigida could never succeed in making him retire to rest early. He had spent so many years in being up till four or five in the morning that it was now impossible to break the habit. As, when he was kept at home, he never went to bed until dawn, and as he spent the night in wandering about the rooms, and the bad habit of being up at night by one's self is very inexpensive, the ingenious señora let him retire to rest at what hour he liked. He remained at the Café de la Marina with the latest customers, and when these had gone he waited while the servants put away the china and glass, and the proprietor was ready to shut up. When he was literally sent off from the establishment, he withdrew to the Rua Nueva, where he sat with his friend the watchman, and, chatting with him, passed the hours before dawn.

Don Lorenzo, Don Agapito, Don Pancho, Don Aquilino, Don German, and Don Justo were *Indians*. That is to say, they were people who had been sent as children to the West Indians by their parents to earn their living, and they had returned between fifty and sixty years of age with fortunes varying from one hundred and fifty to half a million pesetas. There were more than fifty of these Indians in Sarrío. The hard work and the long state of self-suppression in which they had lived made their ideas of happiness quite different to ours. We find pleasure in a constant change of amusement, in going about and traveling, and enjoying with both body and mind the beautiful variety of things of nature.

But these West Indians looked for nothing more than exemption from the hard law imposed by God on Adam after his fall; and, in truth, they gave themselves up to this peculiar delight. The majority of them had their money invested in government funds, so they had their incomes without any trouble. They were early risers from force of habit, and they paraded the streets or the mole every morning in parties of six or eight. They watched the arrival and departure of boats, and the loading and unloading of cargoes. After dinner, they retired to the Café de la Marina, or to that of La Amistad, and spent three or four hours watching or joining in the game of billiards.

"Go, little ivory ball, go into that pocket! See, see, Don Pancho, it has cannoned." "Come out, my little dear, come out of that pocket." "Ah! ah! well played, Don Lorenzo!" "Did it not go well, Pancho?"

The game was always seasoned with these remarks, which went on without pause.

When the days were long, these West Indians were seen in parties about the environs of the town, either walking, or seated on the grass on the banks of a stream. That was the hour of reminiscences of the tropics.

"Do you recollect, Don Agapito, do you recollect that little dark creature who came to you for a place in the shop?"

"And how well she sang, the little rogue!"

"They said you were smitten with her, quite smitten, Don Agapito."

"How now, Don Pancho—why, she only went to the blacks' ball with the negro of my partner, Don Justo?"

"Get along, man, don't annoy me; the one who went to the ball was yourself; I saw you sportive enough with her in the country dance."

There was no counting on this West Indian clique for subscriptions for the orchestra, theatre, or any public amusement. The young people of the town had to apply to the purses of their fathers, for they knew it was useless to expect American money to be forthcoming, which roused such indignation among the young people that they called them stingy fellows, boors, and money-laden asses to their faces as well as behind their backs. But the Indians were

thick-skinned, and treated such terms with contempt. The one who professed an open aversion to them (and for whom did he not entertain it?) was Gabino Maza.

Why should these fifty idlers spend their days dawdling about the streets? If they would only devote their money to some industry profitable to the place!

When Don Melchor de las Cuevas and his nephew entered the saloon, the only person standing and gesticulating in the middle of the place was this same Gabino Maza.

He could not remain seated two minutes; the excitement of his nervous system, the vehemence with which he tried to convince his audience, obliged him to jump from his seat and dash into the centre of the room, where he shouted and gesticulated until he had exhausted his breath and his strength. He was talking of the theatrical company, which had announced its departure on account of having lost in the receipts of thirty performances.

Maza was trying to prove that there had not been such losses and it was all make-up.

"It is not true; it is not true. He who says he has lost a copper, lies!" (Then lowering his voice and giving his hand to Gonzalo.) "How are you, Gonzalo? Yes, I know you arrived yesterday. You are all right. I am glad of it. I repeat, that he lies! Why, they don't dare to tell me so!"

"They have lost six thousand reals in the thirty performances, according to the account that the baritone has given me," said Don Mateo.

Maza ground his teeth. His indignation impeded his speech. At last he burst out:

"And you listen to that drunkard, Don Mateo? Get along! get along!" (With assumed disdain.) "By dint of consorting with comic players you have lost your head for business. You have got rusty."

"Listen to me, you blusterer. I did not say I believed him. I said that was what the baritone's calculations came to."

Maza leaped up, and returned to the centre of the room, tore his hat violently from his head with both hands, and, waving it frantically, he vociferated:

"But, señor; but, señor! We seem to be made fools of here! Well, you tell me what has become of twenty thousand and more reals which the receipts came to, and almost as much again for admissions paid at the door?"

"The salaries have very much increased," said the harbor-master.

"You are not drunk, by Gad, Alvaro! You are not drunk—I will tell you in a minute what the salaries are" (counting on his fingers.) "The tenor, six crowns; the treble, another six; that's twelve; the bass, four; that's sixteen; the contralto, three; that's nineteen; the baritone, four—"

"The baritone, five," interrupted Peña.

"The baritone, four," persisted Maza in a rage.

"I am certain it is five."

"The baritone, four!" roared Maza again.

Alvaro Peña now rose in his turn, fired with the noble desire of getting the better of his opponent, and then ensued a hot and furious dispute, which lasted about an hour, and all, or nearly all, the members of that gathering of celebrities joined in. Such a battle resembled the famous engagements that took place between the Greeks before the walls of Troy; there was the same fury and heat, the same primitive simplicity in the arguments, and the same candid, rough violence in the invectives.

"You are an addle-headed blunderer!"

"Hold your tongue; you are a ruffian!" "You are a bellowing ox!" "I tell you it is not true, and if you want it plainer, you lie!" "Goodness, what a goose! You are like a silly woman."

These altercations were very frequent, almost daily incidents at the Club. As all those who took part in them had a straightforward, perfectly primitive way of dealing with questions, similar, not to say equal, to that adopted by the heroes of Homer, the argument started at the beginning of the dispute continued until the end. There was a man who would spend an hour incessantly saying: "One has no right to meddle with anybody's private life!" or "That may do in Germany, but not here in Spain!"

Then cries briefer, and more to the point, such as "windbags!" "windbags!" filled the air until the crier collapsed on the sofa with exhaustion.

But what the arguments lost in variety they gained in intensity, for they were expressed with great and forcible energy, and in tones raised to such a pitch that some of the voices became quite hoarse, which was generally the case with Alvaro Peña and Don Feliciano, who had the loudest voices, but the weakest throats. When the Corporation had the trees of the Promenade de Riego trimmed, it caused a commotion in the Club; when the clerk of the House of Gonzalez and Sons decamped with fourteen thousand reals, it caused another heated discussion; when the parish priest declined to give a certificate of good conduct to the pilot Velasco, Alvaro Peña burst a blood vessel in his excitement. But no bad feeling remained after these violent scenes were over, neither were the personal remarks recollected that the discussions gave rise to.

How could it be otherwise, since there seemed to be a tacit understanding that none of the ungracious epithets were to be resented? The local character of the subjects was unique. Politics were little studied in Sarrio; it was only when the papers noticed some event of great importance that the inhabitants of the place took a passing interest in them.

Twenty years ago the rich banker, Rojas Salcedo, was elected representative of the place in Parliament, and he paid one visit to Sarrio to make himself acquainted with the town. Nobody thought of disputing his election. The presidents and secretaries of the colleges generally met together, and computed from the Acts the number of votes that he was entitled to. The reason of this was that Sarrio had always been a commercial town, where everybody could gain a living without having recourse to Madrid for government appointments.

The majority of the young men, after having passed two or three years in some college in England or Belgium, took their places in their fathers' offices as their future successors; the others, the minority, followed some military or civil career with a fixed income, and only came occasionally to pass a few days with their families.

It must, in one word, be confessed that Sarrio was a sleepy place, dormant amid all the great manifestations of mind, amid all the regenerating lights of contemporary society; nobody studied the profound problems of politics, and the terrible controversies engaged in by the different parties in other places, to gain victory and power, left

them utterly unmoved. In short, in the year of grace, 1860, there was no public life in Sarrio. They ate, they slept, they worked, they danced, they played, they paid their taxes, but they were absolutely wanting in public spirit.

When that evening at the club the dispute had utterly worn them out and spoiled their digestions, Don Mateo, beaming with delight, announced to the company that he did not mind about the departure of the dramatic company, for he had for some days past been arranging a surprise for the Sarrienses; and after a great deal of trouble the matter was concluded.

He was in treaty with the celebrated Marabini, the phrenologist, the prestidigitator; probably Tuesday, yes, Tuesday or Wednesday, they would moreover be able to admire his wonderful skill at the theatre; he would, moreover, bring with him some dissolving views and a tame wolf.

Gonzalo meanwhile had left the billiard-room and was looking at half a dozen West Indians playing at chapo. When they struck the ball all the gold seals that hung from their enormous gold chains rang like bells. These chains and these seals were the greatest inducement and the chief bait that the artisans of Sarrio used to persuade their sons to go to Cuba.

"Fool! and you could come back in a few years with a fine cloth coat, a well-got-up shirt-front, patent boots, and a watch-chain like Don Pancho's!"

This last inducement was too much for any lad.

"Will it go seven times round my neck, dear father?"

"Yes, boy, yes; and you will have pencil cases and seals hanging on to it."

And so with their heads full of the prize the poor fellows went off on the "Bella Paula," the "Carmen," the "Villa de Sarrio," or any other sailing vessel, to perish with yellow fever or hunger, lured to destruction by the glitter of the trumpery jewelry like the voices of the terrible Lorelei.

The gestures of the Indians while at billiards being those of people unaccustomed to restrain and compose their feelings, were strange and funny, and a source of delight to the young men of the place, whose antipathy to the West Indians was always shown in making fun of them. Who tapped upon the floor while the balls were running like Don Benito? Who bent from one side to another, and twisted and contorted himself as if the destination of the ball depended upon his movements, like Don Lorenzo? And who could equal Don Pancho, who was little and fat, almost square, in his way of sinking in a heap on the sofa after having struck a ball, to better see the havoc he had made on the table? Occasionally one of them addressed a word of impatience to the fellow: "Get up, my boy; don't excite yourself!"

Don Feliciano Gomez took a seat by Gonzalo, who soon wearied of his good-tempered, superficial conversation, which he always accompanied by an affectionate poke in the ribs at every instant.

"When is the great day to be, Gonzalino? Soon, eh? You know I am longing to see you with your young lady on your arm, going to high mass! All right, my dear; all right; go and be happy. At home, the girls [it was thus he always termed his old sisters] don't leave me a moment's peace; since yesterday it is: 'When is Gonzalino going to be married? Don't forget to ask him!' Well, the poor things have known you ever since you were born. There is nothing like matrimony for a peaceful, contented life. You will say, 'That being so, why have you not married yourself, Don Feliciano?' Listen my boy, why should I marry, when I can live happy as a bachelor? What do I want? I have a home, with two dear girls who take the utmost care of me, whom I adore——

(Poor fellow! report in the place gave quite another version.)

"And so I have nothing to complain of—is it not so, my boy? Certainly, when I was young I had other ideas, but, as years go by, one ceases to think of them. Look here, if any one said to me now: 'Feliciano, would you like to go back twenty years?' Bah! let another dog have that bone. The best age for a man is fifty. Don't you doubt it, Gonzalino. It is then that one can eat and sleep in peace. Is there a young woman that is worth a dish of sardines freshly fried?

"But they have to be fried just before they are eaten; if fried during the soup, they are not worth a brass farthing. Or a lobster with fresh draft cider? Doesn't it make your mouth water, my boy? And now you are going to be married, and there will be a kissing and 'my darling' here and 'my love' there—is it not so? Well, well, as things go it is a good thing. The girl is of good family. Don Rosendo is rich—you are doing well, doing well, my boy. But, I say, why don't you marry the little one, Venturita, who is pretty? I don't say that the elder one is ugly, but there is no doubt that the younger one is more attractive; she is just like a rosebud. What roguish eyes! what teeth! what gracefulness! But if you are engaged to the other sister, I have nothing to say. But what comes up to prettiness! And it would be the same family——"

These remarks made a strange impression upon Gonzalo. It was the formulation of what he had vaguely felt in an uncomfortable way ever since the previous evening. Yes, it was quite true, what beautiful eyes, how mischievous, and yet how candid! What an alabaster skin! What lips, what teeth, what golden hair! Cecilia, poor thing, was plainer than when he went away and less attractive. How was it possible that she had taken his fancy? Gonzalo had, in fact, to confess to himself that she had never taken his fancy as Venturita certainly now had. Why then—?

Well, it was no use asking questions. He was only a lad at the time; he had not been accustomed to seeing ladies; Cecilia's kindness had impressed him. Then there was a certain satisfaction in being engaged. Then the distance which enhances the beauty and increases the value of things. In fact, everything had combined to bind him to that girl. But, if only he had seen Venturita sooner! It was better not to think of that. The affair was too far gone to be retracted. Unlike himself, he remained a good quarter of an hour pensively looking at the marble balls without seeing them. Don Feliciano had gone.

At last his healthy, sanguine temperament asserted itself over the ridiculous fancies that threatened to disturb him. He rose from his seat, the frown which had momentarily darkened his brow was soon banished by the genial smile which was his particular attraction. He shrugged his shoulders with contempt, and that gesture seemed to say: "I am going to marry the plainer of the De Belinchon girls. Well, and what then? In any case it would have been with one or the other, unless I married no one. I want to be happy. It is not necessary for happiness to come from without; I have it within, in the even temper God has given me, in the money left me by my parents, in this marvelous health, and in this ox-like strength."

When he returned to the sitting-room, he found that all the habitués had been thrown into great perturbation by the news just brought in by Severino, of the ironmongery shop.

"Don't you know what has happened, sirs?" They all left their seats and surrounded the store-keeper, who spoke with visible agitation.

"Don Laureano was robbed and assassinated last night."

"What! Don Laureano, who lives in the country house?"

"Yes; he of Las Acenas. They say that, at half past two, or thereabout, nine masked men entered the house; they knocked the servant down with sticks, they tied up the señora and the maid-servant, and they killed Don Laureano. What they must have made them suffer before they gave up the money! The good man only had twelve thousand reales, and those he had hidden away, but they tortured the women until they made them disclose the hiding-place." A shudder of horror went through the notabilities of Sarrío. They turned as pale as if they had assisted at that fearful scene.

The house of Las Acenas was a mile from the town, in the solitude of a pine forest, but nobody took that into account; they imagined themselves assaulted in their houses in la Rua Nueva or de Caborana and cruelly assassinated. Oh! what acts of violence! Santo Cristo, what atrocities!

The first moments of surprise that elapsed were followed by remarks in low voices. The robbers could not be very far off. Such a thing had never happened before in Sarrío, or its suburbs, in anybody's recollection. Marin asserted that he had seen some suspicious-looking men about for some days past. This news gave rise to an inward panic among the bystanders. They all determined not to go out any more at night, but this determination they kept to themselves.

The mayor said that, in his opinion, the robbers must have come from Castile.

"From Castile?"

"Yes, señor; from Castile."

"I have heard my father (who is now in glory) say that in the year 1805, seventeen men, armed, and on horseback, appeared in Sariego. They prowled round the place, and finally robbed Don Jose Maria Herrero of seventy thousand crowns that he had hidden under one of the bricks of the hearth."

At any other time, the customers of the café would have said that because such an event had happened in the year five, it did not necessarily imply that the same thing should occur in Las Acenas in the year sixty, but just then no one felt equal to controverting the statement.

Then they continued to talk of the event of Las Acenas in subdued tones, and they seemed all to concur in the wildest, most extravagant ideas. But as Gabino Maza was never known to agree for more than ten minutes together to what was said in his presence, he suddenly seized the opportunity of some very silly remark, made by Don Feliciano Gomez with the perfect naturalness and modesty that characterized the conversation of this distinguished merchant, to pounce upon him in a manner as violent as it was unjustifiable.

"What ridiculous thing will you think of next? What is the good of a house-to-house visitation? Do you think you are going to find Don Laureano's money in a heap there?"

"If the money is not found, some trace might be discovered."

"Of what, you dunderhead, of what?"

Then the dispute had full swing. The cries and noise were indescribable. At last, as usual, nobody could hear anything, nobody could understand anything. The voices were perfectly audible over the whole Plaza de la Marina, but the people were so used to it that they did not stop to listen.

CHAPTER VII

BURGLARS

THE notables of Sarrío resolved to abstain from setting foot in the street at night, therefore the Club, Graell's shop-parlor, and even Morana's, were all deserted at an early hour. The five or six locksmiths in the town were given more orders for locks, bolts, iron bars, and patent keys than they could execute.

The robbers of Las Acenas had not been caught, and every one declared, with more or less authority, that they were still prowling about the place, ready to slip in anywhere at some unexpected minute. Nevertheless, as one gets accustomed to everything, even illness, and even to the discussions at the atheneum, they became accustomed to the danger, and again sallied forth of an evening, after taking great precautions to well lock up their houses.

The first to venture was Marin. As all Doña Brigida's efforts to induce him to retire to rest at a reasonable hour were of no avail, she let him go out without any pity.

Don Jaime asked permission to carry under the blue military cloak that he wore at night an old, short gun kept in the garret, and the magnanimous señora granted the permission under the condition that he take it unloaded. Then Alvaro Peña sallied forth, for having a certain military reputation and being a man of reputed courage, it behooved him to show bravery at such a critical time.

He carried two saddle pistols in his pockets, and a sword-stick in his hand.

The mayor, Don Roque, who from time immemorial had repaired to Morana's with Don Segis, the chaplain of the Augustine convent, and Don Benigno, the curate of the parish, there to imbibe in the course of the evening from four to eight quarters of Rueda wine, could not put up with the domestic hearth for more than three days; so he also sallied forth into the town.

The octogenarian official, Marcones, armed with carbine and sword, accompanied his chief, himself carrying a revolver and a sword-stick. Don Melchor, Gabino Maza, Don Pedro Miranda, Delaunay, Don Mateo, and all the others soon followed suit, and repaired to the nocturnal resorts. The West Indians held out longer. Thus Graell's parlor, Morana's, and the Club were transformed into veritable arsenals at nightfall. Each one, on his arrival, put his war accoutrements against the wall, and on leaving the places they seized them with an intrepid courage worthy of the Biscayan blood that coursed in the veins of nearly all of them.

The old-fashioned harquebus stood side by side with the modern repeating rifle, the cylindrical iron sword by the steel bladed modern sword-stick, the heavy bronze pistol by the plated revolver. And this diversity of war accoutrements served to sustain the warlike spirit so necessary for the occasion.

Certain other measures of great utility had been adopted. The watchmen had orders not to extinguish any street lamp until twelve o'clock at night. They were provided with more powerful whistles than the old ones; and they had orders to keep their eyes on any stranger passing along the streets at night. The townsfolk wisely agreed among themselves not to make way on the sidewalk for anybody, as it might not be a friend, and everybody knows how propitious to criminals the custom of making way on the sidewalk is. Full of this idea, Don Pedro Miranda and Don Feliciano Gomez met one night in the Calle de San Florencio. They were both muffled up in their cloaks, with their swords unsheathed, prepared for any emergency, when Don Feliciano cried to Don Pedro from afar:

"Well, friend, make way!"

"Bah! bah! make way yourself," returned Don Pedro.

"You are the one to make way," replied the merchant; "make way, make way."

"Bah, bah, be kind enough to let me pass," returned Señor Miranda. Neither man budged an inch. They unmuffled themselves and unsheathed their swords.

"Will you have the kindness?"

"Will you have the goodness?"

Who knows what awful tragedy might not have taken place in Sarrio at that instant, if they had not recognized each other?

"Does it happen to be Don Feliciano?"

"Is it Don Pedro?"

"Don Feliciano!"

"Don Pedro!"

And rushing to each other, they shook hands with effusion.

"What a fate would have been yours had I not recognized you, Don Feliciano!" exclaimed Señor Miranda, showing his broad iron sword with its bone handle.

"And yours would not have been agreeable, Don Pedro!" returned the merchant, as he made passes in the air with his finely polished Toledo blade.

One had to go down two steps to enter Morana's shop. The shop was a confectioner's, although it did not look like it; it was the only confectioner's in Sarrio. Nowadays there are three, if I am not mistaken. I say, it did not look like a confectioner's, because church tapers, wax hands and feet and bodies for votive offerings were sold there and had gradually become the chief stock in trade instead of a mere supplementary one; and this was due to the lack of greediness in the town, which speaks very well for it. It is usual in Spain for the folk of little villages and towns to be passionately fond of sweets, for want of the pleasures peculiar to great towns, for, say what one may, the pleasures of the table even are not equal in small towns to those of large ones. In the first place, clever cooks are not forthcoming, the food has not the variety induced by the laws of biology, and the palate has not risen to the state of culture from a right and just estimate of the culinary science.

Perhaps it will be remarked: "But the nuns of St. Augustine used to make sweets." Yes, but we must remember that this manufacture was limited exclusively to preserves of cherry, quince, pear, and apricot, almond tart and burrage tart, and a particular sweetmeat shaped like fishes' fins, called orange flower.

I can only repeat the fact that there are few high livers in Sarrio. After all, rare as this abstemiousness may be in towns in the interior, it is common in maritime places, which are known to be less under ecclesiastical sway. For observation teaches the visitor of the towns that more sweets are consumed where church services and religious rites absorb the greater part of life, and where enthusiasm for the religious sentiment is evinced in nones, masses, confraternities, and canonries, which shows that there must be some mysterious affinity between mysticism and sweetmeats.

This branch of Morana's business was exhibited in the shop by two pine wood cupboards, painted blue, with glass doors at each end of the counter. In these cupboards there was a fair show of caramels, spiral cakes, sugar cakes, almond cakes, madeleines, and above all the celebrated tablets, the renown of which must certainly have reached the ears of our readers, as it dates from remotest time. The secret of the magic composition of these tablets we have never been able to discover, but their fascination was irresistible, and, strange to say, it was based upon their extraordinary hardness. At the age when Morana's tablets are eaten, the chief thing is not that the sweets should be delicate, savory, and exquisite, but that they should last a long time. It was not easy to get the teeth into them at all, but once in this stick-jaw paste, the extrication from it presented a really difficult problem.

Allow me to offer a delicate tribute of affection and gratitude to these tablets which, from four to eight years of age, constituted the greatest joy of my existence.

It is perhaps to their sweet influence that the author of this book owes the optimistic spirit which, according to the critics, shines in his works.

Morana, daughter and successor of another Morana, who was dead, was a woman of forty years of age, of a pallid complexion, with gutta-percha plaisters on her temples for the severe pains in her head.

She married a Juan Chrysostom, who, according to Don Segis, the chaplain, did not take after his patron saint.

Nevertheless, when he administered corporal punishment to his wife, he seasoned it with rather a rare amount of learned talk.

"I who love this woman," he exclaimed, as he commenced operations—"I who love this woman like a wife, and not like a servant, according to the Apostle Paul's command—you have read the Apostle Saint Paul?—what right have you to read, you great ass!"

The wine was very good, one can almost say it was the only good thing in the place, and that was because it did not remain long in the bottle, for Don Roque, Don Segis, Don Benigno, Don Juan, "the old Salt," and Señor Anselmo, the cabinet-maker, took care to empty it. It was a white wine, strong and superior, and it went to one's head with alarming facility.

The customers of the shop left every night between eleven and twelve, rather stumbling in their gaits, but silent and quiet, which prevented any scandal. They sallied forth arm in arm, leaning one against the other, and they went along without saying a word, albeit with much puffing and blowing.

Their instinct, which never completely left them, instigated this prudent behavior, for they knew if they spoke much or little, some dispute would arise and then a scandal would ensue. Not a word—not a word; it was better even not to whisper—and when they arrived at their houses, they murmured a gruff "good-night" and the one left last was Don Roque, as he lived further away than anybody.

So these venerable men got intoxicated every night in this solemn, quiet, patriarchal fashion.

Two of them, Don Juan, "the old Salt," the clerk of the harbor-master, and Don Segis, were reaping the consequences of that course. "The old Salt" had a nose enough to frighten one. When least expected, the hour of retribution came for Don Segis, who, seized with an apopleptic fit, was left with one leg dragging as if a weight of six pounds were tied to it. It is true that the insatiable chaplain was not contented with his four quarters of wine at the confectioner's; he made Morana give him a glass of gin in each, which greatly added to the expense; if he had six quarters of wine, he had six glasses of gin; if eight, eight; and so on.

The effect of all this gin was evident.

"But, Don Segis, how can you drink so much gin at a time?"

"There is nothing for it," he replied in a tone of humility; "if I did not take a glass with every quarter, child of my soul, what would become of me? I should be ill."

The conversations at Morana's were less exciting and thrilling than those of the Club. Very few things interested these old parties; the most important local matters, which excited storms in the Club, were here treated, or rather touched upon, with indifference.

When the Gonzalezes sent off the captain of the "Carmen" and put an Andalusian in his place, they only said in a quiet tone:

"If the Gonzalezes have done so, they had reasons for doing it," for they were quite indifferent on the subject.

"It is true," said another, after some time, raising his glass to his lips.

"Ripalda seems a good fellow," said a third, after five minutes, as he put his glass down on the counter.

"Yes, he seems so," replied another gravely.

Ten minutes passed in meditation. The customers gave affectionate kisses to their glasses, which shone like topaz. Don Roque at last broke the silence.

"There is no manner of doubt that Don Antonio embraced her."

"Embraced her," said Don Juan, "the Salt."

"Embraced her," echoed Don Benigno.

"Embraced her," corroborated Señor Anselmo.

"Really embraced her," added Don Segis in a lugubrious tone.

Their minds were occasionally exercised on the subject of doves. Señor Anselmo and Don Benigno were devotedly attached to this pursuit; each had his dovecot, his doves, and mode of management, and long and lively discussions were held occasionally on the subject. The others listened without daring to give an opinion, as they raised their glasses to their lips in solemn silence.

The crime of Las Acenas horrified them, but it did not cause as great a commotion as in the rest of the neighborhood.

At the end of five or six days they returned to their patriarchal customs, and such was their bravery that the majority left their arms behind in the shop.

It was nearer one o'clock than twelve when Don Roque, who had exceeded by three quarters his usual six, sallied forth with the other five frequenters of the confectioner's in a serried line to their different homes.

Marcones closed the file with his gun on his shoulder. The first of the line was Don Segis, who lived in a little two-windowed house, close to the Augustine convent; then came Don Juan "the Salt," then the coadjutor, and finally Señor Anselmo, pulling out the enormous shining key with which he beat time when he conducted the orchestra, and opened the apartment where he slept.

The mayor remained with his aide-de-camp. He said something, but his aide-de-camp did not hear him. They directed their steps toward home, which was not far off. But before arriving there, Don Roque, who puffed and blew like a whale, and whose walk was unmistakably like the gait of that creature, suddenly stopped and gave a long discourse in a loud voice, of which Marcones caught nothing but the word "robbers" repeated several times. The official, alarmed, looked all round to see if he could see anybody while loading his gun, but he saw nothing to give him reason to suppose that the villains were at hand. Don Roque made another remark, if such a term can be applied to a series of strange, intermittent sounds, both horrible and depressing, but Marcones managed to gather that his chief wished a hunt made in search of the criminals of Las Acenas. Marcones thought that the force was hardly equal to the undertaking; but discipline forbade objections. Moreover, he nourished the hope that few murderers cared about taking the fresh air at such an hour. So, after a careful examination of their weapons, they took their dangerous course through all the streets and alleys of the town.

One is in honor bound to state that Don Roque walked in front as the leader of the valorous enterprise, with his revolver in his left hand, and his sword-stick in his right, leaving his noble breast a mark for the enemy's bullet. Marcones, weighed down by the weight of his gun and his eighty-two years of age, walked six steps behind.

It was a moonlight night, but great black clouds occasionally darkened the sky, and the light of the petroleum lamps burning at the corners of the streets was not sufficient to banish the gloom in them.

Sarrio had five chief streets, known respectively as Rua Nueva, which runs to the harbor; the Calles of Carborana, of San Florencio, of La Herreria, and of Atras. These streets, long and narrow, run parallel to each other. The buildings are generally low and poor. Other smaller streets cross and communicate with the principal ones, and lead to branch roads where the spacious residences of the West Indians are built, and which constitute what may be termed the suburb of Sarrio.

As the party was passing through the Calle de Atras, near to that of Santa Brigida, they heard cries and

lamentations, which obliged them to halt.

"What's that, Marcones?" asked the mayor.

The old official shrugged his shoulders philosophically:

"Nothing, señor; it is at Patina Santa's."

"How dare they commit these enormities? Let us go there. Let us proceed."

"Let us proceed," was a phrase both used and abused by Don Roque, as it conveyed his sense of the decision, rapidity, and energy of his authority to remedy all grievances. Patina Santa was the great high priest of one of the two temples of pleasure existing in Sarrio, but the sordid, wretched appearance of these temples was quite unlike the ancient famous ones of Greece.

"What scandal is this?" cried Don Roque in his stentorian voice as he approached the miserable dwelling.

Three or four lads in the street flew away like birds at the sight of the dignitary, but the doves remained.

Two of them stood at the door and two more were at the windows. Those at the door wished to withdraw at the sight of the mayor, but he caught hold of them.

"What is this scandal—eh?" he repeated.

The girls began to explain the cause of the commotion, but hardly had they uttered a word than Don Roque interrupted them, vociferating:

"To prison with you!"

"Señor, I—"

"To the prison—ah! To the prison, away with you all! Be off, everybody! Where is the ruffian Patina?"

Merciful heavens, what a commotion then ensued!

The girls at the windows had nothing for it but to come downstairs, and Patina came with them, for Don Roque brooked no delay. Cries and lamentations filled the air, while the strident voice of the mayor cried out incessantly:

"To the prison—ah! To the prison—ah!"

The unhappy creatures called on God and the Virgin; but the mayor, with his infuriated face and flaming eyes, raised his voice still higher as he deafened himself with his cry:

"To the prison—ah! To the prison—ah!"

There was no help for it.

The watchman, who had approached at the sound of the first ah's, led them off to the town prison, in attendance on his worthy chief, while the neighbors watched the scene from behind their window-panes in mingled compassion and derision.

Don Roque exercised his authority by locking the door of the dovecot himself, and handed the key over to Marcones, and with the usual "Proceed," they continued their perilous course. The mayor and his aide-de-camp had not gone very far when, in one of the narrowest and dirtiest streets, they espied a man's figure cautiously approaching a door, which he tried to open.

"Stop!" whispered Don Roque in the ear of his subordinate. "There is one of the thieves."

The official only caught the last word, but it was enough to make him drop his gun.

"Don't tremble, Marcones, for there is only one," said the mayor, seizing him by the arm.

If the venerable Marcones had been at that moment in full possession of his faculties of observation, he might have detected a decided tendency to a convulsive movement in the hand of his chief. The thief, hearing the steps of the patrol, suddenly turned his head and stood motionless, with his hand still on the door-handle. Don Roque and his companion also stood motionless, and the moon appearing from under a cloud shed its light upon the direful scene.

"Hsh! hsh! friend," said the magistrate at the end of some time, without advancing a step.

The robber heard this exclamation of authority, and took flight at one and the same moment.

"At him, Marcones! Fire!" cried Don Roque, courageously running in pursuit of the criminal.

Marcones wished to follow his chief's injunction, but fear made him helpless.

The trigger fell without emitting a spark. Then, with martial promptitude, he cast aside the weapon, which was useless, drew his sword and made valiant efforts to keep pace with the mayor, who, with intrepid courage, was at least twenty paces in advance, in pursuit of the robber.

The fellow now disappeared round the corner of a street.

But on their arrival there the pursuers saw him attempting to gain the next.

"Boom!"

Don Roque fired his revolver, crying at the same time:

"Take that, thief!"

He again disappeared, and again they caught sight of him in the Calle de la Misericordia.

Boom! Another shot from Don Roque.

"Take that, thief!" But the villain, doubtless as a last resource, and to prevent any watchman stopping him, began also to cry:

"Thieves! Thieves!"

Then the sharp, long whistles of the watchmen were heard, followed by another and another.

The street of San Florencio was well lighted, and the criminal was clearly visible, trying to get quickly under the shadow of the houses.

Boom! Boom!

"Take that, thief!"

"Thieves!" returned the fugitive, without ceasing flight.

Two watchmen joined the column of attack, and ran, brandishing their pikes, by the side of the mayor.

The thief seemed, at all cost, anxious to reach the Rua Nueva, so as to gain the harbor, where he could secure himself in a boat, or cast himself into the water. But before arriving there he stumbled and fell prostrate on the

ground. Thanks to this accident, the patrol gained upon him considerably, and had almost reached him when the villain jumped up with great celerity and flew off swifter than the wind. Don Roque fired off the last two shots of his revolver, still crying:

"Take that, thief!"

He disappeared round the corner of the Rua Nueva. Arrived there, the magistrate and his force, now near the Plaza de la Marina, saw no sign of the criminal anywhere. They took a few hesitating steps on to the said plaza, and there they stopped, not knowing what course to take. "To the mole! To the mole! He must be there," said a watchman.

They were just about to proceed farther when a window of one of the houses was suddenly opened and a man in night attire said in sonorous tones that resounded in the silence of the night:

"The thief has just entered the Café de la Marina."

These words were uttered by Don Feliciano Gomez.

When the patrol heard them it rushed to the door of the café and abruptly made its entrance. The sitting-room was empty. There at the end, by the side of the counter, were three or four lads in white aprons standing round a man who was lying, more than sitting, upon a chair.

The mayor, the officer, and the watchmen rushed at him with their pikes, swords, and sword-sticks at his chest, and all with one accord cried:

"Take that, thief!"

The criminal raised his terror-stricken face, now whiter than wax.

"Ah—if it is not Don Jaime, God bless my soul!" exclaimed a watchman, lowering his pike. All the others did the same, dumb with astonishment. For indeed it was a fact that the villain they had so hotly pursued was no other than Don Jaime Marin, taken unawares as he was about to enter the door of his house.

They had to carry him home and bleed him. On the following day Don Roque appeared to ask his pardon, which was granted. But Doña Brigida, his severe spouse, would not grant it until she had given expression to a storm of recriminatory adjectives, among which that of "drunken" figured frequently.

Don Roque submitted meekly to the attack, and the matter dropped.

CHAPTER VIII

CECILIA'S TROUSSEAU

PREPARATIONS for the wedding had begun in the Belinchon household. They were started very cautiously. Doña Paula sent for Nieves, the embroideress, and a long conference ensued with closed doors. Then patterns were ordered from Madrid, and a few days later the señora, accompanied by Cecilia and Pablito, took a journey to the capital of the province in the family coach. The prying Don Petra, who was passing along the Rua Nueva as Doña Paula and her children returned, saw the servant take from the carriage large, heavy parcels that looked like bales of material.

All Sarrio then soon knew that preparations for the trousseau of Don Rosendo's eldest daughter had commenced, and Doña Paula had one of her heart attacks when she heard that it was known. The blame was cast on Nieves, but she declared that she had never breathed a word on the subject. Doña Paula declared she must have done so; the embroideress wept, and there was a regular scene.

Well, as the cat was out of the bag, there was no use making any more mystery about it. The room at the back of the house, the one that looked on to the Calle de Carborana, was the scene of operations for the staff working at the linen under Doña Paula's orders and Nieves's instruction. It consisted of four persons besides the two maids of the house, when domestic duties permitted, and Venturita, and Cecilia herself. It was a merry party, as work did not prevent chatting, laughing, and singing all day long. Merriment welled from the young creatures' hearts, and bubbled forth in aimless laughter that sometimes lasted a long time. If one of them dropped the scissors—laughter; if a skein of thread caught on a neck—laughter; if the cook came with a red face to ask the señora for the money for the milkwoman—hearty laughter. Not only were those working at Cecilia's trousseau young and merry, but, from the directress herself, they were all pretty.

Nieves was a tall, graceful, red-haired girl, with a white, transparent skin, clear blue eyes, a perfect nose and mouth, twenty years of age, and endowed with a disposition that was Heaven's own blessing. It was impossible to be long melancholy in her company. Not that she was talkative or witty, nothing of the sort; the poor girl had little more intellect than a fish, but her boundless good-humor shone from her eyes in such a charming manner, and rang forth from her throat in such clear tones, that it was quite infectious. By the work of her hands she supported a paralytic mother, and a bad, idle brother, who treated her shamefully when she was unable to give him sufficient money with which to get intoxicated.

Her troubles, which would have been insupportable to anybody else, only momentarily disturbed her equanimity, and, rising above them, she soon recovered her habitual cheerful spirits. She enjoyed the blessing of perfect health, the only pain she ever knew being an occasional stitch in the side from overmuch laughter. Valentina, also an embroideress, and also with red hair, was not so pretty; her eyes were smaller, her skin less delicate, her nose less regular, and she was smaller of stature.

On the other hand, her bright locks were curly, and clustered very prettily on her forehead, her hands and feet were smaller and more delicate than those of Nieves, and the striking point of her face was a constant little trick of knitting her brows, which gave a pleasant piquancy to her features, as it was not due to bad temper.

Encarnacion was a needlewoman too; she was a great, strong, bouncing girl with a vulgar face. The artisans of Sarrio thought she was the flower of the flock, but she would not have pleased the taste of a refined, intelligent person.

Teresa, also of the same trade, was perfectly Moorish in coloring; her hair was as black as jet, and her large eyes

were as dark as her hair, and her nose and mouth were regular; she was considered ugly in the town on account of her swarthy appearance, but she was really a type of Oriental beauty. There was nothing remarkable in Generosa, one of the two maids of the house. Elvira, the other, was a pale little thing, with large, languid eyes, and very graceful figure.

The working classes of Sarrio have never gone in for the ridiculous imitation of ladies, which is so frequent nowadays in other places in Spain. They think, and I am of the same opinion, that the fashions adopted by ladies would not enhance their natural grace; in fact, they would lessen it. And this is logical, for, in the first place, they are not accustomed to drawing their waists in, as fashion demands of its slaves, and as little towns have no good dressmakers, the imitation would be both inferior and ugly; whereas, who upon the terrestrial globe, or upon any other globe, can compete with the charm of the girls of Sarrio when they don the richly embroidered fichu, crossed in front, and tied behind? Who can equal their fascinating mode of arranging the curls on their foreheads with a studied carelessness? Who can take part in a giraldilla with more consummate grace, or give in a more coquettish way a push to a young fellow who gets out of his place, while saying with a mingled smile and frown:

"Good fellow, you are mad, or on the road to it. Look out, or I shall pinch you!"

Who can sing with more sentiment and with less ear the couplet:

"When Aben Hamet Granada left,
He felt his heart of joy bereft."

There is no doubt that the artisan girls of Sarrio, whose strict ideas of taste are the admiration of both Spaniards and foreigners, especially nowadays when characteristic features are on the wane, are quite right to maintain their independence and to hold their own costume in spite of the dressed-up young ladies of the cities. Because (be it said softly, so as not to be overheard), the truth is they are much prettier. And this I say without meaning offense to anybody in particular; Heaven forbid.

There is no traveler in the Peninsula who, on thinking of Sarrio, will not echo this assertion with more of the enthusiasm natural to him.

There is no Englishman who stops for a few days at this port but who, when talking to his friends at Cardiff or Bristol of this *Spanish town*, will begin by raising his eyebrows and smacking his lips with delight, with "Oh! oh! oh! Sarrio! the young girls there are very, very, very beautiful." And if Englishmen say it, what will be said by the Spaniards, and particularly those who have lived so long under their beneficent influence?

The four workers, including Nieves, although she was rather superior, belonged to this much-admired class of women for whose prosperity and continuance in their ways I offer daily prayers to Heaven, and advise every good Catholic to do the same.

On working days they were dressed in cotton gowns, with a little woolen fichu tied behind and a silk handkerchief falling back on the neck from the uncovered head. Nieves, as an exception, wore a black fringed fichu.

They had just sat down to work after dinner. The sun poured through the panes of the two windows despite the blinds. The workers were gathered together in one of the corners of the room to escape its rays. Teresa, the most musical of the party, started a sentimental song in sad, drawn-out cadences in a sweet, timid voice, so that the others should join in parts; and in effect Nieves soon "took second," and the rest followed suit, some taking first and others second, which resulted in a somewhat melancholy harmony, tinged with romance. Romance may vanish from customs, and be banished from the novel and the stage, but it still finds a delicious haven of rest in the hearts of the artisans of Sarrio. The music continued until Pablito saw fit to disturb it by breaking in suddenly with his bleating voice. The needlewomen stopped singing, raised their heads in alarm, and then burst out laughing.

"*Madre!* what a fright you gave me!"

"I thought it was a cow!"

"And I thought it was a cock crowing—and I still think so," said Venturita.

The handsome Pablito, reclining in his armchair in the other corner, laughed loudly at his own expense. He certainly was of a jocose turn of mind, as we shall have occasion to see later on. From the time of the commencement of his sister's trousseau Pablito evinced a sudden taste for a sedentary life that had not hitherto been noticeable in him. Who had ever seen him before stop a minute in the house after dinner? Who would have thought that he could spend the morning in that armchair chatting with the workers? Nevertheless, it was a fact. For the last month he had not been out riding or driving, and he did not spend more than an hour in the stable during the course of the day.

Piscis was quite upset. He came every day to fetch him out, but it was in vain.

"Look here, Piscis, I have to clean my silver spurs, so I can not go out." "I say, Piscis, I have to go and get a bill of exchange cashed for father."

"Look here, Piscis, Linda is ill and can't be ridden."

"She is all right now," growled Piscis.

"Have you come from the stable?"

"Yes."

"Well, anyhow, I can't go out to-day—am out of sorts."

Sometimes Piscis entered the room and sat waiting silently; it was certainly not for long, because he was always thinking the women were making fun of him, and this prevented him being at his ease. When he thought the right moment had arrived, or when he noticed symptoms of boredom in Pablo, or when some other circumstance beyond our province occurred, he rose from his seat and made a sign with his hand to his friend as he gave a long, low whistle, for they understood each other better by whistles than by words. They both objected to articulate sounds and eschewed their use in each other's company, but Pablito did not relish the sign at that moment.

"I say, Piscis," he said, "I am dreadfully idle. Be so kind as to go to the stable and ask Pepe to put another oil compress on Romeo."

"I will do it," returned Piscis with a frowning face.

"All right, Piscis; thank you very much. Ta-ta! You will come to-morrow, eh? Perhaps I shall be able to ride then."

This was said with great suavity and amiability, to throw his friend off the scent. Piscis growled a "good-day" without turning to the company, and left with his eyes aflame, uglier and more demoniacal-looking than ever. The same thing occurred the next day. In spite of his respect for Pablito, Piscis then came to the conclusion that he

admired one of the needlewomen. Which? His perspicacity could not solve that question.

The young people began singing, but coming to the words:

"Only thou, Divine woman,
Said a prayer
At my solitary tomb,"

Pablito gave vent to such a discordant bellow that they all burst out laughing; but Venturita became serious.

"Look here, Pablo, if you go on like that, you had better go off with Piscis."

It was then Pablito's turn to be cross.

"I shall go when I feel inclined. You are always the one to spoil everything."

Young Belinchon meant to infer that his sister Venturita was the only one who failed to recognize the gifts which Heaven had bestowed on him, and this was true; and all the company laughed as if they had heard a passage from "Rabelais" instead of a cross remark. Doña Paula, who had an idolatrous admiration for her first-born, and nourished a grudge against the girl for her sharp remarks, which she considered were not warranted by her beauty, came to her son's assistance:

"You are quite right, Pablo! She always does throw cold water on any enjoyment. Goodness, what a girl! The man who takes her will have something to do to keep her in order."

At that moment Gonzalo appeared at the door of the room; he bent like a bow to shake hands with his future sister-in-law, Ventura, and Cecilia. The latter became serious, for, without turning her head, she knew that all the workers were looking out of the corners of their eyes, and she knew the kind of smile that wreathed their lips. Every day was alike. Before Gonzalo arrived the needlewomen lost no opportunity in teasing the bride.

"Cecilia, which of these garments will you wear the day of your wedding?"

"Señorita, you *will* sleep in these sheets, they are so fine."

"You won't be the only one to find them so."

"I say, you rogue, what a fine young man you've got. You won't have such a handsome fellow, Venturita."

"Who knows!" returned the girl.

Cecilia listened to these words with a smile on her lips, and blushed. Since the beginning of the preparations for the wedding her cheeks, formerly so pale, were almost rosy. This animation, and the light which happiness lent to her eyes, made her look interesting and sweet, if not pretty. There is not a girl who does not become more or less good-looking on the approach of marriage.

Cecilia was naturally silent and reserved without being bad-tempered. She hardly ever spoke, except when she was addressed, and then her replies were sweet, clear, and to the point. Timidity, which lends a certain charm to youth, was not the characteristic trait of her character, but our heroine had a sweet serenity and a certain sympathetic force in all her actions and words that revealed the perfect purity of her mind. This serenity was taken by unobservant people, if not for pride, which certainly could not be laid to the charge of Cecilia, for cold-heartedness. Even those who were most often at the house thought she was incapable of conceiving a great and tender passion. Accustomed to see her fulfil her domestic duties with the regularity of a clock, they would have required a power of penetration not possessed by many to divine the true moral worth of the eldest daughter of the Belinchons. The majority of such beings live and die unappreciated because they do not possess any of the brilliant qualities that attract all that see them. Innocence may be ranked among the virtues of this class of girl, and rare as it is, it is one least calculated to add to the value of a woman's character. Very few are those who know how to appreciate the beauty of these crystal souls; see them without noticing anything to arouse attention. But the same can be said of certain philters that are poisonous and certain drafts that are life-giving, and because our unpractised, dull eyes can not discern the elements of life or death that lie dormant in them, are we to say that such do not exist?

It was difficult to divine whether sad or pleasant feelings filled Cecilia's heart, but it was not impossible. I do not know if she tried to hide them, or whether her particular nature impelled her to do so, but it was a fact that in her home she was misunderstood, even by her parents. If perchance it was a question of paying calls, or buying a dress, Doña Paula would ask her daughter with solicitude:

"And what do you think, Cecilia?"

"I think it is very nice," was the reply.

"Do you really think it is nice?" said the mother, looking into her eyes.

"Yes, mama; I think it is nice."

But Doña Paula was always left in doubt as to whether the dress pleased her or not, or what she really thought. She seldom cried, and when she did, she took such pains to hide it that nobody knew of it. Whatever distress she felt was only betrayed by a slight line in her forehead, and great happiness with her was only evinced by a little more intensity in the gentle smile constantly upon her face. When Gonzalo wrote to her from abroad, she went to her mother and gave her the letter directly she read it.

"Do you like the lad?" asked Doña Paula, after reading the letter with more emotion than her daughter had shown in giving it to her.

"Do you like him?" returned the girl.

"I? Yes."

"Then if you and papa like him, I like him too," said Cecilia.

Who would have thought from those cold words that Cecilia had been in love with him for some time? Nevertheless, as love is of all human sentiments the most difficult to conceal, and as there was no need to hide it when her parents' consent had been given, she let it then be seen quite clearly. In temperaments like that of our heroine the slightest indication signifies a good deal. The happiness that filled her heart was soon seen in her face by all who knew her intimately. Few beings have known greater joy on earth than that which Cecilia experienced at that time.

All the litter about the room, the paper patterns, the designs, the linen stretched in frames, the skeins of thread, all spoke a soft mysterious language to her; the flashing of the scissors, the darting of the needles, prophesied future

joys to her. Sometimes they said to her:

"You will be seen, Cecilia, going to mass on Sunday on the arm of your husband. He will carry your prayer-book, he will leave you to go to the altar of Our Lady and will stay behind among the men; then he will wait for you at the door, will offer you the holy water, and then he will give you his arm again."

At other times they seemed to say to her:

"In the morning you will rise very quietly to keep him from waking, you will brush his clothes, you will put the buttons on his shirt, and when the time comes you will give him his chocolate."

Other voices seemed to say:

"And when you have a child!" But here the bride-elect felt her heart swell with delight, her hands trembled, and she cast a rapid glance at the needlewomen, fearing they had noticed her emotion. As the different articles of clothing were finished and ironed Cecilia put them away carefully in a press, and when that was full she took them to a room upstairs, where she artistically and carefully arranged the underclothing, petticoats, nightcaps, and dressing jackets upon long tables, set out for the purpose; then she covered them delicately with a linen cloth and left the room, locking the door and putting the key in her pocket.

After greeting the party Gonzalo took a seat near Pablito, and putting his hand familiarly on his shoulder he whispered in his ear:

"Which do you like best?"

And as he bent toward his future brother-in-law he cast an earnest look at Ventura, who returned it with a peculiar glance. Then both turned their eyes to Cecilia, but she had not raised her head from her embroidery frame.

"Nieves," replied Pablo, without hesitation, in his falsetto voice.

"I knew it, and I applaud your taste," said Gonzalo, laughing. "What a smooth skin—what teeth!"

"And what a figure! First rate, don't you know?"

Both looked at the embroideress, who raised her head, and seeing that the conversation was about her, she made a face.

"Come, don't talk in a whisper," said Doña Paula with asperity peculiar to the women of the people.

"Let them be, señora," returned Nieves; "they are talking about me, and in that they show their good taste."

"Certainly. Pablo was calling my attention to the ruddiness of certain lips, the transparency of a certain skin, and the golden hue of certain hair."

"Then they were talking of you, Valentina," said Nieves, blushing and nudging her companion.

"What an idea! Don't worry about that, as if we don't know who is the prettiest!" said the other, with evident pique.

"Gently, gently, señoras," exclaimed Gonzalo. "It is true that Pablo began by talking of the perfections of Nieves, but it is certain that he had meant to go on to those of all the rest, if he had not been interrupted. Is it not so, Pablo?"

"Yes, I meant to go on to Valentina."

Whereupon the girl referred to raised her head and looked at him with the half-frowning, half-roguish look that was peculiar to her.

"Take care, Nieves, that these young men don't forget themselves."

Pablo, without heeding the interruption, proceeded:

"And then from Teresa and Encarnacion, Elvira, and Generosa, I should have gone on to Venturita, for of course all men are at her feet; to Cecilia, no, for she is engaged; and then I should have said something about Señora Doña Paula, who, be it said without offense to anybody, is the most beautiful of all."

"What a humbug!" exclaimed the lady, pleased at her son's flattery.

Then Pablo rose from his armchair and embraced his mother affectionately.

"Get away, get away, flatterer!" she said, laughing.

"Come, open your purse, mama," said Venturita.

"I see! A spiteful remark as usual," exclaimed the young man in a rage, as he turned his head to his sister; but she only smiled to herself maliciously, without raising her head from her embroidery frame.

"You have done a great deal," said Gonzalo in a low voice, as he took a seat by the side of his fiancée.

"So, so," returned Cecilia, looking at him with her large, luminous eyes.

"But, indeed, it is a great deal. Yesterday you had not embroidered this clove. It looks to me like a clove."

"It is jasmine."

"Nor these two leaves, either."

"Bah! That is nothing."

"And what are you embroidering now?"

Cecilia went on plying her needle without answering.

"What are you embroidering now?" asked Gonzalo in a louder voice, thinking that she had not heard.

"A sheet—hush!" returned the young girl, slightly raising her eyes in the direction of the embroideresses, and quickly dropping them again.

At that moment Gonzalo's and Venturita's eyes met in a meaning glance over Cecilia's head.

"Well, you see, every one to his taste," said Pablito, as he looked fixedly at Nieves, as much as to say:

"Don't pay any attention. I only say that as a duty."

"What is there to suit everybody, Don Pablo?" asked Valentina in an ironical tone.

"Flowers, girl."

"Give them to the saints."

"And to pretty girls like you."

"If I am not pretty, I precede those that are, without any by your leave."

"The deuce she does! Valentina puts her back up directly one goes near her," exclaimed the snubbed young man.

The joke made the needlewomen laugh.

"Valentina does not like young men," said Encarnacion.

"She is quite right; you get nothing from young men but promises, lost time, and often a lifetime of misery," said Doña Paula sententiously, unmindful of her own fortunate lot. "As to that, Sarrío is quite demoralized; there is hardly a girl who keeps company with one of her own class. The young man is at least expected to wear a cravat, to carry a cane and a cigarette-holder, although he may not have a plate to eat off. Young girls do not mind being seen at dusk nowadays with young gentlemen, nor do they object to returning from fairs on the arm of one of them, singing at the top of their voices."

"Poor young things! I don't know what you expect. Because the son of Don Rudesindo married Pepe la Esquilla, and the pilot of the 'Trinidad' the Mechacan girl, you think all is gold that glitters. But seeing is believing. Look at Benita, the girl at Señor Matias's, the sacristan. She does not look very pretty now, eh?"

"Benita has her marriage lines," said Encarnacion.

"Lines, eh? She will see what her lines are worth."

"Señora, the lad can not desert her; if he does, she will pursue him all her life."

"Silence, silence, chatterbox; who put such ideas into your head?"

"It is a well-known fact that Benita has gone to law."

"Look here, señora," said the dark, sentimental girl, "it is quite true that we run risks, but what are we to do? The artisans of the town are just as bad; they mostly spend Sunday and Monday and one day in the week at the tavern. How many are there who take their wages home to their wives regularly? If the husband is a sailor, he sends it home one quarter, keeps it three quarters, and then keeps it altogether. The supplies ceasing, the unhappy woman is forced to work to get bread for her children.

"And then in other cases what thanks or reward does the wife get from her husband? If he does go out with her on a Sunday afternoon, he stops at every public house on the road and leaves the poor creature at the door; or if there is some friend with him, he shouts out some insulting remark at her that makes her blush like a peony.

"Yes, yes, señora, they are all such vagabonds. Goodness knows they are not worth the bread they eat. The other day I met Tomasina—you know the girl at Uncle Rufio's who married one of Prospero's clerks less than a year ago—well, she was at that moment going to get two reales from her father to buy some bread, for she had not had a mouthful all day. Her husband drinks nearly all his wages, so the poor thing has nothing to eat by the middle of the week.

"God help her! And most nights the great pig comes home hopelessly drunk, and nearly beats her to death. Sometimes the poor thing goes to bed bruised and supperless.

"And then, seeing these things, people want a—well, better hold one's tongue! But I do say, caramba, that if one has to go to the devil, it is better to go in a coach."

"Look here," intervened Valentina, raising her face with its habitual frown, albeit a trifle more pronounced, "don't go on like that; you say you like young gentlemen. Well and good. I don't care; but don't you throw all the dirty water on your own class. If they drink—and there are those that do—don't I also see gentlemen coming home quite intoxicated? And if they do beat their wives, half the time they would not do it if the women's tongues were not so long, don't you see? And Don Ramon, the music-master, beat his wife when he came home one night. You must know that, as you live near."

"I don't chatter about everything, girl," returned Teresa, somewhat dampened by the fear that her swarthy friend would make her reveal her nocturnal perambulations with Donato Rojo, the medical officer of health; "only I say there are many asses."

"Very well, leave them in peace, then, and don't talk of them, and they won't talk of you. Every one for herself, and let sleeping dogs lie."

"Listen, Valentina," said Elvira, smiling maliciously. "Do you think Cosme will beat you when you marry?"

"If I deserve it, he will. I would rather have a blow or two from my Cosme than the scorn of a fine gentleman—so there!"

"That's what I like to hear; take a lesson, take a lesson, girls," said Pablito.

CHAPTER IX

A CHANGE OF HEART

GONZALO, after talking for some time with his bride-elect, left his seat, took three or four turns up and down the room, and seated himself by the side of Venturita, with whom he was always on good terms, for they liked laughing and joking together after they had once become friendly. The girl was drawing some letters preparatory to embroidering them.

"Don't come teasing here, Gonzalo; you know how badly I draw," she said, while the look that she gave the youth was so flashing and provocative that it made him drop his eyes.

"I am not so sure of that. You don't draw badly," he replied in a low voice that slightly trembled, as he bent his face down to the paper which Venturita had on her lap.

"Pure flattery. You will acknowledge that it might be better."

"Better—better—everything in the world might be better. This is good enough."

"You are getting quite a flatterer. I don't want you to make fun of me, do you hear?"

"I don't make fun of anybody, much less of you," he returned, without raising his eyes from the paper, and with his voice lower every minute, and evidently agitated. Venturita kept her eyes fixed upon him with a mocking expression, in which the triumph of satisfied pride was plainly visible.

"Come, then, you draw them, Mr. Clever," she said, as she passed him the pencil and paper with gracious condescension.

The youth acceded to the suggestion, as he ventured to raise his eyes to the girl's, but he quickly dropped them as if he feared their magnetism. He took the book from her lap on to his knee, put a piece of white paper on it, and proceeded to draw.

But instead of the letters, he began to sketch, with some skill, the head of a woman; first the hair parted in two braids, then the straight, pretty forehead, then a delicate nose, a pretty, short chin joined to the throat by a soft, graceful curve. It was wonderfully like Venturita. The girl, leaning on the shoulder of her future brother, followed the movements of the pencil, and a vain smile gradually overspread her face. After drawing the head Gonzalo proceeded to delineate the figure, and the peignoir, or dressing-gown, worn by the girl was soon reproduced; but he took some time drawing minutely the silk bows with which it was fastened in front. When the picture was finished, Venturita asked him in a mischievous tone:

"Now put underneath who it is."

The young man raised his head and their smiling eyes met. Then, quickly and decisively, he wrote under the drawing:

"The one I love best in all the world."

Venturita took the paper in her hands and looked at it with delight for some moments; then, with a pout of assumed disdain, she gave it back to him, saying:

"Take it, take it, you rude fellow."

But before it reached Gonzalo's hands Cecilia stretched out hers and snatched it from him laughingly, saying:

"What papers are these?"

Then Venturita sprang from her seat, as if she had been stung, and caught hold of her sister's hand.

"Give it up, give it up, Cecilia! Let go!" she cried, with her face aflame and distorted with a forced smile.

"No, I want to see it."

"You shall see it afterward; let go!"

"I want to see it now."

"Let be, child; let her see it. What does it signify to you?" said Doña Paula.

"I don't like anything being taken from me by force," Venturita cried, turning serious. Then realizing that she was losing ground, she resumed her smile, saying:

"Come, Cecilia, let go; don't be disagreeable."

"Don't make such a fuss! Let go yourself; you are hurting me."

"Who are you to snatch the paper from my hand?" she returned, and really in a rage. "Let go, let go, you ugly thing, you parrot nose, you fool! Let go or I will scratch you," she added, with her eyes flashing and her face distorted with rage.

Seeing her like this, the smile that had suffused Cecilia's face suddenly left it, and opening her large eyes, full of surprise, she exclaimed:

"Goodness, you seem mad, child. Take it, take it; I don't want it."

So she gave up the paper, which was crumpled in her hand, and Venturita, with her face still distorted with rage, tore it into a thousand pieces.

"In all the days of my life I never saw such a mad creature!" exclaimed Doña Paula in amazement. "Ave Maria! Ave Marie! Wherever did you get such a bad temper from, child?"

"It would be from you," replied Venturita sulkily, without looking at anybody.

"You shameless girl! If it were not for folk being here! How dare you answer your mother like that? Don't you know the commandment of the law of God? I will take you to-morrow to confess to Don Aquilino."

"Very well; give my regards to Don Aquilino."

"Wait a bit, wait a bit, you bad girl!" cried the señora, making as though she would rise to chastise her daughter.

But at that instant the figure of Don Rosendo, in his many colored dressing gown and silk tasseled velvet cap, appeared at the door.

"What is the matter?" he asked with surprise at the sight of his wife's excited state.

Suffocated with sobs, Doña Paula then proceeded to give him an account of his daughter's want of respect.

Don Rosendo thought it behooved him to frown severely and say in a solemn tone:

"You have behaved badly, Ventura; go and ask your mother's pardon."

We know that he was absent-minded, always absorbed in some idea, so this domestic episode only partially roused him from his preoccupation. Nevertheless, seeing his child obstinate, supercilious, and angry, he repeated his command with greater firmness.

"Come, daughter, go and ask your mother's pardon, seeing that you have been rude to her."

The girl made her usual scornful pout and murmured under her breath:

"As if I should think of doing such a thing!"

"Come, Venturita, what are you muttering there? Come, before I get angry."

"Do, do, Venturita; don't behave like that," implored all the needlewomen in low tones.

"Don't bother me. Will you leave me in peace?" she retorted, also in a low tone, albeit an angry one.

"Won't you do as I tell you?" now demanded Don Rosendo, with increased severity, "won't you?" But the girl sat silent and motionless.

"Then leave the room at once; get out of my sight!" stormed the father.

Venturita rose from her seat and, stiff and sullen, she made her way through the party, and left the room, slamming the door heavily behind her. Don Rosendo, after standing a moment motionless with his eyes on the door by which his daughter had made her exit, turned round and said:

"I am sorry to have to be so severe with my children, but sometimes there is no help for it."

The fierce expression soon faded from Belinchon's fine face, and was superseded by his habitual look of thoughtful abstraction.

"Gonzalo, if it is not troubling you, I wish you would come with me into my study," he said, turning to his future son-in-law.

The young man, who had several times started and turned pale during the last scene, was now filled with dismay, for he feared that the summons betokened nothing less than that Don Rosendo, having a suspicion of the inconstancy of his feelings, was now about to call him to account. So, with his head bent and very anxious, he followed Belinchon into the study, which was a spacious apartment, furnished with the luxury befitting a rich merchant—a massive table and cabinets of mahogany, loaded with parcels of books and papers, a velvet carpet, sofas upholstered with brocade, and a colossal silver inkstand. A quarter of the room was filled with a heap of little packets, wrapped in paper of various colors, which would puzzle anybody who entered it for the first time. Not so Gonzalo, or any intimate friend of the house. Those packages were full of toothpicks!

"How so?" the reader will ask.

Don Rosendo Belinchon, a cod merchant of such renown, a dealer in toothpicks as well?

No, Don Rosendo did not deal in toothpicks; he made them. And this not from any speculative motive, which would have been beneath him, but from a purely disinterested love of the thing. He had evinced the taste in early youth, but the assiduous occupations of his trade and the vicissitudes of his life had only hitherto permitted him to indulge his passion in a desultory way in leisure hours. But from the time he could leave his office to a few faithful underlings he gave himself up heart and soul to such a simple and useful amusement. In the morning at Graell's shop, in the afternoon at the saloon, in the evening at home, or at Don Pedro Miranda's, he was always working. His servant spent a great part of the day in preparing perfectly equal pieces of dry wood, from which his dexterous hand produced the queen of toothpicks.

And as he never rested from his work, not even on holidays, the production was so excessive that there were not enough purchasers in town, and when the heap reached from the table to the ceiling he was obliged to despatch packets of them to his friends in the capital. Thanks to the noble efforts of this clever representative of his trade, we can say with pride that Sarrio attained the level of the great capitals in this interesting branch of civilization, and that no other Spanish or foreign town could compete with it, for the house of every rich man, as well as every poor one, boasted a well-cut toothpick, irrefutable testimony of the cultured refinement of its inhabitants.

Don Rosendo signed to the young man to be seated on the sofa, which he did in visible agitation. Then the merchant proceeded to take a chair with an air of mystery, and placing himself opposite the youth, he gave him a dig in the ribs and jauntily said with a smile:

"Well, Gonzalito, and what do you think of this question of the slaughter-house?"

"The slaughter-house?" asked the young man, opening his eyes wide with surprise.

"Yes, the new slaughter-house; do you think it ought to be put on the Escombrera, or on the Plaza de las Meanas, or at the back of Don Rudesindo's houses?"

Gonzalo seemed to see heaven open and, smiling with pleasure, he replied:

"I think it would be very well on the Plaza de las Meanas. It is very open—very airy there."

Then seeing that a frown gathered on his future father-in-law's forehead, and that the smile suddenly left his face, he added stammeringly:

"I don't think it would be bad at the Escombrera either."

"Much better, Gonzalo; infinitely better."

"Maybe, maybe."

"But it *must* be, and I tell you plainly that to have it on the Plaza de las Meanas (this, mind you, quite between you and me) is an act of utter madness; an act of ut-ter madness," he repeated, with additional stress on each syllable.

"And this opinion of mine," he added, "is not, as you imagine, a thing of yesterday, or of to-day, but of all my life. From the time that I was capable of understanding anything I knew that the slaughter-house ought not to be where it is; in a word, that it ought to be moved. Whither? An internal voice always replied: 'To the Escombrera.' Before I was able to give any scientific reason I was as convinced as I am now that it was there that it ought to be, and nowhere else. Now that the discussion of the problem is at hand, I feel obliged to support this opinion, to communicate my idea to the public, and to give it the result of my meditations. If you have nothing to do, I will now read you the letter that I am sending to the 'Progress of Lancia' with this end in view."

And in effect, without waiting for Gonzalo to reply, he turned to the table, took up some sheets of paper that were upon it, put on his spectacles, and, approaching the window, he commenced reading the letter in a voice which betrayed his emotion.

The letter was written on business paper, large and ruled. All the letters that for years past he had sent to the "Progress of Lancia" and to other periodicals had been written on the same sort of paper, on both sides. He did not then know that the paper ought only to be written on one side for the press, but he soon acquired that valuable knowledge, as we shall see.

Don Rosendo Belinchon evinced a taste for writing communications to the press almost simultaneously with that for toothpicks; that is to say, it dated from his early years.

A great advocate of human progress, of reform, of all kinds of discussion and instruction, it was natural that the press should inspire him with respect and enthusiasm. Newspapers had always been an indispensable element of his existence. He subscribed to many, both national and foreign, because, being educated for commerce, he was well versed in French and English, and he never missed devoting a couple of hours to reading the journals even on the busiest days. These hours had increased during later years, at the expense of the codfish business. The delight that our hero felt in the morning, after taking his chocolate, in perusing the leading articles of the "Pabellon Nacional," the events of the "Politica," and the light news of the "Figaro," was so intense that the brightness of his face pervaded the atmosphere.

Like all men of wide and lofty views, he was not exclusive in his press proclivities. He liked a paper as a paper, a pleasant medium of the progress of human reason, or, as he better expressed it, as a "lofty manifestation of public

opinion."

The opinions that each supported were secondary matters. He subscribed to papers of every opinion, and enjoyed them all equally. If he had any particular predilection, it was for venomous articles and paragraphs, for their way of saying one thing and conveying another, of twisting phrases in such a manner that an apparently innocent clause was an envenomed shaft, filled Don Rosendo with such delight that he went nearly mad with joy. Sometimes on reading in "La España" a paragraph in this style:

"Yesterday the circular of the Señor President of the Supreme Court to his subordinates appeared at last. We congratulate General O'Donnell, the president of the Liberal party, and Señor Negrete and the Democratic Government party on the colossal work that they have consummated in a few moments of lucidity," he would exclaim, waving the paper in his hand:

"What spite, Caracoles; what spite!"

This liking, or, rather, passion for the press, was not fruitless, as we have said. Even in his youth he had sent two letters to a weekly paper published in Lancia, called "Autumn," describing the annual festivities that took place in Sarrio in the month of September. These letters were read with profit and no little pleasure in the town, which encouraged him to write three more the following year, giving an account of the marvelous number of rockets that were sent off in Sarrio on the 13th, 14th, and 15th of the month, the beautiful illumination of the 16th, and the magnificent ball given at the Lyceum on the night of the 17th.

After tasting the sweets of publicity, Don Rosendo could not do less than indulge in them from time to time.

The least pretext sufficed for him to send a letter or a communication to the papers.

Sometimes he signed them with his name, at other times with some pretty pseudonym or anagram.

If the fisher-folk had a festival in honor of St. Telmo, Don Rosendo immediately wrote his letter to the "Progress of Lancia" or to the "Bee," describing the decorations, the bonfires, the mass, the procession, etc. If a banquet were given in the new school buildings on their inauguration, three or four days later the Lancian paper contained a letter publishing the speeches and improvised sonnets. If a bricklayer fell from a scaffolding, there was a communication from Don Rosendo asking for better protection for bricklayers who have to go on scaffoldings. If the son of Don Aquilino sang at a mass, there would be a letter from Don Rosendo describing the touching ceremony and praising the clear, musical voice and the serene appearance of the young priest. If the tides were high and strong and broke away some stones from the end of the pier, a letter; if the boats from Bilbao declined to take on board the pilots of Sarrio, a communication; if a harvest of maize were lost by the drought, a letter; if the prevailing winds were from the northeast, a letter.

In short, nothing happened on terra firma or in the atmosphere of the town worthy of mention without its being tackled by the clever, flowing pen of our merchant. How much work will the future historians of Sarrio be saved by this valuable material, accumulated by one of its most enlightened sons!

With advancing years Don Rosendo Belinchon's letters assumed a character less romantic, we won't say frivolous (for it would not be either correct or respectful to apply such a term to that estimable gentleman); but it was noticeable that the subject-matter was not so much the junketings and recreations of the townsfolk, but something that would tend, directly or indirectly, to forward their moral and material interests. The trades, the schools, the salvage from shipwrecks, the building of a church or a prison, were the matters that he now most frequently treated to his own glory and to that of his birthplace.

One of them, of vital interest for Sarrio, as he maintained, was the slaughter-house. He had not hitherto approached this question, because he knew that his opinion was at variance with that of a large number of his fellow-townsmen. But he considered "that the time had now come to express it without any perambulation or circumlocution."

The letter he now read, the first he had written on the subject, was addressed to the "Progress of Lancia," and it ran thus:

"THE SENOR DIRECTOR OF THE 'PROGRESS OF LANCIA.'

"*Dear Sir*—The attention now accorded to natural physical science, and especially to the science of hygiene, as the health of places as well as people depends upon it, in view of its great practical utility, the timidity of those who, influenced by an education as erroneous as it was deficient, condemned the study of these great problems, being cumbered with antiquated, dull ideas, is now happily vanishing under the powerful movement of the nineteenth century, rightly called the century of enlightenment."

Don Rosendo's style was always involved. He continued:

"Now that civilization, released from the obstacles that crippled the conscience and the mind, opens a vast field to all, by means of the press, to express our independent ideas and give them forth to the world, trusting in the friendship that you have always accorded me, and in the kindness with which the public has hitherto received the humble efforts of the pen," etc., etc.

After three or four more paragraphs in this perambulatory style (which the editor of the "Progress" always had to curtail) Don Rosendo went into the question, putting forward the slaughter-house, or, as he termed it, "the public massacre-hall," in all its bearings, so as to condemn its establishment on the Plaza de las Meanas in terms that left no room for doubt. The reasons given for the opposition were obvious. For one thing, the southeast winds, prevalent during the greater part of the year, would carry miasmatic smells, etc.

For another thing, the difficulty of reaching solid ground for the cementing would cause an enormous expense, etc. The necessity of passing through the town with the cattle, etc. For another thing, the proximity of the houses, the bad effect on the mineral springs, etc.

In fact, Don Rosendo having given more than twenty reasons, in what he termed "a clear, succinct style," he added that they would be given more fully in the forthcoming letters with which he purposed "troubling the readers of the illustrious periodical."

When the reading was over, Gonzalo pronounced the reasoning incontrovertible, and Don Rosendo (with his

spectacles on his nose) declared that there was no gainsaying it.

Having arrived at such a perfect understanding, they separated in a befittingly cheerful spirit. Don Rosendo remained in the library to copy his letter, and Gonzalo was about to return to the workroom; but before he left the apartment his future father-in-law called him back to say:

"Mind, not a word to anybody of this."

"Don Rosendo, I swear!" returned the young man, raising his hand in sign of protest.

The merchant, in an expansive frame of mind, continued:

"You will soon know something else which will be a pleasant surprise to you. It is an idea which came to me two months ago, and which I hope to carry out, God willing, very soon. Oh! it is a brilliant idea! It will make a radical change in Sarrio, you know!"

The mysterious manner, the serious, agitated tone of his voice, the look of triumph which fulminated from his eyes as he spoke, surprised Gonzalo not a little. Nevertheless, he did not dare to ask for explanations, and his future father-in-law let him go with a vacant smile.

CHAPTER X

TWO TRAITORS

THE party in the workroom was meanwhile still being entertained by Pablito's conversation, which was embellished by practical illustrations, in accordance with his versatile nature.

Venturita had not yet returned, and Gonzalo reseated himself by the side of his betrothed and began talking to her with undisguised embarrassment and timidity, for, being unaccustomed to hide his feelings, his treachery weighed upon his soul. Sometimes Cecilia raised her head to reply, and her clear, serene, innocent glance made him blush. To overcome his confusion he thought he had better tell her his love and devotion in more ardent terms than hitherto. Like all irresolute natures, in a time of exigency he took the worst course to give himself a moment's respite. Cecilia received the protestations in silence, without evincing the delight that women generally show on hearing expressions of affection from the one they love.

"You are very flattering to-day, Don Gonzalo. I don't like being spoiled," she said at last with a smile.

"But it is a pleasure to tell you what I feel," he replied in a choked voice.

"Well, it is a pleasure I do not understand," she returned sweetly. "The deeper my affection the less I like to speak of it."

"That is because you do not really love."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, in such a genuine tone of reproach that our young man was taken aback.

"Yes, yes; it is because you are naturally cold. The heat of feeling, like physical heat, can not remain long concealed; there comes a time when it rises to the surface like the lava of volcanoes. And of all sentiments, love is the one that can best burst the strings of the tongue. It is only really felt when one can say in every tone and in every manner possible, 'I love you.' What you said just now is absurd, for simultaneously with the birth of love in our hearts for anybody there comes the desire to express it; and to satisfy this desire is the greatest of all delights."

"It may be, it may be," she remarked in a doubtful tone. "Although I have not experienced it, I can well imagine it from what I suffer. But, Gonzalo," she added in a tremulous voice, "for God's sake don't measure my affection by my words. I can not, I can never say what I feel. There seems to be a sort of lump in my throat, and nothing comes but foolish things, insignificant remarks, when I should like to utter words of affection! Oh, it is a torture! It is being like a dog without a tail."

Gonzalo burst out laughing, and the girl, who had spoken more strongly than usual, turned red and bent her head.

"But nobody has cut out your tongue."

"In this matter you must consider that they have."

"Very well; you must express yourself in writing," and at that moment he turned his head quickly toward the door, which had been swung open.

It was Piscis. After muttering a "Good-afternoon," he took his usual seat in the corner, followed by derisive glances of the needlewomen, toward whom, for this and other reasons, he vowed eternal hatred.

After returning their mocking looks with one that was straight and fierce he remained silent for some minutes, but as his soul was burdened with solemn and profound secrets, and Pablito would not cease his attention to Nieves, he was boiling over with rage. After having whistled to attract his friend's attention, he ventured to disburden his mind in public at the risk of his confidences not being understood and appreciated by the feminine element of the party.

"What is it, Piscis?" asked Pablito, hearing the whistle.

"Do you know why Romeo is neighing?"

Then the needlewomen raised their heads in surprise, and Valentina, trying not to laugh, said to Teresa:

"Child, what is he saying?"

"Why does a horse neigh?"

"Because—"

Although she spoke in a low tone Piscis heard her quite well, and turning from Pablo, who had taken the question quite seriously, and wished to hear about this peculiarity of Romeo's, he said to Valentina in an angry tone:

"Will you be quiet, you chatterbox?"

These emphatic words were received with an explosion of laughter by the workers.

"Don't fuss yourself, Piscis; let them be. Well, you took Romeo out? I am glad of that."

"I harnessed him to the wagonette with Linda," returned the Centaur, with an angry look at the listening

Valentina.

"If you could have seen—shiver my shins!—how he behaved! I with the whip, and he, thud, thud, against the dashboard. I returned to the stable and put on the kicking strap. Then I went out again. But what did the creature do this time? He got between the wheel and the traces, and then he began neighing. Dash me! I very nearly broke a lamp."

"I must get to the bottom of this," returned Pablito, profoundly interested, and leaving Nieves to go over to Piscis.

"I must think it over to-night," returned the Centaur, looking very grave, "and we will see to-morrow what we can do."

The two friends then lowered their voices and plunged into an animated private discussion.

Gonzalo was disturbed. He kept casting glances at the door, hoping every minute to see Venturita return. Nevertheless, the time went on and the girl did not appear. His abstraction so notably increased that Cecilia had to ask him the same question three times.

"What is the matter? Your thoughts seem to be wandering."

"It is so," he said, slightly coloring; "I recollect that I ought to write to London to-day on an important matter of business, and it is now about six o'clock."

Whereupon he took leave of his betrothed, of Doña Paula, and the rest of the party, and left the house.

Once in the passage he slackened his steps, and began looking round on all sides without seeing what he wished. Then, with bent head, he slowly and sadly descended the staircase and was about to raise the latch of the door when he thought the string by which it was pulled from upstairs shook. He stood a moment motionless. He again raised his hand to the latch, and again noticed the vibration of the cord. Then he turned back, looked up the staircase, and there above a pretty little face was smiling at him.

"Is it you?" he asked in a falsetto voice, his countenance suffused with joy.

"Yes, it is I," replied Venturita in the same tone.

"Do you want me to come up?"

"No," returned the girl, as much as to say, "Why do you ask, sir?" Gonzalo mounted the staircase on the tips of his toes.

"We must not stay here; we shall be seen," said Venturita, taking his hand and leading him along the passage to the dining-room.

There Gonzalo took a seat without leaving hold of her hand.

"I thought I was not going to see you again to-day. What a temper you have, child!" he said, smiling.

Venturita's face clouded.

"If they did not irritate me every minute, I should not have one."

"But recollect, it was your mother who reprimanded you," he replied with a smile.

"What?" she exclaimed passionately. "Why is my mother to annoy me every hour and every minute? If she thinks I am going to stand it she is greatly mistaken. She does not mind what that boor does; she will do anything for him. There is nothing but spoiling for him! Look here, Gonzalo, if you want us to be friends, don't interfere with me." And at these words, uttered in an angry tone, her eyes flamed with rage, and she gave a violent pull at her hand to release it. But this Gonzalo did not allow, and kissing it passionately several times, he said, laughing:

"But, my girl, don't be angry with me, who have done nothing. If I admire you, it is just because you are so hot-tempered. I don't like women who are milk-and-watery."

"Because you are so yourself," she replied, now calm and smiling.

"Don't believe it. I am not so milk-and-watery as you think. When I am angry, I am so indeed."

"Bah! Once a year!"

"Well, as I am so, I ought to like quiet, sweet-tempered women."

"You make a mistake; one always likes one's contrast. Fair people like dark people, thin people fat, tall people short. Don't I suit you because you are so tall and I so small?"

"Not only for that," he said, laughing and drawing her toward him.

"Why, then?" she asked, giving him a mocking glance.

"Don't you know? Shall I whisper it to you?"

"Why?" she insisted, keeping her eyes upon him.

"Because you are so very ugly."

"Thank you," she returned, with her face bright with gratified vanity.

"There is no one uglier than you in Sarrío; not in the whole world."

"You have seen uglier in the countries where you have been."

"I assure you, no."

"Holy Mother of Amparo! Then I must be a monster," she cried, accepting the flattering hyperbole of the words.

"Somebody is coming!" said Gonzalo, suddenly turning grave.

Venturita went to the door.

"It is only the cook passing," she said, turning back into the room.

"I think we are in danger here. Suppose your mother or one of the girls came in—or Cecilia" (he added in a low voice)—"what excuse could we give?"

"Something or other; that's a slight matter. But if you are nervous, we can go elsewhere."

"Let us go to the drawing-room."

"No, no; wait a moment. I will go first."

Then stopping at the door, and turning back, she said:

"If you give me your word to be good, I will take you to my room."

"On my word of honor," replied the young man with delight.

"No caresses?"

"None."

"Swear it."

"I swear."

"Very well; stop here a minute, and then come on tiptoe. Till we meet again!"

"Till we meet again!" said Gonzalo, taking one of her hands and kissing it.

"I see what it is," she said, pretending to be angry; "before you come you begin to break your word."

"I did not think that your hands were included in the promise."

"Above all things," she said, with severity in her tone and a smile in her eyes.

At the end of two minutes the youth followed her, found the door ajar, and entered. Venturita's room was like its mistress, small, pretty, and seductive.

There was a sandalwood bedstead hung with brocaded silk hangings and covered with a blue silk coverlet; an ebony cabinet inlaid with ivory, which formed a desk when opened; a comfortable blue velvet armchair; a toilet table and looking-glass, also hung with silk; a mirrored wardrobe of sandalwood, like the bedstead; and a few gilt chairs completed the furniture; and the room was as redolent of sweet perfume as the sanctum of an odalisque.

"Oh, this is better than Cecilia's room!" said Gonzalo.

"When did you see that?" asked Venturita.

"A few days ago she showed it to me; bare walls, with a few second-rate pictures, a curtainless bed, a common wardrobe."

"Well, if she doesn't have it as I do, it is because she doesn't care to. I certainly had to get around papa at first. But my sister is so—well, she is as God made her. It is all alike to her. Everything pleases a commonplace person, doesn't it?"

"In this room there is so much taste and so much coquetry, and that there always is about you."

"Why do you accuse me of coquetry, you silly?" she asked, in her old mocking tone.

"Because it is true, and quite right so. Coquetry, when not excessive, adds attraction to beauty as spice adds flavor to food."

"And so I suit your taste! Well, look here; although coquetry may give attraction, or flavor, or what you like, I am not coquettish. You at least have no right to say so. I say—it seems to me—"

"It is true; you are right; you are quite right. I can not call you coquettish, because the coquetry I was speaking of is quite different."

"Do me the favor to sit down, for I think you have grown enough—and let us leave abstract questions."

Gonzalo dropped into the chair the girl offered him, still under the spell of her brilliant, mischievous eyes. From the minute he entered the room he experienced a delight, half physical, half spiritual, which dominated his senses and his spirit. The perfume that he inhaled mounted to his brain, and the magnetic glance of Venturita hypnotized him.

"You did wrong in bringing me to your room," he said, as he passed his handkerchief over his forehead.

"Why?" she asked, opening and shutting her eyes several times, which were like stars at the close of a hot day in summer.

"Because I don't feel well," he returned, with the same smile.

"You really feel ill?" replied the girl, opening her eyes wide with an innocent expression.

"A little."

"Shall I call some one?"

"No; it is your eyes that hurt me."

"Oh, come!" she exclaimed, with a laugh, as if that were of no consequence; "then I will shut them."

"Oh, no; don't shut them, or I shall be much worse."

"Then I will go," she said, rising from her chair.

"That would kill me, my girl! Do you know why I am ill? It is because it kills me not to be able to kiss your eyes."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Venturita, with a burst of laughter. "How bad it must be! I am sorry not to be able to cure you."

"Will you let me die?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. Let me kiss your hair, then."

"No."

"Your hands."

"No."

"Let me kiss something of yours. See, you are doing me a lot of harm."

"Kiss this glove," said the girl, laughing, and taking one from the toilet table. Gonzalo seized it, and kissed it passionately several times.

The reader, who may have denounced Gonzalo in his heart as a disloyal, perfidious fellow, or at least weak, and maybe deserving the appellation of "a disagreeable character," as the critics say when the people in novels are not all as heroic and as clever as might be wished, must imagine himself in that little nest, as full of perfume as the chalice of a magnolia, with the youngest daughter of the Belinchons, dressed in a blue-ribboned peignoir, revealing a good part of her neck, like roses and milk, with her shining blue eyes on him, and a soft, melodious voice that moved his very soul, and if the girl gave him a glove, saying "kiss it," he must think whether he could refrain from doing so.

"You must calm yourself, Gonzalo," she said, with a smile that would have bewitched St. Anthony.

"Yes, yes."

"Very well. Now we must talk seriously and review the situation."

Gonzalo became grave.

"After what you said to me three days ago I did think that before now you would have said something to mama, or papa, or that you would have written. But no; you not only let the time slip by, so that things get worse every day, but I see that you are more affectionate and attentive to Cecilia than ever."

Gonzalo made a negative gesture.

"Yes; I saw you a moment ago through the keyhole of the room. Nothing escapes me. Now this is very bad if you don't love her; and if you do love her, it is treating me badly."

"Are you not yet sure that you alone possess my heart?" said the young man, raising his eyes toward her.

"No."

"Then yes, yes; a thousand times yes. But I can not treat Cecilia in a cold, indifferent manner. That would be very ugly. I prefer to tell her plainly and end the matter once for all."

"Then tell her."

"I do not dare."

"Then don't tell her, and you and I will have done with each other. Better so," returned the girl with impatience.

"For God's sake, don't speak like that, Ventura! I shall think you don't love me. You must understand that my position is awkward, strange, and terrible. To be on the eve of marrying an excellent girl; then without any quarrel whatever, without any warning of any kind, to suddenly say to her: 'It is all over. I can not marry you because I do not love you, and I never have loved you,' is the most brutal and hateful thing that has ever been known. Besides, I don't know how your parents will take my behavior. It is most probable that, justly indignant on her behalf, they will load me with reproaches and forbid me the house."

"Very well; marry her—and go in peace!" said Venturita, turning somewhat pale.

"That I'll never do. I marry you, or nobody."

"Then what are we to do?"

"I don't know," returned the youth, hanging his head in distress.

Both remained silent for some seconds. Then Venturita, placing her hand on his head, said:

"Think it over, man; think it over."

"I do, but with no result."

"You can't manage it. Come, then; go along, and leave it to me. I will speak to mama; but you must write a letter to Cecilia."

"Oh, my God! Ventura!" he exclaimed, full of anguish.

"Then what do you want—say?" asked the girl, now in a rage. "Do you think I am going to be made a plaything of?"

"If we could only manage without this letter," returned Gonzalo humbly. "You can't imagine the effort it will be for me. Would it not do if I left off coming to the house for some days?"

"Yes, yes; be off and don't come back!" she replied, taking a step to the door.

But the youth caught her by the tresses of her hair.

"Come, don't be cross, beautiful one; you well know that you have completely conquered and fascinated me, and that I will obey your every command, even to casting myself into the sea. I only told you my opinion—if you don't like it, I have nothing more to say. I only want to avoid hurting Cecilia."

"It is like your conceit!" exclaimed the girl, without turning round. "Do you think Cecilia is going to die of grief?"

"If she is not hurt, so much the better, and I shall be saved remorse."

"Cecilia is cold; she can not love or hate much. She is very good, and does not know what selfishness is; but you will always find her the same, neither happy nor sad. She is incapable of either giving or taking offense; at least, if she does take it, nobody knows it. What are you doing?" she added, turning round quickly.

"I am untying the ribbons of your tresses. I want to see your hair loose again. No sight gives me more pleasure."

"If that is your fancy, I will undo them. Stop," said the girl, who had reason to be proud of her hair.

"Oh, how beautiful! It is a marvel of nature!" exclaimed Gonzalo, putting his fingers in it. "Let me bury my face in it; let me bathe in this river of gold."

And so saying, he hid his face in the fair locks of the girl.

But it happened that a few minutes earlier, as the clock struck seven, the seamstress and the embroideresses had left off their work and prepared to leave. Before doing so Valentina was commissioned by Doña Paula to go to Venturita's room to fetch thence some patterns on the wardrobe. So she pushed open the door at the critical moment in which Gonzalo was bathing his face in that original manner. On hearing the sound he rose suddenly and stood, paler than wax. Valentina blushed up to her eyes, and said stammeringly:

"Your mother wants the patterns, those of the other day; they ought to be on the wardrobe."

"They are not on the wardrobe, but inside it," returned Venturita, without any confusion whatsoever.

And turning to the wardrobe, the girl opened a drawer and drew out a paper parcel, which she gave her.

"Stop a moment, Valentina," said Venturita before she left the room; "be so kind as to tie my hair, for I can not do it with this bad finger."

Then she showed that her finger was bleeding, for she had managed to scratch it when getting the patterns out. Valentina, still quite taken aback, proceeded to tie the ribbon.

"Yes, my hair hurt me, and on untying the ribbon I scratched it with the pin which fastened the bow. Poor Gonzalo could not manage to do it very well, eh?" she added, with a laugh.

"Oh, no!" said the youth with a forced smile, amazed at her calmness. The excuse, well conceived as it was, did not deceive Valentina, who was quite certain of what she had seen.

"Do you think she was taken in by that story of the scratch?" anxiously asked Gonzalo when the girl had left the room.

"Perhaps not, but I don't mind her; she is the most stupid of the lot."

Valentina took the patterns to her mistress, and then started to go home until the following day.

On crossing the hall she distinctly heard the sound of a kiss, and on looking in its direction, toward the dark room, she caught sight of the black and white checks of Nieves's dress.

"So this is the way the wind blows, is it?" she murmured, with that particular little frown that characterized her. Then she descended the staircase and passed into the street, where Cosme was waiting to escort her home.

CHAPTER XI

MEETING IN SUPPORT OF THE FOURTH ESTATE

THE 9th of June, 1860, ought to be recorded in letters of gold in the annals of the town of Sarrio, for Don Rosendo, supported by Alvaro Peña and his son Pablo, appointed the afternoon of that day to meet at the theatre for the discussion of a subject of *vital* (Don Rosendo would not for the world have omitted the word "vital") interest to the town of Sarrio and its suburbs.

Only four or five of the most intimate friends of the merchant were acquainted with the noble and patriotic project which had prompted the invitation; so, drawn by curiosity as much as by courtesy, those who had been asked arrived at three o'clock precisely, and many came to the meeting who had not received an invitation.

The theatre was packed quite full. The patrician townfolk took possession of the boxes and stalls, while the plebeians repaired to the gallery. On the stage there was a writing-table, old and dirty, and round it were placed half a dozen chairs, neither new nor clean, for they served as furniture for any "poorly furnished rooms" in a play. The stage was still empty, although the theatre was full, and the whole house was almost in darkness, for what little light there was came through the dusty panes of a window at the back of the stage.

In time one's eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and one could distinguish the people as they entered and proceeded cautiously along the line of boxes, so as to avoid knocking against anybody, touching the craniums of the occupants, in their search for vacant seats.

"There is no room here, Don Rufo."

"Is there no place?" asked the medical man with the vacant smile of the blind.

"No; go up to the stage boxes."

"Come here, Don Rufo; come here," cried some one in the front.

"Is that you, Cipriano?"

And after more pushing and struggling the newcomer managed to get settled. One arrival, more wide-awake than the others, lighted a wax taper, but instantly there arose voices from the gallery:

"Eh, eh! Cat's eyes, Don Juan! When you go at night to Peonza's house you don't have a taper then."

Don Juan hastened to extinguish it, to avoid the insults and shouts of laughter leveled at him by the idle crowd.

As time went on the hum of conversation grew deafening. The patronizers of the gallery expressed their impatience by stamps, cries, and shouts, while exchanging with each other, over the heads of the occupants of the stalls, jokes and remarks which were coarse in the extreme. It was a good thing that there were no ladies present.

At last four gentlemen appeared on the stage—Don Rosendo Belinchon, Alvaro Peña, Don Feliciano Gomez, and Don Rudesindo Cepeda, proprietor of the finest cider distillery. The four men took off their hats as they assembled on the stage. Silence suddenly reigned. Some of the audience—the minority—also took off their hats; the majority, more veiled in darkness, and more inclined to discourtesy, so prevalent in the gallery, remained covered. Don Rosendo and his friends smiled shamefacedly at the audience, and, to overcome the oppressive feeling of nervousness and embarrassment, they began talking to the occupants of the front row of stalls who were within sight. Alvaro Peña, more courageous by dint of his military experience, advanced to the front of the stage, and, giving an exaggeratedly familiar tone to his remarks, and aimlessly smiling like a ballet girl, said:

"Señores, my coadjutors are as anxious as myself for all persons of note in the audience to come up here, so that they may assist us with their support, eh? and with their knowledge, eh?—in short, that they may second us in the enterprise about to be inaugurated." The harbor-master pronounced his r's very much like j's.

The modesty conveyed by this suggestion was received with a murmur of applause from the assembly.

"Is not Don Pedro Miranda here?" asked Peña, now at his ease, and resuming the despotic military air peculiar to him.

"Here he is—here!" cried several voices.

Don Pedro, however, remonstrated with those who pushed him toward the stage.

"But, señores, why? What is the object? There are other people."

But there was no help for it. He was gradually pushed to the stage, and as there were no steps by which to climb, Peña and Don Feliciano Gomez pulled him up by the hands on to the boards.

"Now, Don Rufo, come up."

Don Rufo, the chief doctor of the town, after protesting a little, was also pulled up in the same way. And by the same simple means five or six more gentlemen arrived upon the stage. Each ascent was greeted with loud applause and a murmur of delight from the friendly gathering. The officer then seeing Gabino Maza seated in a chair by the wall, cried out cheerfully:

"Gabino, I did not see you! Come, man; come along."

"I am very well here," cried the huffy ex-officer of the navy, dryly.

"Shall I come down for you?"

Maza returned in a loud voice:

"There is no need."

"Come, Don Gabino, go up. Don't be idle. Men like you ought to be there. There is only you now to go up!"

And at the same time they tried to push him on. But all entreaties were in vain. Maza was as determined to remain in the box as the others were that he should leave it. Then Alvaro Peña came down after him, but after a long altercation he was obliged to retire defeated.

The stage was now almost full. More chairs were brought from the actors' dressing-rooms, the most aristocratic residents of Sarrio took their seats, and then ensued a consultation to decide who was to be the chairman of the meeting.

In this there seemed to be some difficulty in coming to an agreement, and the public gave signs of impatience. The majority was of opinion that the honor of sitting behind the pine-wood table was due to Don Rosendo, but he declined it with a modesty much redounding to his credit. At last, however, he took the chair, as he saw the public was getting tired; the applause was tremendous. Fresh and wearisome discussion ensued as to who was to open the meeting. Alvaro Peña, a man of impulse and action, finally took a few steps toward the curtain; and said in a loud voice:

"Gentlemen."

"Sh! Sh! Silence!" cried several voices, and silence reigned.

"Gentlemen, the object of this meeting is no other, eh? than for us to unite in the support of the material and moral interests of Sarrio. Some days ago our most worthy president informed me that they were deteriorating, eh? and that it was necessary to support them at all costs. Gentlemen, there are many questions at issue in Sarrio at this critical time—the question of the covered market, the question of the cemetery, the question of the road to Rodillero, the question of the slaughter-house, and many others; and I said to my worthy friend, the only means of solving these problems was to call a meeting at which all the Sarrienses could freely give their opinions."

"What?" cried a sharp voice from the gallery.

Peña darted an angry look in the direction of the sound, and as he was known to be a violent man, and had great, fierce mustachios, the fellow trembled in his skin, and did not venture to make a second ejaculation.

"My good friend, whose large heart and love of progress is known to all, said to me some time ago that he was of the same opinion, and that, moreover, he had a plan that he was anxious to lay before this illustrious assembly. Therefore we have called our friends of Sarrio to a public meeting, and here we are—because we have come."

This collapse produced an excellent effect on the audience, who laughed and clapped their hands good-naturedly.

"Gentlemen," continued the captain, encouraged by the sound of merriment, "I believe that what this place requires is to be roused from its state of lethargy to the life of reason and progress, eh?—to rise to the height of the progress of the century, to take stock of itself and its powers. Hitherto Sarrio has been a town under the sway of theocracy; plenty of nones, sermons, and rosaries, and no thought of the advance of its interests and the knowledge of anything useful. We must get out of this state, eh?—we must shake off the theocratic yoke. A place governed by priests is always a backward and a squalid place." (Laughter and applause, mingled with hisses.)

The officer spoke better at the conclusion of his speech, and even acquired a certain aplomb during his denunciation of priestcraft.

"May I be allowed to say a word?" cried a clear voice from a box.

"Who is it? Who is it?" asked the audience and the dignitaries of the stage of one another.

"It is Perinolo's son."

"Who?"

"Perinolo's son. Perinolo's son."

These words were repeated in a low tone all over the theatre.

Perinolo's son was a pale youth with large, prominent eyes. Nothing else was visible in the semi-darkness of the place, which was fortunate for him, for a good light would have revealed the crumpled front of his shirt and the disheveled locks of his hair, and the holes in his boots and his threadbare trousers would have been seen through the balustrade of the box. But all the people of Sarrio knew him from meeting him constantly in the street or at the cafés. I must say that, in spite of his appearance, he was a lad of gentle mien and disposition.

His father, Señor Maria el Perinolo, the boot-maker in the town, was quite an institution. He was one of the few old artisans who in the middle of the century still retained the jacket and large hat of former times. He was a Carlist fanatic, a member of all the religious confraternities; he told his beads in the afternoon as the bell from the Church of St. Andrew rang for prayer; accompanied by several womenfolk, he joined in the processions of Holy Week with its disciplinary garb and a crown of thorns, and he had under his care the Chapel of the Nazarene, in the Calle de Atras. This poor saint, who had never given anybody cause to speak against him (supreme testimony of honesty among the lower classes), brought up his own son, Sinforoso, and two others in the holy fear of God, and the strap, scourgings, penances on his knees, days on bread and water, ear-pullings, and blows, constituted the tender memories of Sinforoso's childhood.

As he grew from boyhood and youth he showed signs of having profited by his father's teaching. Perinolo made up his mind that the lad's vocation was not in the direction of boot-making, but of becoming a pillar of the Romish Church. Means were, however, wanting to send him to the seminary at Lancia, so Don Melchor de las Cuevas, Don Rudesindo, and the parish priest spontaneously came to his assistance, and allowed the lad three pesetas a day until he could intone the mass. But at the end of the second year of theology these gentlemen received from the seminarist an elegantly expressed letter in which he stated that he did not feel called by God to an ecclesiastical career, and that rather than be a bad priest he would learn his father's business, or go to America; and it ended by entreating in fervent terms that he might be allowed to exchange theology for the law, for which he had a predilection, so as to modify the disappointment of his father. His benefactors acceded to the request, and Sinforoso finally became a pillar of the state instead of the church, as Perinolo had wished.

While pursuing his studies with marks of commendation from the beginning to the close, he contributed several articles to the daily papers, by which achievement he considered himself entitled to let his hair grow and wear eye-glasses. So that the licentiate returned to Sarrio with an aureole of glory befitting one who had won his spurs and still waged war in the press of the day. He attached himself to the most advanced Liberal party, which alienated him from his people. His father was greatly enraged with him, and it was only through his mother's intercession that he let him remain in the house. He never spoke to him or gave him a centime for his expenses, but merely let him sleep under his roof and partake of their scanty fare. At the end of a few months the youth's boots became shabby, and his

clothes looked wretched; but the man of letters carried it off by the reserve and gravity of his physiognomy and the self-importance of his deportment. He spent the morning reading in bed, and the afternoon and evening in loud discussions at the café of what he read in the morning. The townfolk did not like him, but they respected his talents and dignity.

"Who asked permission to speak?" queried Don Rosendo.

"Suarez—Sinforoso Suarez," said the youth, bending over the rail.

"Then you have it, Señor Suarez."

The young man coughed, ran the fingers of both hands through his hair, leaving it rougher and more tumbled than ever, put on his glasses that he wore hanging by a string, and said:

"Gentlemen."

The quiet, impressive tone with which he said this word, the long pause that followed it, during which he fixed his glasses on his nose and looked at the audience in a superior way, inspired silence and attention.

"After the brilliant speech which has just been given us by Señor Peña, my respected friend, the illustrious harbor-master of this port [the captain, who had never spoken to Suarez more than three times in his life, bowed graciously], the assembly is quite convinced of the generous and patriotic feelings which prompted the promoters of this meeting. There is nothing so beautiful, nothing so grand, nothing so sublime as to see a town met together to discuss the dearest, highest interests of life.

"Ah, gentlemen, when listening just now to Señor Peña I imagined myself in the Agora of Athens, a free citizen, with other citizens, free as myself, discussing the destiny of my country; I imagined I heard the ardent, eloquent words of one of those great orators who adorned the Hellenic State. Why, the eloquence of my dear friend, Señor Peña, was like the overwhelming passion that characterized Demosthenes, the prince of orators, and like the fluency and elegance that distinguished the discourses of Pericles. [Pause, with his hand to his glasses.] He was bright and animated, like Cleon; deliberate and temperate, like Aristides; his intonation was quiet and precise, like that of Esquines, and his voice was pleasant to the ear, like that of Isocrates.

"Ah, gentlemen, I, like the eloquent orator who has preceded me on the subject, desire that the place which gave me birth may awake to the life of progress, to the life of liberty and justice. Sarrío! What sweet recollections, what ineffable happiness does this single word awaken in my soul! Here were passed the days of my childhood. Here my mind began to form. Here love made my heart palpitate for the first time. Elsewhere my mind has been enriched by the knowledge of science, and the grand ideas engendered by the study of law; here my soul has been nourished by the sweet and holy feelings of the hearth. Elsewhere my intelligence has been sharpened by polemics and the light of ideas; here my affections have been fostered by tender family love.

"Gentlemen, I will say it again, come what may, Sarrío is called to a great destiny. It has a right to be one of the first towns on the Biscayan coast, an emporium of activity and riches, by reason of the excellent position which nature has given it, a harbor second to none, as well as the integrity, industry, and the great gift of intelligence of its inhabitants."

[*Bravo! Bravo! Unanimous and loud applause.*]

The silence, caused more by surprise than any bad feeling, was now broken, and the "bravos" and applause continued without intermission. Never had the industrious, honest, intelligent people of Sarrío heard any one speak so fluently and eloquently before.

"That discourse was a revelation of the modern parliamentary style!" So Alvaro Peña said when the meeting was over.

The speech continued half an hour longer, amid the increasing enthusiasm of the audience, when one of the notabilities on the platform thought that his throat must be dry, and that it was time to give him a glass of sugared water.

The idea was communicated in an undertone to the president, who interrupted the orator with the remark:

"If Señor Suarez is fatigued, he can rest. I am going to have a glass of water sent him."

These words were received with a murmur of approval.

"I am not tired, Señor President," the orator replied gently.

[*Yes, yes; rest. Make him rest. Let him have a glass of water. He will hurt himself. Let him have a few drops of anise.*]

The audience, suddenly inspired with tender sympathy, manifested quite a maternal solicitude for Perinolo's son, who, inflated with delight, smiled on the audience and continued:

"Fatigue is fitting for valiant soldiers. Those who, like myself, are accustomed to the tribune [he had spoken a few times in the Academy of Jurisprudence in Lancia], do not easily become fatigued."

We must now say that Mechacar, a shoemaker, a neighbor, and a rival of many years' standing of Señor José Maria Perinolo, who had known Sinforoso from his birth, and had often given him two or three beatings with the strap, when on his return from school he annoyed him by calling him by some contemptuous nickname, was in the gallery with his hands resting on the rail, and his face, alert and attentive, on his hands. No enthusiasm shone in those eyes under the lowering brows, as in those of the others; but envy, hatred, and malice were visible on the countenance. When the honeyed words of his rival fell upon his ears he felt powerless to stand the farce, and he called out in a rage:

"Stop that rubbish, you fool!"

[*Indescribable indignation of the audience. All eyes were turned to the gallery. Voices were heard saying:*]

"Who is this brawler? To the prison with him! Out with the fool!"

The president asked with terrible severity:

"Are we in a civilized town, or among Hottentots?"

The question thus formulated produced a profound impression upon the audience. Suarez, slightly pale, and in an agitated voice, finally said:

"If the meeting desire it, I am ready to sit down."

[*No, no. Go on! Loud and prolonged applause for the orator.*]

The indignation against the rude disturber increased to such a degree that sounds of threats were audible, and several shook their fists in the direction whence the voice had proceeded. Alvaro Peña, the Greek orator, more indignant than anybody, finally went up to the gallery and put Mechacar out of the theatre by force, amid the applause of the public.

The storm abated, the orator continued. He made a wide digression through the fields of history to prove that from the Roman conquest, when Spain was divided into citerior and ulterior Hispania, and afterward into Tarraco, Betica, and Lusitania, and so on down to the present day, the Sarrienses had on all occasions given proof of a powerful intellect, very superior to that of the people of Nieva.

Such assertions were received with great signs of approval. Then suddenly passing into the region of law, he gently touched upon branches of knowledge that are not common, particularly in Sarrio—the science of Tribonianus and Papinianus.

On arriving at a certain point he said, with a modesty that did him credit:

"What I have just observed, señor, has no scientific value whatsoever. Every boy and girl knows it who has made the acquaintance of the pandectas."

Don Jeronimo de la Fuente, a schoolmaster of the town who had studied the modern methods of pedagogics, and knew something of Froebel and Pestalozzi, a celebrated man who had written a primer on irregular verbs and kept a telescope at his window always turned toward the heavens, now rose from his seat and said:

"Corporal punishment has been stopped in the schools for some years."

"I did not say 'palmetas' [blows]; I said 'pan-dec-tas'" [digest of law], returned Suarez, smiling with some vexation.

Don Jeronimo was angry at having made such a mistake.

The orator continued, and finally resumed his seat, saying, like the eloquent officer who had preceded him, that Sarrio must awake to the life of progress; that she must arise from the lethargy in which she lay, and that she must take part in the struggle of ideas, which are always fruitful; and that she must let the radiant sun of civilization rise on her horizon.

"If it be true, as I have heard, that, thanks to the patriotic and generous initiative of a most worthy citizen of this town, the Fourth Estate of modern powers is about to celebrate its advent here; if, in fact, Sarrio will be presented with a periodical which will reflect her legitimate aspirations, let it be the palladium for the exercise of her intelligence, the promoter of her dearest interests, the advanced protector of her tranquillity and peace, the organ, in short, by which she may have communion with the intellectual world. Let us congratulate ourselves with all our hearts, and let us also congratulate the illustrious patrician whose efforts will bring to us a ray of this luminous star of the nineteenth century which is called the press."

[Bravo, bravo! All eyes are turned to the chairman. The face of Don Rosendo beams with dignity and delight.]

After the son of Perinolo came Don Jeronimo de la Fuente.

The illustrious professor of the instruction of youth was very anxious to rise in the eyes of the public after his slip about the pandectas. He began by saying that he shared the opinions of the worthy orator [notice that he did not say eloquent, or illustrious, but worthy, nothing more] who had preceded him on the subject; that he, destined by his profession to light the torch of science in infantile brains, could not do less than be a devoted partizan of all modern enlightenment, more especially of that of the press. In corroboration of this statement he begged to say that as soon as a periodical in Sarrio was an established fact he would have the pleasure of laying before his fellow-citizens the solution of a problem which until now was considered insoluble, that of the trisection of the angle, to which he had devoted much time and trouble, and which, fortunately, now was crowned with success.

He spoke, moreover, with great emphasis on other matters—of physical geography and astronomy, clearly and briefly explaining the earth's rotation and progression, the composition of air, the formation of the clouds and dew, the origin of the salt of the sea, of springs and rivers, the scientific cause of tides, and also something about the cause of volcanoes.

Afterward, just by the way, he passed on to an explanation of the celestial mechanism, and particularly the law of universal attraction, discovered by Newton, by which planets move round the sun in elliptic orbits. Then he explained with great brilliancy the nature of an ellipsis.

Finally, speaking of our satellite the moon, he remarked that the time of its revolution round the earth was sensibly diminishing, which indicated the decrease of its orbit. This, according to the orator, would sooner or later result in the moon falling into the earth, when both would be shattered.

Don Jeronimo then resumed his seat, leaving the audience quite crushed under the weight of this alarming prophecy.

The proceedings went on until the lamps were lighted.

Don Rufo, the town doctor, a tall, lean man, with a pointed beard and gold eyeglasses, then got up and declared explicitly in a few words that thought was only a physiological function of the brain, and the soul an attribute of matter, and that the greater or less degree of intelligence in animals depends on the cerebral lobules and the weight of the brain. The orator computed that its weight in a man was three pounds and a half. Then he gave the calculation of the phosphoric matter that it contains. Man's brain contains more phosphorus than animals', while theirs have more than birds'. In children the quantity of phosphorus increases considerably at the natal hour, and it continues to increase rapidly with the course of time.

But in what part of the brain is the spark of intellectual activity situated? asked the orator. In his opinion this activity has its mainspring in the grayish or bluish substance, and in some way in the whitish substance, which is the conductor of such activity.

He then spoke of the dura mater, the hemispheres of the brain, the frontal, parietal, and occipital parts of the skull, the function of the cerebrum, the seat of the cerebellum.

Here the speaker conceived the happy idea of making a beautiful comparison between the circumlocutions of this gray substance and a heap of intestines thrown promiscuously together. All the faculties which we call the soul are nothing but functions of this gray substance, of this mass of intestines. The brain secretes thoughts, as the liver does bile. The orator concluded by saying that while humanity is ignorant of these truths it can not rise from its present state of barbarism.

Navarro, the veterinary professor, who never wished to be behind the doctor, then asked leave to speak, and after a few words of congratulation on the inauguration of the "meeting" (all the speakers used the English term), he gave expression of a few very rational ideas on the gangrenous quinsy of the pig, and the treatment for its prevention. The orator hesitated, stuttered, and grew hot in the expression of his ideas, but this deficiency of language was compensated for by the novelty and interest of the subject, for numbers of these nice animals fell victims to quinsy at certain seasons in Sarrio.

In spite of the interest and respect with which the public listened to the discourse on the danger which threatened pig-farming, there were certainly signs of impatience to hear the president's speech. After the allusion of Perinolo's son to the fact of a journal, every one was anxious to have the news confirmed. While Navarro was talking a voice from the gallery cried:

"Let Don Rosendo speak!"

And although this rude interruption was rebuked with a prompt "Sh!" it was evident that they had had enough of Navarro.

At last the celebrated man of Sarrio, the standard-bearer of all progress, the illustrious patrician, Don Rosendo Belinchon, reared his majestic figure behind the table.

[Silence! Sh! Sh! Silence, gentlemen! Attention! A little attention, please.]

These were the cries that proceeded from the crowd, although nobody dared move a finger, such was the anxiety of all to hear the president's remarks.

Like all men of a really superior mind and clear intelligence, Don Rosendo wrote better than he spoke. Nevertheless, his quiet mode of speech gave an impression of dignity that was wanting in the orators who had preceded him.

"Gentlemen [pause], I thank [pause] all the people [pause] who have assisted [pause] this afternoon [pause] at the meeting which I have had the honor to convene. [Much longer pause, rife with expectation.] I have a real pleasure [pause] in seeing gathered together in this place [pause] the most illustrious persons of the town [pause], and all those who, for one reason or another, are of consequence and importance."

[Bravo! Very good! Very good!]

After this exordium, received in such a flattering style, the orator maintained that he was moved by the desire to raise the intellectual tone of Sarrio. Then he added that the object of this meeting had only been that of raising this tone. *[Long applause.]* He considered himself too weak and incompetent to accomplish the task. *[No, no. Applause.]* But he counted on—at least he thought he could count on—the support of the many men of feeling, patriotism, intelligence, and progress dwelling in Sarrio. *[Thunders of applause.]* The means that he considered most efficacious to raise Sarrio to its rightful height, and to make it compete worthily with other towns, and even maritime towns of more importance, was the creation of an organ that would support its political, moral, and material interests. "And, gentlemen [pause], although all the difficulties are not yet overcome [pause], I have the pleasure of informing this illustrious assembly *[Attention! Sh! Sh! Silence!]* that perhaps in the ensuing month of August *[Bravo! Bravo! Loud and frantic applause that interrupted the orator for some minutes]*—that perhaps in the ensuing month of August *[Bravo! Bravo! Silence!]* the town of Sarrio will have a biweekly paper."

[Loud applause. Navarro threw his hat upon the stage. Several other spectators followed his example.] Alvaro Peña and Don Feliciano Gomez employed themselves in picking them up and returning them to their owners. Don Rosendo's face shone with an august expression, and his lips, wreathed with a happy smile, revealed the two symmetrical rows of teeth, eloquent proof of dental skill.

"In spite of these expressions of regard [pause], for which I thank you from the bottom of my soul [pause], pride does not blind me. My want of power *[No, no. Applause.]* makes me fear that the organ about to be started may not come up to the expectations of the public."

[Voices from various sides: "Yes, it will. We are sure it will." Applause.]

"But if, perhaps [pause], the lack of cleverness can be atoned for by faith and enthusiasm, it will certainly be so. My humble pen and my modest fortune are at the disposal of the town of Sarrio."

[Vehement signs of approbation.]

"The new paper," continued the orator, "has a great mission to fulfil. This mission consists in starting the reforms and the advancement which the town requires." The necessity of these reforms and advancement was known to all the world. The covered market was absolutely indispensable; the road to Rodillero was the constant desire of both places; and as to the slaughter-house, Don Rosendo asked with surprise how the town could consent to the existence of a focus of filth like the present one, which was a perfect disgrace to the place.

Gabino from his seat had listened to the speakers with marked disdain and disgust. He turned about in his chair as if it were hurting him, and he was filled with an overwhelming desire to cry out to the orators: "Asses! Fools!" as he was accustomed to in the Club, or to slash out at them with one of his fiercest sarcasms. These fooleries thoroughly upset him. It was not surprising, when we recollect the state of the ex-sailor's liver. He breathed with difficulty, he ground his teeth, he smiled sarcastically, and was paralyzed with rage, thus showing his disapprobation of all that had been said, all that was being said, and all that would be said. Occasionally he gave vent to a "Bah!" or a "Pooh!" or a "Pshaw!" and other peculiar sounds not less significant.

Finally, in the middle of Don Rosendo's discourse, either because his grave eloquence was incontrovertible, or because the applause exasperated him to an intolerable degree, Gabino left the place and walked up and down in front of the door of the theatre in a pitiable state of agitation. In a few minutes he returned, and then went up into the gallery. Then, hearing Don Rosendo touch upon the matter of the slaughter-house, he left his seat, and, arriving in the first row, cried out excitedly, "This is not fair play."

On hearing the remark Don Rosendo stopped suddenly, dumb and pale. A loud murmur of surprise ran through the whole theatre. Some cried, "Out with him!" Others said, "Sh! Sh!" and the eyes of all, after being directed to the gallery, were turned to the chairman. Don Rosendo, quite agitated, said with a hoarse voice:

"Gentlemen, if these remarks have shown that I have had any unworthy thoughts in the convocation of this meeting, my delicacy forbids me to remain in the chair, and I retire."

[No, no! Go on! Go on! Long live the president!]

"I am sure, gentlemen," said the orator, visibly moved, "that the individual who has just called out is not a resident of Sarrio; he was not born in Sarrio! He can't belong to Sarrio!"

Somebody having murmured that the interlocutor was of Nieva, great indignation and confusion reigned in the theatre. A formidable cry of "Down with the bullfinches! Viva Sarrio!" It must be mentioned that the people of Nieva were called bullfinches on account of the great number of these birds there, while the people of Sarrio are called in Nieva chaffinches for a similar reason.

The excitement having at last abated, Don Rosendo acknowledged the applause with thanks and acceded to the persuasions of the audience, and returned to his place.

"Before again occupying this seat [the president had retired to the back of the stage], I must say that if this popinjay or bullfinch [*laughter*] wants to force from me an opinion on the subject of the slaughter-house, I have no objection to giving it, because I am always straightforward. [*Great interest. You could have heard a pin drop.*] I solemnly declare, gentlemen, that in my opinion the new slaughter-house ought not to be put anywhere but on the rubbish chute."

The orator terminated his eloquent speech with a few more words, and the meeting broke up.

The audience left the theatre, half asphyxiated, as much by the many emotions experienced in a short time as by the hundred and four degrees of heat in the place.

CHAPTER XII

THE STORY OF A TEAR

ALL this happened in exalted spheres, while in the obscure regions of private life events were transpiring which, albeit not so memorable, were of some importance to those concerned.

On the day following the interview already narrated between Venturita and Gonzalo, the young man did not appear at his betrothed's; he remained at home, feigning a seizure of violent toothache. Such at least was the news that reached Cecilia through Elvira, the maid, who met Don Melchor's servant on the market-place. As the young man did not appear the next day either, the family thought he was still suffering, but Venturita and Valentina were not deceived. The embroideress avoided meeting the girl's eyes, perhaps from fear of embarrassing her, or because she herself felt embarrassed without knowing why. Venturita was as merry as ever; and Cecilia, the only one anxious enough to be silent, took a toothache mixture from her wardrobe, copied out a prayer to Saint Polonia which had been given her, and calling Elvira mysteriously aside, she said with a deep blush:

"Elvira, will you be so kind as to take this bottle and paper to Señor Gonzalo?"

"Now, at once?"

"As soon as you can. If you have nothing to do just now— But I don't want it to be talked about."

"All right, señorita," returned the pale little brunette, smiling kindly, "nobody shall know a word about it. Your mother was just asking for some starch, so I will go and get some."

When Gonzalo received the little packet, he was overwhelmed with remorse, and paced up and down the room in agitation. Three or four times he was on the point of taking his hat, going to the Belinchons' house, and letting things go on as before. All the feelings of honor, kindness, and goodness inherent in him, the voice of reason which spoke for Cecilia—in one word, the good angel which every man has within him, impelled him to this course. But he could not drive the pretty, graceful image of Venturita from his mind: the fire of her eyes seemed still to pierce his soul, the sweet, voluptuous touch of her golden hair—in fact, his bad angel held him back. Gonzalo was a man of physical health, powerful muscles, rich blood, but with a weak will. Evil spirits fear delicate constitutions more than a fine one like his. The battle fought by his good and bad angels did not last long; it was soon decided in favor of the latter by means of a note from Venturita brought by the other maid of the house. It ran thus:

"Don't be impatient. To-day I will speak to mama. Trust in me. VENTURITA."

The look of the maid as she gave this note seemed, in spite of her smile, to convey a tacit reproach, which somewhat upset him. He dismissed her with a handsome tip; and on opening the letter with a trembling hand, he noticed the sandal perfume, always used by Venturita, and as it recalled to his mind the bewitching, beautiful girl, it set chords vibrating in his being which had hitherto remained untouched. He put the letter to his lips, and intoxicated with passion, he kissed it effusively many times.

Poor Cecilia! She had taken the first piece of paper that came to hand, and without waiting for perfumes, she generally wrote to her lover in pencil.

If women only knew the importance of these wretched details!

Venturita had been hovering about her mother all day, waiting for an opportunity of speaking privately to her. In the evening, when the needlewomen had gone, the mother and daughter were at last alone. Cecilia had retired to her room, a prey to a depression that she had tried to combat by work during the day. Doña Paula was seated in an armchair with her eyes fixed on the window, looking at the last rays of the setting sun, in a melancholy, pensive attitude unusual in her. She seemed to forebode the trouble that was coming. Venturita put the embroidery frames away in a corner, covered them over with a cloth, arranged the chairs in order and dragged the work-basket to one side so that it should not be in the way.

"Have the lights brought," said Doña Paula.

"Why?" returned the girl, taking a low chair by her side. "It is all tidy now."

Her mother turned her eyes again to the window, and resumed her melancholy attitude. At the end of some minutes' silence Venturita took her parent's hand and raised it affectionately to her lips. Doña Paula turned her head with surprise. Seldom, nay never, had her youngest daughter given this respectful kiss. She smiled sweetly, and

taking her by the chin, she said:

"Are you pleased with the dress?"

"Yes, mama."

"It makes you a very pretty figure. If it is taken in a little at the waist it will be charming."

The girl was silent, and after a minute she raised her eyes, and, controlling her voice, said in a calm tone:

"I say, mama, what do you think of Gonzalo's retreat?"

"Gonzalo's retreat!" exclaimed the señora, turning her head anxiously. "What do you mean, child?"

"Yes, his retreat, because I don't believe that he is ill; yesterday he was playing billiards at the Marina Café all the evening."

"Bah! bah! you are joking."

"I am not joking; I am serious."

"And who told you that?"

"I know it from Nieves, who was told by her brother."

"The pain probably left him in the evening, and he went out for a little change."

"Well, then, why did he not come to-day?"

"Because the pain no doubt returned."

"Don't you believe it, mama. You can be quite certain Gonzalo does not love Cecilia."

"Do you know what you are saying, child? Be so good as to hold your tongue, before you make me angry."

"I will be silent, but the proofs that he is giving of his affection are not very great."

"That I should have to hear this!" said the señora, turning round proudly. "If Gonzalo is somebody, Cecilia is as good. My daughter is not to be treated with disrespect by Gonzalo, or the Prince of Asturias, do you hear? I will inquire into the truth of what you have said, and if it be true, I will take measures."

Doña Paula was naturally kind and gentle, a friend of the poor, and generous; but she had the unreflective pride and the extreme touchiness of the working class of Sarrio.

"No, mama, I don't mean that. Who said that Gonzalo treats Cecilia with disrespect?"

"You yourself. Why does he not love her then?"

Venturita hesitated a moment, and then replied with firmness:

"Because he loves me."

"Come," said the señora laughing, "I ought to have seen from the first that it was all a joke."

"It is not a joke, it is pure truth, and if you want convincing you can see for yourself."

Then she drew from her bosom a letter which she had ready, and handed it to her mother; whereupon Doña Paula sprang to her feet and cried:

"Quick! a light, quick!"

Venturita took a box of tapers that was on the table, and lighted one.

Mother and daughter were pale. The mother held the letter to the light, and after reading a few lines she dropped into an armchair, and fixing her eyes on her daughter with a sad expression, she said:

"Ventura, what have you done?"

"I? Nothing," returned the girl, letting the taper, which was nearly burnt out, fall to the floor.

"Is it then nothing to you, you heartless, mad creature, to prevent the marriage of your sister, to deceive her so abominably and to give rise to such a scandal in the town as never was seen?"

"I have not done all this. He was the one to declare himself to me. Is it then a sin to be loved?"

"On this occasion, yes," replied the señora severely; "at the first sign you ought to have told me. To allow him to speak to you in any other way than as to a sister was treachery to your sister, and does little credit to yourself."

"Well, there it is," returned the girl in a scornful tone.

"Then it shall not be," said Doña Paula angrily, as she rose from her seat. "What do you suggest? Come, say; or rather, what have you suggested?"

"You can imagine."

"To marry each other, eh?" she asked in a sarcastic tone. "Then you are greatly mistaken! The marriage of your sister is broken off—Well, it is as good as broken off—Of course, you are free to marry Gonzalo, but don't you think you will set foot in this house. In the first place, you are a bad girl who ought to pay for your grimacings; and in any case your father and I will not consent to your marrying a man who has treated your sister so disgracefully and deceived us all round. People would indeed say that we were dying to have him for a son-in-law, so give up the idea, child."

"Well, if you like it or not," said Venturita, flouncing to the door, "I shall marry him."

Doña Paula felt inclined to punish this insolence with corporal punishment, but the girl quickly left the room and shut the door; then half reopening it, she said in furious tone:

"I will marry him; I will marry him; I will marry him."

The following day Gonzalo received a letter from Ventura in which she said:

"Yesterday I spoke to mama, and I think she will give in. Keep your spirits up."

And in effect, that same morning mother and daughter renewed the conversation in the daughter's room. It was a long interview, and we do not know what transpired, but at the end of an hour Doña Paula appeared with her eyes red with weeping and her hand on her heart, from which she frequently suffered, and retiring to her room she went to bed.

Ventura came out behind her, quiet but pale, and calling Generosa, her confidential maid, she gave her a letter for Gonzalo, who that evening appeared at nine o'clock in front of Belinchon's house. A few minutes later, Venturita opened the window of the library, which was on the ground floor and protected with iron gratings.

"Everything is settled," she said in a falsetto voice, directly the young man approached.

"No! How? Really?" he asked in a tone of delight.

"It has been a pretty hard task for me! She was furious."

"And your papa?"

"Papa knows nothing about it yet, but he will give in, too. See if he won't give in. The measure taken could not have been more effectual."

"What measure?"

"The one I took. The whole business looked so hopeless that it would have ended by your being forbidden the house, and I should have been packed off to Tejada in disgrace. All entreaties, all arguments were in vain; she was mad with rage, she called you an infamous traitor, you can imagine how she spoke of me! Then I saw that there was nothing for it but to take a strong measure; and it was somewhat strong," she added in a low, changed voice.

"What strong measure?" asked Gonzalo with curiosity.

Venturita was silent for some moments, and then somewhat shamefacedly returned:

"I told her—I told her that there was nothing else for us but to marry each other."

"Why?"

"Why—why—guess why!" said the girl with impatience.

Then Gonzalo divined what she meant, and the knowledge filled him with repugnance and terror. A gloomy silence fell upon him, and Venturita at last said:

"Do you think it was wrong?"

"Yes," he returned dryly.

"All right, my boy; to-morrow I will tell her it was all a lie, and then all is over between us."

"That won't do any good. I do not quarrel with the result, as you must know, but with the way you have managed it."

"I lose more than you."

"Well, I feel it all the same."

"All right, then show it," she returned in a pet, jumping up from the window-sill, where she had been seated.

But Gonzalo put his hand through the bars, and caught her by the dress.

"Stop."

The dress tore.

"Now you have torn my frock, do you see?"

"Well, don't go so quickly."

And succeeding in catching her by the arm, he obliged her to sit down again.

"What rough manners!" exclaimed the girl, laughing; "that must be the way bears make love."

"Do you love me?" asked Gonzalo, also laughing.

"No."

"Yes."

"No."

"Give me your hand as a friend."

The girl then gave him her pink and white hand, and the herculean youth kissed it passionately several times.

"Good-by till to-morrow, and I will tell you all the news," she said, once more rising from her seat.

Gonzalo withdrew, and after taking a few steps he recollected that the news signified the way in which Cecilia would take his disloyal conduct, and his forehead corrugated with an expression of pain. In this state of preoccupation he crossed the Rúa Nueva, entered the Plaza de la Marina, went along by the harbor, and reached the end of the mole. The night was mild and clear. The stars shining in the firmament were reflected in the tranquil waters of the bay. The rigging of the anchored shipping stood out distinctly from the dark blue background. The hour for the extinction of lights had not yet struck, and one could see several lights and figures on the ships; the sailors reclining on the upper decks were chatting before retiring to rest.

Occasionally a glance would be cast at a great English steamer anchored in the middle of the harbor, and a sailor would call out, with an exaggeration of the pronunciation:

"*All right*," and a schooner would echo the words, "*All right*" and the cry would be taken up by all the tenders, schooners, and fishing smacks. It was a joke upon the English anchored there. But it was received with silence; the great steamer treated it with the phlegmatic, profound contempt that nobody can assume better than a son of Albion.

The end of the mole was the resort of anybody who wished to enjoy the fresh air. It was one of the hottest nights of August. Gonzalo, overwhelmed by the heat and the difficulty of his position, walked along with his hat in his hand. Before he reached the end of the mole he caught sight of a gigantic figure on the second stage.

"I say, uncle," he cried.

The old sailor spent the greater part of his life on that mole in intimate communion with the sea, his old friend and companion. The terrible ocean was an open book to him, either sleeping in its immense bed of sand or awakening and lashing the sky furiously with its foam. He could accurately forecast its rages, its storms, its smiles, and its profoundest working. To him the monster seemed to reveal its liquid heart as to a faithful friend, and told him how it fretted in its granite prison, and how the sight of human wickedness sometimes made it long to rush over the land and submerge this fulsome human ant-hill. And the good man, thinking of all the crimes about which he had read, would reply:

"You are right, friend; in your place it is probable I should feel the same."

Nothing in the world would have induced Don Melchor to forego his morning, afternoon, and evening walks at the end of the mole. During his wife's lifetime, when he was under surveillance, he had to his great vexation been obliged to give up the later walks. But now unfortunately, as he had no one to look after him and keep him in hand, he did as he liked.

Nothing came up to the sea air cure for catarrh. When occasionally he had a pain in his inside, he drank a couple

of glasses of salt water and he was all right. There is no better or simpler medicine than sea water. Once he had a bad leg: two ulcers corroded the flesh down to the bone; and the doctors not only gave the leg up for lost, but despaired of his life. In desperation he had himself carried down to the beach and bathed. After nine baths the ulcers were cured. One can imagine what he thought of the curative efficacy of the sea after that!

On the other hand, he had a great objection to rivers. The air of a river made him hoarse, the fogs suffocated him, and gave him asthma. The "shut-in" feeling of the air filled him with aversion and unspeakable dislike. Don Melchor slept little; he rose before sunrise; and directly he got up he ascended to his observatory, and examined the sky and the sea; and after drawing out in his head a meteorological map of the coming day, he went down to the end of the mole to corroborate his observations; ascertained whether the wind was passing, or settled, if it were positively north, or inclined to the east or west, if the weather were going to be good or bad, if the sea would be stormy or calm, how long the weather would remain as it was; to what quarter the wind would veer at mid-day; if the sea would then be calm or rough, etc., etc.

He could not take his chocolate until he had made all these observations.

And really, however this may look like a mania, I think it is less silly than rising from one's bed to notice if one's neighbor's face is clean or dirty, cheerful or sad, if he eats or if he fasts, if he sleeps or if he wakes, if he be idle or industrious, how long he remains at home, and what road he takes when he goes out. Gonzalo mounted the upper wall with an irresistible desire to unburden his heart and tell his uncle what had happened, for although his character was little adapted for love confidences, the occasion was important and critical. Don Melchor, who walked a little bent under the weight of years, straightened himself at the sight of a man approaching, for he was anxious to hide all signs of weakness from the world, and he liked to be thought a stalwart fellow.

"Is that you, Gonzalo?"

"It is I, uncle."

"That is a wonder! For you like seeing billiard balls roll better than waves."

"No; I have not played billiards to-day. But I am worried and upset, and I want to speak to you about an important matter; in fact I want your advice."

Don Melchor looked at him in surprise.

"An important matter?"

"Yes—look here, uncle; would you marry a woman you did not love?"

"What a question! Matrimony at my age is a thing of the past, my boy."

"But if you were young, would you marry like that?"

"Never."

"Very well, uncle—I do not love Cecilia."

"You do not love Cecilia?" exclaimed the old gentleman in horror.

It must be said that Don Melchor had a blind affection, almost adoration, for his nephew's betrothed—the girl was sacred to him. From the time that he knew Gonzalo's affections were set in that quarter he inspected her as carefully as if he were examining the hull of a ship before masting her. He had considered her kind, quiet, intelligent, and capable, and his delight at the marriage was only embittered by hearing that the engaged couple were not going to live with him.

He seldom visited Belinchon's house, but when he met the girl in the street he made a point of stopping her and treating her with exceptional courtesy and attention.

"You do not love her?" he repeated. "And why don't you love her, you dunderhead?"

"I don't know. I have made superhuman efforts to love her, and I have not succeeded."

"And you have just found that out—a month before your marriage? Come, Gonzalo, you have got a screw loose."

"It is shameful—I grant it—but I can't resign myself to being unhappy for life."

"Unhappy! And you call it unhappiness, you great fool, to marry the nicest and prettiest girl in Sarrío, for no other can hold a candle to her."

Gonzalo could not forbear smiling.

"Cecilia is a good girl, and worthy of marrying a better man than I am, but pretty, uncle—"

"Pretty, yes, pretty, you fool!" exclaimed the Señor de las Cuevas in a rage; "you would find fault with an angel."

Surprising as the statement may be, the old man was at that time of life when one is more impressed by the poetry of womanhood, seen in exquisite sensibility, resignation, sweetness, and self-sacrifice, than by the ephemeral physical charms before which impetuous youth is so prone to fall captive.

"Do not let us quarrel about it."

"But we will quarrel about it—I won't have Cecilia spoken of like that—so there!"

"All right; then I'll say that Cecilia is a very pretty girl—but—"

"But what?"

"But I can not love her, because I love another."

"What thousand deviltries are you saying now, boy?" returned Don Melchor, taking his nephew by the arm and shaking him.

"I can not help it, uncle. I am madly in love with her sister, Venturita."

"Are you in your senses or out of them, you madman?"

"I am speaking seriously—I love her, and she loves me."

"And you think that this is all there is to be said?" said the old man, getting more and more angry. "Do you think a solemn promise can be broken in that way? Do you think a girl can be made the laughing-stock of a place like this? Do you think any parents will tolerate such infamous conduct?"

"Uncle," returned Gonzalo quietly, "before daring to tell you this, things have occurred which have made me take this step. My position with Venturita is an established fact; her mother knows it, and has authorized it, and by this time her father has also been made acquainted with the circumstances."

"And will give his consent?"

"I am sure he will."

Don Melchor dropped his nephew's arm, and raised his hand to his forehead. It was some time before he could speak. At last he said in slow and melancholy tones:

"All right. I am powerless to prevent this disgrace—for it is a disgrace," he added forcibly. "You are of age, and even if you were not I would have nothing to do with such a business."

"Are you angry?"

"There is no use being angry. I am only very sorry. I am sorry for her, for I am very fond of her—and I am still more sorry for you, Gonzalo. God can not help the man who breaks his word. You were on a safe ship, well built of white, seasoned wood, with the flats well lined, straight strong masts, and bright and smart rigging; and you leave that to embark in a craft that is prettier and showier. You are making a fine experiment, but take heed, lad, the journey is long, the sea wide and wild; when all the calm and beauty of the present becomes a scene of storm, when the soft winds rise to a hurricane, matters become serious, and pretty decorations and designs are of no avail where timber—good strong timber—is required. Give me good timber and I will take you for miles. It is not much good for a ship to leave a port well dressed if her hulk is not equal to her get up. You know that I liked Cecilia—I am very sorry that I can not say the same of her sister. And this is not speaking against her; I do not know her well enough to do that, neither do I feel inclined to, but I can and I ought to tell you my sentiments although you disregard them."

"Oh, uncle!"

"It does not matter, my boy; when a lad's mind is set upon anything, full sail must be set and he must go before the wind. Everything looks ship-shape—but foul weather comes, and I tell you, you are not navigating your ship well, you are not behaving like a gentleman."

"Uncle!"

"The facts speak for themselves. Even if you have got over her parents, and overcome all difficulties, you can't make black white, and make a bad action good. Heave the anchor and unfurl the sails. I am old, and I hope I shall not live to see the storms overtake you. But if it be God's will to punish me thus, if for my sins I have to see you shipping water with bare masts, I shall feel, my boy, that it is beyond my power to help you."

At these last words the voice of the old man shook; Gonzalo's heart strings tightened. For some time they were both silent; and then Don Melchor said:

"Come along to supper, Gonzalo."

"I am not hungry now," returned the young man, "but I will come presently."

"Very well. Good-by," said the Señor de las Cuevas sadly, and turning his steps shoreward, he was gradually lost in the gloom.

Gonzalo remained where he was, with his eyes fixed on the wall of the mole, against which the sea was quietly washing. The waves after breaking against the stone wall with a soft, hollow murmur, receded with a sharp sound like that of curtain rings being drawn. The phosphoric brilliance of the foam proved the presence of the millions of beings existing as comfortably in the watery depths as we do on the dry land in spite of their wild career through space. The monster slept under the dark mantle of night quietly and peacefully, as a child undisturbed by bad dreams. The soft sough of its respiration was hardly audible in the hollows of the rocks.

The black outline of Cape San Lorenzo stretched far out to sea on the west where the revolving white, green, and red lights of the lighthouse at the point were visible. The stars were shining in the firmament with wondrous power. Jupiter blazed in the heavens like the god of night piercing the darkness with its golden rays. Suddenly a change came over the scene. The pale crescent of the moon raised its horn in the east over the tranquil water, and irradiated it with a track of light. Lucifer paled before the serene splendor of the goddess, whose slow and majestic ascent eclipsed the brilliance of the starry orbs of every size about her. She rose in a radiant splendid atmosphere emitting, diffusing, and disseminating the ambient soft influence of her wondrous presence. And the ocean, ebbing and flowing since the beginning of the world under this same influence, now kindles like a flame of fire; its vast shining bosom trembles, and it dashes its waters over the rocks of Santa Maria like enormous stratae of mercury, which in their retreat mingle with the incoming waves.

Sublime silence reigned, and a sense of ineffable peace pervaded the scene so old, and yet so new. Nature herself seemed to stop and listen to the eternal harmony of the heavens. The waves softly kissed each other without daring to interrupt the august serenity of the night with any louder sounds.

In spite of the great uneasiness which the conversation with his uncle had caused him, Gonzalo felt the fascination of the sea, the sky, and the moon, and his uneasiness changed to sadness. The severe words of the old sailor had suddenly awakened his conscience, and the struggle between his good and bad angel recommenced. For one moment his good angel nearly conquered. The young man thought he would go to the Belinchons' house, speak to Doña Paula and beg her to say nothing to Cecilia, but hurry on the marriage. However, at that moment Venturita's image came before his mind, and he felt it would be impossible to live near her without suffering horribly. Then, as it nearly always happens in these struggles, there came a sense of the unendurable.

"The best thing to do," he said, "will be to go at once. I will return to France or England, and not marry either. Then there will be no treachery. The injury I have done Cecilia will soon be forgotten. She will find a more worthy husband than I, and when I return at the expiration of a few years I shall probably find her happy, and surrounded with children. But—but to leave Ventura! to leave that being, radiant with happiness! No more to hear that voice that fills my soul with delight! nor to feel the sweet touch of her hand, fresh and soft as a rosebud! To leave her shining eyes and magnetic smile!—oh, no!"

Drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead. Mortal anguish filled him at the thought of separation, and to overcome the sense of it being definitely settled he said to himself: "We'll see, we'll see. It would be very difficult to go back now—almost impossible. The mother knows about it now. Don Rosendo too, and probably Cecilia also by this time."

The good angel loosened his hold and let go his hands as, spent and defeated, he gave up the struggle. If not with the eyes of the body, Gonzalo could see with those of the spirit, the white form of the good angel passing through the serene atmosphere, and vanishing on the glistening waters.

Then overwhelmed with a strange sadness, he wept. This kind of struggle can never take place in the human soul without upsetting it for some time. To win happiness he had to wound the heart of an innocent girl, break a promise, and be a traitor.

The words of his uncle still echoed in his ears: "God can not help the man who breaks his word."

And, in fact, he felt himself unworthy of help. A cruel indefinite presentiment of misery, death, and sadness overwhelmed him; and in one moment the awfulness of life without virtue or peace was revealed to him, as to the youth of the legend who embraced a beautiful young woman, and when the light oscillated with the wind, he saw that she was transformed into a hideous, hag-like, bony being.

The waves softly washed the wall at his feet, and with his eyes fixed upon them he abstractedly followed their undulating motion. The seaweed growing in the depths moved with the motion of the water like the hair of a dead person. How quietly he could sleep down there! What peace in those transparent depths! What magic light below! Gonzalo gave ear for the first time in his life to the eloquent voice of Nature inviting him to repose in her maternal bosom—the siren voice sweet with irresistible charm, audible to unhappy creatures, even in their dreams, and so often leading them to place the cold muzzle of a pistol to their temples. It was for one minute, not more. His cheerful and sanguine temperament rebelled against this depression; his vitality, exuberant in his healthy constitution, indignantly repudiated the passing thought of death. An insignificant incident, the appearance of a little green light in the distant horizon, sufficed to divert his attention from these gloomy ideas.

"A ship coming in," he said. "What time is it?" (He drew out his watch.) "Half past ten, already! If it were a little earlier I would stop. I'll go and see if there's anybody at the café, for I should like a game of chapo."

He then took out a fine Havana cigar from his case, and smoking it with gusto he repaired to the *Café de la Marina*.

Almost at the same time a sad scene was being enacted in the Belinchon household. Doña Paula had remained all that day in bed, a prey to a dreadful pain in the left side, which caused her great difficulty in breathing. With the plebeian's invincible antipathy, nay terror, of science, she did not like to have a doctor, but she prescribed for herself some of the numerous remedies recommended by the many medicine women who came daily to her house to extort money from her with their vile, exaggerated adulations. So there was no end of embrocations of meat fat, cups of herb concoctions, the inside of fowls, etc., etc.

At last, by dint of these formidable therapeutics, the good lady improved in the evening enough to wish to get up; but Cecilia and Pablito would not hear of it. Both of them had sat with her for some time at her bedside; Cecilia especially had only left her long enough to make the embrocations and tisanes. Pablito made frequent excursions into the corridors, where, curiously enough, he nearly always met Nieves, from whom he extorted toll tax. Sometimes their suppressed laughter reached the room of the invalid, and she would smile kindly, and say to Cecilia:

"What silly creatures!"

For it never occurred to her that her adored son could be up to anything but hide-and-seek.

As the pain gradually left her, her mind was oppressed with the thought of telling her daughter the sad news which had made her so ill. She could only cast long and melancholy glances at the girl as she drew deep sighs of distress. She said several times:

"Cecilia, listen."

And each time she stopped, and merely asked for some trifle.

Night closed in. Venturita lighted the shaded lamp, and then withdrew. Pablo, finding his mother better, and seeing no further opportunity of exercising his seigniorial rights in the passage, withdrew to the café. Mother and daughter remained in the bedroom, the former in bed and seemingly tranquil, the latter seated near her. After a long silence, during which the Señora de Belinchon turned over in her head a thousand ways of opening a conversation which might lead naturally to the confidence she was obliged to make, she said:

"Have the girls worked well to-day?"

"I don't know, I have scarcely seen them," returned Cecilia.

"I think that if they go on at this rate they will finish too soon."

"Perhaps so."

Doña Paula was at a loss to know how to proceed, and remained silent.

At the end of some minutes she took up the thread afresh.

"The trousseau will be completely finished in this month of August, and I do not think you will be married for some months."

"Some months?"

"I think so. I believe Gonzalo does not wish the day to be so soon," said the señora with a trembling voice.

"Has he told you so?"

"Yes, he has told me so—I mean—no, he has not told me so—but I have guessed it from certain things—from some indirect remarks."

Doña Paula was here overpowered with a feeling of suffocation. Fortunately Cecilia could not see the flaming color of her cheeks.

"I should like to know what those remarks were," returned the girl in a firm voice.

"Don't ask me, child of my soul!" exclaimed the señora, bursting into tears.

Cecilia turned deadly pale, and let her mother kiss the hand she held in hers, astonished at this emotion.

"What has happened, mama?—speak."

"A terrible thing—my heart—an infamous, infamous thing—I would rather die this moment than see the ruin and the misery of one of my daughters."

"Calm yourself, mama; you are ill, and you will do yourself great harm if you allow yourself to become so excited."

"What does it matter! I tell you I would rather die—I would give my life for you not to love Gonzalo—You do love him, dear heart? You love him deeply?"

Cecilia did not reply.

"Tell me, for God's sake, that you do not love him."

Cecilia was still silent; at the end of some minutes, trying in vain to give a firm tone to her voice, she said:

"Gonzalo declines to marry me, is that it?"

Doña Paula was now silent in her turn, and hid her weeping face in her hands.

Some minutes went by.

"Has he anything against me?"

"What could he have? Who could have anything against you, my lamb?"

"Then, if I do not please him, or he does not love me, what is to be done? It is better to be undeceived in time."

"Oh!" cried Doña Paula, breaking into fresh sobs, for under the apparent resignation of her daughter she detected a profound grief which she strove in vain to hide.

"What is to be done, mama? Is it not better for him to say so now than after we are married? Do I not know what a wretched life he would lead united to a woman he did not love? The pain that he causes me now, great as it is, is nothing to what I should feel if my husband did not love me. The pain would get worse and worse until I died, while now it may go, or at least be alleviated—Perhaps when he has gone away and I have not seen him for some time I shall gradually forget him—"

"But he is not going," returned the señora in confusion.

"If he does not go, patience—I will try not to go out, and I shall not see him."

"But, child of my soul, your misfortune is much greater! Gonzalo is in love with your sister."

Cecilia turned still paler, her face became livid, and she was silent.

Her mother again kissed her hand with effusion, and then drew her to her, and covered her face with kisses.

"Forgive me for torturing you like this. Much as you suffer, I suffer more. Yesterday evening your sister came and told me. Imagine my distress and grief. My first impulse was to kill her, for I was sure that she was most to blame. She gave me proof that they have been carrying on for some time, and showed me letters which made Gonzalo's faithlessness very clear to me. When I was convinced of his treachery I said that I would have nobody make a laughing-stock of my daughter, and Gonzalo should not set foot again in this house, that he was as bad as she; in short, I said all that came into my head. But this morning, this morning—I learned something still worse. I learned that your sister has gone farther than I can, or wish to, say. There is nothing for them but marriage, and that as soon as possible. Now you know why I have had this pain, which all but kills me, and would that it did so! Your father and I are both trapped—our hands are tied. If it were not so I would sooner be cut into little pieces than consent to this marriage. The infamous way this man has treated you will make me hate him all my life. Yes, all my life!" she added in an angry tone.

Cecilia did not answer. She sat with her hands clasped in her lap, her head hanging on her bosom and her horror-struck eyes fixed on the ground.

Neither the vehement broken utterances of her mother nor the sobs which succeeded them made her change her position. She remained thus for some time, motionless, and white as a statue.

In those large, limpid eyes there at last trembled a tear; it grew, it moved, then overflowing, it left a wet track upon her wan cheek, and fell like a drop of fire upon her hand, and there remained. A little later it evaporated. An angel had gathered it up and taken it to God in protest for her who had shed it.

CHAPTER XIII

"THE LIGHT OF SARRIO"

A NEW bright day dawned upon Sarrio after the recent heavy gloom. By the mercy and grace of God the beautiful town was now, when least expected, provided with a press organ, which was to be biweekly, or as the illustrious organizer expressed it, "hepdomenal." Grave obstacles and perilous difficulties were at first opposed to the realization of the undertaking, but the genius of the wonderful man who undertook it overcame them all. The first difficulty was that of money. Fifty shares of a thousand ducats each were issued for the support of the periodical. The friends of Don Rosendo only took up nine. Don Rudesindo had five allotted to him, Don Feliciano two, and Don Pedro Miranda, in spite of his large income, only another two—no more. Alvaro Peña, Don Rufo, Navarro, *et al.*, excused themselves for want of funds, and that with reason; besides, they gave the business the benefit of their brains, which no doubt was a great thing. So Don Rosendo, with a generosity which greatly impressed the rest of the company, was the holder of the remaining forty-one shares.

Messengers were despatched to Lancia in search of a printing press, but the negotiations proving fruitless, the press organizer went himself to the town. At the end of some days he was fortunate enough to find a printer who had been ruined for some years, and no purchaser had been forthcoming for his broken-down, rotting apparatus which lay covered with dust in a dark cellar. When Don Rosendo proceeded to examine it with its owner, he could not help feeling respectful emotion, and grave thoughts filled his mind as he contemplated it.

"Here," he said, "is lying in idleness the most influential instrument of human progress, and this not from any fault of the owner, but through the desertion of mankind. How much information, how much spiritual food might it not have produced during these barren dumb years! While barbarism and ignorance are rampant in the greater part of our country, that printing apparatus, the only agent of their dispersion, stands motionless for the want of a hand to work it and to bring forth from it the secrets of science and politics."

He almost kissed and fondled the machine in his enthusiasm. The printer, seeing his visitor so well disposed in its favor, could not be outdone, and he declared himself so devotedly attached to the very skeleton of his machine that he would not part with it for any money, for it had always been the faithful companion by which he had earned his bread (and according to report, his wine too). He descanted upon its perfections with as much enthusiasm as if he were its offspring and indebted to it for his life's breath; and he moreover made the solemn statement that it printed

better and cleaner than all the printing presses of the day.

Hearing these facts Don Rosendo fully concurred in the exordium on the machine, and tried to prove to him that he ought to part with it to prevent its wondrous qualities being lost to the world. But the more eloquent the merchant grew, the more tender and clinging became the printer. Finally, seeing there was no persuading the man to part with his treasure, and he had not the heart to enforce it, he arranged for him to go to Sarrio with it, and settle down there. He was to take a few compositors with him, who were to teach the trade to some of the lads in the town, and he was to be furnished with all necessary materials for the establishment of a printing office. Folgueras, the ruined printer, was thus to be the director and master of the concern, and his salary was to be drawn from the journal, and according to our calculations this proved to be twice as much as what is given in the best printing office in Madrid. However, it is not much if we consider the merit of the machine and the deep love professed for it by the owner.

The title of the newspaper was one of the points in which the inventive, superior mind of Don Rosendo particularly distinguished itself. It was called "The Light of Sarrio," a name extremely impressive and well-sounding, and moreover testifying to its mission, which its founder wished to be that of enlightening and dignifying the town of Sarrio.

He secretly ordered from Madrid an engraving for the head of the paper, and on its arrival a few days later it caused rapturous delight among the shareholders and all those who had the good fortune to see it. It represented a seaport, like Sarrio, in the dark hours of the night—to judge by the black hue of the sky and sea; on the left towered the heights of an ideal mountain, upon which was seen a man, bearing a distant resemblance to Don Rosendo, turning the rays of an enormous lantern upon the town; round about him were the heads of several people, and the shareholders believed in good faith that they represented themselves, and so they felt deeply indebted to the designer.

The printing press was to be set up in a storehouse of Don Rudesindo's, to whom, of course, a rent was to be paid; and at the printing office there was to be another room, but these plans required some consideration before they could be carried out. The printing press was finally set up, but not without heavy, unexpected expenses, for Folgueras, who pretended he was furnished with all that was necessary, had nothing at all, and they had to send to Madrid for sets of type, have type galleys made, buy tables, etc., etc.

At last everything was in order. Don Rosendo worked like a slave, and busied himself with the smallest details, and his talent as organizer was more shown than ever on this occasion. He made Sinforoso Suarez chief editor with a salary of twenty-five crowns a month, and he made Don Rufo's eldest son manager. But the paper for printing had not come. They had telegraphed to Madrid for a supply and it had not arrived. The impatience of Belinchon knew no bounds. Telegrams went and came by the electric wires. They said it was detained at Lancia—a telegram to Lancia asking for it. Then they heard it had not left Valladolid—telegram to Valladolid. Then that it had not left Madrid—telegram to Madrid. Don Rosendo swore he would have no more paper from Madrid, but that he would order it henceforth from Belgium. But disappointment changed into delight, as it often does, when the news came that several bales had arrived at Lancia, and were there awaiting a cart to take them to their destination.

As the copy for the first number had been ready for some days, the printing was immediately proceeded with, and it had to be done on an extensive scale, for Don Rosendo intended to circulate it through the provinces, to send it all over Spain, and even to introduce it into foreign countries. Both he and his partners took a personal interest in seeing the printing press started, and they never wearied of admiring its complicated machinery, the wonderful precision of its movement, and the marvelous velocity with which it worked, for it cast off no fewer than two hundred copies in one hour. Its illustrious founder could not restrain the press ardor which consumed him; he tore off his coat in the presence of everybody, and literally put his shoulder to the wheel until the sweat poured copiously from his manly brow. A striking instance of enthusiasm and love of civilization to which we like to draw the attention of the rising generation!

At last "The Light of Sarrio" appeared in great style, for its founder had seen that the paper was good, and it was fairly well printed. The only faulty feature was the engraving on the front page, for the majority of the people thought that the individual holding a lantern in his hand was a negro, instead of the respectable individual we have mentioned. It contained a leading article in large type called "Our Objects." Although it was signed by the staff, it emanated entirely from the pen of Don Rosendo. The purport of the appearance of "The Light" in the press was chiefly to defend cap-a-pie the moral and material interests of Sarrio, to combat ignorance in all its forms, and in the fierce battles of the press to fight unweariedly for the triumph of the reforms that the progress of the times requires.

"The Light" maintained that the hour had struck for breaking with the doctrines of the past. Sarrio earnestly desired to emancipate itself from the thralldom of pettiness and conventionality; it wished to break the bonds which had hitherto restrained it, and enter into full possession of its own conscience and rights.

"We trust," said the writer, "that a period of moral and material activity will date from the appearance of our publication, and that we shall assist at one of those social reformations which mark an epoch in the annals of the town. If our voice is successful in awakening the town of Sarrio from its long sleep and apathy and we soon see the dawn of an era of labor and study befitting the reform movement that we hope to inaugurate, we shall feel amply repaid for our efforts and sacrifices."

The language could not have been more noble and patriotic, and modesty, as usual, tempered the tone of the authoritative eloquence.

"We do not aspire," he said, "to being the vanguard in this great battle of thought about to take place in the town of Sarrio, but we do aspire to fighting like common soldiers, for we do expect a place in the rear-guard. There we shall fight like good men, and if we finally fall vanquished, we will envelop ourselves in the sacred banner of progress."

The military allegorical style was very effective in the town, and it contributed not a little to the enthusiastic reception accorded to the paper.

In short, the article was so rich in expression, so replete with deep remarks, and the style was so concise, that the public was at a loss to attribute it to any one but the illustrious director—and in this it was right.

Then the periodical contained a long article by Sinforoso on "Woman." It consisted of two close columns of poetic prose, embroidered with all the flowers of rhetoric, describing the sweet influence of this half of the human race.

He maintained, in fervent language, that civilization can not exist apart from matrimony; conjugal love is its only basis. Everything is holy, everything is beautiful, everything is happy in the intimate union of a young married couple. The man, rendered happy by his companion, feels his faculties increase, and is capable of carrying out enterprises otherwise impossible to him. The influence of the woman presses him onward to virtue and glory; it is the sweetest and at the same time the most powerful of social forces. Sinforoso queried with surprise, "How could some beings consider woman inferior to man? She with her beauty, delicacy, grace, sweetness, perspicacity, and patience is the highest work of creation. But the mission of woman is to be a wife and mother. Without being these she is not fully evolved, she fades like a flower without perfume." The writer concluded by advising woman to bear this in mind, and for no earthly consideration to consent to be voluntarily deprived of the two conditions of her honor and glory.

This exordium on matrimony, although addressed to the fair sex in general, was written for the special edification of a certain pretty cigarette-maker of the Calle de Caborana, whom Sinforoso had courted in vain for some years. The public thought that the girl would end by accepting him, partly by reason of the poetic terms in which he made his case clear, and partly because of the fifty reales a month which the suitor now received for his work on the staff.

Then followed a contribution from the professor, Don Jeronimo de la Fuente; it was a serious, violent attack on Kepler's three great laws of the motions of the planetary bodies, or rather on two of them, for he preserved silence on the first, which treats of the elliptical orbit of the planets. He fiercely opposed the second, maintaining and demonstrating by means of a most brilliant calculation that the areas described by the radius vector are not in any degree equal to the time employed in making them, but they concord with the attractive or repulsive force of the celestial bodies. But the chief object of his attack was the third law, for Don Jeronimo rejected as antiquated and absurd the idea that the time taken for the revolutions of planets was proportionate to the cubic feet of their distances from each other; for he showed not merely by empty words, but by figures, that there was no ground for such a calculation.

He announced another article for the next number, which was to establish a new basis for the celestial mechanism which would quite smash up the old one. In it he maintained that the stars were attracted by one pole and repelled by another like electric bodies, and upon this great principle he satisfactorily explained the movements of the celestial bodies, their disturbances, and many problems which had hitherto been deemed insoluble.

Thanks to the telescope in the window of his house, Don Jeronimo had made a series of prodigious discoveries which set at naught all the existing knowledge of astronomy. It was not astonishing that the learned professor, filled with legitimate pride, exclaimed at the end of his article:

"Down with Kepler, Newton, Laplace, and Galileo from the pedestal upon which man's ignorance has placed them and all colossal standard-bearers of false science! All their calculations have vanished like smoke, and their magnificent systems are like dry leaves, fallen from the tree of science to rot and decay."

Some verses by Periquito, the son of Don Pedro Miranda, were also inserted that confided to a certain mysterious "G" that he was a worm, and she a star; he a branch, and she a tree; she a rose, and he a caterpillar; she a light, and he the shadow; she the snow, and he the mud, etc.

There were reasons for suspecting that this "G" was a certain Gumersinda, the wife of a corn merchant, a woman remarkable for her stout figure, which caused her some difficulty in walking. Periquito had a particular fancy for ladies who were plump and married. When both these qualities were combined in one being his passion knew no bounds. And such was the present case. One must not think by this that the young man was a vicious creature. The husbands of Sarrio were not disturbed about him. Periquito was always in love, sometimes with one, sometimes with another lady, but he never dared to address them or send a love letter. Such courses were not in his line, which consisted chiefly in fascinating them by his gaze. Therefore, whenever he came across one of these fair creatures at church, or in the theatre, he first managed to take a seat at a convenient distance, and once he had taken up his position, he directed the magnetic power of his eyes straight at the passive object of his experiment until she occasionally glanced at him with an expression of surprise. The respectable matron, often not considering herself worthy of such particular attention, would look round and ask those with her if she had a spot on her face, or if her hair were out of order.

Periquito was indefatigable, and went through all these performances with the gravity they deserved. Sometimes he spent an hour or more with his eyes fixed on one person, and often when the hour had elapsed, and the enamored youth thought his soul must have filtered through the pores of the obese lady to the affection of all her faculties and feelings, this same lady would say in an undertone to her companions:

"Goodness, how that fellow Don Pedro does stare!"

How far the poet was from supposing that the star of his dreams held him in such small account!

Sometimes, but very seldom, Periquito got a little farther. When he was quite sure that the husband was not at home, nor even about the town, he sent the mysterious lady a bunch of flowers which was really a passionate eloquent letter, if the lady had only been as well versed as he was in the language of flowers. Unfortunately, the supine ignorance of the fair sex in Sarrio made these ingenious modes of communication null and void. The same can be said of certain other delicate attentions to which Periquito resorted to show his devotion. If he saw the lady wear a blue dress, he donned a cravat of the same color, a blue striped shirt and a blue flower in his buttonhole; and if the lady continued wearing the same dress, he went as far as to adopt blue trousers; and if the color were green, brown, or gray, he also followed suit. If the unhappy lady were of a religious turn of mind, Periquito voluntarily imposed on himself the terrible ordeal of rising early, and attending the mass to which she went; and if on Saturday, Monday, or Thursday she approached the sacred table to communicate, he also received the spiritual food from the priest on the same days. If the lady had plants in her window, Periquito promptly ascertained her hour of watering them, and took care to pass by at that time, when he was in the seventh heaven if perchance a few drops fell from the watering-pot on his hat. In the small hours of the night he wandered about the house, making invocations to the moon, and praying it might watch over the dreams of his love.

On one occasion, when he was in love with the wife of a lieutenant of the carbineers who was ordered to Burgos, he nearly died of grief. His mad passion inspired him with the idea of going off to get a glimpse of her, so after writing a letter of farewell to his father and taking twenty dollars of his savings he started for the City of the Cid; but in Venta de Bañas he unfortunately came across a married lady of the Civil Guard who attracted him to Palencia; there he saw another lady who took him farther, and so on, until he came back to Sarrio. This was not his only

escapade. On another occasion he went fifteen miles on foot merely to cast an amatory glance at a certain lady as she sat at the window, and this lady was married to a second husband.

As the final touch to this description we must add that Periquito, to use his father's expression, ate like Heliogabulus, and yet he never grew fat.

"The Light of Sarrio" was for our impressionable young man an admirable means of airing the vague fancies, anxieties, joys, and distresses which consumed his soul, and declaring himself in mysterious acrostics to all the matrons, more or less stout, who paraded their plump forms in the streets of the flourishing town.

Finally came the columns of "Intelligence" under different headings. The genius of Sinforoso and the rest of the staff of "The Light" shone in this portion of the paper. The paragraph called "Going and Coming" referred to the visitors who had come to Sarrio in view of the approaching festivities.

Another, headed "Sarriensians out Walking," maintained in a graceful, sparkling style that the weather was delicious, and that the people of Sarrio could not do better in the evening than take a turn in the pretty, leafy environs of the town.

Another, "The Mayor to the Fore," was an appeal to Don Roque to have gutters put to several houses.

Later on this section dropped the title of "Intelligence" for that of "News to Hand," which Don Rosendo put in in imitation of "*Nouvelle à la Main*" of the "Figaro."

The journal ended with a charade in verse.

The fiction was Don Rufo's department, and as he had been studying French on the Ollendorf system for a year and a half, he decided to translate for the paper the six volumes of the "Mysteries of Paris." It is unnecessary to say that although "The Light of Sarrio" lived for some years, it never got as far as the third volume. Don Rufo was a wonderful translator. If he had a defect it was that of translating too literally. Once he wrote: "The carriage went off at a quick trot, inside a lady fair and frail."

In another passage, he said that Monsieur Rudolph passed his youth in the perusal of the chief works of antiquity. Finally, he represented the Countess as taking hold of the button (instead of buttonholing) of the secretary, and this provoked so much derision from ignorant folk that Don Rufo lost his temper and resigned the work, which then was undertaken by a pilot who for several years had made the run to Bayonne.

The success of the first number, as was expected, was prodigious: the article by Sinforoso, the learned dissertation by La Fuente, the "Intelligence," and even Periquito's verses, were all read with due appreciation by the public. But Don Rosendo's article headed "Our Objects" made the profoundest impression on people of a serious turn of mind. The well-turned phrases, so full of spirit and fire, the noble thoughts, the enthusiasm for the interests of Sarrio, the frankness and modesty that characterized it, filled their hearts with joy, and made them feel as if an era of prosperity and well-being had dawned.

That night the band, conducted by Señor Anselmo, with his great shining key, serenaded the staff. The front of the publishing office was illuminated with Venetian lamps, and, as usual, the pretty light-hearted artisans of Sarrio took the opportunity of dancing country dances and mazurkas on the hard stones of the street. The worthy individuals who gave voice to their admiration and enthusiasm for the staff of "The Light" in the language of music were inspired thereto by De Rueda's wine and cigars. Joy reigned in every heart, and overflowed in embraces as hearty as they were spontaneous. Don Rosendo embraced Navarro, Alvaro Peña, Don Rudesindo, Don Rufo, Sinforoso, and Don Pedro Miranda, the printer Folgueras. The musicians embraced each other, and they all embraced their conductor, Señor Anselmo. Outside the printing office, Pablito, also in commemoration of the auspicious day, embraced the fair Nieves under the shadow of a doorway, and several other lads, following his example, openly distributed their commemorative kisses among the happy girls.

The only thing that disturbed the general happiness was the peculiar sadness that came over Folgueras after he had imbibed several litres of wine. The recollection of Lancia, his natal town, suddenly occurred to him and threw him into a state of depression difficult to describe. Just when cheerfulness and gaiety had reached their height he called Don Rosendo aside, and with tears assured him that life away from his adored town was an unsupportable burden to him; better to die than lose sight of the humble dwelling which saw his birth and the streets trodden by his baby feet. The same week, please God, he hoped to leave Sarrio and return to Lancia with his belongings.

On hearing this sudden news Don Rosendo turned pale.

"But, man, the next number of "The Light."

"Don Rosendo, you will have to excuse me. You are a gentleman—a gentleman knows how to appreciate the feelings of another gentleman. One's country before everything. Guzman the Good flung his poniard to the enemy to kill his own son. You know that well enough, eh? What do you think of that? Riego died on a scaffold. Well! What do you think of that? If I were in the workhouse, with not a shirt to stand up in, there would be no need for any one to tell me anything. Do you think you will keep me all tied like a dog to the wheel? But all sentiment dies out in a man—the man lives, the man works, the man occasionally shows his true self—and because he drinks a quartern, or two, or three, is he to forget his country? Eh? What do you think of that?"

Don Rosendo called Don Rudesindo to his assistance, and they succeeded in dissuading the printer from his course by the force of their strong reasons, the most potent of these being a fresh bottle of Rueda wine. After this was imbibed, the patriotic feelings of Folgueras calmed down. Then he took another bottle, drank it, was ill, and slept.

Thoughts of glory, vague desires for undying fame, filled the mind of the illustrious founder of "The Light of Sarrio" by the time he retired to rest. After extinguishing the light, they recurred over and over again until they took some definite form. Don Rosendo was moved at the thought of the possibility of his memory being perpetuated by a tablet put up in the Consistorial buildings. This ambitious thought made him tremble with joy and delight between the sheets. Being a modest, sensible, magnanimous man, he tried to expel the idea, but it returned to his mind with additional clearness. He saw the white marble, he saw the gold letters, he clearly deciphered the graven lines:

"Tribute of gratitude from the town of Sarrio to her enlightened son, Don Rosendo Belinchon, indefatigable champion of her moral and material progress."

His mind, filled with these brilliant forecasts, could not easily succumb to Morpheus; nevertheless, he finally slept with a smile on his lips. A progressive angel, ready for these emergencies, beat his wings over his brow through the night watches and gave him pleasant dreams.

The next morning found him in the cheerful frame of mind befitting a man who has seen his efforts crowned with enviable success. He performed his toilet to the humming of scraps of song, he took chocolate with his family, gave a glance at the national and foreign newspapers, and without cutting his usual bundle of toothpicks, he went out to ascertain what effect the first number of "The Light" had produced upon the town. He was received at Graell's shop with effusion, he was congratulated on his article, which he modestly tried to disclaim, and the talk about the paper was long and eager.

What most excited the enthusiasm of the frequenters of the café was to think that Nieva had not yet arrived, nor would it arrive for some time, at a similar state of advancement. And Don Rosendo, not a little elated with these eulogies, promised to take active measures in favor of all that was asked of him. One requested that the deep ruts of the Calle de Atras should be mentioned; another that a lamp should be put outside his house; another that some pills should be recommended; another, that serenades should not disturb the hours of sleep, etc., etc. Don Rosendo assented to all, knitted his brows and extended his open hand in a valedictory fashion. The journal would settle it all. Woe to him who ran counter to the reforms of the press! He had often held forth on toothpicks to the assembly of respected matrons of the town generally gathered in Doña Raffaello's shop, but "The Light" was the subject of his discourse to-day. The fiction portion seemed to have met with the most favor from the fair sex; Don Rosendo told them the next number would be much more interesting, and then he withdrew.

A party of sailors by the port were loud in their congratulations, and they hinted that the harbor was very dirty and required dragging.

"It shall be done—it shall be done," said Don Rosendo, and he went off full of a solemn sense of his omnipotence, and, seeing the large curling waves in the distance, he even asked himself if it would not be a good thing to ask them, by means of the press, to moderate their uncalled-for excitement. At the approach of the dinner hour he directed his steps homeward, meditating on the grave responsibility he would incur before God and man if he did not use his great power for the prosperity and improvement of his native town. On arriving at the Rua Nueva, he met Gabino Maza. The choleric ex-officer greeted him very politely, asked after his family, and made the kindest inquiries after the health of each member; then he talked for some time on the possibility of the cold northeast wind soon changing into a warm, southwesterly one, asked when the next ships would start for America; he then complained of the dust on the roads, which made walking unpleasant, spoke of the price of codfish, and the news of the Newfoundland cod fisheries, but Rosendo naturally expected him to mention the paper. Nothing of the sort. Maza did not make the slightest allusion to it. This began to upset our friend and made his position painful. The conversation passed from one subject to another without bearing at all upon the press. At last Don Rosendo, showing his gleaming teeth, said somewhat abruptly:

"Have you not received 'The Light?' One of the first copies was sent to you."

"Dear me! I think it did come to the house yesterday, but I have not opened it yet," returned Maza with affected indifference. "Don Rosendo, will you come and dine with me? Good-by, till then."

Don Rosendo stood for an instant rooted to the ground, feeling as if a bucket of cold water had been thrown over him. The blood rushed violently to his face, and he almost staggered home. The unexpectedness of the blow made him feel it much more keenly. When the shock had passed off, he fell into a violent passion against that—he could not resist calling him anything less than a malicious and despicable creature. He arrived home in a deplorable state of agitation, and although he took his seat at the table and made violent efforts to calm himself, his digestion was so thoroughly upset that he recoiled from all food. He was gloomy and silent during the meal; a sarcastic smile occasionally wreathed his lips, and he murmured: "The villain!"

Finally his wife, who was upset on her own account, ventured to say:

"What is the matter, Rosendo?"

"Nothing, Paulina; but envy causes a lot of wickedness in the world," was the short, bitter reply.

Having given utterance to this profound remark, he remained in a state of comparative repose, leaning back in an armchair to collect his thoughts; and after the expiration of half an hour he once more sallied forth in the direction of the Club. On entering the café Gabino's voice fell upon his ears, shouting as usual upstairs. From the staircase he thought he heard him talking of the periodical and calling it "a solemn farce." His heart jumped, and he entered the room agitated and upset. At the sight of him Maza, who was gesticulating in the centre of a group of men, put on his hat with a sudden gesture, and took a seat upon the sofa.

Don Lorenzo and Don Feliciano Gomez greeted the newcomer with a certain embarrassment, and with some shamefacedness, all of which confirmed Don Rosendo in his suspicion. He hid his feelings as much as possible, and striving to assume a cheerful demeanor he began talking of the current news. Conversation then took its natural course, and confidence was restored. But the engineer Delaunay, as artful as he was malignant, turned the conversation upon the newspaper, and in the lisping tone that he affected, said, with an ironical smile, to the founder:

"What little contributions are you preparing for the next number, Don Rosendo?"

"You will see when it comes out," returned the chief editor, who knew there was a joke underlying the question.

"Here, in Don Feliciano," continued the engineer with the same smile, "you have a staunch defender."

"If he defends me it is because somebody has attacked me," returned Rosendo with increased asperity.

Nobody said a word. Silence reigned for some time, until it was broken by Belinchon making a casual remark to Don Jaime, and the conversation was resumed. But the blow had only been momentarily averted; thunder was in the air and soon became audible.

Maza was consumed with the desire to tell Don Rosendo that the paper was a humbug, and the latter was not less anxious to tell Maza that he was a malignant fellow. Thus both took advantage of the first opportunity of communicating these polite remarks. The dispute lasted more than two hours. Maza tried to restrain himself because of Don Rosendo's superior position, and besides, he owed him fifteen thousand reales. The founder of "The Light" also considered it prudent not to give full expression to his thoughts. Nevertheless, for better or for worse, all came out for the edification of the notabilities who ranged themselves on one side or the other of the contending parties. It must be confessed that the minority was on Maza's side. The West Indians, neutral, as usual in these disputes, occasionally appeared, cue in hand, at the door of the billiard-room to listen to the arguments of the disputants and gain some light on the subject. For those discussions were very improving, as they taught them many terms and

phrases unknown to them; and thus they were less shut out from even a superficial interest in the many problems of life. It was unfortunate that their devotion to billiards prevented their always listening.

CHAPTER XIV

VIOLENT RECRIMINATIONS

THE state of agitation and anger in which Don Rosendo left the Club can not be exaggerated. His noble, magnanimous soul was wounded to the quick by the ingratitude and baseness of his false friends. It must be horrible to live and die in obscurity and to have Heaven-born gifts wasted in boredom and inaction when one is meant to shine in the higher spheres of human society. But it is still more painful to see the deprecation of one's noble mental efforts and magnanimous endeavors for the triumph of goodness and truth. Such was the case with Socrates, Solon, Giordano Bruno, and also with our hero. The first sting of malignity caused him the acute pain which great benefactors of the human race can not but feel, and his spirit failed him. It was only for a minute, however, a mere passing weakness which bore witness to his sensitive disposition.

Nevertheless, that night he could eat no supper, and it was a long time before he could manage to sleep. To how many depressing thoughts had this incident given rise. While the common herd of the townfolk of Sarrio, destitute of genius, perspicacity, and intellect, slept soundly, the philanthropic man lay tossing on his couch as if it were a bed of thorns, robbed of the enjoyment of refreshing sleep.

He rose the next morning somewhat pale and hollow-eyed, but firm in his determination to continue his work of regeneration. The sleepless night, instead of weakening his intention and making him relax in his efforts, had only strengthened him in his course, and roused him to fresh efforts. Fire consumes and turns straw to ashes, but it purifies gold.

Therefore he proceeded enthusiastically in the organization of his plan for the second number, which was to appear the following Thursday, and as usual success brought many offers of assistance. Many were the contributions sent for the second number, but the majority was below the mark, and want of space obliged him to reject several that were good. This gave rise to a great deal of grumbling and bad feeling—second difficulty in the course of his patriotic enterprise. But on the publication of the fifth number there was a much more serious trouble, which caused a great sensation in the town and gave rise to a perfect storm.

It happened that Alvaro Peña, being quite convinced, as we know, that all the miseries and drawbacks suffered by the human race are exclusively due to the clerical influence, thought he would use the press as a field of an active campaign against it. This he opened by sending as skirmishers several paragraphs, asking about the funds of a certain sisterhood of the Rosary which were not forthcoming, speaking in disrespectful terms of the Daughters of Mary, and making irreverent remarks on the special prayers and confessions, and also ridiculing the scapularies worn by the young religious sisters in the town.

But the shots were particularly aimed at Don Benigno the curate, the director of the female consciences of Sarrio and the instigator of all those revolts against sin. The rector was an old apathetic man who passed his life in a little house near the town, and willingly left to his curate the care of the souls of his flock. And Don Benigno fulfilled his duty as an active, vigilant, and most zealous pastor, keeping watch over the flock by day and night, so that no wolf should take off any sheep, and giving most careful personal attention to those he purposed offering to the Heavenly Bridegroom. Nothing could exceed the ardor with which he procured brides for the Most High. As soon as a young girl knelt at his feet for confession he thought that he was in a position to insinuate that the world was corrupt, its pleasures were transitory and often damnatory, earthly love was corrupt, affection as a daughter and sister was despicable, the time of working out salvation was very short, therefore the best thing to be done was to leave this earthly world (Don Benigno was very fond of this adjective), surrender all to Christ, and repair to that delightful retreat spoken of by San Juan de la Cruz, and there remain oblivious of all cares. He knew just such a happy retreat, a real little piece of Heaven, where one could enjoy in anticipation the delights reserved by God for his faithful servants.

This retreat was a Carmelite convent, just founded in the outskirts of the town, and the curate was its great patron and supporter. Certainly this had caused a slight coolness between him and Don Segis, the chaplain of the Augustinians, but the latter did not dare to show his resentment because it would not have served his purpose to quarrel with his coadjutor. These insinuations to the young girls were sometimes effectual, sometimes not. Don Benigno rarely made them in the ears of an elderly person. We do not know if he thought that Heaven would rather receive a bride of fifteen than one of thirty, or whether he thought the older people were more obstinate and suspicious than the young girls.

Anyhow, that spiritual sport induced interesting episodes. On one occasion the priest was the victim of an assault made by a youth who had been robbed of his bride-elect by the convent. On another occasion, after having obtained a dowry for a young girl, and having provided her with clothes, the bride of Heaven escaped in the night with a tailor's assistant. Don Benigno used to take the brides himself to the abode of the bridegroom. When there were difficulties to overcome on the part of the family, he bore himself with the skill and energy of a consummate lady-killer, and he organized and carried out the conquest with an astuteness that many mundane suitors would have envied. It was this matter to which Alvaro Peña referred when in a certain paragraph he mentioned a certain priest devoted to "pigeon-sport." And as we know Don Benigno's proclivity in this direction, the shaft went home with diabolical effect. The readers also understood the allusion, and laughed not a little at the mischievous joke.

Seeing himself made fun of like this, the priest, being, like all artists, of susceptible and choleric temperament, grew terrible angry.

"Have you read Don Rosendo's paper?" he asked Don Segis that evening at Morana's.

It must be mentioned that since the first irreverent paragraph Don Benigno never spoke of "The Light of Sarrio" by any other term.

"Yes, I read it this morning, at Graell's."

"And what do you think of that insult?"

"What insult?" asked the chaplain calmly.

"Why, man, have you not read the infamous remarks made about me?"

Don Segis raised his glass to his eyes, attentively examined the golden liquid, put it to his lips, and slowly drank it. After coughing a little, and drying his mouth with a silk handkerchief, he said gravely:

"Tush! There is not a kind spirit about it, as we all say; but it is best to take such things calmly, it is no good exciting one's self."

This was a fresh blow to the curate, who had hoped to find his indignation shared by Don Segis, and he was dumb with suppressed rage. It was thus that the chaplain of the Augustine convent was able to pay Don Benigno out for his uncalled-for partiality to the rising convent. The curate then addressed himself to Señor Anselmo and to Don Juan, "the Old Salt," who both expressed disgust at the paragraph, without, however, showing much interest in the subject, for we know that that would not have been in keeping with the quiet character of the patriarchal gathering.

But on the following Thursday, Alvaro Peña left Don Benigno, and attacked the chaplain of the nuns, making him the subject of a description in verse, and giving a graceful reference to the mingling of the glasses of gin with the quarterns of white wine. It was then Don Segis's turn to be furious, and Don Benigno's to be calm. But it was evident that this calmness was only put on, merely assumed to pay Don Segis off for his want of sympathy, for, as a matter of fact, he was still bleeding from his wound. Therefore it was not long before a reconciliation took place, and they both agreed, with unusual ardor, to skin every one who wrote in Don Rosendo's paper, beginning with the founder himself, and ending with the owner of the printing press. They were quite aware that Alvaro Peña was the author of the insults, but as every one had always known that he was a soulless vampire, capable of sucking the blood of all the clerics of Sarrio, to avoid harping on the same string they soon turned from him and laid all the blame on Sinforoso.

They considered themselves justified in this course, because the young fellow had been a seminarist, and consequently a traitor. Then he came from the same stock, for his father was a Carlist, and his grandfather before him. Moreover, Don Rosendo Belinchon, Don Rudesindo, and Alvaro Peña and Don Rufo, all men of certain position in the town, might have some license and do as they liked—"but that puppy! that ragamuffin!"

Excited by the murmur of applause, Don Benigno drank a few more quarterns than usual, and the chaplain would not let himself be outdone.

When the men left the shop in the classic chain, Don Segis noticed that his swelled leg dragged less than usual, and he remarked it to Don Benigno, who congratulated him on the fact. Then when, a few steps later, they reached the walls of the Augustine convent, Don Segis said in a loud voice, that as he felt no desire to go to bed that night he would go on with him. But the curate whispered in his ear that he would like to speak to him in private, so both remained in front of the convent.

"Friend Don Segis, what do you think of going and pulling Perinolo's son's nose for him?"

"Gently! gently! gently!"

"If we could only give him a hiding, without any scandal, of course."

"Gently! gently!"

"At eleven, or half-past, they leave the café. We can wait for him about there, and then administer a little corporal punishment."

"Gently! gently! gently!"

"Are you a man, or are you not, Don Segis?"

This question, innocent as it was, produced great perturbation in the mind of the chaplain, to judge by the series of faces and agitated gestures which he made before he could find his voice.

"Who? I? I would never have believed that a friend and coadjutor could say such a thing to me!"

Then he turned aside in great emotion, and raised his handkerchief to his eyes, which shed some tears.

"Well, men should comport themselves as men. Come along, and let us chastise this rascal."

"Come along!" replied the chaplain in a firm tone, as he turned in the direction of his house.

"Not that way, Don Segis."

"Which way you like."

The two clerics took each other by the arm, and proceeded on their way, not without certain vacillations, in the direction of the Café Marina. It must be observed that they both adopted a lay costume in the evening; they wore black frock coats, with full skirts and tight sleeves, thick boots, and enormous felt hats.

It was a good quarter of an hour before they finally reached the café. Once there, dazzled by the lights, like silly butterflies, they almost collapsed and withdrew.

"It will be better to wait for him near his own house. There are several people about here still," said Don Benigno.

Don Segis, being in a submissive state of mind, followed his friend's suggestion.

In the Calle de Caborana, at the corner of that of Azucar, which leads to the Rua Nueva, they both took up their positions, a stroke of strategy, as the enemy had to pass that way, for his house was situated in the Calle de Caborana. Then the two clerics displayed the persistence of the Navarrese in the defile of Roncesvalles, for during the half hour's waiting, they bore with indomitable heroism exposure to a fine rain, without fear of rheumatism or without any other mundane consideration causing them to budge an inch from their post of occupation. Finally, relieved in his mind and satisfied with having maintained a heated discussion in the café, the chief editor of "The Light" directed his steps to his house, when he unexpectedly came upon the enraged curate, who said in a shrill voice:

"Listen here, boy; if you will now repeat the insults which you have written in Don Rosendo's paper, I shall be very glad to hear them."

Surprise, the sarcastic and threatening tone of the priest, and the sight of the portly form of Don Segis standing motionless as a reserve force a few steps off, filled Sinforoso with such terror that for some time he was speechless; and it was only when the cleric advanced a step toward him that he managed to say:

"Calm yourself, Don Benigno. I did not use your name."

"Hallo!" exclaimed the priest with a fierce smile, "I see you don't crow so loud now. What is the matter with the cock that does not crow? What is wrong with the cock that does not crow, boy?"

Don Benigno took a step forward, and Sinforoso took a step backward.

Don Segis, the reserve force, also advanced a step to preserve the strategical distance.

"Calm yourself, Don Benigno!" cried Sinforoso in terror.

"I am very calm, young fellow! I only want to hear that about the doves again which pleased me so much."

"I did not write it!" exclaimed Perinolo's son in dismay.

"You did not write it, boy? Then take this for when you do write it." And he leveled a blow at the editor's cheek.

"Calm yourself, Don Benigno!" exclaimed the wretched fellow as he fell backward with his hands outstretched.

"Don't I tell you I am very calm? You braggart. Here's another little dove!" And he administered another blow.

"For God's sake, Don Benigno, calm yourself!"

"There goes another little dove!" another blow followed.

Let us say now, before going any further, that of all the blows given in Sarrio during the two years subsequent to the appearance of "The Light" (and goodness knows they were innumerable), the cheeks of this distinguished youth were the butt of at least one-half of them.

Being powerless to calm his infuriated assailant by his entreaties, and suspecting the doves would prove to be numerous, the chief editor cried out with all his strength:

"Help! help! They are killing me!" Then he turned round to take refuge in flight, but the iron fingers of the priest caught him by the arm, and at the same moment Don Segis, thinking that the time had come for him to join in the fray, leveled a heavy blow on his shoulders with his stout stick.

"Help!" cried the wretched fellow again. It happened that at that moment Alvaro Peña, the intrepid naval officer, who was proceeding from Graell's shop, where he generally spent his evenings, to his dwelling in the Calle del Azucar, rushed to the spot, saying:

"What is the matter, Sinforoso? What is the matter?"

"Help, Don Alvaro; they are killing me!"

"Hold on, Sinforoso, help is coming!" he cried as he rapidly approached.

The priests, hearing the voice of that hated and terrible enemy of the Church, were much alarmed, but emboldened by the fight, they faced him in battle line with their sticks raised in the air. Peña was filled with mingled rage and pleasure as he advanced to the attack.

"Windbags!" he cried, as he wielded his stick, and Don Benigno's enormous hat flew twenty paces off.

Don Segis advanced with the purpose of aiming his stick at the head of the officer, but before he could do so a blow caught him at the back of the head, leaving him badly hurt.

"It might have been expected. Caramba! only nocturnal birds are capable of treacherously lying in wait for a defenseless man, making a street brawl and disturbing the neighbors' rest. We must have done with these bloodsuckers who sap the life of the town and try to keep it in a state of barbarism. Call these the ministers of God! The apostles of charity! The eternal disturbers of social peace!"

Even in this critical moment the officer could not drop the anticlerical rhetoric and pompous style that he always adopted. Every phrase was accompanied with a blow. The priests being powerless to withstand his furious attack, tried to take to their heels. The curate soon got out of reach of the stick, but poor Don Segis, with the extraordinary weight of his left leg, was left behind, and had to endure the blows from Peña's weapon for some time. Alvaro's voice could be heard in the distance, crying out in mocking rebuke:

"Hypocrites! Whited sepulchres! Is this conformity with the spirit of the Gospel, you brawlers? You preach peace and love to mankind, and you are the first to disgrace the sacred doctrine! When shall we shake off your yoke and emancipate ourselves from the slavery in which you have kept us for so long!"

Any one would have thought to hear him that he was making a speech in some democratic club instead of administering corporal punishment.

Thus ended that encounter.

The next morning the harbor-master received a visit from the rector of Sarrio, who came to implore him not to make mention of the unfortunate incident in the newspaper, and offering all kinds of apologies to both him and Sinforoso on behalf of the curate and Don Segis.

Peña declined to accede to this request, for it was an admirable opportunity to open an attack upon the enemies of liberty and progress; and, in fact, the next number of "The Light" contained a circumstantial account, written in a humorous style, of all that had taken place, which greatly exercised the minds of the clergy and the timorous people in the town.

CHAPTER XV

GONZALO MARRIES

THE weighty and serious matters on Don Rosendo's mind prevented his giving the painful incident that had disturbed the even tenor of his house the especial attention that he would have accorded it at any other time. Nevertheless he was much upset when he learned of Gonzalo's treachery and his younger daughter's misconduct, and he held long conversations with his wife on the subject—irrefutable proof that great men may be full of exalted, grand ideas, and yet not blind to the things of this world, as is usually supposed. His first impulse was to send off Gonzalo and shut his daughter up in a convent, but the entreaties of Doña Paula and his own clear-minded

conclusions led him to change his purpose.

At the expiration of some days of indecision (the burden of the other cares caused their number to be few) he granted the ill-conducted young people permission to marry; but not without first having an interview with Cecilia, and hearing from her lips that she willingly forgave her sister, and wished the marriage to take place as soon as possible.

The consent being given, Gonzalo presented himself one afternoon at Belinchon's house. It was a fortnight since he had been there, and his heart sank at the prospect in spite of his wishes having been so fully and promptly realized. He dreaded the first interview, and not without reason. Doña Paula received him with marked coldness, and even the servants' manners were tinged with a hostility which hurt him.

Then the idea of seeing Cecilia made him tremble. But when Venturita came into the room all his fear and all his depression vanished. Her sprightly chatter, the bright sparkle of her eyes, and her graceful, mocking coquetry quickly raised his spirits and transported him into the seventh heaven. The enchanting enthralment of her voice and manners had lulled him into an indifference to all else by the time Cecilia entered the room.

The sight of his victim exercised a strange and sudden effect upon him; he automatically rose from his seat, and his face changed color.

"How do you do, Gonzalo?"

This was said by Cecilia, as if she had seen him the preceding day and nothing particular had happened, only she was a shade paler than usual. But the young man was so overwhelmed with confusion that he could not reply to this simple question without stuttering. The clear and tranquil glance of Cecilia affected him like an electric current, and he turned to Doña Paula, whose face was overshadowed with a severe and melancholy expression, while Venturita looked out of the window with assumed indifference. At last he resumed his seat, trembling violently, and Cecilia, who had come to ask her mother for the keys of the cupboards, gave him a quiet smile of farewell as she left the room.

The preparations for the marriage began. Doña Paula had the delicacy, rare in a low-born woman, not to allow a single article of wearing apparel made for Cecilia to serve for her sister.

So a fresh trousseau was quickly put in hand. To the great surprise of the needlewomen, Cecilia joined in the work. Some attributed this concession to kindness, others to want of feeling. It is true that, although a little thin, her face expressed the same quiet cheerfulness as ever, and her fingers worked at her sister's initials with the same dexterity as when she embroidered her own. But the cutting of the scissors and the sewing of the needles seemed to say horrible things, ah! very horrible things, instead of those pretty ones which used to make her tremble with joy.

They remained buried in her heart, however, and the keenest observer would have read nothing in those large, liquid, beautiful eyes but the usual quiet smile.

"Didn't I tell you so, girl?" whispered Teresa in Valentina's ear as she looked at our young friend.

"Yes, Señorita Cecilia is incapable of loving anybody."

Gonzalo avoided the workroom, and when perchance he appeared he was so abashed and confused that the embroideresses winked at each other and smiled. Seeing him so embarrassed, and Cecilia so calm and indifferent, you would have thought that the parts played by both in the sad love affair had been reversed.

In the meantime tongues wagged on the subject in the shops, in the houses, in the streets, and at the Promenade—there was no end to it. The event caused a great sensation in the town. While preparations for Cecilia's marriage had been going on, it had been the general opinion that Gonzalo showed a deplorable want of taste, that he was throwing himself away on the poor girl, who was represented as little less than a monster of ugliness; and they all wondered why he had not chosen her sister, who was so lovely and so graceful. Directly they learned of the change their opinions suddenly veered round.

"What a scandal! What a disgraceful proceeding! What parents to consent to such infamy! Where was the shame of some people? Poor girl, so beautiful, so slender, with such lovely eyes! Well, I consider her prettier than her sister."

"So do I."

We must not miss the opportunity of saying that this eternal discontent of people with regard to the actions of their fellow-creatures, much as it upsets us, does not argue intentional unkindness, malignity, or envy, as we are apt to think when we are the object of their remarks; it is nothing but an evident tribute to the imperfection of our planetary existence and the love of the ideal that every one bears within himself without ever seeing it realized. After having thus shown ourselves both philosophical and optimistic, we will proceed with our story.

The day of the marriage arrived. It was solemnized early in the morning at Belinchon's house, in the presence of a few relations and friends; and after taking chocolate the bride and bridegroom left for Tejada.

This was an estate about four miles from the town, where Don Rosendo's genius, aided by money, had had full scope to produce great effects. When he bought the place it consisted of several fields and a wood, where cows pastured, and the notes of thrushes, linnets, and blackbirds filled the air. Don Rosendo began by doing away with this indigenous colony, and substituting a foreign one for it. The breed of cattle of the country was proscribed and replaced by one from Switzerland. The same ruthlessness was shown in robbing the trees of their native songsters, and hanging them with cages full of rare, exotic birds that croaked dolefully all the year round at sunset. The energetic reformatory spirit of Don Rosendo did not stop at the animal kingdom, for it was brought with equal relentlessness to bear upon the vegetable one, and the character of the place was thus completely transformed. By degrees the great shady chestnut trees, with their gnarled trunks; the gigantic oaks, which had renewed their scalloped foliage more than three hundred times; the walnut trees, that looked like enormous thistles; the luxuriant orchard trees, bowed to the ground with the weight of the luscious fruit, and many other trees pertaining to a good landed property in the country, all gradually succumbed to the saw and the ax.

Washingtonians, araucarias, excelsas, and many other trees of foreign extraction, chiefly of the coniferæ family, were planted in their stead, which made the place look something like a cemetery in the eyes of the vulgar.

However, when any such remark was made to Don Rosendo he merely replied that coniferæ had the advantage of foliage during the winter, and the vulgar would return that that very fact made it look like a cemetery in the winter, and in the summer too. But Don Rosendo did not deign to reply to such a silly remark, and in this he was right.

As everything that is worth much costs much, the foreigners of both kingdoms absorbed a good deal of Belinchon's income. The birds of the country had fed themselves and dressed their feathers without any extraneous assistance, but those from abroad, shut up in cages and enormous aviaries made for the purpose, required several attendants to feed them and to keep their places clean. Then homesickness caused great blanks among them which could only be filled by sending expensive orders to Paris and London. The same thing happened with the vegetable kingdom, only of every plant that succeeded by dint of great care and cultivation thirty or forty died, and the constant attention of the gardeners could not prevent this mortality.

The house was also neither Spanish nor European in style. It was built in Chinese style, with little pagodas rising upon every side. I do not know what connection these little towers had with Babel, the scene of the confusion of tongues, but I must tell you that in the neighborhood the fantastic building went by the name of "Don Rosendo's Babel."

It was magnificently furnished, and wanting in none of the comforts and refinements afforded by modern civilization to the rich. It had a splendid room, decorated in Persian style, a bathroom, a large dining-room, fairly well frescoed, and several beautiful little airy apartments, where the light penetrated through colored windows.

So Gonzalo and Venturita repaired to this nest two hours after their union had been solemnized. On their way thither they had talked without embarrassment on different subjects. The young man had imprinted several kisses on the cheeks of the girl, as when they were betrothed; but on arriving at the "Babel," and finding themselves alone in the Persian chamber, he was overwhelmed with confusion and awkwardness.

He tried to find subjects of conversation, but he failed in the attempt.

Venturita scarcely answered him, but she looked at him with an expression of mingled passion and coquetry.

"Look here, stop—stop talking that nonsense. Leave off and give me a kiss," she added laughing, and patting his mouth with her primrose hand. Then Gonzalo colored deeply, and kissed her passionately.

His passion of these first days bordered on madness. Venturita, with her singular beauty, the languid, voluptuous expression of her eyes, and her invincible tendency to recline, was a perfect odalisque. But unlike one in being merely a beautiful animal, she was full of a mischievous spirit that bubbled forth at every moment in rather equivocal jokes and meaning puns, so that Gonzalo was always roaring with merriment, in ignorance of the danger of that mood between husband and wife. The life they led was very sedentary, for Ventura did not like going out; the sun gave her headache and the cold hurt her throat. She spent much time in the adornment of her person, and changed her dresses as often as if she were in Madrid, so that the greater part of the day was spent in her dressing-room. This did not displease Gonzalo; for, on the contrary, when he saw her appear looking lovely and graceful, exhaling a penetrating perfume like a tropical flower, he was transported with delight, and a tremor of passion shook his whole being as he thought that that exquisite work of nature was his—entirely his.

Nevertheless, everything was not quite like what he had imagined it would be. Sometimes the young bride, half in earnest, half in joke, shut herself up in her room and there spent three or four hours without permitting him to enter, in spite of his affectionate entreaties through the keyhole.

"I rob you of the sight of me for some time," she would say afterward, laughing, "to increase your wish to be with me."

And, in fact, these coquetries augmented the young man's passion to such an extent that it became quite a madness. When the beauty felt inclined, they walked in the grounds, but they did not go far. On arriving at one of the few shady, cool retreats which had escaped the reforming hand of Don Rosendo, the girl liked to sit down—but neither upon the grass nor the rustic seats, so Gonzalo had to run and fetch an armchair for her from the house.

"Now sit here at my feet."

The young man then prostrated himself at her side and passionately kissed the hands that his beautiful wife gave him.

"Samson and Delilah!" she laughingly exclaimed, putting her snowdrop hands through the ruddy curly beard of her husband.

"You are right," he replied with a sigh. "A Samson without hair."

"You no hair!—and this—what is this?" she returned, ruffling his locks and making them stand up like a broom.

"I am speaking of my strength."

"You have not strength, eh? Let's see—show me your arms."

Laughing, he took off his jacket, and turning up the sleeves of his shirt he brought to view his enormous gladiatorial arms, on which the powerful muscles stood up like a network of cords.

"What strength!" exclaimed the girl, taking hold of one arm with both hands, which were unable to compass it. Then, seized with sudden enthusiasm and admiration, she added:

"How strong, how handsome you are, Gonzalo! Let me bite your arm?"

And bending down she tried to insert her pretty little teeth into the flesh, but the youth had such iron muscles that her teeth only passed over the skin without breaking it.

Then she grew vexed, and tried again to succeed in piercing the flesh at all costs. Finally he relaxed his muscles, and said:

"I will let you bite me, but only on condition that you draw blood."

"No, not so," she replied, while her pleased smile expressed the wish to do it.

"Yes, you must draw blood; if not I won't let you do it."

Then the girl proceeded to bite her husband's arm.

"Harder!" he cried.

And she bit harder.

"Harder!" he repeated.

And she bit harder still, while a mischievous smile sparkled in her eyes.

"Harder! harder!"

"Enough," she said, rising from her seat; "don't you see I have drawn blood? How cruel, just as if I were a dog!"

And bending down again, she sucked with delight the blood that welled up in the arm. Both smiled with repressed passion, and then they looked at the little red circle made by the girl's teeth.

"Do you see?" she repeated, half ashamed. "Well, it was one of your strange fancies!"

"Thanks! I should like this mark to remain here forever. But no, unfortunately it will soon go."

"I can renew it every day," she mischievously returned.

"I should be very pleased."

"You want to make your wife into a little dog; well, you had better say so plainly."

And suddenly embracing him, and kissing him passionately on the eyes, cheeks, mouth, and beard, she repeated incessantly:

"Say so plainly! say so plainly, you bear! This mouth is mine, and I kiss it. This beard is mine, and I kiss it, too. This neck is mine, and I kiss it. These arms are mine, mine, and I kiss them too!"

"Take me altogether; my life is yours," he said, intoxicated with happiness.

"I love you; I love you, Gonzalo, for your good looks and your strength. Look, let me put my hand on yours—what a difference! It looks like an ant."

"A white ant," he returned, taking the little hand between his own great strong ones.

"I love you; I love you, Gonzalo. Take me in your arms. Could you walk with me like that?"

"Oh! you are nothing."

And lifting her like a feather, and putting her on his arm like a child, he began jumping about the garden.

"Not so fast! Carry me gently. Let us go for a walk."

So he carried her all over the park without feeling any fatigue. And from that day that kind of walk pleased the girl so much that whenever they went out she clung to her husband's neck for him to carry her.

The servants smiled and shook their heads at the sight. But a still better way of amusing her was very soon discovered. There was a swing near the house, out of order, but more from time than use. It was repaired, and as soon as it was ready it afforded many hours of occupation to Gonzalo.

"If you could only know how I enjoy it! Push a little more."

Whereupon the youth's vigorous push made the swing fly, and the girl's eyes closed and her nostrils dilated with a feeling of intense delight, and Gonzalo liked seeing her so well amused.

Thus twenty days went by. During that time they received two visits from Pablito and Piscis; once they came in the tilbury, and once on horseback. The chief object on this last occasion was to ride a mare that Pablo had received in exchange for an older one. And strange to say, in spite of being so much in love, our young friend received the visits of the two equestrians with inexpressible delight, entered deeply into their interests, and when they had gone he had a feeling of void in his life, for his blood and his muscles were suffering from the extremely sedentary life he was leading. One day he proposed to his wife to go shooting, for he was an excellent shot and an indefatigable sportsman. Venturita made no objection as long as she could go with him, and so it was arranged. Therefore, one morning they went in search of a covey of partridges, the existence of which Gonzalo had been aware of since the day of his arrival at Tejada. But before they had gone half a mile from the house Venturita was quite done up, she could not take another step. Her husband, therefore, was obliged to carry her back in his arms, and forego his favorite pastime.

Doña Paula, who had regarded the marriage with great aversion, did not make any allusion to visiting the bride and bridegroom until many days had elapsed. She then suggested to Pablito to accompany her, because she feared it would pain Cecilia to do so; but the girl quietly expressed her intention of also going to Tejada. So one afternoon the mother and daughter started off to the place in an open carriage; but on coming in sight of the well-known little stone towers, Cecilia turned pale—she felt a pain at her heart and she could hardly see; so when Doña Paula saw her daughter's indisposition she gave orders to the coachman to turn back.

"Poor girl!" she said, kissing her. "You see you can not do it."

"I shall be able—I shall be able to," she returned, covering her eyes with her hand.

On the following day Doña Paula paid the visit, accompanied by Pablo, and she cordially invited the bride and bridegroom to leave the retired spot and to come to them in town, so this they did the following week.

Cecilia came down to the street door to receive the couple; she embraced and kissed her sister warmly, she gave her hand to Gonzalo, and kept it from trembling by a supreme effort of will; and the young man embraced her with a fraternal affection, thinking himself forgiven.

The bride and bridegroom were put in possession of the rooms that Doña Paula had destined for her eldest daughter, and, to all appearances, life resumed its peaceful course. Nevertheless, Gonzalo was sorry to see that they were not environed with that warm and genial atmosphere which adds so much to the comfort of the domestic hearth. Everybody was kind and attentive, from Don Rosendo down to the lowest servant; but no affection was shown them. Ventura did not notice it, or if she noticed it she did not much mind.

CHAPTER XVI

MARTIAL DOINGS

AFTER that grand victory over the clergy, "The Light of Sarrio" resumed its successful and prosperous course. The boisterous, vehement harbor-master was able to continue his civilizing crusade without fear of any more ambushes. Sinforoso did not give up his post; however, he never went home without being accompanied by Maza or some other friend, both being well armed.

But Gabino Maza, who was always captious, knew how to make a malicious use of the rupture with the Church by appealing to the consciences of several of the townsfolk. Not that he was a strict Catholic, or cared a rap whether the whole priestcraft were rooted up like parsley, or not, for his ideas had always been somewhat heterodox, and the

clergy had long considered him beyond the pale, yet he was the one now to be shocked.

"After all," he said, "we have been brought up to respect religion, which is the only curb upon a town, and people can not be allowed to ride rough-shod over the sacred beliefs of our wives," etc.

These perfidious insinuations caused several people to give up their subscriptions to the paper.

The editor and the proprietor, who divined the source of the blow, were greatly indignant; but Gabino Maza, seconded by the no less irrepressible Delaunay, did not relax in his contentious campaign. If any of the staff of "The Light" were present nothing was said, but directly they left tongues wagged freely and furiously. Sometimes seriously and sometimes jokingly they discussed all who were concerned with the paper, more especially, as was only logical, its highest representative—the eminent Don Rosendo. They said (oh! disgraceful conduct!) that it was only the desire of seeing himself in print which had inspired him with the philanthropic movement of lighting the torch of progress in Sarrio; that Don Rufo, the doctor, was an impostor; Sinforoso, a poor thing—a broken reed to lean upon; Alvaro Peña (here the voices were lowered and furtive looks cast round), a blusterer without a spice of justice in him; Don Feliciano Gomez, a poor devil who had better look after his own not very flourishing affairs; Don Rudesindo, a great brawler who was only trying to let his storehouse and advertise his cider; and as to the originator and promoter of the enterprise, Don Rosendo, they said that he had always been a stupid fool, who had thought himself an author when in fact he understood nothing but the rise and fall of the price of codfish.

Only the imperious duty of acting as faithful and impartial chroniclers obliges us to record such remarks; for of a truth it is much against the grain—the pen itself even seeming to revolt in one's hand against writing down such abominable things.

The backbiters abstained from speaking against Don Pedro Miranda because they had already asked him to withdraw from the periodical, which he seemed inclined to do after the skirmish with the clergy; for Don Pedro was an old Christian, and a great friend of the Augustinian chaplain. The malignant remarks were successful in setting some of the influential ladies of the town against the paper, among whom was Doña Brigida; so the foolish and degraded Marin went over to their side at the Club.

The dissentient side was also increased by the drunken mayor, for a feeling of fellowship with the frequenters of the café, and the vexation caused him by the constant excitement of the press, made him quickly retire from the great reform movement. That which finally set him against "The Light" and its staff was a paragraph in which the mayor and the corporation were severely censured for the license they allowed the town police and the little they did to render Sarrio a pleasant seaside resort for distinguished scrofulous patients in the summer.

Although they outwardly behaved as friends, a veiled, silent enmity reigned among the chief frequenters of the Club, and this increased day by day, thanks to the mischief-makers, who never cease on such occasions to air the differences and dislikes. Thenceforth they avoided quarrels and disputes because the angry cries and insulting terms which meant nothing in former days were now, thanks to the cordial dislike which existed among them all, fraught with much danger.

Therefore greater silence and more courtesy reigned in the resort, but it was accompanied with less frankly and cordiality. That strange state of feeling could not last long. Among people meeting every day and not being very cordial with each other, a quarrel is soon inevitable. It happened thus.

There arrived at the saloon, no one knew how, a copy of a certain Catalonian illustrated paper, where, among other pictures, was one representing the banks of an American river, upon which a dozen crocodiles were disporting themselves. Maza had the paper in his hand when Rufo came up behind him and said in a jocular tone:

"A lot of crocodiles, eh?"

"They are not crocodiles," returned Maza in a dry, disdainful tone, without raising his head.

"And why are they not?" asked the doctor, wounded by the tone.

"Because they are not."

"That is no reason."

"If you don't know, study; I am not here to teach you for nothing."

"Tut! The sage of Greece. Stand off, gentlemen!"

"I am not a sage, but I say these animals are not crocodiles, for there are no crocodiles in the river Maranon."

"What are they, then?"

"Alligators."

"Call them what you like! Alligators and crocodiles are the same."

"Another atrocity! Where did you learn that?"

"Why, man, it is a well-known fact that the alligator and crocodile only differ in name. Here is Don Lorenzo, who has traveled, and can tell us whether it is not so."

"The alligator is rather smaller," observed Don Lorenzo, with a conciliatory smile.

"The size is of little consequence. The question is whether it has the same form or not."

Don Lorenzo nodded in sign of assent. Maza jumped up in a fury:

"But, gentlemen! But, gentlemen! Are we among cultivated people or among country clowns? Where do you find that crocodiles are the same as alligators? The crocodile is an animal of the Old World, and the alligator of the New."

"Excuse me, friend Maza, but I have seen crocodiles in the Philippines," returned Don Rudesindo.

"Well, and what if you have?"

"Because you say crocodiles don't belong to the Old World—"

"No more they do! Are not the Philippines in the New World? Gentlemen, gentlemen, open your umbrellas, for fooleries are raining down now."

"What? Do you mean to say that the Philippines are not in the other hemisphere?" asked Don Rudesindo, his face distorted with rage.

"Never mind; never mind; go on."

"The chief difference between the crocodile and the alligator," intervened Don Lorenzo in a tone of authority, "is that the crocodile has three rows of teeth, and the alligator only two."

"It is not so, sir; it is not so! Crocodiles have the same rows of teeth as alligators."

Don Lorenzo received this remark with indignation, and Don Rudesindo came to his support; Maza, seconded by Delaunay, was not less furious in his attack. Several members of the Club soon joined in the dispute, which got warmer every minute. The voices were deafening. If they had had three rows of teeth like the crocodiles, or even two, I do not doubt that they would have devoured each other, seeing the rage and passion with which they showed the one set with which nature had endowed them. Maza was so aggressive and so insolent that at last Don Rudesindo, no longer master of himself, gave him a blow on the head with his umbrella. The subsequent conflict of sticks and umbrellas made a noise so terrible that it would have struck terror into the bravest heart. Several who had no recollection of having given any opinion on the teeth of the reptiles in question received their share of umbrella blows the same as those who had discoursed upon the subject. The master and several other people came upstairs, the West Indians left off playing billiards, Don Melchor de las Cuevas, a person of influence in war as well as in peace, mediated between the combatants, and the disturbance was finally quelled, but it was some months before their tempers cooled down.

The result was, that from that day Gabino Maza, Delaunay, Don Roque, Marin, and three or four other members left the Club. Don Pedro Miranda only appeared between long intervals of absence, which made the remaining members and the staff of "The Light" see that they could not count upon him, and that it would not be long before he joined the other side, as indeed it came to pass. The dissenting party used to meet in the Café de Londres in the Calle de Caborana, but not many months later the news ran through the town that they had taken a storehouse in the Calle de San Florencio in which to hold their meetings; and so it was. They had the floor boarded and carpeted, the walls and ceilings painted, and after furnishing it with several chairs and armchairs, they began going there as regularly as they had formerly gone to the Club. As the roof was low, and there was a ledge in the wall on which Marin used to take his afternoon nap, the place soon went by the name of the "Cabin" in the town, and the name clung to it. The staff of "The Light" treated the deserters with scorn as long as they had no roof under which to assemble, but now the matter assumed importance, and the first symptom of fear was evinced in an article, or a screed in blank verse, describing the new meeting-place, and bringing each of the members into notice under the names of different animals: Maza, a fish; Delaunay, a crowing cock; Marin, an ass; Don Roque, a pig, etc.

This exasperated the "Cabin" party in an inexpressible way. Don Rosendo became more and more pushing and active in his press campaign, and he essayed to introduce into "The Light" all the forms and customs that he noticed in the national and foreign press, more especially the French. He commissioned a clerk in Madrid to send him, every Wednesday, a telegram of twenty words, and moreover to write him political and literary letters. He translated all the foreign notices that appeared in periodicals, even those of fashion, courts of justice, and theatres; but where he distinguished himself was in the market column. It is not easy to describe the cleverness with which he treated the subject of cereals, oils, spirituous liquors, rice, etc. To show the intelligence and brilliance he brought to bear on such a prosaic matter we must quote one of his paragraphs in which he wrote:

"Sugars, alive to these variations, remain low, and will not attain any permanent rise until coffees, cocoas, and all foreign produce restrain their violent oscillations." It was, in fact, the soul of the paper.

Nevertheless, he had not done enough to realize his ideal. Belinchon had always followed with the greatest interest the personal polemics of the Parisian press, which generally ended in a duel. And these proceedings afforded him such exquisite pleasure that no banquet could be more congenial and delightful to his taste. When several days passed without this excitement Don Rosendo languished. The descriptions of the assaults of arms among the celebrated fencers of the capital were of equal interest to him, and although he found fencing expressions—*Engagement de sixte, Battement en quarte, Contreriposet, Feinte, etc.*—were somewhat confusing, he translated them in his own way, and pretended to be quite conversant with them. He said there was no surer sign of the state of the culture of a country than in its devotion to arms. The practise aroused and inspired the idea of human honor and dignity, and their abandonment brought dishonor and degradation. He knew better than their own relations the biography of all the great duelists and fencers in Paris, and he could give a detailed and minute description of all the duels that had taken place, with their accompanying wounds.

When an assault of arms was announced between two masters like Jacob and Grisier, our friend was greatly excited; he eagerly opened the "Figaro" every day, and mentally backed the one or the other.

One day in bed—his best ideas seemed always to come to him there—it occurred to him that to be a journalist without a knowledge of the use of arms was like being a dancer without the power of playing the castanets. One day, when least expected, a blow might fell him to the ground if he were ignorant of the art of parrying it. It was true that nobody in Sarrío was versed in the science of fencing, but then nobody was under a strong obligation to attain it. There might be some dispute between him and a journalist of Lancia or Madrid, and then he would have to let himself be assassinated! These thoughts led him to adopt the resolution of learning to use the foil at all costs. How? Why, by sending for a master to come to Sarrío, as he could not leave the place. Without communicating the idea to anybody, he wrote to a friend in Paris to look out in the fencing clubs for a teacher, even if second rate, who would be willing to expatriate himself. At the end of some time, such a one was found who, for the sum of two thousand francs a year, with the liberty of giving other lessons, would settle in the Biscayan town.

The news went forth that a professor of fencing, Monsieur Lemaire, had arrived in the schooner "Julia" for the sole purpose of teaching Don Rosendo the noble art of self-defense.

And, in fact, our friend was soon seen in the company of a slight, red-haired young man of foreign appearance. The people were horror-struck, for in a little town where blows with fists and sticks are given and taken the coldbloodedness, formality, and gravity of duels inspire horror and terror. They first thought that Don Rosendo wished to kill somebody, and it was only after some time that they understood the reason of the step. Don Rosendo entered into the matter with the ardor and gravity that it deserved. He devoted an hour every morning, and two more in the afternoon, to perfecting himself in lunging, which was all that the professor allowed him to do for the first two months. The most noteworthy result of this exercise was that at the end of some days he did not know whether his legs were his own, or whether they really belonged to another rational biped like himself. So sharp and strong were the pains to which he became subject that even in his dreams he thought he was still lunging, and jumped up with cries of pain. Then Monsieur Lemaire was so cruel that he was never satisfied with the efforts made by the good gentleman. "Try again, again, again!" and Don Rosendo had to stretch and strain himself to such a degree that he felt as if he were being sawed asunder. When the noble exercise was over Señor Belinchon, being

nearly bowed to the ground with pain, was obliged to hold by the furniture to get from one room to another; and the noble founder of "The Light of Sarrio" walked henceforth to the end of his days as if he were bandy legged. But these tortures, similar to those endured by martyrs in Japan, he bore, if not with pleasure, with heroic endurance, as he remembered at what enormous sacrifices the improvement of one's self and one's country is attained.

At the end of two months the eternal tic-tac of the foils commenced: *Dégagez; coup droit; dégagez; un, deux; dégagez, doublez*. But the torture of the legs was not herewith relaxed. Don Rudesindo, Alvaro Peña, Sinforoso, Pablito, the printer Folgueras, and several others took lessons at the same time. In the hall the fencers were so overwhelmed by their belligerent feelings that solemn silence reigned. Nothing was heard but the sharp voice of Monsieur Lemaire incessantly repeating in an absent fashion: *En garde vivement—Contre de quarte—Ripostez—Ah bien!—En garde vivement—Contre de sixte—Ripostez—Ah bien!—Parez seconde—Ripostu—Well done!* Don Rosendo thought he was transported to Paris, and he saw a Grisier, Anatole de la Forge, and the Baron de Basancour in Don Rudesindo, Folgueras, and Sinforoso.

"The Light" no longer seemed to be "The Light," but "Le Gaulois" or "Le Journal des Débats."

At the end of five months he was well versed in the art of self-defense; he could parry direct blows, he could attack with a shortened arm, and he could spring forward to perfection. He then thought the time had come for a scandal to take place. It behooved the town to know that all the money expended on the fencing lessons had not been thrown away; besides, he wished to imbue the place with a taste for the refinements of the great capitals. But with whom in Sarrio could he pick a quarrel? However willingly he might quarrel with one of the members of the Cabin, he knew that the only one capable of fighting was Gabino Maza, and he held him somewhat in awe, especially since he had heard the professor say that one had to be very careful with violent men, even if they could not fence. After long and profound consideration he thought the best thing to do was to pick a quarrel with some journalist of Lancia through the discussion carried on by "The Light" with "The Future" about a particular branch road, and this plan he carried into execution. In the next number he showed himself so aggressive and so insolent to the paper of the capital that, surprised and indignant, it replied that certain remarks in "The Light" were only worthy of contempt.

Whereupon Don Rosendo commissioned his friends Alvaro Peña and Sinforoso Suarez to take his challenge to the editor of "The Future." So the two gentlemen went to Lancia, and returned the same day.

On seeing them come back Señor Belinchon ardently hoped that the affair might have been amicably settled without the necessity of fighting, although he had been the one to demand satisfaction, which is a fresh proof of his singularly exalted soul and the exquisite sensibility with which he was endowed. Unfortunately, however, the editor of "The Future" had remained firm, and the seconds had arranged a duel with swords which was to come off the following day at an estate in the Lancian suburbs.

On learning this our hero felt his legs tremble, not with fear—that nobody would dare imagine—but with emotion at finding himself about to be the object of public curiosity and attention. As they were walking toward home, Peña said to him with rough frankness:

"The Villar party wanted to have the sword points blunted, but I said: 'I know Don Rosendo very well, and he is a man who abhors childishness; you can not trifle with him. When one has to do with a quarrel like this it has to be treated seriously. I am certain that if we blunted the points there would be a row with him. Was not that what you would have said?'"

"Exactly. Many thanks, Alvaro," returned Señor Belinchon, giving him a hand which Peña found rather cold, and he added in a weak voice:

"But if the points were a trifle filed I would not mind agreeing to that. The affair, after all, does not precisely exact death."

"I did not dare to agree to it. Not knowing your opinion, I feared to vex you."

"Not at all—not at all. I would not mind their being filed."

"Well, now it can't be. The conditions are arranged and unless they suggest it again the points will have to be sharp. That will suit you, as you know how to use the foil."

"And precisely for that reason I did not wish to take any unfair advantage of my adversary."

To this remark Peña gave a knowing wink.

"Don't be so scrupulous, Don Rosendo. If you can run him through *first!* like a little bird, don't hesitate to do so."

The officer accompanied these last words with an expressive pass in the air with the tips of his fingers, as if he were inserting them in a human body.

Don Rosendo made a gesture of repugnance, and after keeping silent for some time he said sullenly:

"What I fear is, that these cursed pains will not let me lunge properly."

"Tush! man, don't trouble about that. You won't feel any pain in your legs during the duel. Haven't you ever found that a toothache goes away directly you arrive at the dentist's door to have it drawn?"

This consolatory simile provoked a roar of laughter from the officer which lasted for some time, while Belinchon remained grave and depressed, as it behoves heroes to be on the eve of battle. The news of the approaching duel ran through the place like an electric shock. The excitement of the townsfolk was indescribable. It never entered anybody's head that a person advanced in years, with a married daughter, could cross swords with any one on the question of a branch road. Nevertheless Belinchon's party admired the firmness and bravery of their chief, who had a fearful nightmare that night. He dreamed that the sword of the editor of "The Future" cut him in two. The conqueror carried off one-half as a trophy, and only the other half returned to Sarrio. His cries awoke him, and filled Doña Paula with such alarm that she fetched the anti-spasm medicine. Belinchon, with the fortitude of heroic temperaments, said nothing to his consort, but he took a dose of the mixture.

On the following day he went off to Lancia in a carriage, accompanied by Peña, Sinforoso, and Don Rufo, with two swords. Upon leaving the town more than a hundred persons were waiting in the road to see them off. Don Rosendo felt quite overcome.

"Good luck! You'll send a telegram, eh? It shall not be said that Sarrio was beaten by Lancia."

Don Rosendo pressed the hands of his partizans with emotion. They all offered to accompany him, and vowed vengeance in case of his perishing in the duel. At last they reached the appointed spot, and there they met the enemy.

The seconds conferred with each other, and the swords were produced and put into the hands of the combatants, whose faces had assumed the color befitting such solemn occasions, which is that of bottle green varied with an orange hue. Once on the defensive, and the word of attack given, they both began brandishing the swords methodically, first on one side and then on the other, with a lugubrious, terror-striking sound. At the end of some time Villar ventured to raise his weapon with the intention of wounding his adversary's head. But lo! Don Rosendo gave such a prodigious leap backward that the seconds looked at each other in astonishment. Villar, also surprised, waited for his adversary to return to the attack. The melancholy *tic-tac* recommenced; Don Rosendo at the end of some time raised his sword, whereupon Villar instantly far exceeded his foe in the really supernatural bound he made backward.

The seconds looked at each other in increased surprise, for they thought he would leap out of the field.

The duel lasted in this way more than half an hour, during which Don Rosendo once cried:

"Stop!"

"What is it?" asked the seconds, approaching.

"It seems to me that the other gentleman has blunted the point of his sword."

Then Villar's sword was inspected, and it was seen that it was not so.

This act of generosity, more befitting the Middle Ages than our own times, raised him, when it became known, in the public estimation to the dignity of the legendary heroes—Roland, Bayard, and Bernardo del Carpio. The duel ended when Villar's sword quite unintentionally struck Belinchon's brow. It was a simple scratch, but the seconds considered it terminated the fight. Don Rufo stuck a large piece of English sticking-plaster on the wound. The wounded man nobly gave his hand to his adversary and despatched a telegram to Lancia to be sent to Sarrio. Then they all breakfasted cheerfully together; and during the meal the champions expansively confided to each other the blows they had intended to administer, and which for lack of opportunity they had been powerless to give.

"Why, man, if you had not prevented it in time I should have cut your head in two. With one or two feints at the face I should have given a thrust at your chest and a cut at your head," said Don Rosendo, swallowing a large mouthful of cod.

"Well, you would not have come off any better if I had carried out my intended line of attack," returned Villar. "I should have raised my arm, ping! I should have made a feint at your head, ping! You were to aim at my arm, ping! I to give you a cut at your face, ping! You to go for my head, ping! I to parry and make for your arm, ping!"

Here the editor of "The Future" of Lancia, who had been brandishing his fork and trying to swallow a fish-bone during the description of his proposed famous and complicated plan of action, now nearly choked and turned crimson. He had to be taken into the air, and Don Rosendo was the one to give him the sacred slaps upon his back to make him get rid of the fish-bone. Beautiful and striking example of chivalry that can never be forgotten!

The breakfast over, Don Rosendo and his companions entered the carriage, and repaired to Sarrio. More than half the population, apprised by the telegram, awaited them on the outskirts of the town.

A cry of delight and enthusiasm burst from all throats on the approach of the carriage. Don Rosendo, much moved, put his head out of the window and took off his hat, which revealed the piece of English sticking-plaster. At the sight the people gave vent to a loud hurrah, and the vehicle was fairly mobbed by the crowd. After entering his house the acclamations were so great that the founder of "The Light" was obliged to appear at the window, where he was greeted with fresh enthusiasm.

That night his friends treated him to a serenade.

END OF VOLUME ONE

The following typographical errors have been corrected by the etext transcriber:

their three daughetrs=>their three daughters

That discourse was a relevation=>That discourse was a revelation

bottle of Ruede wine=>bottle of Rueda wine

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE FOURTH ESTATE, VOL. 1 ***

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