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THE CHURCH MILITANT.

ADAPTED FROM THE SPANISH OF JUAN VALERA.

BY

IVAN THEODORE.

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"*Nescit labi virtus.*"

THE Very Reverend the Dean of —— left among his multifarious papers at his death, a few years ago, one packet which, after many vicissitudes, passed into my hands, fortunately without loss or injury. It bore as inscription the Latin sentence set forth above, not the name which I have chosen as a title; and perhaps it is to this fact that the preservation of the papers is due, no one caring, hitherto, to meddle with what seemed to be merely some theological dissertation.

I found, upon examination, that the packet consisted of two separate sets of papers, labelled respectively, "Letters from my Nephew," and "Paralipómenos." To the latter was added a short note by way of Epilogue.

The handwriting of the whole was identical, whence it might be inferred that it was that of the Dean himself. And since the documents seemed to assume somewhat the shape of a novel—though with little or no plot—I imagined at first that, as such, they

were just the outcome of some of the old gentleman's leisure hours. But when I came to look more closely into the matter, and especially when I noticed the extreme simplicity—the *naïveté*—of the style, I arrived at the conclusion that I had before me the copies of actual letters, which the Dean had either destroyed, or returned to the owners, and that the narrative part—the Paralipómenos—was alone his own work, added with the view of supplying certain details which had come to his knowledge, and without which the story unfolded by the letters would have been incomplete.

Be that as it may, the reading of these papers interested me so much that I have decided to publish them, in the belief that they may also afford pleasurable interest to the many students and lovers of human nature, of whom to-day can boast more, perhaps, than any preceding age.

In order to meet some possible doubts, it may be well to explain at the outset that the letters which form Part I. appear to have been written by a young man—whom we will call Don Luis de Vargas, changing the names to prevent undue recognition—rich, indeed, in theoretical knowledge, but innocent of the ways and wisdom of the world, brought up by his uncle, the afore-mentioned Dean, and destined to the priesthood.

PART I.

Culejo, March 22.

MY DEAR UNCLE AND REVERED MASTER,

I arrived here, the place of my birth, four days ago, safely and well, and find my father in his usual unfailing health. You can readily imagine that after all these years of absence, the delights of home coming, and all the attendant calls upon my time, have been so absorbing that I have not been able to write to you hitherto. You will forgive my apparent remissness, I am sure.

Leaving home a child, and returning a man, my first impressions of objects which have been preserved in my memory are very singular. Everything seems so absurdly small. The country rambles, for example, of which I have been cherishing recollections as so immense and toilsome, I find can be easily compassed in a short morning's walk. The old home, itself, which has risen up before me as a perfect palace—well, it is certainly all that can be expected of a gentleman-farmer's house, yet it seems strangely cramped and diminutive after Sevillian residences.

But the beauty of the country is wonderful. The gardens, the groves of trees, the lanes—ah, they are lovely! The lanes, perhaps, above all. On one side—sometimes on both—will run a silvery stream of water, with its gentle murmur, and its banks carpeted with sweet-scented herbs, and a thousand sorts of wild flowers. Overhead will arch the great walnut-trees, while the hedges are redolent with the rose and sweet briar, or bright with pomegranate and honeysuckle.

My father is very anxious for me to see all his outlying farms, vineyards, and olive-grounds, but I am so enchanted by my immediate surroundings that I have, so far, cared to see nothing else, and have hardly stirred out of the village. His time is a good deal taken up by his duties as *cacique*.[1] I have always supposed that there was more of honour than duty in the position, but I find that it entails serious enough work.

I am not left much alone, though. When I shall be able to open the books I brought with me I cannot say. There is a constant stream of visitors in and out, all eager in their friendliness towards "Luisito," as they call me. They cannot understand what they are pleased to term my "insane fancy" for being a priest. They tell me in the coolest manner

[1] *Cacique*, Arabic Sheikh = Mayor.

possible—quite regardless of the steps which I have already taken—that I must not think of such a thing; that it is all very well for poor folk to go into the Church, but that I, a rich man's heir, ought to uphold the house, ought to marry, and cheer my father's declining years with half a dozen romping grand-children.

And then they try to flatter me—and flatter my father—and say that I am just fitted to take my place in the world, that I have the manners and bearing that would ensure success, and so on, and so on—things that only disgust me, and make me more ashamed than proud.

But it seems there is one serious defect in me. I am horribly thin, from, of course, over-study. So I am not to be allowed to look at a book while I am here, and I am to be fed upon all the fat that the land can produce—to be made a prize animal, in fact. Invitations to breakfast and dinner come in as if I was in danger of being starved at home, and the daily rain of delicate offerings in the direction of fruits, &c., &c., is quite embarrassing.

To-morrow we dine with the much-talked-of Pepita Jimenez, of whom you have doubtless heard. You may not know, though—I did not until I came here—that my father entertains matrimonial designs upon the lady.

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Which last is not quite so absurd as I am afraid it will seem to some of his friends. He is young and active enough in all his habits and ways, notwithstanding his fifty-five years, and he has moreover what I suspect is an irresistible charm in women's eyes, the reputation of having been a sort of Don Juan Tenorio—the glory of past conquests.

I have not yet had the pleasure of making Pepita's acquaintance. They say she is very lovely; but I expect to find it a rustic sort of beauty. What the inner woman is like I cannot quite make out, but she evidently possesses a considerable amount of natural ability, and fascinating manners. She is twenty years old, or thereabouts, and a widow—widowed after three years of married life. Her mother was the Doña Francisca Galvezy, who was, as you know, the relict of a retired captain.

> "Nought left he at his death
> Save his sword and its sheath,"

as the poet sings. And up to sixteen years of age Pepita lived with her mother in the greatest poverty and misery.

She had a distant relative, a sort of uncle, Don Gumersindo by name, who was the owner of one of those minute divisions of an estate with which foolish family pride and land-hunger have blessed our country. An ordinary individual would have

been content to drag on a burdened existence upon the simple incomings from the property, perpetuating poverty and indolence. But Don Gumersindo was anything but an ordinary man. He had, first, a perfect genius for economizing, and then a wonderful faculty for absorbing any unconsidered trifles of others which happened to come in his way. It would be difficult to say how he lived, but he did live—to over eighty years. And his money lived with him and grew. Grew, by being carefully tended, and grew by being loaned out upon very safe securities at a very nice rate of interest. Not that Don Gumersindo was a usurer—anything but that. He might almost be said to have posed as a public benefactor: for whereas, hereabouts, it is customary to exact twenty, or even thirty per cent., he, moderate in everything —even in his greed—was content with ten. But he looked well to his security, and lost nothing.

In this way, carefully and industriously, intent upon an uninterrupted growth of his capital, and permitting himself no single luxury, he went on for pretty nearly eighty years, and became possessed of a wealth that would be considered very respectable anywhere, and in these parts—thanks to the all-pervading poverty, and to Andalucian exaggeration —was regarded as something prodigious.

It must not be imagined from all this that he

was one of those typical misers from whom the world shrinks with natural feelings of repugnance. He was a bright, well-cared-for little personage, neat to the last degree. It might not be upon record that he had ever indulged in a new article of attire, but if his outer man could be reckoned, with himself, among the oldest inhabitants of the place, it was always spotlessly respectable.

And he must really have been possessed of some most excellent qualities. He was affable to all, sympathetic, willing to do any one a good turn, and to devote time and labour to any good work—so long as he was not called upon to part with money. He was pleasant and cheerful withal in disposition, fond of his joke, ready to take part in any festivity in which it could not come to sharing in the reckoning, and knew how to make himself the life and soul of any company in which his lot might be cast. Finally he fulfilled to the letter the scriptural injunction to be friendly with all women, intimate with none. No one could accuse him of amorous intentions, and yet he was fond of the society of the fair sex, and regarded by all—old and young women alike—with the greatest favour.

Pepita's mother seems to have been an exceptionally vulgar body, ignorant, and gross in instinct. In her way she was devoted to her daughter, but it

was in a grumbling, hard way, constantly harping upon the immense sacrifices she made upon Pepita's behalf, the privations she endured, and the unlovely old age which their poverty was entailing upon her. Pepita was not her only child. She had a son—the elder of the two—who was a thorough blackguard, and who had attained to the unenviable distinction of being *par excellence*, the bully and gambler of the district.

This unfortunate youth, after getting in and out of innumerable scrapes, had been finally located in Havannah, and his mother flattered herself that at last she was freed from a part of her burdens. After a short respite, however, the lad's evil conduct cost him his place, and his appeals for money seemed to presage the settling down again of the cloud that they had fondly imagined to be dissipated. All this, as may be supposed, by no means improved the condition of affairs at home, where there was already barely enough for the wants of the two women. Doña Francisca redoubled her despairing lamentations and reproaches, and, ever foolishly indulgent towards her boy, ordained that Pepita should seek some situation, and henceforth shift for herself.

Matters were in this pass when, all at once, Don Gumersindo took to frequenting the house with an odd persistency, and honouring Pepita with very

special notice. Nevertheless, it was so unlikely that a man who had compassed an ordinary lifetime without any indication of a desire to be married, should now be meditating any such thing, when he had one foot in the grave, that neither Pepita nor her mother—Pepita least of all—could suspect Don Gumersindo's true sentiments and purposes. You may picture their astonishment, therefore, when one day, in the midst of his usual jokes and gossip, he assumed a sudden air of gravity, and said,—

"Look here, Pepita; will you marry me?"

The inquiry might fairly have been taken, from all that had gone before, as a jest, and Pepita was a mere girl, innocence itself. And yet she somehow divined—from her innate woman's instinct, I suppose, and from something in her interlocutor's manner—that it was a serious enough matter. Overcome by confusion, she did not know what reply to make. Her mother, however, had all her wits about her, and promptly stepped in with, "Now, child, don't be so silly! Tell Don Gumersindo that of course you will, with much pleasure, and whenever he likes."

Which "With much pleasure, when you like," poor Pepita had to repeat then and many times afterwards. Almost mechanically, and with trembling lips, one can imagine her doing it, all possible re-

sistance or repining overborne by the entreaties, the complaints, the commands of her mother.

I am afraid that I am wearying you with all these details of Pepita Jimenez and her history, but they interest me. And I think that you, too, must be able to feel some interest in her, seeing that she will probably, and before long, become your sister-in-law —my stepmother. The rest of the story I can tell you in a word or two.

Pepita married Don Gumersindo, and exposed herself thereby, I need hardly say, to the usual amount of evil-speaking that is chiefly bred of envy. It would be certainly difficult to place such a marriage in a pleasant light, and yet, if, as seems to have been the fact, Pepita suffered herself to be guided by the representations and entreaties of her mother—and perhaps some other advisers—seeing this to be the only way of repaying the care and self-sacrifice that had been bestowed upon herself, of securing for her mother an easeful old age, and of helping her brother out of the slough into which he had fallen, then one is bound at any rate to be lenient in passing judgment.

How impossible it is, too, to enter into the heart and secret understanding of a young girl brought up in perfect ignorance of all that life demands and imposes, and to know what ideas she forms of marriage!

Probably she only thought of devoting her days to care for one who had greatly honoured and benefited her; of bringing gladness to his remaining years, and rescuing him from mercenary and unloving hands. It would be a pretty picture that she could make of herself, as something of an angel in human form, illuminating solitariness and oncoming darkness by the soft light of her youth and beauty.

But enough of psychological speculation. I have really no right to enter upon any such criticism. I have never seen Pepita Jimenez, and have not a shadow of acquaintance with her. It is admitted on all hands that her married life was blameless in every respect. Three years she cared for and watched over Don Gumersindo with assiduous love and patience, making him taste a joy of which, poor soul! he had probably never dreamed. And when, after a long and painful illness, the old man died in her arms, he left her sole mistress of all his fortune.

It is more than two years since Pepita lost her mother, and more than one and a half since she became a widow, but she still dresses religiously in deep mourning, and her whole bearing, as well as her retired manner of life, are such as to lead one to suppose that she cherishes the memory of her husband as if he had been the brightest and best of men.

It is just possible, though, that her pride, and her

knowledge of the not altogether orthodox manner in which she has been endowed with wealth, give her an uneasy conscience, and that, shrinking from the eyes of the world, she seeks solace and freedom from useless regrets in austerity and retirement.

Here, as in all parts, people think a great deal of money. Indeed I say wrongly, "as in all parts." In the busy world, in the great centres of civilization, there are other distinctions and positions which confer as great lustre as the mere possession of wealth. But in a small place like this, where the successes and glories of science and literature are ignored, and where worth of character is little esteemed, there is nothing to mark off social hierarchies save the having much or little money—or money's worth. Pepita, then, with all her wealth, and having youth and beauty likewise on her side, is a personage of very great repute. From all the country round suitors have flocked to her. But it would seem as if she has no ambition or desire for a second marriage. She puts every offer gently from her—so gently that she has made no enemies—and lets it be understood that her one wish is to devote the remainder of her life to pious and charitable objects.

My father, even, who certainly has the best chance of any one, does not appear so far to have made much way with his suit. Pepita shows him indeed—almost

anxiously, one could fancy—every possible sign of regard. But as soon as he begins to talk of love and marriage she stops him with some gentle reminder of his past faults, and strives to draw his thoughts to higher things.

I must say that I am rather curious to know this woman of whom everybody talks so much. Curious, too, from no merely idle motive. I am of Pepita's way of thinking. I am most anxious that my father should come to a better knowledge, and a better life; that he should bid adieu to the passions and turmoils of youth, and crown his declining years with quiet happiness and honour. Only I differ from her with regard to the *modus operandi.* I believe that he would best secure all this by settling down with some woman who was worthy of him, and whom he could love. From all accounts Pepita Jimenez seems to be exactly suited to him, and I want to see if it is really so. Shall I confess to an *arrière-pensée*, that, from motives of family pride, I should like to circumvent any possible attempt to play fast and loose on the young widow's part?

If I had other ends of life in view than those I have, I should naturally prefer seeing my father remain single. Then, as his only son, I should inherit at once his wealth and his position. But you know well that I have chosen my path, and that

nothing can make me swerve from it. However unworthy I may be of the vocation, I feel myself called to the priestly office, and the riches and honours of the world have but little attraction for me. The very fire and passion of youth—all that might excite to, and, in some sort excuse, a course of worldly indulgence—I would employ to kindle yet more brightly my ardour in the heavenly course. And all my training, the habits of thought which you have formed within me, and even the little scientific knowledge to which I have attained, urge me towards the glorious career of a missionary. Once let me be cut adrift from all ties here, once let me find myself—ignorant and sinful as I am—raised to the priesthood; endowed, through the wonderful and sovereign grace of the Most High, with the power of binding and loosing sin, and of bringing light into dark places; entrusted with the ineffable privilege of taking the God-man into my hands, and straightway, with glad heart, I bid farewell to country, home and friends, and take my way to preach the gospel in the distant lands of heathendom.

From these aspirations I would carefully exclude all pride or vainglory, I would not esteem myself better than others. Whatever I am, in power of faith, or in ability to do and to suffer, I owe, first to the grace of God, and then to the carefully ordered

training which you, my beloved uncle, have given to me, and to the bright example which you have ever set before me.

There is one doubt, one fear, which I hardly like to face. Yet it will arise within me at times, and since I cannot shut my eyes to it, and am moreover in duty bound to lay all my inner life open to you, I ought—and indeed desire—to speak plainly of it. To do so is part of the system of self-analysis which you have so strongly inculcated—of weighing the exact nature and value of motive, and so satisfying conscience.

I have often meditated at length upon the methods of education of two opposed schools;—of those who would preserve innocence at the expense of knowledge, in the belief that the unknown evil is more easily avoided than the known, and of those who would put evil in all its nakedness and ugliness plainly before the disciple, so soon as he has attained to full reasoning powers, in the hope that sin will then be duly abhorred and overcome. It seems to me that it is only through an acquaintance with evil, that we can arrive at any just appreciation of that Divine goodness which is the only worthy goal—even if unattainable—of noble aspiration and desire; and I can never be sufficiently grateful to you for giving me a perfect knowledge of the good and the bad, that

I might flee the one and cleave to the other. I rejoice in being able to pursue righteousness—perfected righteousness, so far as it is permitted to frail humanity—with a clear understanding of the trials and self-denyings which I must face, and likewise of the specious delights, the sweetness, the flowers, that make easy and seductive the road to eternal death.

And yet another thing I owe to your teaching,—a spirit of charity and tolerance towards the faults and short-comings of my neighbours. Not indeed a spirit of weak indulgence or carelessness, but of sorrowful sympathy and forgiveness.

I hardly know why I set all these considerations in order now, but they seem in some sort to help me to lay before you this shadowy doubt, or dread to which I have referred. In effect, then, there are two questions which will persistently intrude themselves upon me. First, do I indeed prepare for myself this life of separation from the world from the high motives that I love to dwell upon, or is it because the relations between my father and myself are somewhat strained? Secondly,—and springing out from the other question,—do I, from the bottom of my heart, forgive my father his treatment of my poor mother, the victim of his evil courses?

Upon self-examination I can honestly say that I

fail to find standing ground for the doubts which assail me. I entertain for my father sentiments of the purest gratitude and love. I owe so much to him, even this very reverence I have for my mother. It would almost seem as if he has striven, by devotion and benefaction to me, to make some atonement for all the wrongs and griefs he caused her. From my earliest days he watched over me, and cared for me, with unwearied regard, and finally conferred upon me the inestimable blessing of ten years' life and training at your side.

His affection for me is really extraordinary; I would that I merited it! Of course there may be something of vanity in it. In paternal love there is always a certain admixture of egoism—a continuation of egoism, one may say. Whatever there is in me of good, of virtue, of beauty, may be regarded as the emanation and repetition of my father's personality. But be that as it may, I am quite sure that he entertains for me an affection far above, and independent of, any motive of egoism or self-interest.

In such a knowledge I find great consolation and assurance. It is so blessed a thing to be able to satisfy myself that the bond between us is not just one of duty, or circumstance, but of real love and reverence. There is surely no harder task in the world than the having to force one's affections against

nature and principle, for the sake of fulfilling a duty.

Yet withal—and here returns my scruple—how can I be assured that my purpose of entering the Church, and foregoing thereby all the advantages of my position and inheritance, comes honestly from a just appreciation of the relative values of earthly and heavenly riches, and not from some motive of pride or hidden resentment?

Perhaps the best test is to ask myself if I could readily, under certain conceivable calls of duty, enter into and administer all the life and possessions which my father could devolve upon me. I think I could, —I think I could! And if so, may I not rest with a clear conscience, and go forward upon the way I have marked out for myself without a doubt?

Adieu, my dear uncle. Henceforth I will write to you often, and as unreservedly as you have desired. And, we will hope, not in the wearisome and disconnected style in which I have written to-day.

Gulejo, March 28.

I am already beginning to tire of my life here. Each day increases my longing to return to you, and prosecute my work. My father, however, is

very wishful to accompany me, and to be present at the great ceremonial, and he urges me to prolong my stay for at least two months. So good he is, and so affectionate, that I feel bound to humour him in every possible way, and I shall therefore do as he says in this matter.

For the sake of giving him as much pleasure as I can I submit to all sorts of distasteful experiences. I make believe to enjoy all the round of dissipation that fills up our days, the picnics, the balls, the sports, —even shooting, with all its horrible accompaniment of cruelty. Finding myself dubbed "The Saint"—sometimes from malice, sometimes, I hope, from better motives—I make it my study to cover over, as far as I lawfully can, all obtrusive evidences of my vocation, and of my alienation from worldly pursuits, and to bring myself with unfailing sympathy and light-heartedness into accord with all around me. Wherein, I take it, I offend against no canon of real holiness, nor yet of the saints themselves.

But it is desperately hard work. The never-ending feasting, the dissipated talk, the gross jokes, the thoughtless and careless life disgust and weary me terribly. I have no desire—even when unveiling my most secret conceptions to you—to be pharisaical, or to speak evil of those who are perhaps as good, in their way, as I am; but I often think that it would

be a more difficult, a more reasonable and a more meritorious work to evangelize such people as I have around me here, than to go to India, or China, and seek those who, if more surely lost, are not more surely astray than these my countrymen and women.

Some will have it that the blame of heathendom at home lies at the door of modern thought, with its accompanying materialism and unbelief. If so, modern thought does its evil work in some very subtle and magic way, and not by natural means. For certainly no one here ever reads anything—good, bad or indifferent—so I cannot divine how they, or any of their fellows, can be corrupted by unsound views and doctrines with which they have no apparent means of becoming acquainted.

Ah no! I fear—but it is a dreadful thought—that the fault rests with the ministers of religion. Are they, in Spain, really fitted for their high vocation? Are they capable of teaching and raising the people committed to their charge? In individual cases, undoubtedly; but in the mass? Do those who consecrate themselves to a religious life, to the care of souls, do it from obedience to a divine and irresistible call? Or is it only one way among others of gaining a livelihood?—with this significant difference, that it is a career tempting only to the needy and

resourceless members of the community, as offering but little scope for ambition.

Three days ago we fulfilled the engagement with Pepita Jimenez of which I spoke in my last letter. I had not met her before, owing to her strictly retired life. She is certainly as beautiful as fame has represented, and, judging from her almost effusive graciousness towards my father, I am not surprised at his hopes that before long she will yield to his suit.

You will readily understand that in view of our probably near relationship I took very particular note of my hostess. She is a remarkable woman. I cannot make her out at all. There is a wonderful air of repose—quietude—about her, which may come from sheer cold-bloodedness, from lack of any real sentiment, or from a self-contained and calculating disposition. Or, of course, it may have better sources, in an impregnable peace of soul, in an all-pervading purity of aspiration, which permits the thoughtful accomplishment of all social obligations while mind and heart are steadfastly fixed upon higher things. It is at any rate a perfect picture, whether it is all a matter of indifference, of calculation, or of an interweaving of the prose of common life with the poetry of hope and noble desire. Nothing is out of harmony, and yet the whole is very notable, very distinct from all surroundings.

Even to her dress. She does not altogether affect a country style, nor yet take her model from the fashionable world. She mixes the two, and in such a way that you would say at once that she was of the country, yet a polished lady. There is no trace of ostentatious regard for her appearance and person—no scents, or cosmetics, or display of any kind; but the beautiful whiteness of her hands, etc., etc., together with the care evidently bestowed upon her dress, betray a thought and attention paid to these matters which are somewhat foreign to the rustic soul, and not altogether in accordance with the notion that she harbours a contempt for mundane things, and lives only for heaven.

Her house, too, is beautifully ordered. Not furnished in artistic style, or even with any great elegance; but there is nothing in bad taste, nothing out of harmony, nothing pretentious. Any number of plants and flowers,—in the court, upon the verandahs, about the rooms. Here again there is nothing rare, but all is arranged with the greatest taste and skill, common and unobtrusive as the plants may be.

Living creatures upon which to lavish fondness are evidently a necessity to her. The whole place is alive with the song of numberless birds, and she might be the veriest old maid from the array of pet

animals wandering about her. There is the usual spotlessly white and slightly helpless dog, two or three cats and a parrot, all as sociable as you please, —more sociable than *I* please. In the same category might almost be placed her servants, in the selection of whom methinks there is a wondrous amount of care apparent. It can hardly be a matter of chance that they are without exception natty and good-looking.

At the end of one of the *salons* I saw a little oratory, with a rather noteworthy image of the child Jesus—in wood—prettily got-up, and with a very sweet expression. His dress of white satin, with its blue and gold mantle, the whole covered with jewels and precious stones, is most magnificent; while the altar, with its fresh flowers and bordering of plants, speaks to the devotion and unceasing care of the mistress of the house.

What to think of it all I don't know. Upon the whole I incline to the belief that Madame is dominated by a strong spirit of human sympathy, and that the canaries, the flowers—the child Jesus Himself—are but the outcome of it. Probably, at the bottom of her soul, the last is little more to her than the birds and the cats.

I must say that her whole bearing—her discretion in a somewhat difficult position—was admirable, both

towards my father and myself. Not one single foolish jest or word did she give utterance to, no idle question upon my vocation, or the career upon which I am shortly to enter. We talked of the doings of the neighbourhood, of harvest and labour prospects, of the various methods of improving the cultivation of the vine, and so on; and throughout all she was modesty and naturalness themselves, in no way obtrusive of opinion, though evidently possessing strong sympathies and a remarkable fund of information.

It was a sight to see my father! He was a perfect boy! He paid, as you may suppose, very marked attentions to Pepita, and they were responded to, if not with love, with a certain degree of complacency which appeared to satisfy him.

Besides ourselves the only guests were the doctor, the notary and the vicar.

The last named, M. Ribas, Pepita's spiritual father, seems to have an immense opinion of her, if one may judge from the way in which he spoke of her to me in private, of her numberless deeds of charity, her faith, and rectitude of life. He makes her out to be little less than a saint.

Listening to all such talk, and from all I have seen, I cannot help concluding that it would be the best possible thing for my father to marry the lady

of his choice. He is not at all the subject for a life of asceticism. In a safe and well-ordered marriage lies his only chance of compassing a peaceful and honoured old age.

Upon our return my father spoke to me unreservedly of his plans and hopes. He acknowledged that his life has been anything but what it should be, and said that there was no remedy for him save in Pepita's love. In view of the happy event of his marriage, he went on to say, he had carefully guarded my interests, so that, should there be any second issue, my prospects of inheritance would not be interfered with. To this I replied that, to carry out the purposes of my life, I had no need of wealth, and that it would be only and entirely a comfort to me to see him settled, and blessed with a wife and family.

Then he spoke of his suit, and of his hopes, so enthusiastically that one would have imagined that *he* was the youth, and I the receptive old father. The waywardness and coyness of Pepita naturally make him all the more eager. He told me with glee of the dozen or so suitors whom she is reputed to have had at her feet, and how she would have nothing to say to any of them. Nor to him either, in the way that he could wish; but he flatters himself that, by persistent love and judicious treat-

ment, he will be able to convert the affection with which she certainly regards him into a deeper and warmer sentiment. He looks upon her aversion to matrimony as a mere passing fancy, a conceit, which must be annihilated by time. Pepita betrays no purpose of entering a convent, or taking up any other strict form of religious life, and however unworldly she may be, she is always anxious to please and to be pleased. In my father's estimation the root of the whole matter lies in a certain natural pride. She is altogether a superior being, in intelligence and in refinement, and so can hardly be expected to yield to the importunities of the country boobies who have hitherto laid siege to her. She imagines, perhaps, that there is no satisfaction to be found save in the service of God, and that her soul is wholly possessed by a mystic love of Him, just because, so far, she has met with no mortal sufficiently potent to make her forget her child Jesus. "It may be vanity," my father wound up by saying, "but I think *I* can do it."

Such, my dear uncle, are our occupations and preoccupations here; matters foreign, indeed, to my previous experiences, and foreign to all those high purposes which I cherish the more as the world strives to divert my mind from them.

I can only suppose that it is your interest in me which has given rise to the notion that I am, some-

how, gifted with great parts. I pass for a veritable well of science and discernment. Everybody seems to come to me for advice and assistance in their difficulties. Even the vicar—though, surely, it is verging upon a betrayal of secrets of the confessional —has taken to consulting me upon some of the cases of conscience submitted to him. Without, I should say, mentioning names, or giving unnecessary details.

One of these cases has especially interested me, as harmonizing with much that I have been feeling myself, and speaking of to you.

It seems that there is a fair devotee who is irresistibly drawn towards the religious life of the convent. Not, however, experiencing what she deems a proper spirit of self-annihilation, she fears that she is moved rather by pride than by truly heavenly aspirations.

To love God supremely and give oneself up to the contemplation of Him ; to be always hearkening to His voice speaking within the soul ; to purify oneself of all earthly passions and chains, so as to be indeed united to Him—these are, doubtless, grand and holy ambitions. But the scruple with this inquirer lies in the thought that the springs of her desire may be in self-love and pride.

"In this way"—as she puts it. "It may be that I consider myself, small ground as there may be

for such an idea, so much better than those around me that the beauty and perfection of my inner life would be disturbed or tarnished by active affection for, or commerce with, such inferior beings. My very love of God may not be in any sort infinite or appreciative, but only superior to my little knowledge, and consequently slight estimation, of the world. If so, it has in it two elements of weakness, the spirit of pride itself being the first, and the second the danger that some creature will come across my path which shall seem entirely worthy, and shall draw away all my affections and desires from my Creator, whom now I rashly profess to adore and exclusively serve."

When M. Ribas first put this case to me I tried to excuse myself from giving any judgment upon it, alleging, as reasons, my youth and inexperience in casuistical matters. But he persisted in such a way that I was finally compelled to deliver my opinion, and I should indeed be happy if I knew that it met with your approbation. I said that what this daughter of doubt and perplexity should do is to look with more charity upon all who surround her, seeking to cover their shortcomings with the mantle of love, rather than dwelling upon them with caustic analysis, and striving to bring into ever clearer relief all of latent good and virtue. Moreover that she should school

herself to see in every human being a worthy object of love, a neighbour, an equal, recognizing in each the image of God after which they are fashioned, and a possible source of all goodness and greatness. That I believed if she realized thus the amount of good that there is in the world, if she strove to estimate those around her, not only at their apparent worth, but at *more* than their apparent worth, and if she bravely took herself to task for her own sins and shortcomings, she would no longer be a prey to the temptations of pride and self-love, but would feel the due potency of human affections and sympathies. Then, if she was still dominated by a supreme and invincible divine passion, which seemed to separate her from all creature inclinations, she might rest assured that it had no unworthy source, or foundation, but sprang from a pure and right appreciation of the Altogether Lovely.

If, as I suspect, it is Pepita Jimenez who has consulted the vicar upon these her doubts and difficulties, my father need not, methinks, flatter himself that he has made much progress towards winning her heart—so far, that is to say.

There will be an end, however, to the present uncertain state of things if the counsel I have given reaches her through M. Ribas in some form or other, and if she puts it in practice. One of two departures

will be taken. She will either throw mysticism and self-containedness to the wind, and accept cheerfully the good things which this life has to give—centred presumably in Don Pedro de Vargas, who is certainly in every respect worthy of her confidence and her love—or she will become a second Maria de Agreda.

Which? I wonder.

April 4th.

Yes, the monotony of my life weighs upon me dreadfully. Not indeed that heretofore I have had so very active a career, or that now my days pass by unemployed. I am a-foot or in carriage from early till late, making excursions, paying visits, or assisting at some convivial resort or meeting. But it is all out of harmony with my tastes. My intellectual life is *nil;* I cannot open a book; I am never left alone for a moment's quiet thought. And since, in the past, all my delight has been in study and meditation, the strange and unwelcome routine of to-day is the veriest monotony—drudgery—to me.

Another great reason of disquietude comes from my eager desire—a desire which I feel more and more strongly as the days go on—to enter upon the career

which lies invitingly before me. It seems a profanation, so to speak, to have one's mind drawn out in petty distractions when the realization of the cherished dream of one's life looms near at hand.

Beautiful, indeed, is all nature around me, the blue vault of heaven, joyously sparkling, these clear spring nights, with myriads of bright hemispheres, the fertile plains, rich with a promise of bountiful harvests, the silvery streams, the groves and gardens, the unceasing song of birds—beautiful all! And at other times my very delight in these things has seemed to go hand in hand with my religion and devotion, purifying the one, invigorating the other. But now any dwelling out of the spirit life seems a weakness, a danger, a sin. Though I have made comparatively little progress in the heavenly path, though my spirit is by no means free from clouds and false imaginings, though my inner life is, I know, still dependent upon outside impressions, though I confess myself unable to be just my best self by sheer force of aspiration and intelligence, or rise into the supreme love and truth without the intervention of form and image, yet I feel an unconquerable aversion from the ordinances which are set for the help and guidance of the natural man, and even for rational, reasoning meditation. I would not have to *teach* myself to know God, or gather together reasons for loving Him. I would

rise at once to essential and intimate communion with Him.

But what merit have I? Where is the long process—the prayers, the fastings, the mortifyings of the flesh—that can alone prepare for a high spiritual life? What have been my works, what the record of my book of days, that I should look for Heaven's special favour? Nought, surely, save just this strength and importunity of desire.

I know that there are would-be philosophers who think to make a great point against our holy religion by the accusation that it leads to a wrongful despising of the things of time and sense—of Nature and her ways—as if there were to be found therein more of Satan, of marring evil, than of a beneficent Creator; while it jealously monopolizes every instinct, affection, and faculty for a grand Egoism, a loving, serving, worshipping of Self in Deity. And I know how untrue this is; that our religion is universal love, and that to love God is to love all His creatures, even as He is in all, ineffably and gloriously. Moreover, that, so far from this creature love being sinful, or even dangerous, it is an altogether commendable perception of Divinity in Divinity's works.

And yet I experience a strange fear—a jealousy, a remorse—when I find myself penetrated with a subtle joy as I enter some leafy grove, as I listen to

the nightingale's song, or watch the shining of the flowers and stars. There seems something of sensualness in such delights, something that tends to make me careless—even if it be but for a moment—of higher claims. It may be said that there is a sin of the spirit against the flesh. I would not be subject to that. But neither would I have any material form or beauty whatsoever, or any mere delight of the senses—even those lawful ones which appeal to the spiritual part of one rather than to the flesh—draw me away from the contemplation of the Divinely beautiful, or cool my ardent love of Him Who has made the earth and all which is therein.

I have just passed my twenty-second birthday. So far my religious fervour has been strong enough to bring into subjection every love to that of God, every desire to that of seeing His holy religion triumphant throughout the world, and of helping in the glorious work. Worldly thoughts and occupations have undoubtedly entered into my heart and life, as you know. And, with your unfailing graciousness and indulgence, you have replied to my confessions, that man is not above his nature, and that to pretend to have attained to angelic perfection is pride ;—that, therefore, while I ought to keep all profane excitations in check, it is useless to expect to eradicate them. You have pointed out that, while a love of

science, a desire to penetrate into all the mysteries of one's own being and surroundings, or even a coveting of glory and renown (however such motions may be governed by Christian humility, and directed to right ends), possess elements of self and selfishness, they may yet be made subservient to lofty resolution and the divine life.

So then I need have no fear of any pride I may feel in my calling, or any lingering ambition to have the worlds of science and letters at my feet. But I do fear the involuntary weakness and tenderness that come over me when human sympathies appeal strongly to me. I do tremble for myself when I find that a flower by the way, or the message flashed to me by some remote wanderer in the starlit sky can move me almost to tears.

Tell me what you think of all this, and if you too condemn me as weak.

April 8.

Our round of what we are pleased to call rural pleasure goes on, and I force myself to take part in it all. I have been, I think, over every corner of the estate, and seen all that is to be seen in the Culejo world. My friends are astonished to discover that I

am not altogether ignorant of the forms and phenomena of nature,—in accordance with the old and settled conviction that the study of God's Word is opposed to, and casts out any knowledge of His works. Quite marvellous is taken to be my ability to distinguish between the respective vines, even when, as now, they are only just in bud, and to criticize the relative worth of the respective species; to know wheat from barley, anise from beans; to tell the names of the different trees, or recount the properties and virtues of the various herbs!

Pepita Jimenez, hearing from my father how much I delight in these old-fashioned gardens, invited us, the day before yesterday, to a so-called "strawberry feast," at a country house she has at some little distance from Culejo.

This constant desire, by the way, to please and gratify my father, while at the same time she persists in her refusal to regard him in any light but as a friend, seems often to me to have in it not a small admixture of unworthy coquetting. But then, when I am with her, and see her frankness and modesty, I find myself unable to harbour any such evil thoughts, and am bound to believe that she acts with perfectly good intent, and is desirous only of keeping up the pleasant relations which have always existed between the families.

Well, we went to this place on Monday. A lovely spot, indeed! It is bounded on one side by the stream from which we here draw our water for irrigation purposes, and which just at this point breaks its course by a very pretty cascade. The water falls over into a small basin, with banks of evergreens and flowering shrubs around it, and then winds away through the meadows, strewing its course with flowers and greenery.

The declivity at the rear of the garden—the *raison-d'être* of the cascade—is planted with fruit-trees, walnuts, figs, and hazels. At its foot lie the squares of kitchen garden, beds of strawberries, tomatoes, scarlet runners, and so forth. And then comes the garden proper, with all the old-fashioned flowers that I am so fond of. Roses especially,—roses, roses everywhere, and of a thousand varieties. The house is a tiny place, but as neat and pretty as one could wish to see; and there, under cover of a devotion to strawberries—of which indeed there were any quantity—we found our luncheon prepared, with the indispensable Father Ribas just arriving to make up the quartette.

I need not say that my father was as devoted to Pepita as usual. And she was graciousness itself to him, though there was a filial air about it which I should imagine he did not altogether desire. It is

truly wonderful to see how a man of his character, not over-scrupulous, as a rule, with regard to women, can nevertheless be attracted and subdued by modesty and purity. All his ways with Pepita are fulfilled with respectful chivalry. Not Amadis himself, in presence of his Oriana, could have been more gallant and yet self-effacing. No unseemly word or allusion, no doubtful jest, none even of the amorous compliments which here in Andalucia are looked upon as quite the orthodox thing, escaped from his lips ; and yet his homage was perfectly accented and complete.

I discovered that a great part of her power lies in her eyes. Of no very clearly defined shade, they are yet intensely lustrous, and full of the attraction of unfathomableness. Perhaps the best thing about them is total unconsciousness of their value. Eyes are to Pepita visual organs, and nothing more, in beautiful contrast to the creed of most well-favoured damsels, who seem to regard them as a species of electrical apparatus for stirring and blighting the hearts of the sterner sex.

Not that Pepita is cold in manner. There is just an air of perfect serenity about her, and in her glance charity and sweetness combined. She will look at a flower, or any other inanimate bit of nature, with love and tenderness, and if, when she turns to any one whom she may be with, there is a greater depth

of consideration or sympathy in her glance, no one can detect in it a special or evil design, or presume upon any distinguishing regard.

I find myself wondering very often if all this is studied—if she is only a consummate actress. But it seems impossible that mere acting could be so undeviating, and so perfectly concealed. So I come again and again to the conclusion that she is one of those remarkable beings who are content to take Nature as their guide;—that those wonderful, liquid glances are just herself.

And I weave another theory about her. I suppose she bore a great affection for her mother; then, through a process of duty, circumstance, gratitude and companionship, she came to care, in some quiet way, for Don Gumersindo; and then—the life of human love was over for her, and, being replaced by a nobler devotion to God, and by a regard for terrestrial objects simply as His works, she has attained to an enviable peace of mind which is altogether impregnable.

In which, if there is an all-pervading element of egoism, she herself is not conscious of it. Very convenient, indeed, must it be for one in her position to possess such a happy frame of inward life!—to love without love's torment, and without having to combat passion; to be able to make of the affections and

devotion of those around her just a pleasant complement of her daily life.

And then I ask myself if in criticizing Pepita Jimenez thus, with a certain covert inclination to censure, I am not judging her by myself. What do I know of her inner life? I pretend to read her mind ;—is it not my own that furnishes the alphabet? I have never had to face and conquer great passions. All my desires, my instincts—good and bad—have been led, thanks to your wise instruction, into one channel, without any great difficulty, without any serious turning aside. In the attainment to one goal there is for me satisfaction, not only of all noble and pure aspirations, but also of such lower desires as the love of renown, or of a cosmopolitan experience. The career upon which I am entering, therefore, binding up everything for me, may render me unable to comprehend thoughts and ways on the one hand less narrow and restricted than my own, and, on the other, without the stimulus and satiation of a great future.

I have spoken with a note of blame of the care Pepita bestows upon her person and her dress, of the quiet, complacent reposing upon her beauty, of an approach to coquetry in her manner. Well? are great natural gifts bestowed that they may be despised? Do disorder and virtue

go hand in hand? Is not cleanliness next to godliness? May not a pure soul from its very purity take delight in a pure body?

It is very odd that I cannot help regarding Pepita in this critical way. I suppose it is because she is going to be my stepmother.

How do I know that she is going to be? Supposing she does not care for the honour? Supposing that she has really no more regard for my father than is apparent from her manner?

Ah, but she has! The inscrutableness of womankind is an old theme. Somewhere at the bottom of her heart she cherishes the proper feeling for him. Now, perhaps, appreciating that whatever costs little is worth but little, she is trying him—putting his constancy to proof with her coldness; but you may depend upon it that it is only to bind him the more effectually, to end by giving him the coveted and gentle "Yes." We shall see!

Our day came quickly and pleasantly to an end. There was the liveliest of talk upon all the multiform interests of country life, and in every direction Pepita was no whit behind the others, even in the presence of such veteran agriculturists as my father and M. Ribas. I cannot help being amused when I see the latter sit open-mouthed when Pepita speaks. In all his seventy and odd years, and during all his

wanderings, he professes never to have met with her equal in acumen and discreet observation.

Whenever we come in from these expeditions, I speak to my father about my restless longing for the day of my consecration ; but he, happy in having me with him, and immersed in all his varied occupations, is always ready with some excellent excuse for putting off our journey. Now it is so many pipes of wine that must first be cleared or decanted ; now the young canes that must be set, or the olive-ground that has to be turned up. There is always some pretext for keeping me here, sorely though it be against my will. And yet I ought hardly to say that, for to be with one who is so good to me as my father must be in itself a pleasure.

But I dread earthliness of desire and life creeping over me. I fancy myself losing exaltation of spirit in prayer. The low standards of thought and aspiration around me seem to be planting themselves upon my very nature. In the silence of my chamber, when my soul should be holding high converse with God, I suffer distractions to lay hold upon me, and fail grievously to attain to the raptness of former times. And, on the other hand, my sympathies and affections seem to spend themselves, with a heretofore unknown intenseness, in puerile or merely worldly directions, filling me with an after reaction of as

intense shame. If I awake in the night, and some serenade, with the sound of the guitar, floats to my ears, it appeals to me as if it were some heavenly music rather than a rough, perhaps ribald, certainly badly sung love ditty.

Then I am subject to fits of strange and altogether unaccountable tenderness. The other day the children of one of my father's bailiffs brought me a nest of young sparrows, and the sight of the little helpless, motherless things actually moved me to tears of pity. After that you will not be surprised to hear a confession that the scenes of human suffering which form so terrible a feature of daily life in our streets, touch me in a way to which I have hitherto been a stranger. And this even while I call to mind continually how much it behoves us to protest sternly against, and denounce, the carelessness, depravity, and ofttimes deceitfulness which lurk behind.

You will smile, perhaps, at my telling you all this. Indeed it is not easy. But I want you to see how necessary it is for me to return to my old life, to my studies, to my lofty visions and projects. And, above all, to take upon myself that glorious office wherein my soul will find the true aliment and nourishment for the fires which would devour it.

Culejo, April 14.

I am still here, bound by my father's wishes, and following the same routine.

The greatest pleasure I have, after that of being with my father, is walking and talking with the vicar. We scour the country alone. I doubt if there is a field, hill or wood which we have not explored. It seems almost impossible that a man of pretty nearly eighty years of age can be such a walker, so strong and active. I verily believe that I tire sooner than he does.

I must say that he has made me think much better of our Spanish clergy, against whom, as in my conception ignorant and careless, I have sometimes inveighed. "Of how much greater worth," I often say to myself, when I am with M. Ribas, "is a man of this sort, fulfilled with honest and good desire, and all innocent affections, than the most finished scholar whose soul lacks charity, and is dead to a pure and sincere faith!"

And yet do not suppose for a moment that my good old friend, even in matter of intellect, is of a low type. Uncultivated he is, certainly, but he is possessed of really fine natural parts. Possibly you will say that my high opinion of him is the offspring of his liking for me—of that readiness, in some sort

to sit at my feet—but it is not so. His mind, all prejudice apart, is remarkably clear and well ordered, and he knows how to join a perfect care for our holy religion to a reasonable sympathy with, and appreciation of, the results and benefits of modern research and civilization. Then what I admire very much in him is his soberness—his supreme common sense —in all those questions of religious manifestation which so often degenerate into mere hyperbolical sentiment.

And he is simply unremitting in good works. There is no misfortune from which he turns aside, no suffering which he is not anxious to assuage, no poverty which he refuses to help, no depth of humiliation to which he will not stoop.

In all of which works of charity it must be confessed he has a potent auxiliary in Pepita Jimenez. Her compassionate disposition, and ardent devotion to all religious undertakings, form a theme of which he never grows weary

It is wonderful to note the varied character of the objects of her care,—varied to confusion, one would think. In the public and private offices of the Church, in the administration of alms, in the ordering of schools and hospitals, in the organization of fêtes it is always "Thanks to the Señora doña Pepita!" If flowers are wanted for the altar, they are forthcoming

from Pepita's gardens. If there is a new or more gorgeous robe wanted for the Virgin, it is still Pepita, Pepita! No wonder that M. Ribas puts great store upon her. No wonder that our conversation, however far afield it may go, always wanders back somehow to Pepita Jimenez.

And indeed there is not much else to talk of—except my vocation. Country affairs, parish difficulties and projects—these go into three words. We are neither of us given to gossip, or the diffusion of scandal, and my affairs soon become threadbare, so nothing remains but to talk of our fair friend, in whom we are both of us really interested.

What books have come in her way I do not know, nor yet what instruction she has received. But she is evidently endowed with a restless and investigating mind, which leads her into regions where she has difficulty in finding a path, and brings her pretty constantly to M. Ribas for advice and help—sometimes very much to his embarrassment I should say. He has not, as I have already hinted, received any very great training himself in theological matters, and yet his open and receptive mind forbids his turning away from any problem that seems to have a possible grain of new truth in it. So you may imagine that between them these two get into very formidable fogs and doubts.

The danger of which—the danger of falling into heresies—he fully recognizes. But he believes that, starting with a right creed, he may trust to God for all necessary enlightenment, and for grace to keep upon the right path. Moreover that Pepita will always submit to his guidance, and be amenable to his counsels.

So they weave together all sorts of conceptions and fancies concerning the mysteries of our religion and the articles of our faith, some of them exceedingly poetical and beautiful, and mostly upon the life and character of our Blessed Lady, for whom they have an unbounded reverence. It is often very instructive indeed to see the way in which they contrive either to harmonize or to combine the common superstitions of the day concerning the Virgin, with the views set forth in the writings of the fathers of the Church.

From much that M. Ribas tells me I make out that below all Pepita's serenity there is a strong undercurrent of disappointment and dissatisfaction with self. Across a vivid natural appreciation of the pure and beautiful in life there comes a persistent idea that, in her own ways, she has been found wanting;—especially in the matter of her relations with Don Gumersindo. She has tender and grateful recollections of him indeed, and cannot reproach her-

self for having failed in her duty towards him ; but—Don Gumersindo was her husband, and he should not have been.

Herein, perhaps, lies the secret of her intense devotion to Our Lady, in whose life, and life's relations, there was so much grief, so much bitter disappointment, and yet withal the seed of such endless peace and glory.

I cannot help a springing fear for my father when I look at Pepita's character, and hear all these things about her. With all his fifty-five years of age, he is very desperately in love with her, and she might as easily ruin as bless. That she is pure in all intent, and good in every purpose, I resolutely believe, but there is a latent, often unheeded, power of evil in all mystical and untried lives, a sudden on-sweeping of passion, that can, in a moment, destroy the work of years of righteous intent and purpose.

The power that she has over minds of utterly different cast is most extraordinary. There is something almost supernatural about it. Here is M. Ribas, with all his faith and self-withdrawal from worldly lusts ; there is my father, with no religious beliefs worth speaking of, and entirely taken up with the things of the world. Then there are the country folk.—I don't suppose that any amount of right works and right faith would of themselves win the

respect and affection of these people. And yet as she walks along the road the children run to kiss her hand; the young girls greet her with smiles, and tokens of reverential regard; the men take off their hats, and bow as if they were saluting divinity itself.

And it is not as if she were a stranger. Most of these people have known her when she lived in wretched poverty with her mother; known her married to the decrepit and avaricious old Don Gumersindo. And yet, somehow, she makes them ignore all this, and appears on the scene as a bright emanation from higher spheres, leading captive the hearts and varied sympathies of those upon whom she shines.

I see that I am insensibly falling into the ways of M. Ribas. I can talk of little else than Pepita Jimenez. But it is really the natural thing to do here, inasmuch as she forms the universal subject of thought and conversation. The whole place seems dominated in some sort by her image, and by her spirit.

And, withal, I cannot decide whether she is an angel in human form, or a refined coquette—one proceeding upon instinctive and natural astuteness. That is rather a contradiction of terms, but I guard the expression purposely. I am quite sure that she is not a coquette upon established principles. She is above suspicion in that way—one need only look at

her to be persuaded of it. There is no note of discord, no halting, in the poem of her life. All is in too perfected harmony, too exact rhythm, to have been studied, or wrought by laborious work.

It is a distinct misfortune for me to have come here, and to have remained so long. All this time I might have been with you and with my books, ever making progress. I should have mixed only with those who have like ends and aims with myself. I should have been content to know the ways of the world only by theory and speculation.

And now, all of a sudden, I find myself immersed in the affairs of this life—even if it be but in a corner; I am torn from study, from thought, from prayerful hours, and a thousand profane and puerile objects hold me enslaved.

April 20.

Your letter, my dear uncle, has been most grateful to me, with all its good wishes and its useful counsellings.

You are quite right, I know. I am too eager, too hasty. I would compass the end without the means. I would arrive at the goal without the step by step race. I am beset by coldness of spirit in prayer, by

distraction from holy contemplation, by a dissipation of my affections over unworthy objects, and yet profess an eagerness to enter into intimate communion with God, and can affect to be superior to the ordinary channels and means of grace.

Yes, I know. How can one attain to perfect love without enlightenment and disciplined purity? My pride deserves rebuke. I am indeed called to become as nothing in my own eyes, lest the Divine wrath should make me nothing by the operation of the Evil One.

And yet I cannot believe that I am in danger of the sudden and terrible falling away that you seem to have shadowed forth to yourself. Ah, no! I have hope of better things,—thanks, not to myself, but to God's mercy and grace.

You are wise, doubtless, in counselling me against too great intimacy with Pepita Jimenez. But I am a very long way from any such experience.

I by no means forget that the holy men and the saints, our exemplars, abstained from all familiarity with women save in their old age, and when they had undergone a long course of penitential disciplining and trial, or when there was a sufficient disproportion in years between themselves and those with whom they were brought into intercourse. And I am well aware that, after all, there is no perfect safeguard against

evil ;—that, however spiritual one may be in desire and intent, presumption is liable to bring in sin.

Pray do not, then, suppose that I look upon myself as a noble and invincible exception to the rule of human frailty, or that, despising the danger, I recklessly expose myself to it. The man who loves danger perishes by it. And if the prophet-king, who was after God's own heart, if Solomon with all his worth and all his wisdom, could be overcome of evil and fall into transgression, well may I take heed to my steps and live in trembling ; – I, who am but a miserable sinner, unversed in the winning ways of the Prince of darkness, and but a raw recruit in the forces of Truth.

But, while humbly striving after a more perfect love and obedience, while gladly laying up in my heart your wise admonitions, while carefully distrusting my own strength, and lifting up unceasing supplication for more of Divine light and of Divine life to cast out all hidden ways and shadows of evil within me, I cannot—however I search heart and conscience —accuse myself of any of the dark backslidings at which you hint.

If my letters have been too full of Pepita Jimenez, of her gracious ways and good works, the fault does not primarily rest with me. It is M. Ribas—my father —the life of the place—that must be held chiefly

accountable. With regard to myself, I have not even been favourably disposed towards her—as you surely remember—but have, from the first, and persistently, cherished grave doubts and prejudices against her.

And if I have taken a measure of delight in her radiant beauty, it has been, I assure you, with the purest thought. You will not, perhaps, like my saying it—I shrink from giving utterance to such a thing myself—but really, the only breath, the only shadow, that has come across the bright mirror in which my soul has looked upon Pepita's image is this suspicion of my motives which I think I understand you to have harboured.

But I hope that I am wrong in such an idea. I cannot conceive of anything I have thought or written about Pepita that could lead the most vigilant critic to suspect in me any feelings but those of innocent friendship, any admiration than that which springs from recognition of perfect beauty and perfect art. Surely such admiration is lawful when the artist is God, and the work His temple!

And then—what would you have? I must live in the world; I must be in daily conversation with my fellows. A thousand times have you said that you would not have me buried in a life of contemplation and isolation; that you wish me to be an active instrument in the diffusion of Divine knowledge and

truth. Am I to pluck out my eyes that I may be saved from beholding? Am I not to look upon the beautiful? How, when I am with Pepita, am I to keep myself from noting that her eyes are sweet, and her presence comely? How am I to blind myself to the joyousness of her smile, the purity and all-pervading calm of her whole bearing? True, to one who was the prey of lascivious imaginings—or had not even checked the first whisperings of vice—the glance of her eye, the touch of her hand might be as the striking of the steel upon the flint, the precursor of the spark that should burn and devour the unguarded soul. But I am not such an one. Armed by discipline against such fiery darts, and covered with the shield of Christian prudence, what have I to fear?

Granting, even, that the danger existed for me, and that it was therefore foolish to expose myself to it, it would by no means follow that I should be such a coward as to surrender myself to the first summons of sin.

Pray believe that I can look at Pepita Jimenez with the most perfect dispassionateness. She is beautiful—a glorious work of God—and she is my sister in the great family to which we all of us belong. If I have any special regard for her beyond just that, it is because of the affection she bears my father, and

the relationship in which she will probably stand to myself.

For my father's sake I should be altogether glad if she would forthwith give up any idea of a solitary life and settle down with him. But if he did not enter into the question, I should like to see her remain "a widow indeed," true to all the unspoken vows of widowhood. Then from far-off India, or Japan, I should like to write to her of my travellings and of my loved work. And when I was an old man, ending my pilgrimage among the scenes of my youth, it would be a consolation and joy to find in her a sister, grown old with myself, and to hold with her such spiritual converse and communion as now falls to the lot of M. Ribas.

That is all.

As matters stand I am careful to keep a check on all intimacy with her. I hardly go near her, hardly speak to her. I care not how awkward or how rude I may seem, so long as I am assured that the fortress of my soul is impregnable, and that no occasion is given for evil suspicion or evil speaking.

And, so far as Pepita herself is concerned, I am perfectly certain that you are wrong in the suspicions that you have evidently formed. Whatever scheme can she form with regard to a man who enters the priesthood within a month or two? And when she

has the world at her feet, so to speak, why should *I* find any especial favour in her sight? She hardly knows me, and if she did, there is not much to inspire passion. If I have my share of good looks, I am withal dull, awkward and stupid. In fact, I am to all seeming what I am in reality, a poor scholar. How much do you suppose I can weigh against the pick of Andalucian wealth, fashion, and bravery? What reason could Pepita have for turning to me from all the suitors who now surround her? Or why should she harbour the diabolical idea of just ruining my peace of mind, and unfitting me for my vocation? It is not possible—not possible! I hold her in far too great esteem to suppose it for a moment;—and myself too cheaply. I say that without any false modesty. I mean that I have no particular merit whereby to appeal to her special regard. There may be a certain amount of sympathy—fellow-feeling—between us; and some time, when I have proved myself worthy by a fruitful and noble life, I may even rank as a dear friend. But nothing more. And nothing at all as yet.

Forgive me if I speak too warmly. It is rather what you do not say than what you do which touches my pride.

And yet I will not complain, even of your innuendoes. You give me wholesome counsel, which I

accept thankfully, and will endeavour to follow. And if in some ways you cherish suspicions which are, I think, unjustifiable, I am aware that they spring only from that jealous regard for my welfare which I reckon among the greatest of my blessings.

May 4th.

It may seem strange that I have not been able to write to you for a fortnight. Such is the fact, however. Social obligations just now take up a terrible amount of my time, and my father naturally claims his not inconsiderable share.

In a great city it is easy enough to keep one's-self to one's-self; but in a small country place like this, and especially if one happens to occupy a certain position, there is nothing for it but living in public and for the public. They come—M. Ribas, my cousin Currito, and all the rest of them—into my study when I am writing; nay, they don't hesitate to walk into my bedroom, and carry me off, here, there, and everywhere.

And the Casino! It is always the Casino! Not just of an evening, but all day long. From eleven o'clock in the morning it is thronged with men chattering over the news or gossip of the day, playing

tresilion, and reading the papers. I should say that some of them spend ten or twelve hours a day there. When it is not tresilion it is écarté, or it is dominoes, or chess. And when lighter amusements prove insufficient to keep the demon of ennui at bay, there is the evergreen cock-fighting to fall back upon.

But, after all, I must say there is something very pleasant about life in a place of this sort. And for any one who has no dreams of glory, and no restless promptings of ambition, it may be altogether good. For, of course, with a little effort, quiet hours of solitariness are always attainable. Not, perhaps, for a bird of passage, like myself, without giving a certain amount of offence, but if one were resident, it could be managed without much difficulty.

Then there is no lack of healthy employment for those who desire it. There are the farms to be looked after; the bailiff's accounts to be overhauled; the wine-cellars, with the racking and decanting of the wine, to be attended to; the live stock to be kept up to the mark by sale or exchange; and all the attendant and multifarious dealings and arrangements with the outside world.

And there is a good deal of pleasant admixture of work and play in the life—especially during harvesting, fruit-gathering, or the vintage—with extraordinary

fêtes and events, ranging from bull-fights to pilgrimages, to stir up the otherwise perhaps monotonous days into animation and excitement. I am not quite sure, by the way, that I ought to put pilgrimages in any antipodal relation to bull-fights, for it is pretty broadly asserted that they savour rather of frivolity and sensuality than of religious devotion. I am afraid there is some foundation for the indictment, still it is only sheer prejudice that can deny a blessed kernel of faith and truth in them.

Your last letter gave me a good deal of pain. I see that you remain entrenched in your suspicions, and I know not what to say beyond what I have already said.

Discretion is the better part of valour?—Victory lies, sometimes, in masterly retreat? True; I should be sorry to attempt to gainsay any such sage and time-honoured maxims. But you must see that retreat is not open to me. My father insists upon my remaining here, and as I have no valid reason to urge against his wish, I feel bound to submit to it. So I must conquer by some other weapon than flight.

And do let me repeat that you see very much more than there is to see—that, so far, at any rate, there is no battle to be fought. There is not the slightest reason for supposing that Pepita Jimenez cares two straws about me, and even if she did, it

would be after a very different sort from the women whom you adduce as examples and warnings. A refined and well-ordered soul is not nowadays dominated by wild gusts of passion, as were those half-savage dames of old.

Your extract from Saint Chrysostom is more entitled to consideration, but yet is not quite to the point. The personal attractions of Potiphar's wife must have been something very extraordinary—in the conception of the saint, at any rate. Only under that supposition can one explain how he regarded it as a greater miracle that Joseph should have preserved his chastity than that the three Israelitish youths whom Nebuchadnezzar threw into the furnace should have been shielded from death.

I will even go so far as to suppose that the Egyptian princess had no advantage over Pepita on the score of beauty. But what then? On the one hand, I am no Joseph in gifts and perfections; on the other, Pepita is not a woman devoid of religion and womanly self-respect. And there are other safeguards. Saint Chrysostom probably formed his judgment from the spirit of his times. He lived in days of black irreligion; in the capital and headquarters of corruption; at a court which was at once the source and the example of perfected vice. Now, when the light and influence of Christianity have leavened the whole

tone of society, it would be the height of exaggerated fear to regard the preservation of a man's chastity as more marvellous than the direct and undeniable interposition of God on the behalf of His imperilled children.

In one direction you give me very great comfort. While you justly condemn the weakness that allows my affections to spend themselves upon puerile objects—for which I daily and honestly take myself to task—you distinguish between this and a spirit of alienation from, or antagonism to a deep religious life. You recognize that I preserve intact the disposition and desire to attain to a close communion with God ; that the mind which struggles constantly on the upward path must have in its composition a sufficiency of manly energy ; that all this false sentiment—which is something worse than womanly—has not anything to do with all that passion of divine love and devotion which is something more than manly—an attribute of the angels.

Yes, you may indeed have confidence in me. You may indeed trust that I shall be in no sort a castaway, even though weak human nature may expose my soul to the insidious attacks of evil, or may seem to dally with temptation. God will keep me safe. With His help I shall be enabled to save myself. Or, if I am to be lost, the enemy shall not triumph over me un-

awares, nor yet through a weak capitulation. The fight shall not be half-hearted, nor the fire and blood spared.

Somewhat *à propos.*—Since I wrote to you last I have had a little occasion for the exercise of my patience, and the mortifying of my self-love. My father wished to make Pepita Jimenez some little return for all her attentions, and so made up an excursion to one of his places, the Pozo de la Solana. It was on the 22nd of last month—just a fortnight ago—and it was a day I am not likely soon to forget.

As we had seven or eight miles to go, and for a great part of the way there is nothing but a bridle-path, we had to make the journey on horseback. Riding, however, is not one of my accomplishments, so, in accordance with my custom when I have accompanied my father upon other excursions, I was mounted upon the quietest of mules—"as good as gold, and as solid as a coach," in the opinion of Dientes, the muleteer.

My father and the other gentlemen of the party—except M. Ribas, who followed my example—were, of course, on horseback. My aunt, Doña Casilda, whose size is on a par with her goodness, elected also to trust herself to a sedate mule of tried capabilities, and, supposing that Pepita would never have been in the

habit of riding, I expected to see her adopt some similar means of locomotion.

But, to my surprise, she, too, appeared upon horseback, and seemed entirely at home, dressed in orthodox style, and managing a spirited animal as if she had been to the manner born.

Shall I confess it? The *rôle* that fell to my lot, ambling steadily in the rear, alongside of my aunt and the good vicar, while the others curvetted and pranced away ahead, was a terrible mortification to me. I saw that the figure I was cutting upon that dreadful old coach of a mule was a source at once of amusement and compassion to Pepita, while Currito took no pains to hide his grins, and chaffed me unmercifully.

Pray acknowledge my self-restraint. It was not a pleasant position—was it?—but I submitted to my fate stoically, without a murmur. Currito, indeed, soon stopped teasing, when he found me invulnerable, but the torture continued none the less. There were Pepita and my father—with whom I seemed more than usually desirous to be—cantering away in front, while the vicar and I paced sedately along in the rear, with the admirable but not remarkably entertaining Doña Casilda between us.

It would not have been so bad if I could have enjoyed one of my confidential chats with M. Ribas;

or if I could have shut myself up with my own thoughts, or abandoned myself to the beauty of the scenery which surrounded us. But Doña Casilda happens to be an interminable talker, and one had to be as gracefully attentive as was practicable under the circumstances. We had all the gossip of the district, the complete list of her own virtues and accomplishments, the best methods of making sausages, and preparing *sesos*, with any number of other invaluable confidences and culinary secrets. It appears that the only soul in the place who can match her in kitchen and household affairs is Antoñona, Pepita's housekeeper. I know something of this Antoñona, as she comes to and fro pretty often with messages and so forth. She is a clever woman, if I mistake not; fond of her tongue, but a thousand times sharper and more discreet than my aunt.

I have no doubt that the road to the Solana is everything that is beautiful, but you will understand that it did not appeal very strongly to me. The comfort it was to arrive at our journey's end! It was like the lifting of a great weight from me. It might have been I who had carried the mule, instead of *vice versâ*.

Solana is really a very fine place, and kept in perfect order. It is partly vineyard, partly olive-

ground, with a small oak wood—the trees larger than any I have seen in Andalucia. The water from the Pozo[1] flows away in a clear, beautiful stream, the home of innumerable species of the feathered tribe, that couch amid the long feather grass. How the sight of it all recalled my childhood's days!

We went on foot all over the property, sauntering leisurely through the shady groves that line the banks of the stream, and lingering by the water's edge. Anything more seductive than the silence, the solitariness and the greenness of those walks and wooded nooks, with the shade of evening under a noonday sun, it would be impossible to conceive. One could not but conjure up the life of the old patriarchs, and interweave it with visions of the nymphs and dryads of later conceptions, and the chivalrous exploits of the early days of our own history.

Just for a few moments, how I know not, Pepita and I found ourselves side by side, and alone. The rest of the party had wandered, somehow, out of sight. It was the first time that I had ever been alone with her, and that idea, combined with the delicious solitude around us, had the strangest effect upon me. I positively trembled with subdued excitement and emotion.

The long, close-fitting riding habit, gathered up

[1] Pozo, Ital. *pozzo* = a well.

with one hand, showed off to perfection her beautiful and supple form, and the lightness of her movements. Upon her head she wore one of the large Andalucian hats, which shaded—half veiled—her face ; while the riding-whip in her right hand seemed to one's fancy to be a magician's wand, the embodiment of virtue and power.

Am I again allowing myself to drift into eulogies of Pepita's beauty ? Well, why not ? I bethought myself—unwillingly enough, I confess—of the recommendation given to us by the ascetics, to try and see the beautiful form disfigured by age and sickness, destroyed by death, the food of corruption, the delight of worms. And then I angrily put the idea away from me. It could not be necessary—it could not be right ! It was a mixing of light and darkness !

I thought, very much more steadily, of an argument on the other side. This particular manifestation of beauty—the work of a Divine Artist, may indeed be doomed to a short existence. The form so full of grace, the noble head, the sweet countenance, may within some few years become food for worms ; but the *spirit* of the work—the idea—the beauty itself—will live for ever. And when once it has entered into a man's heart, through his eyes, it must needs dwell there, all unimpaired by age, or death itself.

Such were some of my thoughts as we paced on side by side. I was endeavouring to calm my spirit and to answer the objections and jealousies which you have stirred up within me. And all the time I was desiring—and dreading—that our friends would come up to us, and put an end to the *tête-à-tête.*

Pepita's silvery voice first broke the silence, which I suppose was becoming awkward. "How quiet and abstracted you are, Don Luis!" she said; "I am afraid that I am to-day, innocently enough, the cause of some little tribulation to you, making your father drag you here, away from your beloved studies."

What my reply was I really cannot say. Something very stupid, I have no doubt, for I was in a terrible quandary. I could not pay her one of the every-day compliments that would have been fitting, and I did not want, on the other hand, to appear rude.

"Forgive me," she went on, "if I seem to speak from malice, but I cannot help thinking that there is something else than just separation from your favourite occupations that is troubling you."

"May I inquire," I said, "what the 'something else' is? I have great respect for your powers of divination."

"It is an experience," she replied archly, "that is

perhaps a strange one for a priest-elect, but comes naturally enough to twenty-two years of age."

I felt the blood rush up into my face. All sorts of ideas floated before me. I could only suppose that she had discovered, and was alluding to, some of my perhaps too ardent thoughts concerning herself. Then pride came to my aid, and, conquering my confusion with a great effort, I looked her boldly in the face for an explanation. I have no doubt that I appeared very ridiculous, but Pepita either noticed nothing, or very goodnaturedly affected not to do so.

"Don't be vexed," she exclaimed; "if I seem to criticize you. It is no very huge fault that I have put my finger upon. You are sore at Currito's jokes, and at having to occupy a not very dignified position upon mule-back, like M. Ribas with his eighty years, when you would have liked to play a part more adapted to your physical and mental capabilities. It is your uncle's fault for never having had you taught riding. It is not a very sinful accomplishment, surely! Nor yet very inimical to the career you have chosen. Why don't you get your father to teach you? It would be done in a few days. You will not find many railways, you know, nor yet stage coaches, in Persia or China, and you will cut a poor figure if you cannot mount a horse. You don't know what discredit it might not bring upon your missionary

labours among folk who are more appreciative of bodily than mental exercises."

And so on, and so on—but all in good part—until I was driven to promise that I would do as she wished, taking my father as riding-master. "But upon one condition," I somehow could not keep myself from saying,—" You must promise to assist at my first public performance."

" Certainly," she replied, with the sweetest possible smile, " I shall be delighted."

Hereupon we came upon the rest of the party, very greatly to my relief. I have had so little to do with women that I never feel equal to keeping up a conversation with them, and am moreover always in dread of committing myself in some stupid way.

Our walk ended, we sat down to the good things which the servants had been spreading for us upon the soft, grassy bank of the stream. Light spirits speedily made loose tongues. Currito began again his jokes at my expense, saying that as I sat upon my solemn mule, I was a worthy representative of the dignity of the Church ;—that I looked as if I were conferring the papal benediction. But now my few words with Pepita had wonderfully changed the aspect of affairs, and I could reply carelessly enough. Not that I said anything about my intention to learn riding. I was silent about that; and Pepita, too,

though no compact of the sort had been entered into between us, held her own counsel on the subject. So we came, naturally enough, to the mutual sharing in a secret, which—small matter as it was—gave me an oddly delicious sensation.

We took our way homewards in the same order as we had come, I upon my mule, and in company with my aunt and M. Ribas. But how different were my feelings! There was the same flow of small talk, the same uninteresting personalities, but I no longer hesitated to abandon myself to my reflections. Which —must I confess even that to you?—centred with strange persistence round the bright figure of Pepita.

There she was on horseback before my eyes. And yet it was not thus that I saw her, but rather as she had appeared to me a little time before, in the leafy copses of the Solana. So perfect was the consistency of the image upon my brain that I began to think that *this* was the dream, *that* the reality, and to speculate upon all those other good and evil apparitions with which the pages of sacred and profane history have peopled my mind, and which testify so abundantly to the existence of another, parallel, and in some sort higher life around us.

Something preternatural there must certainly have been in it all. A very ordinary encounter by the

side of the Solana, a few moments of very ordinary conversation, and now, as I was jogging along upon my mule, all this inward disturbance and transcendental experience!

I spoke to my father at night of my wish to learn riding, and made no attempt at concealing that it was Pepita who had been urging me to it. He was delighted at the idea, shook me by the hand, and exclaimed that at last I was going to have a master who could teach me a thing or two worth knowing. In two or three weeks, he went on to declare, he would turn me out the best rider in Andalucia, fit to run the customs—able to mount the horses of the sun, if ever they came in my way.

I do not know what you will think of all this, but I presume there is no harm in it?

If you could but see my father's delight in teaching me! He gives me two lessons a day, and sometimes the two are made into one, as we spend all the day on horseback. The first week we kept to the courtyard; now we go into the country, but by bye-paths, so that no one shall see us. My father is anxious that I should not appear in public until I am perfected. Which, unless his fatherly vanity deceives him, will be very soon. "It is quite evident whose son you are," he says, as he watches me, and sees how I take to the work. Work, hard work and sore, it is, I can

assure you. At that he only laughs, and says I am to tell you that he is subduing my flesh with a little wholesome and much-needed discipline. He is so good that I hope you will not mind his profane jokes and irreverent ways. They are often a great grief to me, but I try to bear them patiently. At the bottom he is a faithful son of the Church—that is always my consolation.

Yesterday, the Feast of the Ascension, we observed here with great *éclat*. The whole place was decorated with flowers and crosses, with half a dozen impromptu shrines in each street.

At night we were all at Pepita's. Her shrine had been the most beautiful of all,—a crucifix in a perfect sea of flowers. We took it up at dusk, arranged it in the large drawing-room, where there is a piano, and then gave a little spectacular representation which we had got up in honour of our hostess.

From the cross floated seven silken pendants, two white, two green, and three red, symbolizing the theological virtues. Eight children, from five to seven years of age, representing the seven sacraments, took hold of the floating ends and went through a kind of slow dance, or series of evolutions, to the accompaniment of some very pretty and solemn music, which the organist played upon the piano. Baptism was a little catechumen in a white tunic;

Confirmation, a bishop in miniature ; Orders, a priest ; Penance, a Nazarene with cross and crown of thorns ; Matrimony, a little couple hand in hand ; Extreme Unction, a pilgrim with staff and wallet.

Pepita seems to be bidding adieu to her strict retirement—to my father's huge contentment. Henceforth she is going to receive, frequently, and I hear that we are expected to be always on duty.

But I am in hopes that my father will not keep me beyond this month, at the outside. In June we come together to you, all being well, and you will see how that, away from Pepita—who will speedily forget my very existence—I shall be entirely content with my old friends, and happy in my work.

May 7.

We have commenced to go—every evening so far—to Pepita's receptions. There are usually some half-dozen matrons there, and as many young girls, with the correct complement of eligible youths and old fogies. The young people romp together pretty much, and make love ; the old ladies gossip, and the rest play cards.

I never quite know on which side to range myself. If I join the young folk, I am a wet blanket, with my quiet, grave ways. If I attach myself to the elders,

I am either an unsympathetic listener, or an ignorant spectator,—gossip not being in my line, and cards being a sealed book to me. It would be ever so much better if I stayed away altogether, but to that my father will not consent. If I did not go, he thinks it would look foolish.

My innocence in the ways of the world is a constant amusement and astonishment to him. "Your uncle," he says, "has given you a sort of lighthouse illumination, bringing all the rays to bear on one spot, and leaving all else in pitch darkness. It has been theology and theology to it, as if there was nothing else worth knowing. And yet," he adds, "I don't know that there is much difference between your life and mine as a young man. I kept my canonical hours in garrison; I had my incense in my cigar, and my choral books in my pack of cards. It comes to pretty nearly the same thing in the long run."

Upon the subject of tresilion—his beloved tresilion—as the natural and proper resort of a man who is denied other relaxations, he waxes especially eloquent. And upon this point I have given in, that I may not be quite without occupation at Pepita's. But against some other accomplishments with which he is anxious to endow me—such as pistol-shooting and fencing—I make a resolute stand.

The riding lessons go on meanwhile. I am told that I am a very apt pupil, and that very soon I shall be able to manage Lucifer. This, I should say, is set forth as the acme and test of my horsemanship, Lucifer being a black arab of my father's, noted for his fire and speed.

But enough of all this. How fares it, you will be asking, with my inner life ?

I keep up strictly my habits of self-examination. Whatever inroads all these worldly occupations and pursuits may make upon my time, I suffer no day to pass without carefully reviewing my position, and calling my conscience to account. And so I cannot hide from myself—and must not hide from you—that the image and thought of Pepita Jimenez gain stronger and yet stronger dominion over me.

"Can this be love ?" I am sometimes constrained to cry.

I have not yet been called upon to redeem my vows of consecration to the altar. So far they only assume the shape of a moral compromise. But they are none the less binding, in my eyes, and if there is aught which bids fair to hinder their fulfilment, it must be put resolutely away from me.

My will, at least, remains strong you see,—thanks to your teaching and discipline. There shall be no weak abandonment to idolatry, no Moses in com-

munion with God upon the mountain top while calf-worship holds sway below!

But the difficulty is that about my temptation to idolatry there is no such grossness, else it would be more readily overcome. The enemy has foothold in the very temple where dwells the Eternal. It is spirit waging war with spirit;—beauty and purity meeting me upon the path to the supreme Beauty and Purity, and holding me there enthralled.

My will remains unimpaired, and my understanding undarkened. I see all clearly, and keep this creature predilection—however pure and ethereal it may be—subordinate to my passionate devotion to the infinite and eternal. Pepita Jimenez is an exquisitely beautiful creation—it is useless to attempt to shut my eyes to the fact—but after all she is only the embodiment of a finite and perishing beauty, while the knowledge and love of God are all-embracing and all-enduring.

Strive as I may, however, I cannot endow the nobler affection with its fit *form.* I cannot give it the actuality, the presence, whereby alone it can wage equal warfare with the more tangible, if more ephemeral, conception and image. I pray fervently for an awakening of my imagination, of my powers of appreciation, that I may be able to shadow forth the reality of the Unseen, and keep ever before me

some perfected symbol or conception of it which shall efface all else. But the light is vague and uncertain, the conception blurred and indistinct, while Pepita Jimenez projects herself upon my soul and my bodily perceptions in all the clear, undeniable radiance of her beauty, her grace, her virtue. Across the page of the book, as I read, flits that form, all unsought ; between my eyes and the image of the Blessed Virgin before which I bow,—ay ! before the crucifix itself !

Yet I cannot believe that I am overcome by this same god of the world—Love. And even if I were, I would still fight, and still conquer.

Pepita ! Pepita ! I must go away ! Then I could tear her, surely, out of my heart. It is the seeing her daily, the hearing her voice, the listening to her praises, that rivet my chains, and draw me away from a worthy life.

And while I remain here I must keep up a brave fight, God being my helper, His love and service my strength. My supplications shall come even to His throne, and shall dissipate the cloud wherein He would hide Himself from me. Like Jacob, I will wrestle, in the silence and all the night ; and if, like him, I am to be wounded and maimed, it shall be that at last I may prevail.

May 12.

I have compassed Lucifer sooner than I expected. I made my first mount upon the "beautiful savage," as my father calls him, yesterday morning, at six o'clock, and away we went into the country.

I got on so well that presently my father could not resist the temptation of seeing his pupil make his public *début;* so, after resting a little while at one of the farms, we turned back towards the town, and clattered up the principal street about eleven o'clock—the busiest time of the day. It is needless to say that we went past Pepita's windows, and as luck—or somebody's calculation—would have it, there was Pepita herself, behind the low blind, engaged upon some piece of feminine handicraft.

When she heard the noise of our horses' hoofs she threw down her work, and stood up to watch us pass. I have since found out that Lucifer has been accustomed to be put through his paces whenever he comes to this particular spot, and so he began his tricks now, rather to my confusion. I tried to quiet him but all in vain. He felt that he had got a new hand upon him, and perhaps did not think very much of it, so only plunged and kicked the more. However, I managed to keep my seat, and succeeded moreover in showing him that I was his master, touching him gently with my whip, and

curbing his seemingly earnest desire to break the lower range of windows. Finally, he made a sedate and pretty reverence to Pepita, almost touching the ground with his knees, and then allowed himself to be gently trotted off.

While all this was going on the usual group of idlers had gathered round us, and among them the arch-idler Currito.

"Not bad that, for a raw hand, eh?" cried my father to them, as we were going off. And then he called out to Currito, who was standing by, open-mouthed, "What about the papal benediction, now, Currito? Supposing you try your hand at Lucifer!"

It was all very absurd; slightly out of keeping, too, with my character and pretensions. Still a triumph is a triumph, even if it be only that of carrying popular estimation by storm. And my father is just as proud of his handiwork as a man can be. He says that if I succeed in making anything out in life, it will be thanks to him; that you have sent him a very learned book, but only a rough, first copy, and that he is revising and correcting it, and giving it a suitable binding.

Part of which "binding" is tresilion, I should think. I have played in public, now, twice.

The evening of the day of my equestrian exploit, Pepita gave me an unusually cordial reception, meeting

me upon my entrance with a clasp of the hand,—a thing she has never done before.

Do not suppose that I lost sight of the cautions of the moralists and ascetics. I did not even take the outstretched hand without a momentary and quickly flashing review of the position. It seems to me that the danger of such an act as this has been very much exaggerated, and that far too hard and literal an intrepretation has been put upon certain scriptural phrases. When it is said that to take a woman by the hand is as when one lays hold of a scorpion, there is surely another meaning than that upon the surface. So it can hardly be literally true that the beauty of a woman leads always to perdition; or that a woman is more bitter than death ; or, again, that one cannot so much as touch a woman without being defiled.

All these thoughts passed rapidly through my mind as I took Pepita's outstretched hand, and pressed it gently within my own. Its softness and tender touch was a new revelation of her beauty to me—of the beauty which before had only appealed to me through the eyes.

It is customary, as you are no doubt aware, that when once the hand is given it is ever afterwards the permitted form of greeting and parting. I trust that you will not see aught of evil, or danger, in this

simple ceremony of friendliness. There is no suspicion of impure thought or motive in it.

My father is very often busy with the bailiff at night—till half-past ten or eleven o'clock; so I have taken his place at tresilion, making up Pepita's quartette with M. Ribas and the notary. We play nominally for money, but never beyond a dollar or so the game, and we are so little intent upon it that we hardly check our conversation, and often wander off into discussions just about as far removed from tresilion as can be imagined.

I have not altered my opinion as to the absurdity of supposing that Pepita is in any way enamoured of me, as you fancied. She treats me with just such affectionate regard as she ought to show to the son of her intended husband, and, beyond that, there is a touch of reserve and deference inspired naturally by my position and calling as a priest-elect.

Is there something else? When I write to you, it is as if I were upon my knees at the Confessional, and so must not hide a secret idea that comes over me at times. It is perhaps only a fancy, but it is none the less persistent.

I think I have spoken in a former letter of the calm beauty of Pepita's gaze. I have said, moreover, that she seems to be ignorant of the potency there may be in a glance, and to think of eyes only as

instruments of vision. So clear and pure is her regard that, so far from creating evil imaginings, it must bring in right and clean thoughts,—shaming, consuming, aught it may light upon of unholiness.

And yet, two or three times, when our eyes have met, I have seemed to discover a quick shooting of fire—of would-be-hidden passion—which I defy the ordinary observer to note. Just for a moment; then it is all gone. I look again, and see nought but the all-pervading calm, the indifference of friendliness, the sweetness of universal charity and benevolence.

It must be that I am mistaken. I am resolved to believe so. It is a passing hallucination, a prompting of the Evil One.

And yet it comes again and again, however I may put the idea away from me.

My father will have it that it is not men but women who take the initiative, and that they do it without in any way committing themselves, so that at every stage of the game retreat is open to them. According to him, it is this subtle eye-language which is the *modus operandi;*—a language which admits of repudiation, or convenient interpretation, at will, but which is yet perfectly intelligible to the favoured one to whom it is addressed, and forms a sort of sign manual—a permit—by virtue of which

he may proceed with confidence upon his mission of love.

It may be that it is just the listening to such ideas as these that has turned my head, and made me imagine I see what does not exist.

But I begin to ask myself why I style it an absurdity—as I did just now—that Pepita should be enamoured of me. It is not by any means impossible, even if improbable.

And if it should be so—if she should entertain for me other than feelings of mere friendship—how horrible would be my position! The woman who is my father's destined bride in love with me!

It cannot—must not—be! The idea is the outcome of foolish vanity, and must be put away.

I am somewhat surprised, nay!—shall I confess it?—piqued, at the careless confidence of my father. God forgive my pride! but I sometimes say to myself, "Am I then so entirely devoid of gifts and perceptions that it is quite safe to leave Pepita and myself to our own ways and wills?"

I can give an explanation of it;—a curious one, perhaps, but sufficient, and recommending itself to my self-love. My father regards himself as actually Pepita's husband, and so begins to share in the fatal blindness and perversity which have been in all times notoriously incidental to such a condition; of which

profane and ecclesiastical histories are full, and which are doubtless allowed for providential ends. There was Marcus Aurelius, with the vicious and abandoned Faustina as wife. Not only did he, good and learned man, ignore what was patent to all about him, but he could even commit to future generations his meditations upon the faithfulness and worth of womankind, and record his gratitude to the gods who had been so gracious in their love-gifts to him. And so it is every day. We see men—especially great men—exposing their happiness to the tender mercies of opportunity and advantage, and making dear friends of those who are robbing them of their greatest prize.

It would hardly do—it would be hardly respectful—to open my mind to my father, and show him his danger. I don't see what I could say, or how I could say it. "My dear father, I cannot help thinking that Pepita has looked at me occasionally in a special manner. But it may be only fancy"?

It would be absurd! I have not a shadow of proof that there is really anything in it.

Should I not rather have to say that it is I who am enamoured of Pepita?—that I covet the good things that he is regarding as his own? But that would not be true. It *shall* not be true!

And if it were, I could not bring myself to confess it.

All I can do is to keep quiet, and watchful over myself; to quit a dangerous place as soon as I can, and to grapple with the temptation—if indeed it grows into a serious temptation—in silence and determination.

May 19.

I am grateful indeed for your letter and salutary counsels. God knows I need them more than ever!

Saint Theresa makes much—and rightly—of the hard discipline through which timid and distrustful souls have to pass when they are brought face to face with temptation. But how much harder is it when, instead of weakness and distrust, there has been—as in my case—overweening confidence!

I have thought myself a chosen temple of God, and that no fire of temptation could hurt me. I awake to find that even if the edifice of my life be preserved from the flames, it is wofully blackened and disfigured.

You were quite right. I ought not to have suffered my eyes to take such delight in this fair woman,—my palate to taste the sweetness of the world's

pleasure, which presently turns into the poison of asps.

Nevertheless I am not lost, even if my confidence is shaken and my peace of mind destroyed. As the hart pants after the water-brooks, so my soul still pants after God. To God she turns herself for peace, that she may drink of the river of His delights once more, and lose herself in the waters that make glad His city. Do my feet cleave to the mire of the slough into which I have wandered ? Are my eyes darkened by the clouds of chimera and vague desire which my ungoverned mind has conjured forth ? I call upon the Captain of my salvation. If He ranges Himself upon my side, I shall yet prevail.

It was no dream—no idle fancy. There is passion, burning passion, in Pepita's glance. And her eyes are endowed with a magnetic force that draws mine to them,—now without my knowledge, now against my will. Then I feel that there is answering fire in my glance, and all my soul goes out in the look.

What this sweet communing is becoming to me no one can tell ! Her image fills my spirit and overspreads the very face of God. Her beauty outshines all other loveliness. The joys of Heaven seem lighter than her touch, the pains of hell poor payment for the moment's bliss that is wrapped up in one of those lightning flashes of love.

In the solitude of my chamber, and the silence of the night, I see all the fearful, iniquitous danger of it, and build up laborious fortifications of resolution. Day comes, and with the day Pepita, and I am a fool again.

I say sometimes that I will plead sickness as a reason for not going next evening into temptation. The evening comes, and I weakly adventure myself.

My good father, all unsuspicious, says, "I have got some work to attend to. If you will go to Pepita's, I will follow, as soon as possible." An excuse trembles upon my tongue—and dies. I take my hat and go, unresistingly.

When I enter the room she meets me with outstretched hand, and my heart seems to stand still as her soft touch brings all thought and imagination into captivity. Henceforward there is but one voice, one presence, for me. It is I, now, who mutely ask for, and hang upon, a glance. And I seem to be continually discovering some new perfection. Now it is a tender flush of colour overspreading the white cheek ; now, a fresh contour of the beautiful neck, or a diviner harmony of movement. My feet may have brought me unwillingly to the house, but from the moment I stand before her I surrender up every way of heart and mind, in eager, joyful service.

Nor is it only the sense of vision that is fulfilled

with satisfied delight. Her words are as perfected music to my ears; her soft laugh as the coo of the dove, or the note of the wind stirring the branches; the fragrance of her presence as the delicate burden of the mountain breeze that has searched the dwelling-places of the wild thyme and the myrtle.

How I play—how I talk—how I act—I know not. One thought, one care, one endeavour, dominates. Our eyes meet, and in the flash of intelligence that passes between us there is a message which could be sent by no other means, a poetry that no pen could write, a music that no voice could utter, or instrument render. Ineffable mystery of love!

Since that day at Solana I have never been one moment alone with her. And yet, if we have spoken nothing to one another, we have said all.

Is this madness? Is it ruin? You cannot tell me so more plainly than I tell it to myself, when I am away from the enchantment.

You counsel me to seek refuge in thoughts of death, —not of her death, but of my own; in the fleeting character of the present; in the certainty and nearness of the great Future. But these things have no terrors for me, no new potency to turn back the current of my affections. Death?—I desire it! Love and Death are brothers, and Love lives in the future even as in self-abnegation. To be reconciled

to the loss of self for the sake of the loved one is the height and essence of true devotion.

No! love is much more potent against love than fear can ever be. Only a nobler, higher service can emancipate me. When I recognize that, and take determined refuge in the thought, I feel myself made over again and know that I shall conquer. God stands out before me as the sun—the centre and source of all light and all life—and this lower object of my affections and desires takes its true rank as the speck of dust that dances in the sun's rays, and draws therefrom all of beauty—grace—desirableness—of which it can boast. Then my soul, consumed by divine passion, struggles against and despises all ignoble bonds, and would create for itself wings upon which to flee away to her eternal Rest.

So I fight on, day after day, marvelling that nought of what I am undergoing is apparent to those around me. I cannot eat, I cannot sleep; or, if a momentary forgetfulness creeps over my eyes, I presently start up from horrible encounters between good and evil angels, wherein, while I strive to range myself under the banners of light, my feet carry me over among the ranks of darkness, and I hear a voice that cries after the deserter, "Because his deeds were evil."

There is no perfect remedy but in flight. If by the

end of this month my father does not give his consent to our departure, I shall run away like a thief, without assigning any reason, or giving any notice of my intention.

May 23.

I am a worm of earth, and no man! I am that most evil excrescence of humanity, a hypocrite.

The sorrows of death have encompassed me; the black torrent of iniquity has gone over my soul. I am ashamed to write to you, and yet am constrained to do so. Confession is my only resort.

I grow worse rather than better, and my downward course is accelerated hour by hour. So far from succeeding in tearing myself away from Pepita, I go to her house earlier and earlier every evening, or rather, I may say, I am taken there, bound hand and foot, by evil spirits.

Fortunately I never find myself alone with her. For that I am distinctly grateful. M. Ribas is always there before me. Dear, good man! He imagines fondly that my growing intimacy with Pepita springs from our sympathy in pious aims and desires!

The subtle language of eye and hand spells itself out more and more intelligibly. It is as if there was a mutual transfusion of life, as if my blood entered

into her veins, and an answering current of life and fire came back to me. When I am with her, I love her with a love that turns through dread to hate when I am away from the spell. To my sight she is the fairest among women—"a spring shut up, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed." To my recollection she is "death and bitterness"—as Judith to the captain of the Assyrians, as Jael to Sisera. I would free myself from her, and cannot. I abhor and adore her, at once.

Each night when I leave her house, I say, "This is the last time." Within a few hours I return—to more abject slavery than ever.

Contrive an escape for me! Write to my father that he must send me back at once. Reveal everything to him, if necessary. Help me! Help me!

May 30.

God has given me strength to resist. For some days past I have not set foot in Pepita's house—have not seen her.

I have no occasion to allege a pretended indisposition. I am really ill—pale and heavy-eyed—and my father, full of affectionate interest and anxiety,

is only too willing that I should withdraw from all excitement and unnecessary dissipation.

The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and surely I shall take it by force. In the meantime God is feeding me with wormwood and gall, and it is well that the bitter cup should not pass from me. After days and nights spent in watching and prayer, something of consolation and peace has come to sweeten the bitterness. I have caught glimpses of the Promised Land, and have been enabled to raise in my heart the song of the new Jerusalem.

At the feet of Our Lady will I lay my tribute of thankfulness for victory. She it is who is appropriately my refuge and defence. Our Mother, who knows all our need and our weakness, and can compass both grace and help for us!

And this other queen, but of earth, I strive daily to dethrone, to abase. I say of her house, in the words of one of old, "the dead are there; thy guests are in the depths of hell. Whoso loveth God will flee from thee, and the sinner shall be taken by thee."

As I meditate upon love, and compare the Divine with the creature affection, I find infinite motive for cleaving to God, and undoing this earthly chain which has wound itself so strongly around me. The world, with its fame, its honours and its powers, I can readily hold cheap by the side of a perfected devotion.

With Christ, if the great tempter were to take me to the mountain summit, and offer me all the kingdoms of the earth for a bending of the knee, I could turn indignantly from both the service and reward. And although, when the temptation comes in the form of this woman, I feel my terrible bondage, and shrink horribly from the sacrifice which is demanded of me, it must be none the less bravely faced. For the undivided love of God is the bringing into order of all other affections, and the negation of all egoism and selfish life. The supremacy of *that* accomplished, all lower impulses and inclinations come in their proper order, without clashings, without jealousies. I have no envy of the martyrs, of the saints, of the blessed ones in heaven—of the Seraphin themselves. Nay!—the higher the place that these occupy, and the more abundant the gifts and favours bestowed upon them, the more satisfied I am,—the nearer God seems to me, and the deeper is my love. So there is brought about an universal and perfect brotherhood and sisterhood. I am one with all, and all are united in His love, and grow up together into Him.

How different is it with this other passion, which is rather a separating of myself from those who have a claim upon my regard! I covet the object of it for myself, and for self alone, and I want nought else.

Devotion and self-sacrifice themselves become mere selfishness. To die for this love's sake would be only means of compassing the love—in despair, probably, of compassing it in any other way.

With such considerations as these I strive to make my infatuation for this woman abhorrent to myself, and for the time succeed. But presently other, softer thoughts—only the tempter in another form—creep in, to deny all the carefully-built-up conclusions at which I have arrived, and to mock me with their instability. I ask myself why I cannot, going away from her immediate presence, reconcile my devotion to Pepita with my devotion to God's service? Just as His love in no way shuts out a love of one's country, of one's fellows, of Beauty, or of Art, so I might surely be allowed to cherish this other service, which is so essentially pure and spiritual. Why should not Pepita Jimenez be to me what Beatrice perhaps was to Dante, an allegory, an inspiration, the type and representation of all knowledge and loveliness?

But, ah me! how can Pepita be just a symbol—the pure suggestion of all under God that is desirable—while she is living, and possibly in my sight? Before that she must have passed over into the world of shadows.

Pepita dead! The very thought terrifies me, and draws my soul to her in all passionate sympathy. It

seems for the moment as if I had committed some horrible crime against her. And now she rises up before me as no shadowy queen in Purgatory, the dream of the stern Ghibelline, but the full embodiment of all earthly warmth of loveliness,—a Galatea stooping from her pedestal to bless the soul of the Pygmalion who has endowed her with life. And I cry from the bottom of my heart, "I am undone, I am undone! My God, do not Thou abandon me, else I have no strength! Show me the light of Thy countenance and I shall be saved!"

June 6.

I think I have spoken somewhere of Pepita's whilom nurse, now housekeeper. She always was a clever personage according to my father, but her light was hidden under a bushel until she married one Cencias, and thereupon became a somebody in the Culejo world. Perhaps I ought to say married the *son* of one Cencias; for the talent and character of the father —an engineer and Jack-of-all-trades in the town— while they passed over in some subtle way into the already well-furnished character of the daughter-in-law, certainly missed the son, of whom hardly the name survives.

Antoñona then came to be of no mean con-

sequence, and the depository of half the secrets of the neighbourhood. Especially is she looked up to as a sort of tutelary genius by all the young folk. She goes in and out of their homes at will, calls them by their Christian names, is the *confidante* of their love affairs, and generally regards herself, and is regarded, as an universal mother and *deus ex machinâ* rolled into one.

I have never taken much note of the woman, but she has suddenly developed a wondrous interest in me, and evidently considers that I require looking after. She has come to see me two or three times, walking straight into my room, without the little formality of knocking at the door, and usually with the same burden—that I am behaving very badly in not going near her mistress.

That would not have any great influence with me; but my father has changed his tone in a notable manner,—calls me an unsociable owl, and urges me to resume my old habits. He has especially insisted upon my taking up friendly relations again with Pepita; so last night, unable to resist his solicitations, and having worn out all my excuses, I went to her reception.

Ah, if only I had had strength to persist in my refusal!

Pepita was alone, no one else having yet arrived.

Our hands met in silence, a mutual embarrassment taking away all power of speech. No warmth, no tender pressure, entered into the clasp, and yet our hands seemed to linger together. There was nothing of love in her glance, as she timidly raised her eyes to mine, but there was a tender sympathy, and a shamed sadness, which appealed to me more powerfully than any words could have done.

Did she read my heart? Did she know something of the struggle I had passed through? Was she trying to discover if divine or human passion had won the day? How much did it import to her? Would she applaud my resolution—that resolution which I felt oozing fast from my finger-tips?

For all this time, while these questions came and went across my mind, we stood still, hand in hand.

She must have understood something from my look; must have read something in my eyes that was hard to bear. The pale, sweet face became yet more marble-like, and contracted with a quick shooting of pain; the light died out of her eyes, and the tears welled up and glittered upon the long lashes that now lay upon the cheek.

Contain myself I could not—not if heaven itself had been the prize! I bent forward, with an instinctive movement to kiss away those tears, but—somehow—

our lips, instead, joined together by an irresistible impulse; and, as the intoxication of that first and yet perfect draught of love flowed over us, she drooped into my all-too-ready embrace, a willing captive.

How long was it—a moment or a life-time?—before we heard a step in the passage, and the voice of M. Ribas?

Summoning up all my energy, I put her gently from me, once more myself, and uttered the only words that broke the long silence between us:—

"The first and the last!"

I was thinking only of the kiss, but no sooner had I spoken than—as if the words had been an invocation—the apocalyptic vision rose up before me, and I beheld Him Who is indeed the First and Last. In all His awful majesty He stood before me, with the sharp, two-edged sword proceeding out of His mouth, wherewith He pierced me to the soul, and laid bare all my horrible iniquity.

I passed the evening in a state of frenzied excitement bordering upon delirium, which I do not know how I dissembled, retiring earlier than was my wont, but only to an intolerable depth of bitterness.

With a scorching upon my lips, and my cruel words, "first and last," ringing in my ears, I seemed

a second Judas, but with a double betrayal lying to my account,—I had sold both God and the woman I loved, with a kiss!

June 11.

Out of evil may come good. The dark past may be forgiven, and only serve to illuminate the future. And Pepita's wound cannot be very deep; she will forget me, and all will be well with her. God grant it!

Since that fatal night we have not met, or held any communication. I have kept my feet from her ways, and Antoñona has mercifully left me in peace.

Now about my leaving here. By dint of urgent entreaties I have got my father to promise that we shall set out on the 25th, the day after Saint John. They make a great deal of the festival here, and we must remain over it.

Withdrawing myself resolutely from temptation, and mortifying the flesh by diligent fastings and devotional exercises, I am able to rejoice in a returning peace of mind, and to look back upon this terrible assault of love as a useful trial. The voice of my supplications and the contrition of my heart have found favour of the Lord, and He has made me

taste afresh of His mercy and graciousness, enlightening my understanding, consuming my evil desires, and enduing me with greater power of will.

So strong at times has been the flood of divine love that it has carried me into the quietism of rapt passion, stripping my soul of all ignoble affections and constraining every faculty to reach out after, and embrace, Him Who is the source and centre of all perfection. Compared with that all other happiness is barrenness, all beauty foulness, and sweetness bitterness itself. What would I not lightly give up for the love of God!

Yes, even that best copy of Him! Her very image shall be erased from my mind. I will weave the hardest scourge of prayer and penitence, and with it chase her from my life as Christ the barterers from His Father's temple.

June 18.

This will be my last letter to you. A week hence we leave, without fail, and I shall see you face to face.

With you I shall be better. You will impart to me the strength which I feel I yet lack. If I write incoherently, you will understand the crowd of con-

flicting emotions and ideas that wage war within me.

Twice I have suffered myself to go to Pepita's. I have been rigidly cold and formal, but, ah! what it has cost me!

Yesterday we were told that she was unwell, and would not receive at present. You may imagine the thousand cruel thoughts that swept across my mind, the offspring of the quickly darting conviction that it was I who had wrought her pain. Why—ah! why—did I return those glances? Why did I ever let her know that I loved her, and deceive her with the idea that I might give up everything for her love? Why did I seal and crown my infamy with that Judas-like kiss?

But sin must not be the father of more sinning. What has been done is done beyond amendment, but the present and the future may be cared for.

One more week and I am free!

* * * * *

That dreadful Antoñona has been with me again,—not to my comforting, as you may imagine. I was writing to you—this very letter—but promptly hid it away, as if I had been doing some guilty thing. Then I rose from my chair, thinking that I could talk better with her so, and that it would help to shorten the visit.

Well—she poured out a long invective against me, saying all manner of wild absurdities that I shall thankfully forget; and then, just as she was leaving, she turned round, came up to me, and gave me three or four sharp digs in the shoulder, saying in her gipsy patois, "Go away with you, wretch that you are! The devil take you for coming here and meddling with my darling! You have killed her—bad luck to you!"

And then she ran off, jeering and swearing at me by turns.

I must not complain. I deserve it all—deserve that devils should tear me in pieces with red-hot pincers.

Ah, my God, make Pepita forget me! Make her happy in some other and prosperous love!

Can I ask more?

My father knows nothing—suspects nothing. It is better so.

Adieu. Yet a few days and we meet. How changed you will find me! How full my heart of bitterness and woe! My innocence gone! My soul's peace destroyed!

END OF PART I.

PART II.

PARALIPÓMENOS.

THE indisposition of Pepita Jimenez caused but little surprise, and not much more comment. Rather had her sudden launch into gaiety, her receptions, and her picnics, seemed strange and unaccountable, so that no one marvelled at her tiring of it all, and relapsing into her wonted retirement.

Nor was there the remotest probability of the real cause of her ailments penetrating beyond the small charmed circle of interested folk who had been necessarily behind the scenes. If such intimate acquaintances as the Doña Casilda, Currito, and M. Ribas were in the dark, the outside world was hardly likely to imagine that the "saint"—as Don Luis was still called—had entered the lists of love against his own father, and had accomplished what the all-powerful Don Pedro de Vargas had not succeeded in doing—bringing into captivity the heart of the beautiful and courted Pepita Jimenez.

She herself had guarded her secret well, notwithstanding the singular transparency of her character,

and the familiarity which she was accustomed to allow to those in attendance upon her. Only Antoñona—who was lynx-eyed in all directions, and especially where the interests of her young mistress were concerned—had been able to penetrate the mystery, and she could be depended upon for absolute discretion. Perhaps it was well that the faithful old attendant did not hesitate to blurt out her discovery to Pepita, and so make potent some much-needed sympathy; for, if Antoñona was coarse in manner and language, and not over-scrupulous, as a rule, in her treatment of the confidences that were made to her, her heart was in the right place, and her rough exterior covered an infinite amount of tender devotion to her foster-child.

Before Pepita had gained any real insight herself into the state of her affections, Antoñona had understood exactly how the land lay; had known, too, when Pepita's ardent glances had received sweet and due response from Don Luis, and had not been in any danger of putting a slight or careless interpretation upon the sudden cessation of the promising relations which had been set on foot.

But it must not be supposed for a moment that Pepita had anything to do with the above-recorded mysterious embassies to the recalcitrant wooer, or even knew of them. Nothing was further from her pure

and delicate mind than to help on her cause by any such underhand manœuvring; least of all could she have countenanced that ferocious denunciation, and disrespectful corporal chastisement, which Antoñona had visited upon Don Luis when last she appeared before him, and whereby she sought alike to mortify his flesh and his pride. It was all the simple outcome of zeal on the part of the self-constituted ambassador.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning, five days after the date of Don Luis' last letter. Pepita was sitting in her boudoir—her special sanctum—which opened out of her bedroom, and where none save Antoñona had the privilege of appearing without due announcement.

It was a pretty room, and prettily, if inexpensively, furnished. The curtains and coverings of the chairs and couches were of a delicate, flowered chintz. The walls were adorned with engravings of a religious character, but all in good taste, and of rare merit—a combination that would have been a pleasant surprise to any one accustomed to the not very high standard of art of a country town in Andalucia. In the window stood a small writing-table, covered with papers, and near it an old oak book-

case, with well-lined shelves. Flowers there were in abundance;—flowers upon the escritoire, flowers upon the richly-inlaid centre-table—the only piece of furniture in the room that was in any way remarkable—flowers and creepers drooping from cunningly-contrived brackets, which shared the walls with the engravings; while the twitterings and trillings of two or three pairs of canaries and linnets in gilded cages gave animation to the otherwise oppressively still life of the apartment.

No show place, or region of mere idle lounging, was Pepita's sanctum. "Office" she called it, and office indeed it was, the headquarters and clearing-house of her multifarious secular and religious employments. Into it there entered, perchance, the doctor; certainly her father-confessor and spiritual adviser, M. Ribas; her bailiff, to the adjustment of his accounts; and Antoñona—the latter pretty much at will. But to the outside world, and to those who had no special business, it was a tabooed region.

Upon this morning, then, when we take up the thread of our narrative, Pepita was sitting upon a low couch, with a book-rest and one or two books of devotion before her. Not quite at her ease, evidently, or possessed of her usual calm patience. Ever and anon she cast hurried looks at the clock, laid her head upon the cushion behind her, as if wearied of

her own restlessness, and then with a fresh effort tried to fix her attention upon the page before her. For one of her neat habits, too, her dress was disorderly and her fair locks strangely unsmoothed. Very sweet she looked, nevertheless, even if the pallid cheeks, with lines under the eyes, the nervous hands, and restless behaviour, did not altogether belong to the Pepita who was the usual occupant of the room.

Presently a light, halting step came along the passage, and, with a deprecatory knock at the door, M. Ribas entered, looked earnestly at Pepita as he pressed her hand, and took the offered chair at her side.

"I am glad, my daughter," he said gently, "that you have sent for me. I was anxious about you, and, even if you had not called me, was coming to look after you. But how pale you are! What is wrong? Have you some trouble to tell me of?"

To the good vicar's tender inquiries, and tone of anxious sympathy, Pepita responded at first only with a deep sigh. Then she said rapidly, in a low voice,—

"Don't you know what it is? I thought you would."

M. Ribas shrugged his shoulders, and looked at her with a certain air of helplessness. He knew nothing, good man, except that his favourite child

was suffering, and that he could not bear to see her in pain.

Presently Pepita began again.

"Dear father," she said, "I ought not to have sent for you, I know. I ought to have come to you—to church—and there confessed all my wrong-doing on my knees. But that would have necessitated penitence, and you see, unfortunately, I am not a bit penitent. My heart is strong in its rebellion and wickedness. I want a friend, not a ghostly adviser."

"Why do you—you whom I have always found so full of gentleness and self-distrust—talk of rebellion and persistence in evil ways? Whatever may be wrong, you will hardly have such sins as those to take upon yourself."

"Ah, father, you do not know how bad I am! I have been deceiving you, and I have tried to deceive God."

"Gently, gently! you are over-wrought with excitement. Quiet yourself, or you can neither speak—nor see—the truth."

"And how should I speak the truth when the spirit of untruth possesses me?"

"*Ave Maria Purisima!* My daughter, you do not know what you are saying. See—there are three evil spirits which can be said to 'possess' a soul, and none

of these, I am convinced, has laid yours waste. The first is Leviathan, or Pride ; the second, Mammon, or Avarice ; the third, Asmodeus, or Impurity."

"Then I tell you that I am the victim of all three—possessed by them all."

"This is too terrible ! I beseech you—I command you—to calm yourself. What you are the victim of is an over-wrought brain."

"Would to God it were so ! Listen :—I am avaricious, because, while I have become the mistress of great riches—and not, perhaps, by the most honest of means—I have clung to them, and have not put them to their true, charitable uses. I am proud, inasmuch as I have looked with disdain upon those around me, and especially upon good and faithful men ; turning aside from their suit, not from any virtue, not from any special love of chastity, but because I could not just enrol them among my humble followers, or make them the debtors of my benevolence. And so, in due punishment, God has given me over to that third enemy of souls. And in his power I lie."

"How, child ? How ? Ah, I see ! You are in love. Well, there is nothing wrong in that. You are free. You may be married to-morrow if you like —and God bless you ! . . . . Um ! and so my old friend, Don Pedro, has won the day ! I declare, you surprise me. I thought it would come some time,

but I had no idea that matters had progressed so far."

"But supposing it is not Don Pedro de Vargas at all?"

"Why, who else can it be?"

Pepita rose from her seat, and took two or three turns in the room with uncertain steps. Then she came behind M. Ribas, and, stooping down till her lips nearly touched his ear, whispered, "Don Pedro has a son," and her head drooped upon the good father's shoulder.

"Has a son?" echoed M. Ribas. "What son?"

"*What* son?" exclaimed Pepita pettishly. "He has only one son."

There was a few moments' silence, the honest face of the vicar presenting a pathetic picture of wonderment and consternation. Presently he said, with a certain note of indignation in his voice,—

"But it is useless—hopeless! Don Luis can never entertain any affection for you."

A bright ray of sunlight shot through the mist of tears that had gathered in Pepita's eyes, and the sadness which had contracted her lips floated away in a light smile, while, with an imperfectly-concealed accent of satisfaction and triumph, she whispered,—

"He loves me."

M. Ribas' firm belief in the mysticism and resolu-

tion of Don Luis had come to his aid against the feeling of horror and astonishment that had at first assailed him. Those three words, however, "*He loves me*," planted the enemy more securely than ever. If the image of our Lady herself had fallen from the altar, and been dashed into a thousand pieces at his feet, he could not have been more horror-stricken. He had half turned round, and still sat looking at Pepita with a lingering of incredulity in his eyes, and a quickly darting hope that, after all, it might be all a piece of womanly vanity.

"He loves me," repeated Pepita, with an assured little nod of triumph, and then a veiling of her eyes and a sigh.

"The cruel mischief of women!" ejaculated M. Ribas. "They would rob the poor, and kill the dead!"

"Did I not say that you had no idea how bad I was?"

"Well, well! God's mercy is infinite, and He can right even this. But tell me quietly just all that has happened."

"You know what has happened—that I love him, *adore* him! and that he loves me, too, although he has struggled hard against it, and perhaps, by this time, successfully. And that a great deal of it all is your fault."

"*My* fault?"

"Yes. You have been continually praising Don Luis to me—though not one bit more than he deserves. And I have no doubt that you have been performing similar good offices for me—though without such good reason — when you have talked with him. What was sure to happen? I don't suppose we were either of us made of stone, or above the appeal of young blood."

"You are right, you are right," murmured the good old man, his head sinking upon his breast, and with a feeling as if it was indeed he, and not Pepita, who was the culprit. "I have been an old fool, and have done the devil's own work."

The words and action of M. Ribas recalled Pepita to a sense of the injustice of her innuendoes. She put her hand upon his shoulder, and, with an eager voice, hastened to add,—

"No, no, dear father, you have nothing to blame yourself for. As if I was not bad enough before, I have been trying now to shift the responsibility of my sins on to the best of men. It is not you at all, but just my own eyes, with my own want of modesty and prudence, that have brought it all about. If you had never said a syllable about Don Luis, about his noble heart, his learning, his talents, I am not so dull but that I should have discovered everything quickly

enough, from hearing him speak. And I could not be blind to the graciousness of his presence, and to all the nameless, natural distinctions which make him so altogether lovable. Your praises of him have been sweet to my ears, but have not opened them. They were but the echo, and that a feeble one, of the passionate adulations that I was lavishing upon him in my own heart every moment."

"Hush, hush, my child!" interrupted the vicar. "These are not thoughts for you to harbour."

But Pepita went on, without noticing the interruption, and in a still more excited tone,—

"But what a difference between your ideas of him and mine! To you he was the model priest, a worthy successor of the apostles. You saw him, in the future, devoting himself to his mission of preaching to the heathen, or labouring here to bring back our country to the simple faith that has become clouded over through the impiety of some, and the lack of bravery and knowledge on the part of others. To *me* he has been all the time just an earthly love, and the fulfilment of the selfish delight of the senses. And in my visions I have seen him give up all—God's work itself—that he might consecrate his soul and life to me, becoming my help, my guide, my sweetest companion. I have committed the most horrible sacrilege. I have striven—*striven*—to detach this priceless soul from

God, and from His temple, just as the thief might rob the holy *Custodia*[1] of its brightest jewel. To this end I have discarded my widow's dress, and have flaunted in the rich attire of a woman of the world; I have bidden adieu to my retired ways, and have plunged into all sorts of frivolity; I have called to my aid every art by which I could make beautiful and attractive this vile body, which is so soon to be food for death and the grave; I have laid wait for my coveted prey with enticing looks, and by soft touches have tried to communicate some of the fire and poison which were running in my blood."

"Child, child! who could have imagined such things of you! God help us!"

"But there is worse to come," continued Pepita. "All this I have done, and the result has been—that Don Luis loves me. His eyes have said it a score of times, have revealed a passion as deep and true as my own. And then I saw him, in his bravery and devotion to nobler things, strive to crush out the fire that had crept into his soul. And I . . . defied him to do it. One evening, when he had kept away from me for ever so many days, he came again. His father, I knew, had asked him to come, and he thought himself strong enough. When he gave me his hand, the

[1] Consecrated vessel in which the sacrament is exhibited in Roman Catholic churches.

spirit of evil that possessed me seemed to endow me with an irresistible power of mute appeal. I said nothing—there was no need of speech—but I overbore him with a sense of my desolation if he took away his heart from me, of the torture it was to me to see him preferring aught in heaven or earth to my love. And when the ready tears sprang to my eyes, he could hold out against the tempting no longer, and stooped towards me. Even then he had no distinct thought save of yearning and consolation, I know, but I drew his lips to mine, and God only knows what would have happened if you had not just arrived at the moment."

"What devil possessed you?" exclaimed the horror-stricken priest. "My Pepita!"

She covered her face with her hands, and burst into passionate weeping, while M. Ribas watched her in silence, his first emotions of indignation melting away into his boundless affection for her. Looking at her thus, and acknowledging how impossible it was to be angry with so fair a Magdalene, he thought he understood the fall of Don Luis, and could only marvel that he had fought as good a fight as he seemed to have done.

"My daughter," he said at last, with the utmost gentleness, "calm yourself. I cannot bear to see you so. And all will yet be well. Don Luis has evidently

repented of his error. If you also are penitent, you, too, will find forgiveness, and you will both of you arise and pursue the heavenly road as heretofore. His going away is a clear sign that his better angel has prevailed—that he can and will keep himself from you, and only bring out of this weakness fresh strength for the fulfilment of his vows and holy purposes."

"All will be well!" flashed out Pepita passionately. "Fulfil his vows and holy purposes! . . . Ah! And begin by killing me! Why did he love me? Why feed my pride with sweet morsels? Why deceive me with the thought that he could give up everything for me? He has sealed me his slave with his kiss. The mark will be ever upon me as of a red-hot iron. And now that he has made me all his own he is to abandon me!—sell me!—slay me! A propitious commencement, truly, of his missionary work—of his evangelistic efforts! It shall not be!—as there is a God above, it shall not be!"

This sudden outburst of passionate love and disdain fairly confounded M. Ribas. Pepita had drawn herself up to her full height, and towered over him with flashing eyes, as some tragic queen. Again he watched her in silence, and with a feeling of helpless terror, as she began to measure the room with mpatient steps. No tender fawn now! no repentant Magdalene!

Rather a lioness faced by bereavement; a prophetess inspired by visions of judgment.

"Is it so?" she began again, coming face to face with the vicar. "Is it so?—that it befits his vocation to deceive me, to bring me to this humiliation and shame, trampling my heart under his feet when he has made it all his own? Cherishing, doubtless, tender and altogether proper recollections of me, and making mention of me in his prayers! If he is so saintly—if his love of God is so all-powerful—why did he give me sigh for sigh, and promise me all that world of love and hope with his eyes? If his affections are so entirely in heaven, why did he hanker after a poor thing of earth like myself? Was it divine charity? Was it religion? Or was it pitiless vanity? Ah!—"

The storm could not last long. The *ah!* broke off in a choke, and she threw herself upon the couch, weeping as if her heart would break.

M. Ribas saw that his opportunity of exorcising the demon had come.

"Pepita, my daughter," he said, in a tone of quiet authority, mingled, nevertheless, with tender compassion, "will you try to attend to me—to give your mind calmly to what I say? Think of the terrible conflict through which Don Luis must have gone, and which you have not yet dared to face. He has not deceived you. You say yourself that you have

known his inmost soul. He has given place to the love of you, but has recognized the higher service which he owes to God. Surely your very self-love may rest satisfied. Of what worth must not your heart be, if it can make such a man as this falter in his purpose? You say that you have conquered; be content with your victory, and now be brave and generous. Let him go without hindrance. Quench the fire of unhallowed love in your breast. Then you may keep his image there, and pay it all due reverence and worship. You may love him,—but as a sacred vessel set apart for his Master's use, and having nothing in common with earthly desire. And, when this short life is past, you will meet again, and can be given in marriage to him as are the angels. I hardly know what I am saying to you, because I am so wrought upon by what you have told me that I cannot command my ideas as I would. Your own discretion, however, and quieted insight will, I am sure, be able to supply all that may be lacking. Even if the vows and calling of Don Luis were not an effectual bar to your union, there are sufficiently powerful worldly considerations to turn you aside. Don Pedro seeks your hand in marriage, and, whether you care for him or not, you would hardly wish to set the father against the son;—rivals first, enemies ever afterwards. Think of the horror of it—think of the

infinitesimal outcome of well-being—and be strong for Christ and the Blessed Virgin's sake!"

"Ah," murmured Pepita, "it is easy to give such counsel, but how is one to follow it with a never-ceasing gnawing and burning at the heart? I should go mad!"

"No, my child," responded M. Ribas, "it is by no means easy to give such advice. And the following it would not be so desperately hard as you imagine. Absence is an unfailing salve for the wounds of love. Don Luis will find it effectually in his work and studies; and to you, too, will speedily come peace and joy, while retaining, perhaps, such softened impress of the trial upon your heart and life as shall be a blessing rather than an evil. Supposing that you could attain to your very uttermost desire, do you think that the joy of the moment would be potent against the surely coming and eternal remorse? Earthly loves last, at the best, but a short while, and are worth comparatively little. The sweetness of which you just get a glimpse as you drink of them is as nothing compared with the terrible and abiding bitterness of the after-taste, if there has been aught of evil admixture in them. How much better that this your love, with its little seed of wrongful desire, should be straightway consumed, and ascend to heaven as gracious incense, than that it should presently die the

loathsome death of disgust, when once it has received its mere earthly satisfaction! Be brave to put away the cup resolutely from your lips when you have but tasted the lusciousness within, and make of this chalice a supreme offering to the Divine Redeemer, Who shall give you, in return, to drink of the river of His pleasures—of the water of life, which satisfieth and giveth eternal peace."

"Father, father!" cried Pepita, springing to her feet, "how right you are! Your words buoy me up, and bring me to my better self. Yes, I will fight against the temptation, and I will overcome. How shameful it would be, if Don Luis could restrain and conquer his lower affections, and I, a pure woman, knew not how! He leaves—the day after to-morrow. So much the better! God go with him! See, here is his card. He called yesterday, with his father, to bid me farewell, and I did not speak to him. I will not see him again,—will not even preserve that tender recollection of him which you say would be allowable. It has been all a dream —a nightmare—and, awaking, I cast it from me."

"Ah, that is my Pepita!—her brave and pure self!"

"Ay, father! God has pulled down my pride with this blow. It was great—it needed some such crushing earthly despising as this. And, after all, Don

Luis is wise—I am in no way worthy of him. How could I, whatever my efforts, make myself his fit companion? How understand him? How give him all the sympathy and help which he will need? I am but a poor, ignorant country girl; he is versed in the great ways of the world, and holds in his hands the keys of all knowledge. He must ever soar far beyond me, and I could only bear him company with my sighs."

"Pepita, Pepita," interrupted again the vicar, "neither say nor think such things. God knows that here is no question either of lack of gifts on your part, or plenitude on his. Don Luis leaves you at the call of duty, and it is for you to give him up, if not joyfully, willingly. So doing, God will give you the reward of noble sacrifice—His strength and abundant peace."

Pepita stood for a moment in silence, with downcast eyes. Then she tightened her hand convulsively upon the handkerchief with which she had dried her tears, and said, with sudden energy, "Yes, father, yes! I know again that you are right. I will give way to no weak repining. I could wish that the day after to-morrow was already come. I am eager for the sacrifice, and even now have a foretaste of the peace that will spring up again in my heart when once it is accomplished."

"God help and bless thee, my child!" said M. Ribas, rising to depart, and laying his hand upon her bowed head, while certain irrepressible feelings of self-complacency at the influence he had been able to exercise over a proud spirit swelled his breast. "God help and bless thee!" he murmured to himself more sorrowfully as he paced homewards. "Poor lamb! It is a pity—a pity!"

For some minutes after she was left to herself, Pepita remained standing, rooted to the spot, and looking straight before her with wide-open, tearless eyes, that saw nothing. The stimulus and support of the good vicar's presence removed, she felt the sharp and inevitable reaction, the tangible sacrifice looming up portentously by the side of its somewhat intangible reward. Slowly the tears welled up again, and as they overflowed she made a hasty movement as if to loosen some knot that was strangling her, flung herself upon her knees before the couch, and buried her face in the cushions, her whole frame shaken by violent sobbings.

In this position Antoñona found her when, sometime afterwards, she came into the room—Antoñona, always full of jealous care of her mistress, and just

now harbouring a considerable mistrust of M. Ribas and all his works.

"That old idiot!" she exclaimed, making a pounce upon Pepita. "If this is what comes of his palaver, he had better stay away altogether. We want none of his *gorigori*[1] and hyssop here!"

So saying, she raised Pepita in her arms as if she had been the child of former years, laid her upon the couch, and, as she smoothed back the ruffled tresses, went on hurriedly, "Now, my darling, tell me all about it. What has happened? Why couldn't he keep his sermons for church?"

At first she got no reply—perhaps expected none. Pepita's tears, however, under the gentle ministrations began to flow less bitterly.

"Now, now, my child," began Antoñona again, in persuasive tones, "give over crying, and tell me what is wrong. What has the vicar been saying to you?"

"He has said nothing but what is good and right," stuttered Pepita through her sobs.

Seeing that she must leave her charge to herself, the sage Antoñona held her peace, and occupied herself with seductive little arrangings of the disordered hair and dress. Her patience was presently rewarded, for Pepita, yielding to the irresistible long-

* *Gorigori* = ribald mimicry of the chant sung at funerals.

ing for some real sympathy, and turning her face to the wall, went on—at first in broken accents, but rapidly recovering her self-possession,—

"He has shown me how wrong and foolish I have been. He has bid me give up all thought of Don Luis, and made me see that I ought to make the sacrifice gladly. And I have said 'yes' to everything, and thought for the moment that it would not be so very hard to give it all up and let Don Luis go. But, you see, Antoñona, I cannot—I cannot! It is no use! It was all very well as long as I had M. Ribas at my side, but as soon as he went I was as weak as ever again. I have been dreaming of life and happiness with the man I love. I have thought of myself as raised, in some miraculous way, to his level, entering into all his plans and hopes, and being a true wife to him. And now—he is being taken from me, and I shall be left alone, without hope or consolation. It *is* horrible, is it not? M. Ribas was perfectly right in everything he said—I felt he was, as soon as he began. But he left me, and then all he had said seemed nothing,—just useless talk. I *love* Don Luis, that is all I can think or care about. And if he really loves me, why does he not come to me, and put everything else—promises and vows and all—on one side? Ah, I never knew before what love was, but I know it now! There is nothing I would not do for Don Luis,

and he will do nothing—nothing—for me! Surely he does not love me. He cannot!—and I have just been deceiving myself all this time. If he loved me, he would not treat me in this way—putting honour and glory and all sorts of things before me. God help me!—I know it is an awful thing to say, but it is the truth—I would give my very soul for him!"

"Jesus, Maria and Joseph!" ejaculated Antoñona, instinctively crossing herself.

"Yes, I know—and may the Blessed Mother forgive me! I think I must be going mad."

"Pretty lamb! you are not just your own self. But, Jesus! how this jackanapes in a priest's frock has turned your head! If I were in your place, sweet, I should not think that heaven had anything to do with it, one way or another, but just that silly book-learning, an addlepate, and his old uncle. I would like to pull him here by one ear, make him go down on his marrow-bones, and beg your pardon!"

"Hush, hush, Antoñona. You are as foolish as I am. I see more plainly than ever that M. Ribas was right, and that I must do as he says. If I die for it, I will do it. And if I die, he will love me then, perhaps, and keep me always in his memory. And the good God will let me see him again in heaven."

Hard and unimpressionable as was Antoñona, with

little of sentiment in her, ordinarily, she could not help her tears springing at Pepita's words and tone. "*Caramba!*" she exclaimed, wiping her eyes, "I would have wagered something that nought would have made me cry again. Now you will just keep quiet and go to sleep. And I shall get you a cup of tea first."

"No, don't, Antoñona. You may go, but don't bring me anything. I shall be all right soon, you will see."

"Then I shall close the shutters, and you must try to go to sleep. You are likely to be weak and upset, when it is days and days since you had a good rest. All will come right somehow."

So speaking, and seeing that Pepita had already closed her eyes, and seemed likely to sleep, Antoñona stooped over her, kissed her softly upon her forehead, and, after half closing the shutters, departed upon tip-toe, shutting the door noiselessly behind her.

While such was the state of things with Pepita, Don Luis was faring little better. He had refused an urgent solicitation to accompany his father upon an excursion which the latter had to make into the country, alleging a bad headache as an excuse, and

so had been left all the morning to his own, not very bright-hued meditations.

Sombre enough they were, in good sooth. And yet no shadow cast by his approaching departure, no seductive arranging of possibilities which his love of Pepita persisted in weaving, and no regretful record of the past could shape his resolution to tear a dangerously beautiful image from his heart, and to give himself wholly to the work for which he had been prepared.

That he was by no means insensible to the clamourings of a deep human affection, and that he had found in Pepita all the qualities for which his heart or imagination could crave, his letters, and the struggles portrayed therein, bear ample witness. But, besides a strongly rooted devotion to the career which he had chosen, and the claims of the vows which he conceived he had already, in some sort, taken upon himself; besides, moreover, his affection for his father—which precluded the possibility of their becoming in any way rivals—he found in his own nature a secret and potent, if somewhat ignoble, ally in his warfare against the enemy which had suddenly arisen to disturb his life.

He was, to put it plainly, obstinate. He had that condition of tenacity of purpose which is firmness or wilfulness, as it is properly or improperly directed,

Perhaps the hardest penance that could have been inflicted upon him would have been the necessity of giving up some line of conduct upon which he had carefully resolved. And this was just what his love of Pepita called upon him to do. The prize was certainly worthy—more worthy than he had ever imagined an earthly prize could be—but the price demanded raised against itself all the bristles of a natural reluctance to swerve from a cherished purpose, and to unmake the whole moral figure in which he had posed both to himself and to the world.

It is a trite enough judgment that men are the playthings of circumstance; that we do not choose our own *rôle* in life, do not steer steadily for some given point, but let ourselves be driven or turned about by the current at its will, and meekly accept the lot which Fortune—herself blind—has drawn for us. The refrain of life is apparently chanted chiefly to the glory of Circumstance and Chance.

But here and there men fight desperately against this seemingly capricious ordering of their destinies, and Don Luis de Vargas was one of these heroes in a forlorn hope. It could not be—should not be—that the noble fabric of his days, which he had perfected in plan and model, and peopled with all sacred forms, should be mocked at as a house of cards, as

the phantasy of mist which the morning can laugh at as it chases it away. And all at the chance bidding of a woman's eyes, and the touch of a carelessly irreverent hand.

So a man's self-love and his love of God, his steadfastness of purpose and the pride that shrunk from the scornful finger of the world, all came to be banded together against poor Pepita Jimenez; and while she was declaiming against the inexorableness of Destiny, and rebelling against Don Luis' supposed indifference, the opposing forces of Duty and Temptation were harrying his prostrate soul in a way that would have satisfied even Antoñona's thirst for vengeance, could she but have known it. Perhaps there would have been no place for conflict—deep and true as were his religious convictions—if he had been able to distinguish between the various interested and disinterested motives which were ruling him; but for the moment they all assumed the same garb of sanctity of purpose, and seemed to leave him no choice but to tread the thorny road of self-sacrifice. He thought of the saints, the martyrs, of all the blessed men, who had trodden the same path before him, and told himself that his sufferings were nothing as compared with what they had been called upon to endure. If Saint Chrysostom could turn a deaf ear to the entreaties of an adored mother, when, from the bed upon which

she had given him birth, she besought him not to desert her for his work in the Church, surely he could resist the seductions of a strange woman who had only just crossed his path, who had no real claim upon him, whose sufferings could in no case be very great, and who was, after all, perhaps rather playing with him than devoted to him.

And the privilege and dignity of the priestly office to which he was called were so great,—so infinitely beyond all earthly privileges and crowns! No creation, this, of mortal man ; no outcome of the breath of a populace ; no creature of chance ; no conception of angel or archangel, but the direct emanation and delegation of the Most High. Should he be careless to wield a power which God entrusted not to those nearest His throne ? Should he contentedly sink to be an unit in the flock, when he might be the shepherd himself? Could he lag behind as a camp follower, when he was called to the side of the Divine Captain ? Could he lurk in ignoble obscurity, when it might be his to bind and loose on earth that God might bind and loose in heaven ; to stand forth as the accredited minister alike of omnipotent wrath and omnipotent mercy ; to be the initiator and agent in wondrous mysteries too deep for human reason ; to call down heaven to earth, not as the consuming fire which obeyed Elias, but as the Word made flesh to redeem,

as the Holy Spirit to regenerate, as an unfailing and revivifying river of grace to purify men's hearts, and make them fit for an indwelling God?

Perish the idea! When thoughts and visions such as these swept across him, the things of earth and time seemed less than small, and the most powerful temptation a thing to be rather despised than struggled against.

The hours passed, and left Don Luis still a prey to his bitter and solitary communing. Now and again he roused himself, and tried to fix his attention upon a book; or—as some fit of exaltation came upon him—he rose from his chair and paced the room, with a rapt look upon his face. But it was weary work. He longed for something to happen, for some interruption—whether pleasant or unpleasant he did not particularly care—to the maddeningly even course of concentrated thought.

It came at last, and from an unexpected quarter. There was a knock at the door, and Currito entered with a brusque "Here you are at last! I have been looking for you everywhere. Come along with me to the casino. It is a great day, you know."

Now at the beginning there had been no great

love between these two. Currito, who was not in the habit of drawing delicate distinctions in character, had set down the budding priest as the type of a class of men whom he regarded as something between fools and hypocrites; while Don Luis had recognized in his cousin the idly dissolute vagabond, against whom he cherished the profoundest aversion. But when the former encountered no unpleasantly persistent odour of sanctity, and when he saw the easy grasp of mind and ready skill with which Don Luis made himself *facile princeps* in some of the pursuits and accomplishments which make up the sum total of country life, his contempt was changed into the wildest extreme of veneration and affection; while Don Luis, on his part, unable to resist the claims of a good heart, and a certain latent manliness in his cousin, let himself be gradually drawn into a considerable degree of intimacy. So there had come to be established the state of things usually attendant upon such a friendship, when one loves and the other is loved; the stronger nature allowed itself to be oddly dominated, in matters of every-day life, by the weaker, and Don Luis rarely dreamed of not responding to any call which Currito might make upon him.

Just now, as we have said, any interruption would have been welcome, and therefore it was with some-

thing of relief that Don Luis replied promptly to his cousin's invitation, "All right—anywhere you like," took up his hat and stick, and, after a look round the room, followed in Currito's wake.

As the latter had announced, it was a great day, the day before the feast of Saint John, and the usual stream of idlers in the streets, cafés and casino was largely reinforced by the influx of country folk who had come to share in the promised festivities.

At the casino the centre of animation was in the pretty, marble-paved court, which had been covered with an awning for the occasion, and converted into an impromptu café. Inexpressibly refreshing to Don Luis' weary eyes and heated brain was that gay and animated scene, with the cool plashing fountain in the centre, the laughing groups of light-hearted chatterers around the tables, and the background of flowers and greenery. It was as when one has journeyed long over the cruel desert, facing only heat and glare and irritation, and comes suddenly upon the smiling oasis, to find that, after all, there is a gladness and pleasantness more real than in the mirage.

But there was destined to be something of the mirage, nevertheless, in this fair vision. The cousins made their way slowly from group to group of friends, beset by numberless invitations and harmless rail-

leries, and presently drifted into an inner room, which was by tacit consent monopolized by the *élite* of the place. Here, as befitted the more sacred character of the room, there was a quieter and more decorous atmosphere; so that as Don Luis, in response to a friendly summons, drew up his chair to watch a game of tresilion, and entered into desultory conversation with the players, he could distinctly hear everything that was going on at the table behind him. Round it there were gathered some seven or eight of the most notorious, idle young bloods of the district—men who seemed to place their claims to distinction not so much upon a pardonable pride in birth and position, as upon certain episodes of gay life in Madrid and Seville, and upon the accurate fit of gloves and coats. Foremost among them was the Count de Genazahar, who to all his other merits and reputations added the being twice elected to the Cortés for F——, and a much-worn interpellation in the House upon a supposed corrupt practice of the Government.

The count was some thirty-two or thirty-three years of age; regarded himself, and was usually regarded, as the model of a gentleman, and was well known in all the lists of love and dispute in which a peaceful result might be confidently anticipated. Every one has his skeleton, however, and the Count de Genazahar possessed one which he had not the common-

sense to keep locked up. With all his experience and success he had not been able to withstand the bright eyes of Pepita Jimenez, and, being treated by her to a certain amount of disdain and ill-concealed dislike which she did not usually accord to those who sought her favours, had nursed his wrath and wounded vanity into a species of insane rancour, which burst forth whenever the subject of the beautiful widow was broached in his presence.

"Pepita Jimenez!" came to Don Luis' sensitive ears, as he had just drawn up his chair to the neighbouring table, "ah, she is a clever one! but there are some things which she will be a precious long time in making us forget; for instance, that she was as poor as a church mouse until she circumvented an old usurer, sent him sharp to hell, and got hold of his *ochavos.*[1] And now she sets up for being a model of virtue and propriety! a lovely idea! As if we did not know how your immaculately chaste ones manage it all on the quiet!"

If it was highly reprehensible on the part of the count to speak in any such disrespectful terms of the fair Pepita, it was little less so that his remarks should be received by his hearers with distinct signs of gusto and approval. In all probability those readers who go through the world with their eyes and ears closed,

[1] A small copper coin.

will exclaim angrily that such things do not happen, that gentlemen never think of according such brutal treatment to ladies of their acquaintance. But the unprejudiced observer of human nature will confess that there is no evil commoner in society than this species of deadly backbiting, and that the fairest reputations are being daily sullied for no better reason than the opportunity of making a telling joke, or enlivening a dreary moment. And he will furthermore give due consideration to the fact that to the Count de Genazahar, and probably to a goodly proportion of his hearers, the subject of Pepita Jimenez was a particularly sore one.

It can readily be imagined what gall and bitterness it was to poor Don Luis as this string of infamous lies and insinuations was poured into his ears. Yet what could he do? Where was his right to stand forth as Pepita's champion? It would only end, in all probability—if once he got roused beyond self-control—in a betrayal of his own secret attachment. And he could not help the springing consciousness that he himself had harboured some such ideas as these in his own breast, nay! had spoken of them to his uncle, even if in more veiled and delicate terms.

But his replies to his friend became very incoherent; and at last, as the count finished with his sneer-

ing innuendo at Pepita's expense, and an approving laugh went round the little circle behind him, he could restrain his anger no longer. He leaped up from his chair, faced round, and exclaimed passionately, "May I inquire if it is customary hereabouts for gentlemen to speak in public of ladies in that way?"

A vague shadow of terror passed across De Genazahar's face at the savage manner of his interlocutor. He had imagined himself safe in his audience, and the idea that he might be called to a just account for his words was not a pleasant one. But he quickly recollected that Don Luis' sacerdotal character precluded the prosecution of any warlike intentions or desires, and therefore, recovering his bravado air, he replied with a mocking laugh, "Go ahead, Señor Parson. Give us a homily on the subject of the proper relations between gentlemen and ladies. You churchmen can teach poor outsiders a great deal upon that matter, I know—whatever you can, or cannot, do in other directions." And he looked round the table in triumph, nodding his acknowledgment of the complimentary guffaws which greeted his joke.

Don Luis stood for a moment, white with restrained passion. He did not know what fear was, and would have liked nothing better than to have made an onslaught upon his tormentors, knocked their heads

together, and left the consequences to to-morrow. But to yield to impulse was never an overpowering temptation to him—his training had rather taught him to doubt and question it. Moreover, the very words of the insult addressed to him helped to steady him, causing him to remember his position, the shadow of the dignity that was already upon him, and the worthlessness of the enemy that faced him.

So, after a moment's pause, he said slowly and without a tremor in his voice, "Then my homily is short. It is this—that, Church or no Church, and without any necessity for bringing the Church into the question, you, Count, in speaking, and all the rest of you in quietly listening to groundless slanderings of one who is absent, and whose character is above suspicion, have committed a vile wrong that no one with any pretensions to the title of a gentleman would be guilty of. Come, Currito," he added, turning to his cousin, "this is evidently no place for us,—I am going." And he marched down the casino, and gained the street and his own room, without so much as looking back to see if he was alone or not.

Nothing could have more completely scattered his exalted imaginings of an hour before, or drawn out more perfectly his sympathy with the maligned Pepita. Once more he was left to his own bitter cogitations, and his last state was indeed worse than

that from which he had shortly before escaped. For some time, as he yielded to the full force of his passion, and thought of all he might have said, and might have done, he felt as if he would give up everything—his future itself—if only he could get at De Genazahar, and inflict upon him a sufficient chastisement. In the usual unreasonable course of reasoning prompted by such circumstances, all sorts of wild schemes of vengeance and heroism floated through his heated brain. He remembered his father's joking allusions to fighting bishops and priests; repented that he had not taken his proffered advice to include fencing in his other newly acquired accomplishments, and went over the exploits of all those good sons of the Church who had been able to wield carnal as well as spiritual weapons, and had not hesitated to add a sanguinary supplement to the Gospel of Peace.

But a soberer mood soon came to him, and he could look at matters more quietly. To sacrifice to anger what he had refused to sacrifice to love, was surely the height of absurdity. He had already gone too far; it would have been better to have remained silent, remembering the injunction not to cast one's pearls before swine. After all he, personally, had no ground for complaint—or, at any rate, for such a passion of revenge as had seized him. Was he not thereby dishonouring his office, and his mistress,

the Church? Somebody had said that the anger and revengeful spirit of the priesthood had worked more mischief in the world than their much-talked-of lasciviousness itself; and the pages of Holy Writ and of history were alike replete with warnings on the subject, from the fault of Moses down to the useless shedding of heretic blood. If Christ was the Prince of Peace, surely one of the first virtues of His ministers was gentleness. It was not by chance that the new reign upon earth was ushered in by the teaching, "not eye for eye, or tooth for tooth, but universal love," with the accompanying blessing upon those who submit meekly to be persecuted and evil spoken of. Perfect should we be, even as He Who makes His sun to rise upon the just and the unjust, and rains upon all alike the inexhaustible wealth of His goodness and forgiveness. Above all did it become one who was intending to take upon himself the distinctive badge of a servant of the God of Love to be a pattern of meekness and humility, to partake more of the nature of the modest herb of the field, which gives out only a sweeter fragrance when it is trodden upon, than of the sturdy oak which refuses to bend save to the riving of the lightning flash.

How long Don Luis had remained buried in these reflections, with his elbows on the table, and his face bowed in his hands, he did not know. Disturbed by

a slight noise behind him, he at last raised his head, became suddenly conscious that the sun's rays were shooting low across the room, and, turning round, found himself face to face with Antoñona, who stood looking at him with an odd mingling of compassion and disgust upon her expressive countenance. She had evidently taken advantage of an hour when she knew that the house would be quiet; had slipped past the servants, without deigning either an inquiry or an announcement, and had opened and closed the door of his apartment with premeditated and catlike noiselessness. From all which it might be inferred that her mission—in her estimation at least—was an important and slightly risky one.

Poor Antoñona! It had all been done so cleverly, and, so far, so successfully! She had been praying as she came along, to such saints as she took any account of, for the self-control and dignified language that would enable her fitly to express all the nobly indignant thoughts which burned within her; and now, when she had gained her vantage ground, she found her enemy already prostrate. As Don Luis angrily exclaimed, "What do you want? Leave me!" her ideas seemed to float away into an inextricable tangle, and her tongue refused its office.

But the question was repeated, "What do you want?" and there was something in the annoyed

and masterful tone which gave her just the tonic and stimulus she needed.

"I want to know what you are doing with my young lady?" she said defiantly. "And, what is more, I don't intend to leave here until you have told me." And suiting the action to the word, she drew up a chair to the table, and looked with unwinking determination full in Don Luis' face.

There was no help for it. It was yet another call upon the patience with which he had been arming himself.

"Very well," he said resignedly, "go on, and have your say out."

"It is not what I have to say, but what *you* have to say!" exclaimed Antoñona, all her woman's volubility coming back with irresistible temptation. "You know that you are behaving very badly to the *señorita.* You have bewitched her with your fine looks and fine talk, and now she is going to die, poor angel! and much you care about it! She does not get a minute of quiet rest, and can neither eat nor sleep—and all through you. This morning she has been as bad as bad can be, at the idea that you are going away from her. A precious work you are leaving behind you! Why in the devil's name did you come here at all? Why did you not stay with your old uncle and stick to your prayer mumbling?

So bright and happy as she was till you came!—making every one worship her, and yet herself as free as free. And now you, with your beautiful sympathy and what not—perhaps with some love-potion—who knows?—have managed to do what no one else could, and when you have caught your poor little bird, and made it perch on your finger, you quietly make an end of it!"

"Antoñona, Antoñona," interrupted Don Luis, "for God's sake stop! I know I have behaved badly. I ought never to have set eyes on your mistress. I ought never to have let her suppose that I cared for her. But you see I could not help it. I did care for her—and I do care for her. She has all my heart. And yet I have never wittingly enticed her, or laid traps for her love in any way. It is no magic potion, but my own love that I have given her; and yet I must go—must tear the love from my heart and life. God commands it, and I dare not disobey. Do you imagine that I suffer nothing—that it is no great sacrifice I am making? Ah! you don't know. But why cannot the señorita be as strong—or stronger—than I? She knows that I am right, and she will surely arm herself with the same fortitude and resolution."

"But you don't give her the chance of making the sacrifice. It is all very well for you. You have your

victim all ready, in the woman who, you know, is every bit your own. But she has not got your love to offer up. She cannot sacrifice what is not hers. Would you have her say, 'Oh Lord, since he does not care for me, I will sacrifice him?' They say that God never mocks any one; but if He did, I should imagine it would be when such an offering of sour grapes was made to Him."

This was even worse than the corporal chastisement of Antoñona's last visit. It was difficult to know what to reply to such specious reasoning, without entering into an undesirable controversy upon the subject of mutual love. Don Luis buried his face once more in his hands, and his tormentor was discreet enough to be silent.

Presently he looked up, and said, "Well, it is no use talking about it. There seems to be no remedy. What can I do?"

"What can you do?" echoed Antoñona scornfully; and then she added in an insinuating tone, "I will tell you what you can do. If you cannot quite cure my darling's hurt, you can help her to bear it. They say that you are very good. Good people are tender, as well as brave. Don't run away without a friendly word, without coming to say good-bye to her. Ah, do that much! You cannot think how bad she is."

"It would be no use. It would only make it all the harder for her."

"No, no,—you don't see it as I do. You will go, and, in your own clever way you will be able to make her as strong as yourself. And if you could just let her see that you care for her, and are only leaving her because you can't help yourself, but are bound to give up everything for the Church, you would prevent her vanity being hurt;—'self-respect' some folk call it."

"It would be tempting God, and would be dangerous both for her and me."

"And pray how would it be tempting God? He would know that your intentions were good, and would surely give you all the help and strength you might need. And has the señorita no claim upon you? Ought you not to do something for her? Are you not bound to do something? If she were to die of a broken heart, or if—poor lamb!—she should be so beside herself with grief as to do something horrible, I fancy you would be sorry enough then that you had not stretched out a hand to help her on to the right road."

Don Luis started up. "Ah, yes!" he exclaimed, "I would ten thousand times rather be lost myself! Very well, I will go to see her. I can surely be strong enough for that."

Antoñona seized his hand, and kissed it.

"Bless you for a kind word at last!" she cried. "They were right when they said you were a good sort."

"And when do you want me to go?"

"To-night, at ten o'clock. I will wait for you at the street door, and take you to her."

"Does she know that you are here?"

"No, it has been all my own doing. But I shall say that I have seen you, and that you intend coming to bid her farewell. You promise me that you will come?"

"I promise."

"Then good-bye, señor. Don't fail. At ten o'clock, punctually. I shall be at the door."

And Antoñona ran off, clearing the stairs, in her delight, at two or three bounds.

It cannot be denied that Antoñona had proved herself worthy of the occasion, and had shown once more what miracles a woman can work in the ways of self-control, tact and influence, when she sets her mind to it.

Perhaps the most subtle evidence of her masterfulness lay in the appointing of ten o'clock for the interview.

It was done on the spur of the moment, for really, up to the last, she had hardly dared to indulge in hopes of her success—indeed had had only the vaguest notions as to the scope and purposes of her mission—and only now did she face the necessity for making arrangements. Moreover, considering the strictness of etiquette on the subject of gentlemen's visits to ladies, and the shortness of time at disposal, it was a point one might have been excused craving a few minutes to think about.

And yet nothing could have been more happily arranged. Ten o'clock had been the regular hour of Pepita's receptions, and therefore it would be in no way food for comment if Don Luis should be seen entering the house at that time. Being the eve of Saint John, too, the streets would be full of people till very late—all night long probably—and that Don Luis should be abroad would be the most rational thing in the world. Finally there would be some accustomed festivities in the servants' regions, which would afford a sufficient safeguard against undue inquisitiveness from that quarter.

All which comfortable assurances passed through Antoñona's mind as she returned home, and contributed no little to her complacency of spirit as she reviewed the position. For she remembered having once heard a preacher say—and, as an interested

party, she naturally appreciated the wisdom of the remark—that scandal-mongers and scandal-makers ought, if anybody, to have a millstone tied round the neck and be cast into the midst of the sea. Only, the judgment was directed against her neighbours, of course—not against herself.

What remained to be done, now, was the due ordering of things at home to the desired end. For it might be all very well for Don Luis to fear that Pepita's evil estate would be aggravated rather than amended by his visit, but Antoñona had no such fears or intentions—if only the affair were left in her hands.

Pepita's house, like most of those of the rich Andalucians, consisted really of two houses, each with its separate entrance. The one comprised the marble *patio*, with the reception and other rooms of the family; the other went by the somewhat quaint, if appropriate, appellation of the "country house," and contained, besides the kitchens and the servants' apartments, the coach-house and stable, the granary, the bodega—where the oil and wine were stored—the press-house, and the mill. In the latter—round the great kitchen fire in winter, and the open courtyard in summer—the overseers, muleteers, and chief labourers upon the estate were wont to assemble for nightly gossipping and diversions, and preparations were

already being made for signalizing this eve of Saint John with special and very high festivities.

But it was not enough—indeed, it was comparatively little, as Antoñona well knew—that the male branches of the establishment should thus be properly disposed of. The due settlement of all questions between Don Luis and Pepita would require time, and perfect freedom alike from interruption and observation. It must therefore be graciously ordained that no manner of work should be done in the house of Pepita that night, and that, down to the youngest of the hand-maidens, all should have liberty to join in the festive operations elsewhere. Then she herself would be on the look-out for Don Luis at ten o'clock; would let him into the house, and, under her wing, he would be in a moment past all possibly spying eyes.

With regard to Pepita, the chief personage in the drama—and therefore, as is often the case in such circumstances, the least and last thought of—it would be better to tell her as little as possible. She should just know that Don Luis had spontaneously asked for a farewell interview, and that Antoñona had said that she thought he would find her mistress at home that evening, at ten o'clock.

Don Luis was in the meantime occupying himself with no such satisfactory reflections. He was no sooner left alone, than he bitterly repented having yielded to Antoñona's solicitations. The more he thought about it, the more plainly did he see the danger to which he was going to expose himself, and the more infinitesimal seemed the possibly accruing advantages.

Stripping the notion of all sophistry, surely it was only a refinement of cruelty to go and see Pepita that he might just insist the more plainly upon the necessity for their separation. It would be easier and better if not a word was said on either side. To go to her, on the other hand, that he might surrender himself to her fascinations was not for a moment to be thought of. Such an undoing of his life, such a betrayal of his father, such an insult to his bishop—who had procured from the Holy Father a special dispensation for his ordination before the appointed time—would be to give up, almost unsolicited, the position that he had won with such careful toil; and to which he had again, after a period of unworthy tampering with the enemy, and through soul-rending and grievous discipline, struggled.

Then why go to see her at all?

His first impulse was simply to stay away, without giving any excuse. And Antoñona, who had wrought

the mischief, should just wait at that street door till she was sick of it. But no—that would not do. To treat Antoñona badly would be a matter indeed of slight consequence, but he had no right to put any such insult upon Pepita.

Then he would write to her, putting into delicate and affectionate words his reasons for failing to keep his appointment, the tenderness of his sentiments towards her, and yet the inexorable necessity that lay upon him to give up all for his heavenly vocation, and upon her to aid him in the self-sacrifice.

Yes, he would write.

But it is not an easy task to tell a lady that she really must not care for you so much. Especially not easy when there is a rebellious heart that will persist in entering protests against the judgment. Four or five times Don Luis essayed to write his letter, and as often tore up the half-finished production. First it was too tender, then too cold; now it savoured too much of the pulpit, now read like the outcome of a mastering fear—as if Pepita were some potent devourer of men, from whose dreadful fangs he craved to be delivered. Finally, when much paper had been spoiled to very little purpose, save the exercise of patience and humility, he arose from his chair in disgust, and swept away his writing materials.

"It is no use!" he exclaimed; "there is no fighting against it! I must go, and face everything as best I can."

No sooner had he come definitely to this resolution than a strange and very comfortable feeling of assurance stole over him. Of course it was the best thing to be done, now that matters had taken the turn they had. He had been foolish to waste time and thought over any other plan. Pepita was altogether good and gentle—as good as she was gentle; it was not as if he had to do with one of the lustful or self-willed women who could brook no 'nay.' And God would keep him—would put into his mouth such words of wisdom that Pepita would not hesitate to bear him company in his self-sacrifice. How good and pleasant it would be, since he was no longer to fight the battle alone, if he could make her feel something of the joy of sacrifice—make her eager to emulate the holy women who voluntarily, and for heaven's sake, have given up, not only lover, but even husband; as the blessed Edith, for example, lived with her spouse, Saint Edward of England, in separation from all carnal desire! Might not Pepita be another Edith to himself—only more beautiful? Might not she be, after a more poetically separate fashion, his virgin-wife?

It was a thrilling idea, and for a time a very con-

tentful one. But presently one or two low, mundane considerations would persist in creeping in, and troubling the peace of the future Saint Edward. There was something suggestive of wrong-doing in the secrecy of the proposed visit. Ought he not at least to advertise his father of it? Once or twice he got up and took a few steps towards the door, to go in search of Don Pedro—who had returned, he knew, from his ride. But he could not bring himself to do it. He might reveal his own secrets; but to set forth Pepita's, for the sake of obeying a filial duty, was something like robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Nor did he feel himself in that calm and prepared state of mind which would be necessary for a properly judicial announcement of his intention to go and pay Pepita a farewell visit. The future was certainly beautifully arranged, but the present was, nevertheless, decidedly perturbing and difficult. He could not keep still, even when he was by himself, but kept walking with uncertain steps about the room. How then could he quietly discuss matters with another—with a deeply interested some one else? So he became suddenly conscious of the fact that, though the windows were open upon the balcony, the room yet seemed stiflingly hot, as if the ceiling were coming down upon his head; and, moreover, that he had

several hours to get through, somehow, before ten o'clock.

What should he do? To breathe and think freely seemed to require all atmosphere, and all space. At least he would have nothing above him but heaven, and get rid of these four walls.

Again there was a sense of relief in some definite resolution, and still more in active movement. In a few moments he had gained the street, and was striding along by unfrequented routes towards one of the many shady walks which bordered the town.

Nothing has hitherto been said as to the outward appearance of the man who was thus seeking rest from the burden of his harassing thoughts and experiences. It was a sufficiently striking figure that strode hastily along the road, making the passers-by—in a country where men move sedately—turn round with wondering and inquisitive looks. Pepita Jimenez would have been more indifferent to the claims of a manly setting of manliness than women are usually supposed to be, if she had gone on with her part quite unconcernedly after this stranger had appeared on the stage of her life. Tall and well-made, swarthy, and yet delicate of feature, a month

or two of country air and exercise had given Don Luis the healthful glow, and easy decisiveness of bearing, which had been lacking when he was fresh from his cooped-up seminary life and self-effacing training.

But his greatest charm lay in the utter unconsciousness of personal attraction, and the instinctive reservation of self, which are the natural outcome of noble thoughts and a well-ordered inner life. So that, however far acquaintanceship might be pushed, there was always a sense of something better in store—that *terra incognita* (therefore, perhaps, credited with being wondrously good) which is so irresistible.

The coveted shade was reached and passed before Don Luis had wearied himself into something like quietude. Arrived, however, at the ruined convent of Saint Francis de Paula, which lay some two miles from the town, he seated himself upon the base of a rude stone cross, which marked the dividing of the road, and allowed himself to be dominated by the peaceful influences of the scene around him.

The sun was just sinking behind the gigantic sierras that closed in the plain, so that the pinnacles and broken angles of the ruin before him stood out clear and dark against a sky of purple and amethyst. Long shadows were beginning to creep stealthily over the level fields, and drive all the light up upon the

slopes of the eastern hills, whose peaks glowed as if they were of molten gold. Then, just as the dying rays caught the windows and white walls of the far-off Chapel of Our Lady, and of the tiny shrine of a Calvary, there came across the plain the tinkling of the vesper bell, that fulfilled, rather than disturbed, the solemn repose.

Virgo singularis,
Inter omnes mitis,
Nos culpis solutos
Mites fac et castos.

Vitam præsta puram,
Iter para tutum,
Ut videntes Jesum
Semper collætemur.

It was not only the devotion of men—it was all nature that chanted the hymn to her Creator. And Don Luis, flinging down his hat, knelt at the foot of his cross, and joined reverently in the universal *Angelus.*

Then he reseated himself, and watched as the night stole on, spreading her mantle over the scene. The beauty, however, was only changed, not lost. There was depth, mystery, and shadow, and the light was transformed, but there was nothing of blackness or blankness. The clear purple of the sky grew darker, and thereby gave effulgence to the countless points of fire that shone steadily through the rare atmosphere.

The golden glow that overhung the horizon died away, and straightway the moon sailed up to clothe the trees and the running water with her sweet, silvery sheen. Here and there, like gentle echoes of the stars, glowworms illumined the greenness that over-arched them; while the nightingale watched among her sleeping fellows, and seemed loth to cease her song, that night, as day, was "good."

But it was getting late, and there was appreciable danger in the voluptuousness which purity itself can impart, when it brings rest to weakened flesh and spirit. Don Luis rose to his feet, gave another lingering look over the fair scene, and then bent his steps reluctantly homewards.

In somewhat aimless fashion, however; following now some roundabout path through the wood, and pausing again, as he came out at the rivulet's edge, to watch the ripples as they danced in the moonlight, and seemed to mock him in their busy joyfulness.

For he felt once more dreadfully afraid of himself, and of the mission upon which he was bent. He looked around him for some helpful influence, and called upon his guardian angel for some sign of standing by him. He half expected at each step to meet with some miracle—some undeniable portent—that should be his warrant for going no further. And the only response was of peace—of contentment

—of *Love!* The stars toyed with the upward glances of the children of earth; the nightingales sang of enchantment; the murmuring brook laughed gaily at any notion of blank and untoward discipline; the leaves and flowers bent their heads to the whispers of the evening breeze, while heaven itself shone placidly upon the doings and undoings of its offspring.

No help for him from outside? Then he would be strong in himself,—sufficient in his own manhood,—better than the heaven that seemed to mock his prayer. He braced himself up with a sudden effort, flung off all irresolution, and set his face steadfastly towards the accomplishment of his task.

Ten o'clock struck from a neighbouring church as he entered the town, and he quickened his already hasty steps so that he might not arrive very late at his destination.

The eve and day of Saint John are doubtless a great festival of the Catholic Church. And yet they have a strange and suspicious smack of paganism about their customs;—a minimum of the religious element and a maximum of the profanely natural. Possibly it is the near coincidence of the festival with the summer solstice that has stamped upon it its character of Love's fête. In the time of the Moors it was dedicated to feats of gallantry and intrigue, and we seem to have chosen our Office for the day rather from our

old romances than from the breviaries. So the young maidens throng to the fountain to bathe their faces in approved fashion, that the lover may be steadfast, or, perchance, that he may appear on the scene. So potent incantations are made over the burning rosemary and vervain, that a future bright with Cupid's joys may be secured, and that desolate homes may know the sound of children's patter. In all directions there is the sound of the tinkling guitar, as accompaniment of amorous serenadings, and the cloaked cavalier feasts with even greater devotion than is his wont upon iron,[1] as he whispers impassioned nothings to his bar-imprisoned mistress.

Don Luis had neglected to take into account the impediments he would meet with in the streets. All the world was abroad, and with one consent slow of movement; while the numberless stalls of the fruit and toy sellers, and of peripatetic manufacturers of *turrones*[2] and cooling drinks, with the trays of their humbler brethren and sisters, made locomotion along tortuous ways that were barely adequate to ordinary requirements of traffic, a work requiring time and patience.

[1] In Andalucia the lover is said to "eat iron" —*comer hierro* —from the bars which secure the casemates of the houses, and through which he carries on his love-making.

[2] *Turron* = a kind of cake made principally of almonds, a favourite Spanish sweetmeat.

It was close upon the half-hour, therefore, when he arrived within sight of Pepita's gate, and paused for an instant to recover himself, and try to still the beating of his heart.

"*Dios mio!*" he exclaimed, looking at his watch, "nearly half-past ten! She will have been expecting me for the last half-hour!"

It was not a calculation tending to inspire a serene courage. Nor yet was Antoñona's greeting, as she put a hand—or rather a claw—upon his shoulder in the darkness of the porch, growling,—

"Ah, vagabond! I began to think you weren't coming. Where have you been? You deserve that all that is good and pretty should wait for you—don't you!"

Even as she spoke she was dragging him forward towards the door, as if reluctant to loose him now that he was in her grasp. Without another word they gained the wicket—Antoñona shutting it gently behind them—crossed the court, mounted the stairs, and, after traversing *salas* and passages, arrived at the door of Pepita's *sanctum*.

The house seemed deserted, and plunged in deathlike silence. The roar of the street was left far behind, and an occasional burst of merriment from the servants' quarters, which came in through an open window, just as a faint murmur, only

seemed to make the stillness more oppressive as it died away.

Antoñona knocked gently, opened the door without waiting for permission, and, ushering in Don Luis with the words, "Señorita, here is Señor Don Luis come to say good-bye," discreetly withdrew, and left the two face to face.

The observant reader must have appreciated the spirit of candour which has inspired the narrator of this history, leading him to disdain any enlisting of potent Fate, or magic of phantasy, upon the side of weak human nature, and causing him to set forth in the simplest—perhaps some will say rather vulgar—way, how two people who were lovely and admirable of character, became entangled by the natural impulses of their own passions, and suffered themselves to be dragged along by the somewhat rough hand of a scheming third person.

This same love of truthfulness forbids now the suppression of a little episode which may throw some additional—if unpleasant—light upon the character of our heroine, and proves her to have been, with all her transcendent goodness, a very mortal. Antoñona did not mention the impending visit of Don Luis until eight o'clock, and Pepita, who had been talking of

dying, and was certainly in a condition calculated to move the sternest to pity, thenceforward thought of little else than how to make herself attractive in the eyes of her errant lover. She bathed her face carefully, removing all those marks of excessive weeping which destroy beauty, but contentedly leaving behind sufficient trace of grief to add interest to her pale countenance. She arranged her hair in a certain artistic disorder, which was grateful to the eye while yet perfectly decorous. She looked anxiously to her white, taper hands; and finally, eschewing all ornament, donned an artfully simple evening dress, which showed off her well-rounded form . . . as it deserved to be shown. In a word, carefully suppressing all evidence of art or labour, she neglected no means of giving fair play to whatsoever of pure, natural loveliness she was endowed with; as if it were an all-prevailing something which could not be hidden, notwithstanding her unhappiness and dire afflictions.

Over these necessary preparations more than an hour was consumed. Then, with a final touch here and there, and a well-satisfied review of herself in the mirror, she descended, at half-past nine, to the oratory. Lighting the candles upon the small side altar—where stood the infant Jesus—she observed for the first time, with a sharp twinge of compunction, that the flowers were all drooping and withered, and,

dropping upon her knees, she poured forth passionate expressions of penitence for her neglect. Then she lifted her eyes, and, with touching frankness and confidence, opened out the burden of her heart. To a Jesus of Nazareth, with heavy cross and thorny crown,—to an Ecce Homo, bound, scourged, and mocked,—to a Christ crucified, blood-stained, dying, it would have been difficult—ay! impossible—to pray thus. But to that little, smiling child, that tangible personification of brightness and love, who had been her guest for so many years, and her daily companion, it was easy enough. Surely He would let her keep Don Luis! Surely He Who was so full of sympathy, Who possessed all the world, and worlds upon worlds, would give up this to Him insignificant unit among many, who was to her just all in all!

She asked it, at any rate—and believed it.

And then she retired to her own boudoir—to wait with what self-control she could muster, until Don Luis should be pleased to make his appearance.

As we have seen, he tarried long. So long that when at last the eagerly desired, and yet in some sort dreaded, announcement came, poor Pepita was being fast reduced to a state of agonized despair which would have interfered sadly with the effects of her forethought and careful preparation.

The visit began in the most grave and formal manner. At Pepita's invitation Don Luis, retaining his hat and stick in hand, took a seat at some distance from the couch from which she had risen at his entrance, and the usual commonplaces passed from one to the other. A taper burned upon a small table drawn up to the couch, shedding its soft rays upon Pepita's discreet and long-suffering look, and there was also a lamp upon the centre table, but the greater portion of the room was still left in shadow. The windows, which looked upon a small enclosed garden, stood wide open on account of the heat. Over the bars clustered some creeping roses and jasmine, which waved their heads to and fro lazily in the evening breeze, and cast fantastic shadows upon the broad path of moonlight which lay upon the floor, disputing pre-eminence successfully with the faint artificial light. Ever and anon a *susurrus* of laughter, or the tinkle of a guitar, swept up from the far-off world, to break in for a moment upon the monotonous *drip-drip* of the fountain in the garden, and startle the air, heavy with the scent of roses and sweet basil. It was a scene and a place where asceticism might be forgiven if it slept.

After the first trivial questions and responses there was a long pause, which neither dared to break. Presently Pepita began again :—

"And so, Don Luis, at last you have condescended to come and bid me good-bye. I had lost all hope of seeing you again."

"You are a little unjust," he replied. "I came before to say good-bye—with my father. And, as we had not the pleasure of seeing you, we left our cards. We heard that you were unwell, and have sent each day to inquire after you. And now," he added, falling back in his confusion upon former questions, "you are really better?"

"Oh yes, I must say that I feel much better. And I have been altogether grateful for your kind inquiries. I know that your father, in his friendly interest, will have been anxious about me, so please tell him, from me, that I am myself again. But why did not Don Pedro come with you? Is he so very busy?"

"My father, Señorita, is not with me perhaps because he does not know of my visit. I have come alone purposely, because my farewell has in it a special character—with which, fortunately, his adieux would have nothing in common. He goes from you for a few weeks only, to take up again speedily the thread of intercourse. I go, probably, for ever. Or, if I return, it will be in a position very different from that which I occupy to-day."

Before Don Luis' grave tones, and quiet, formal manner, Pepita felt her hopes of happiness die, her

power of self-control vanish. She had set mind and heart upon securing his love, and vanquishing his resolution, and she was faced at the outset by the revelation that all her arts and strivings were as the waves that dash idly upon the rock. He was going! Her youth, beauty, graciousness, love, were all powerless to prevent it. She was condemned to worse than perpetual widowhood, she was to go on for ever loving the only man she ever had loved, or could love, and he would give her nothing in return.

She was, withal, one of those characterful natures in whom desire is only reinforced by opposition. A certain innate modesty and pride had taught her all proper dissimulation of feeling under ordinary circumstances, and even a curbing of undue sentiment; but she was no mistress of the world's ways, or of the airy and meaningless periphrases into which it dissolves its finest emotions; while her strangely contrasted life, first of implicit obedience, and then of as unquestioned authority, gave her no helpful experience in stifling the first wild determination to conquer—or let everything perish in the attempt. So she spoke, at first quietly enough, but soon intent only upon giving her soul a sensible word-form, offering herself to the man she loved with the idyllic innocence of a Chloe or Ruth of old.

"Then you persist," she said, "in your determination! Are you so sure of your vocation?—sure that you are fitted for the priesthood? Don Luis, I want to try for a few moments to crush back all sentiment, and ordinary womanly reserve, and speak as if I had no interest whatever in the question. If a poor country girl, unversed in the arts of the world and conquest, has been able, with no effort on her part, and in the short space of a few weeks, so to move your heart that you could not restrain your evidences of passion—could not help giving her a sign of profane love which is wrong for any one to give unauthorized, and infinitely more so for a priest—what do you suppose your fate will be when, in the great world, you are brought into contact with women infinitely more subtle and dangerous? You will meet those who, known only to the outside world by, perhaps, some high-sounding title, and surrounded wherever they go by a dazzling halo of incense and worship, will admit you behind the scenes, and flatter you with the sweet thought that to you they are 'Antoñita,' or 'Angelita;'—who will enthral your vision with all delicate and costly aids to beauty, and your intellect with fit and comprehending talk of politics, literature,—or philosophical religion itself. If your subjugation by this country girl has been the result merely of some idle caprice, or mo-

mentary lusting after pleasantness, how will you not, at every step in your career, fall a prey to like passions? Go your ways into the world by all means. She whom you leave would not have such a man at her side, nor would you be a fit husband for any woman who honours herself. *Only*—don't add to it all the iniquity of becoming God's apostle and representative. The Church has need of better men to serve her—men more capable of enduring strength and virtue. But you may say that such a view of the case is an insult to you—that it is no transient passion, or weak yielding to lust, that has come upon you, but a deep, holy love. Well?—either way you are wrong to persist in your intention of taking orders. The one whom you honour with such a love may be unworthy of it indeed, but what right have you to leave her? Has a lawful love no lawful claims? Do you not think that when you sacrifice yourself you are sacrificing her—and unnecessarily? By the degree and depth of your own suffering you should measure hers. And you should remember that she has none of the strong life of a man; none of the self-control and guidance with which his experience and learning endow him; no intoxicating elixir of fame or glorious work to soothe and heal her crushed and wounded spirit, but only the sad heritage of despair, with involuntary separation from all earth holds that

is good. Your religion calls for unstained hands—will you make your first offering at the altar the blood of a human soul that has been entrusted to you?"

Pepita paused, overcome by emotion. Don Luis, too, had to struggle hard to keep in check the storm of sorrow and love which her words had once more roused within him, and which, despite all his endeavours, asserted itself in his trembling voice, when, after a moment's pause, he replied to her:—

"And I, too, Señorita, will try to put away all personal interest and feeling when I speak to you, and—though after all you only raise side issues—will give you reason for reason, and argument for argument. Nothing was further from my thoughts when I came to you than to enter upon any species of controversy, but I cannot bear to pose as a monster either of iniquity or cruelty, and so must, perforce, reply to your innuendoes. That I have led hitherto a life of strict retirement has in no way militated against my seeing women, and being able to estimate the worth and potency of their grace and beauty. Nay, the *theory* that one forms in these matters,—the product of reading, thought, and warm imagination,—is probably very much more perfect and seductive than the actual entering into possession. Do you think that when a man contemplates taking upon

himself the solemn office of the priesthood, he does not set all these things before his mind in due order? Ah yes!—perfectly I knew, and, I believe, exaggerated, the sacrifice I made when I renounced the love of women. And inasmuch as I exaggerated it, you may be sure that I gave due weight to every possible adjunct of beauty and grace—to the charms of dress and accomplishment, of intellect and refinement, of all the thousand touches wherewith man may polish and make glorious the originally perfect work of his Creator. If then, when I come into actual contact with these brilliant women of the world of whom you speak, I find only a disenchantment—a sad difference between the conception and the reality—I am hardly likely to become the easy prey to their blandishments that you imagine."

"Forgive me," interrupted Pepita, "all that is mere sophism. Perhaps you have pictured to yourself a beauty and worth that you will never find. But you will discover, none the less surely, that the real—the tangible—that which appeals to the senses—possesses a seduction of its own of which no product of fancy or theory can boast. Devout imaginings may combat successfully with mundane dreams, but devout imaginings will face mundane realities only to fall to the ground."

"It may be so as a general rule, but I believe that

with me imagination is more powerful than any possible appeal in the world to my senses—save that which you can make."

"And why the reservation? Am I rather a creature of imagination than a reality? Is it only the ideal Pepita Jimenez that has dominated you—the child of this same powerful imagination?"

"No, I believe that the reality is in all things conformed to the ideal. And yet the real draws its power from the ideal. It may be that you are something for which my soul has craved ever since she came into being—the true supplement of herself, as the perfume of the flower."

"As if I did not fear it! You confess it yourself! It is some craving of a pure and unsatisfied soul which for the moment has taken my form."

"No, no, Pepita! why will you torment yourself in this way? What I love is yourself—for yourself alone. But it is a self so spiritual, so delicate, that I cannot think of it just as something that appeals to the senses. It seems as if you had always dwelt in my mind and knowledge; and I find, now, my ideal justified and satisfied in like manner as I have learned that the craving which a soul may have for an unknown God may receive its accomplishment in a Father infinitely beyond the fairest and grandest conception."

"But it may be the essential—the ideal—woman without being I myself?"

"No, the ideal woman passed before me—and passed away—before I saw you. No queen of the world, merely because she *is* queen of the world, can ever be to me half as real—half as seductive—as the fair women who have peopled the region of my imagination, or can be surrounded by so glorious a halo. I have had my Lauras and Beatrices, my Juliets and Margarets. I have enthroned them at my side, I have had them to spur me on to great and noble deeds, I have given them the sweet humility and devotion of a Ruth, the innocence of the patriarchal age, the eloquence of a Hypatia. They have been keen of wit, noble of blood, beauteous of form, and they have lavished upon me all their treasures of mind and body. And straightway, my soul awaking to God, I have seen all these promises and visions of the world—all that could minister to sense and passion—shrivel up and pass away before the sweep of divine love which consumed me. Not from ignorance, nor yet from uncalculating despite, have I turned from earthly delights and honourings. The love of woman has appealed to me with all the adjuncts it could borrow from hot blood and fired imagination. But I have looked beyond what are, after all, merely shadows and reflections of beauty

and delight, to Him who is the Altogether Lovely, and the only source of abiding joy; gazed until I could say that it was no longer I who lived but Christ living in me."

He broke off, with a rapt look upon his face. His words, coming softer and softer, and yet gaining in earnestness and power as he spoke, seemed to hold his hearer with some spell-binding. For a few moments there was silence between them. Then, with a sigh, and in a harder voice, he went on:—

"Then I came to know you. I had become arrogant perhaps—perhaps self-righteous—and God wished to humble me. At any rate you were allowed to draw away my heart from Him, my feet into lower and crooked paths. And now you mock me by calling me light of purpose, and pleasure-seeking. Therein, as it seems to me, you do yourself wrong—as if any other could have done just as much as yourself. I know that now, more than ever, I ought to be humble, and willing to accept rebuke; and, if God, to punish my pride, has removed His grace from me it is quite possible that I have sinned from low motive. But I cannot yet look at it in that light. It may be only another hallucination—another remnant of unsubdued pride—but it seems to me that in you I have just found, and, finding, could not but bow before, the

substance—the realization—of all those dreams of former days which were dissipated and routed from my mind by the power of divine love. And as there has been no idle motive in this new worship so has there been nothing gradual in its ascendancy. I loved you from the first moment I saw you—almost before I saw you—certainly long before I knew that I loved you. Yes, I see a strange, a supernatural element in it all, as if it had been ordained for me—written in the book of my fate from the beginning of my days."

"And *if* written, *if* ordained," exclaimed Pepita impetuously, "why not submit to it? Why struggle against it? Ah, Luis, sacrifice something to our love! Do you think that *I* have made no sacrifice? Do you think it is a light thing for me to have put away womanly blushing and shrinking in order to make this effort to secure our mutual happiness? I, too, loved you—I believe—before I saw you, and now I have no thought or being apart from you. It is true that you have not had in my poor mind the powerful rivals which I have had to encounter in yours. Neither by force of intellect or of will—by nature or by grace—could I hope to attain to an intimate life with God. Such spheres are closed to me. But I do know Him nevertheless, and do love Him with a sincere and true heart, though my know-

ledge is bounded by the manifestation of Himself in His works—in the records of His power and goodness. And, if I have not lived with such heroic visions as those you describe, I have not been quite without my dreams of some one nobler and greater than the men who surrounded me, and claimed my hand,—of some one whose companionship would be altogether sweet and good, and before whom one might be proud to bow. That some one must have been yourself. The thought came to me when I heard of you, and when we met I knew that it was so. And then, you see, my imagination not being so powerful and rich as yours, I found in you, not just the realization of my dreams, but something infinitely more beautiful and desirable. So I was hopelessly yours from the first. If, as you say, perfect love is to die to self and live only in the beloved object, then that love is mine, for I have certainly lost my separate existence in yours. And yet I have fought against the spell—if helplessly. I have asked God to take away the love, or life itself, and He has not deigned to hear me. I have besought the blessed Mother to efface your image from my heart, but in vain. I have made endless promises and vows if only I were released from the dominion of this passion, but no help has come to me. And so I came to pray that you might be given over to me, that you might be released from all

compromise with the Church, and that you might be inspired with a love for me as great, as irresistible, as that which I felt for you. Tell me, Don Luis—frankly—if heaven has been quite deaf to *that* petition? Or is it that, to bring into bondage a small soul, unpractised, moreover, and weak as mine, a poor love suffices; while to conquer you, watched over and kept by great thoughts and limitless desires, there is need of something far more potent, a passion of love which I cannot inspire, cannot even enter into?"

"No, no," said Don Luis, as Pepita paused for an answer. "It is no question of greatness or littleness of soul. But what is right for you is not right for me. You are free—I am not. The love I bear you is as deep and true as man can give to woman, but against it there are ranged heaven's call, my vows, and all the labours and purposes of my life. Forgive me if I speak plainly. I ought—I *must!* For you to yield to your love is no wrong, no humiliation. For me to yield would be perdition, and an infinite lowering of self. It would be a renouncing of God for one of His creatures, a forswearing of my devotion to His work, a casting down of the image of Christ which I have laboured to set up in my heart and life, and a bringing into fresh existence the old man which I have crucified. Why—why?—instead of all this,

should not you, by the power of the very love that holds you, bring yourself to the point of a noble self-sacrifice? Is it not possible to love one another as brother and sister, without stain or wrongful thought? God, by the pure fire of His love, can so penetrate and fulfil the soul that, just as the metal in the furnace becomes a mass of living, dazzling light, and yet is still nothing but metal, so the affections, even while they remain all-human, may become so etherealized and purified that they will respond to every call God may make upon them. Then they may delight in themselves and in all reciprocation, even as they delight in the only somewhat higher love of the God who is the God of love. Let us, one in spirit, mount this perhaps difficult ascent! Let us together strive after this sinless joy, which is attainable even by mortals! But to that end we must submit first to separation. I must go where duty, promise and the voice of the Almighty call me; and you—"

"And *I?*" cried Pepita. She had been weeping silently, but now lifted up her head with a gesture of despair. "And I?—Ah, I see how it is! I am not of that metal. It is not such as I whom this fire can purge or strengthen. Let me confess everything, putting even shame away from me. All your subtle distinctions and refinements are nothing to me. I

cannot enter into them—my rebellious spirit says a peremptory 'nay' to the very effort. It is *you* I love —you, just as you are. I want your lips, your eyes, your sweet voice, your words of love. Never, never could I do as you ask—never follow where you would go. If you soar away up there, I must remain behind. Ah—I wish I was dead! I deserve to die, I want to die! So, perhaps, I should be freed from these terrible, aching desires and longings that bind me down, and be able to love you in that ethereal way you describe. Then, perhaps, I could follow you wherever you might go—watch over you when you slept—know all your thoughts. Then, perhaps, it could be spirit first, and dull sense nowhere. But so long as I live that cannot be. Ah, if you would but kill me! I am no woman—no Christian—only an evil thing and idolater!"

She stopped, her voice drowned in her sobs. Don Luis, whatever might be his sufferings, resolutely held his peace. After a moment or two she seemed to pull herself together with a great effort, and said, slowly,—

"And now you despise me—rightly. Well! so you will kill me better than by a blow, and your hand and your conscience will be free from stain. Farewell,—I am going. Good-bye, good-bye for ever!"

Even as she spoke she rose from the couch, and, with averted face and drooping head, moved listlessly towards the inner room. Don Luis sat still for a moment, bound by the great fight of passion and duty that swept over him, and yet chiefly conscious of the grim fact that she was passing out of his life for ever,—conscious of it as one in a dream may see impending ruin and yet be unable to raise an averting hand. Then love and pity thrust fear and duty savagely back, and he rushed after her, calling her name aloud.

But it was too late.—She had gone.

For an instant he paused upon the threshold of her chamber, and then he, too, disappeared into the darkness that lay beyond.

Has Nature so profound a sympathy with humanity? Is she not rather like the treacherous wave that will open for a moment to be the hiding place of a tragedy, and straightway go unconcernedly on its dancing way? Not an accented tremor disturbed the peace of the deserted room. The moonlight lay placidly upon the ground, or toyed with the shadows; the flowers nodded lazily over the window bars; the fountain rose and fell in unceasing and drowsy

cadence. And moonlight and perfume, shadow and sound, held within their embrace a scene where all the world and existence were changed for two of Nature's children, who were greater far than Nature herself.

Half an hour elapsed, and Don Luis came forward again through the darkness, and, dropping upon the chair which he had before occupied, leaned forward with his elbows upon his knees, and covered his face with both hands, in an attitude of supreme dejection. For some minutes he remained alone and motionless, unheeding even when Pepita stood before him with downcast eyes and shamed face.

"Now I know," she said presently, in a low, thrilling voice, "now I see what I have done, and how unworthy I am. I have nothing to plead in my excuse save a mad love. But at least do not believe that I have plotted to ruin your life. If it has been wickedness it has also been love, and the blame of it all rests upon me. I deserve more than ever that you should leave me, and you may surely go without stain. If you have erred it has only been in yielding to your pity and compassion, and your sin is but light. Go! it is I now who beseech it of you. Go! and God will forgive you. You may be freed from all shadow of fault, and may yet fulfil your intent of becoming God's minister. And then by your holy

and noble life you will not only purge away the record of what seems to you a fall, but even purchase forgiveness for me. There is nothing to bind you to me. Or, if there is, I break the bond, now, and you are free. Let it suffice for me to have made you take a first step in wrong doing. Do not let me drag you down further.--Ah, my God! There is neither virtue nor right shame in me!"

As she uttered the last words she knelt before him, and bowed her head nearly to the ground. And still he made no sign, even of hearing her. After a moment or two of silence she began again, in a voice choked with tears,—

"Why do you not go? I beg and pray of you to leave me. I shall be able to bear it—to bear your absence and even your despite. I shall be always yours, but will not see you again—will not do anything to bring to your memory the recollection of this wretched, blissful night."

Had he any idea of drawing back,—of taking up again the useless conflict? If he had, the thought vanished with Pepita's words. He started to his feet, stooped over her, and, raising her in his arms, parted the wandering hair gently upon her forehead and covered her face with passionate kisses.

"My life!" he exclaimed, "my beloved! why do you speak so?—Why stoop before me? It is I, not

you, who have been the sinner—the weak fool. Truly," he went on, in a bitter tone, "angels and devils may make a sport and jest of me! I have been a sham saint. I have not had strength to resist you, or frankness to be open with you; and when you have bestowed all your sweet love, and love's favours, upon me, I have not had the grace to receive them in any but my own brute way. What you have ever seen in me to love I cannot conceive. My goodness is all leaf—no fruit; my knowledge the outcome of reading devout books like so many novels; my boasted 'call' the fabric of a dream. If these things had been anything more substantial they would not have so utterly failed me when brought to the test of experience. It might have needed a miracle to resist you, but the miracle would have been forthcoming. If I had been really a 'chosen vessel,' God would surely have interposed to guard what He had set apart for Himself. You ask me to leave you?—I cannot! To go and carry out my wish to be a priest?—it is useless! I never was drawn towards such an idea by anything but pride and worldly ambition."

"I won't have you say such hard things of yourself," cried Pepita, smiling through her tears. "And don't you know how you hurt me when you talk in that way? Am I then so poor an alternative? Have I nothing in common with a noble ideal? If

you cannot take me for pure love's sake—choosing me freely as in some sort the fit companion of your life—go, and never a word of complaint or upbraiding shall pass my lips."

"Ah, Pepita," stammered Don Luis in his remorse and love, "you are all too good! Did I not rightly say that I was not deserving of such a precious gift as yourself, and did not know how to receive it? You know how weak I am, how I need a companion, and how—without you—I have been able to do just nothing. Let us try to do better things together."

It was not a very fit reply to Pepita's appeal. Who *can* say the right thing at the right time? But it seemed sufficiently solemn and acceptable to the parties concerned, judging from the number of seals with which the confession was attested and the new conditions of life delivered.

It was about two o'clock in the morning when a series of discreet coughs, and unwonted shuffling of feet announced that Antoñona was coming to separate the lovers.

"Do you know what time it is, Don Luis?" she said, putting on her brusquest manner as she came forward. "Don't you think that it is high

time you brought your sermon to a close? It must have had more to do with the Forty Hours than the last Seven Words."

"Yes, yes," said Pepita. "He shall go directly."

"The sooner the better," growled Antoñona, turning on her heel. "I will wait below."

Pepita was as one transformed. It seemed as if all the natural joyousness of childhood, which harsh circumstance had stifled, together with the eager hopefulness of youth which all unloving companionship had frowned down, had suddenly awaked to assert their rights and sovereignty; as the long-delayed springtime, in its irrepressible and jocund life, will trip up the heels of a lingering winter.

A fine city dame, indoctrinated with social proprieties, might find something foolish—censurable, even—in what we could here relate of Pepita's doings. But Pepita, however refined she might be, was nevertheless a creature of Nature. So, when she found all the obstacles to her happiness removed, and Don Luis vanquished,—when she believed herself loved, adored, by the man whom she loved and adored—she permitted herself to indulge in perpetual little signs of joy and fond affection, which had something infantile and innocent in them.

Don Luis must go, and the sooner the better, as Antoñona had said. But there were some offices of

love which might first be performed,—and made the medium of more love. It was well that Antoñona, with all her brusqueness, was long-suffering.

When Pepita was left alone she stood for some minutes with clasped hands, the light of joy and love dying gradually out of her face, and giving place to an anxious and troubled expression.

Had she, after all, done grievous wrong in luring Don Luis to her side?

Had she spoken, or acted, in any such way as would lower her in his esteem, when he was away from the influence of her presence, and able to think calmly and dispassionately—as he above all men *would* think calmly and dispassionately—over all the occurrences of the night?

But he must know that, if she had overstepped in any way the usual limits of maidenly reserve, or violated the dictates of pride, she had been moved thereto first by love, and secondly by impulse. He could not—could not—misjudge or despise her for it.

It was not so easy to assure herself upon the other point. Besides putting forth, perhaps, sacrilegious

hands, she had spoken lightly of holy mysteries, and had half scornfully rejected the idea—the desire, even—of treading a path above that of ordinary mortals.

Well,—she would go to the good father vicar to-morrow, confess all her sins and peccadilloes, and submit cheerfully to any penance, howsoever hard, that he might be pleased to inflict. What would she not cheerfully do for Heaven—now that she had won Don Luis? And then she would buy some jewels to put upon the bosom of the image in the convent chapel, and would renew her devotion to the Blessed Mother, who would doubtless enable her to obtain the favour and benediction of Heaven.

While Pepita was thus carefully casting up her accounts with both worlds, and finally coming to a pre-eminently satisfactory balance, Don Luis was wending his way homewards, not without his share of anxious thought. Antoñona had seen him to the street door. As he was leaving he turned suddenly to her and said, "You know everything, Antoñona—tell me exactly what relations your mistress has had with the Count de Genazahar."

"Oho, Don Luis!" replied Antoñona, "you are beginning to be jealous very early."

"It is not jealousy at all. It is mere curiosity."

"I am glad to hear it. I don't like jealous folk.

Yes, I can tell you. The Count is a thoroughly bad egg, and as vain as a peacock withal. He tried hard to make the señora fall in love with him, and marry him, and because she gave him a pretty good piece of her mind, and would have nothing to do with him, he is pleased to imagine that he owes her a grudge. But that does not prevent him keeping something over a thousand dollars that Don Gumersindo lent him some years back—lent him at the señora's asking, for she is as good as gold—and upon no better security than a bit of paper. I suppose he thought that if Doña Pepita had been so kind to him when she was married, she would be kinder still when she was a widow. And when he found out his mistake he was not best pleased."

"Ah," said Don Luis, half to himself, "so that is how the land lies! He owes Pepita money. Thank you, Antoñona.—Good-night."

The heavy-eyed morning was just pushing back the curtains of the night. Now and then a pair of faithful lovers passed on their way, heedless of time, or only conscious of the darkness as being their day; in the open booths the itinerant merchant slept by his goods and chattels; and the waifs and strays, who knew no roof save the starlit sky, lay huddled upon the doorsteps, and upon the broad seats of the promenade. But all was still,—with the ghastly quiet

and colour which perhaps more nearly resemble death than any other hour and circumstance of life can do.

Don Luis paced on, too excited to think or care for sleep, too absorbed to pay much heed to his surroundings. And yet these probably, even while they were ignored, lent their own sobering colour to his thoughts. He ought to be very happy—he *must* be very happy. He had won the heart of a woman who was as fair, alike in form and soul, as the warmest imagination could desire. He had taken a resolution which he could in no real way regret,—a resolution which cleared up numberless doubts, and promised him an abundant happiness in the future. His fall—or what he had been pleased to stigmatize as a fall—now that he looked at it from the solid platform of accomplished fact did not seem such a very awful or shameful thing. It was really only a change—it might be said a proper reforming—of thought and conviction. He was better fitted to be a country gentleman, using well his wealth and position, than a priest. His mysticism had been the baseless product of youthful imagination, inspired by unthoughtful book-learning and the voices which come in solitude. He could smile as he called to mind the supernatural visions and graces which he deemed himself to have received, and which had caused him

to dream of perfect holiness, ecstatic contemplation, and absolute soul freedom. What special gifts, as he had himself often asked, did he possess, that such favour should be showed to him? How many years had he passed in prayer and fasting, and self-discipline? There could not be a better proof that it was all an illusion than the simple fact that a loving word or caress from Pepita fulfilled him with a joy and satisfaction which he had never tasted in any moment of divine communion.

But,—there was just light enough for him to see a good many "buts"—he had not made his change gracefully. He had not been as helpful and nice to Pepita as he should have been—as she deserved—as he would have liked to be. And there were some unpleasant little experiences to be faced. What would his uncle think?—What the bishop?—What the world? And, above all, what would his father say?—What just ground would he not have for anger against him, his son, now his successful rival?

Well, the deed was done, past recall—even if he could have desired the recall. And now it remained for him to make the most of his new life. Surely it, too, might be made good. He would found a noble house, that should be the home of all domestic virtues and holy joys, a centre of religion, culture and benevolence. Conjugal love, with Pepita and

himself, should be so made at once the subject and minister of a higher life, that the peace of God should unfailingly rest upon their home, converting it into a very temple, wherein they should be the high priests, until it should please Heaven to translate them to serve together in a better temple above.

But before he could proceed to lay so much as the foundation of this new ideal there were two difficulties to be smoothed away. His father must be fully informed of all that had taken place—if possible propitiated; and accounts must be squared with De Genazahar. If the former was the harder and more unwelcome task, the latter was, in some respects, the graver.

It was only a few hours since the encounter with De Genazahar and his boon companions in the Casino, and yet what a revulsion of life and feeling had taken place during the interval! Perhaps no better gauge could have been supplied—and Don Luis half laughed as he appreciated it—than the difference in his attitude towards the world then and now. Then, in his character of priest and stranger, he had to stand by and hear Pepita evil spoken of, and refrain from visiting either the speaker or the no less cowardly listeners with the castigation which they so richly deserved. Now, as Pepita's accepted suitor, and as a man with a great stake in all the busy life

that surged around him, his mind went out as unrestrainedly towards thoughts of vengeance as before it had submitted to the ruling of peace. And this, too, while his hatred of needless strife, his abhorrence of duelling, and the religious beliefs that taught him to live in charity with all men remained unchanged,—indeed were quickened into yet stronger life by the wave of human tenderness that had so suddenly engulfed him.

An encounter it must be. It was a barbarous thing, and certainly Pepita had no need of blood to wash away the calumny. As certainly the Count had not believed a word that he had uttered. But that only made his offence the worse, and, as the insult had been a public one, so must the avenging of it be public. Once happily over this, he would pray to be delivered from the recurrence of any such grievous necessity.

Then the sooner the better. And, to save all ridiculous formality—to save moreover a needless dragging of Pepita's name to the front—he would seek De Genazahar himself, and pick some other quarrel with him.

Where could he be found? He had evidently come in from the country that day, and, fresh to the dissipation of the town, would be still indulging somewhere in his favourite vice of gambling,—at the

Casino, probably. At any rate it would be worth while to see if he were there.

He found the Casino still open, but almost in darkness. Only one, inner room was brilliantly lit. His instinct had not led him wrong. Standing at the half open door, himself shrouded in the dimness, he saw five men playing monte. De Genazahar held the bank. At his side were two strangers, whom Don Luis did not know; the other three of the party were Currito, the doctor, and a captain of the *cazadores.* Matters could not have been better arranged for his purpose. He stood for a few minutes watching them, and then stole quietly out of the house and away home. Pausing only to ask the servant who opened the door for news of his father, he mounted upon tiptoe to his room, and, opening a desk, took out one hundred and fifty dollars, which he secured in his purse. Then he descended rapidly, told the servant to watch for his return, and in a few minutes was once more at the Casino.

This time he walked straight into the room, but then paused, and finally advanced to the table in a hesitating sort of way, as if not quite at his ease.

The players stared at him in astonishment. "*You* here!" exclaimed Currito. "And at this time of night —or morning!"

"Oh, he is going to give us another sermon," sneered the Count.

"Not a sermon exactly," replied Don Luis quietly. "You see the last one I preached had such a very poor effect that I took it as evidence of my being upon the wrong road, so I have chosen another path altogether. You have been the means of my conversion, Count. I have said good-bye to my robes, and am going to enjoy myself a little. Why should I not? I am in the 'flower of my youth,' as people say."

"Delighted to hear it, I am sure," said De Genazahar. "Only, take care, my boy! That same flower is a very delicate one—very easily soiled."

"Leave me to look after that," laughed Don Luis. "You are playing monte? I am inspired—I feel it! May I join you? You are dealing, Count;—do you know it would be great fun to break the bank?"

"Eh?—have you been having something strong at supper? Well—I am ready. Out with the coin, and take a hand."

There was no longer any doubt as to his being in earnest, nor yet as to the acceptableness of his company, when Don Luis sat down and laid upon the table a sum as great as the total contents of the bank. De Genazahar proceeded to deal, in silence, but a glitter in his eye, and a paled

cheek, showed his appreciation of the prospective spoil.

"It does not require a very great amount of brain —does it?" observed Don Luis as he gathered up his cards. "I think I understand it. I put my money upon a certain card. If it comes first I win; if not, you win."

"That is it, señorito. You speak like a book."

"I know some people who speak like a book without knowing what they are talking about," retorted Don Luis.

De Genazahar looked up angrily, understanding a covert sneer, but not knowing exactly how to resent it. Fortunately the doctor interposed, to avert the impending storm. "Had not you two better go on playing," he suggested bluntly, "and stop talking?"

The dealing and calling proceeded for some time in silence, Fortune favouring Don Luis with the persistent success which the astute and yet fickle goddess does sometimes accord to her fresh wooers, to lure them on to their destruction, but which had not at all entered into the Count's calculations. "If I don't look out the lad will break me," he muttered to himself. "The gods protect the innocent!"

It was slightly monotonous, and Don Luis very soon got tired of it. "The end of all this," he said,

"really, is to see whether you are to get all my money, or I am to get all yours,—is not that so?"

"Exactly."

"Very well, then,—what is the good of keeping at it all night? It is a long way into to-morrow now, and, remembering your advice, I ought to be beginning to care for a certain 'flower'—a flower that is apt to get spoiled."

"That means that you want to be off, I suppose—eh?"

"Not at all—in the sense that you take it. Quite the contrary. Tell me, Currito,—should not you say that there is a great deal more in my heap now than in the bank?"

"Certainly there is," replied his cousin.

"What is the correct way, then, of saying that I want to stake at one fell swoop as much as there is in the bank?"

"You say '*Copo*.'"

"All right then, I say 'Copo!'" exclaimed Don Luis, turning again to De Genazahar. 'Copo on the king of spades. And let us see a king before your three."

Now De Genazahar knew well that the already grievously diminished heap upon the table contained the whole of his available capital, and to see it

imperilled in the way proposed did not at all suit his purpose. It was for Don Luis, however, to make the stake. There was no help for it.

It is a common saying that those who are fortunate in love are unfortunate in play, but surely the opposite would be the truer dictum. Fortune, as a rule, does not smile only upon one side of her face, and the unlucky man is unlucky in everything.

It was an unusually long deal—as if to mock De Genazahar's ill-concealed anxiety. Neither three nor king appeared till the pack was well through. Then came a card which the Count knew was the king of spades. In a moment there flashed through his ready brain all the resources of the unscrupulous gambler. What could he do? He felt instinctively that he had to deal with no ordinary adversary, and that other sharp eyes were upon him—not all too friendly.

"Well?—go on!" exclaimed the doctor, as the Count paused for a moment, with his hand upon the card. "What are you stopping for?"

"There is not much need to go on," growled De Genazahar. "There you are!" he added savagely, throwing down the obnoxious card. "The cursed priestling has done me! Take your money." And with another oath he dashed the pack upon the table.

Don Luis swept up the contents of the bank with an air of indifference, and for a few moments there was dead silence.

Presently De Genazahar said, in a hard, dry tone, "Now you must give me my revenge."

"I don't see that it is necessary," replied Don Luis, wishing to draw the Count on.

"Between gentlemen—always."

"But in that way we should never stop."

"Give me my revenge!" persisted De Genazahar, blind with passion.

"All right," said Don Luis. "I want to do everything that is fair."

The Count took another pack of cards, and proceeded to shuffle them.

"Ah, but wait," interposed Don Luis, "where is the bank?"

De Genazahar stopped. "I have no more money with me," he stammered in a confused way, "but I presume you will be satisfied with my word."

"Count de Genazahar," said Don Luis gravely, the knowledge that at last his opportunity was come adding a certain cold dignity to his voice, "I should have every pleasure in trusting the word of a gentleman, and in becoming his creditor, provided that I was not afraid of thereby losing his esteem. You showed me a few hours ago how you are in the habit

of treating those in whose debt you are, and after that I dare not run the risk. I do not wish to be repaid—as alone you have repaid the money you borrowed of Doña Pepita Jimenez—in the coin of lies and calumny."

Nothing could have been more offensive, or more direct. Even De Genazahar—who was at bottom an arrant coward, only great in bluster, and who had gradually come to have a certain deep respect for Don Luis—could not brook the insult. "You lie!" he cried, springing to his feet, and livid with rage. "You lie! false hound that you are! I will tear your cursed tongue out."

Don Luis seized with his left hand the fist that De Genazahar brandished in his face, and with the other snatched up the flexible walking cane which was leaning against his chair. "If I don't lie," he said between his teeth, "I strike!" And, before the words were well out of his mouth, the weapon fell stinging across the cheek and ear of the Count, raising a thick weal on its path.

Only a moment or two had elapsed between the utterance of the cunningly worded insult that formed the tail of Don Luis' somewhat formal speech and the downfall of his hand, and the onlookers had been too astonished to interfere. Now, however, they rushed in between the combatants, as the Count was preci-

pitating himself upon his foe, and forcibly dragged them apart.

"Let me go!" shrieked De Genazahar, struggling with his captors. "Let me get at him!"

"You shall get at him," said the captain, "and fast enough! Only it must be in a proper way. You must not fight like a couple of schoolboys. At least, if so, I will have nothing to do with it."

"Then bring the tools—quick!"

"What will you fight with?" said the captain, turning to Don Luis, who was the calmer of the two. "Swords?"

"It is all one to me," replied Don Luis, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Yes—swords," cried De Genazahar, with a sudden recollection that his adversary could not possibly have had any opportunity of practising fencing. "Swords—and be quick about it."

While the dispute had been running high, some thoughtful member of the party had taken the precaution of closing the door of the apartment, and consequently not even the servants—who were asleep upon chairs in the kitchens and passages—were aware of what was taking place. The preliminaries were soon settled, Don Luis choosing the captain and Currito to act on his behalf, and De Genazahar taking his own two friends. The

doctor was to mount the Red Cross, and be neutral.

The seconds now busied themselves in clearing away the tables and chairs, and in disposing the lights conveniently. The captain sallied out to procure the swords, and speedily returned with the weapons hidden under his military cloak. Don Luis and the Count made the necessary toilet preparations, and within a quarter of an hour all was in readiness. The combatants faced one another, the witnesses took their places at the side, and, at the given signal from the captain, the apparently unequal fight commenced.

But if Don Luis was perfectly innocent of all science, De Genazahar seemed either to have strangely forgotten some of his boasted accomplishments, or else to be blinded by rage. Instead of playing with his adversary, or unnerving him by feints, he made a vigorous onslaught upon him, and strove to beat down his defence by a perfect shower of ill-directed blows. It was as much as Don Luis could do to withstand the brute force that pressed down upon him. Three or four times he was struck, but only with the flat side of the Count's weapon, and meanwhile the appreciated frenzy of his foe rendered him the excellent service of steadying his nerves. As he became used to his novel position, he saw that his time must come when the Count was exhausted. Presently, however, he was

touched on the left arm. The wound was not serious, but, from the nature of the cut, the blood flowed out freely. The sight of it, and the thought that his enemy was disabled, made the Count more careless than ever, and with renewed vigour he pressed on to improve his advantage. One tremendous down-cut Don Luis successfully warded off, instinctively, yet half despairingly—feeling that he could not stand another such—and then, with a quick return, and no distinct notion of what he was doing, he buried his sword deep in the shoulder of his unwary opponent. For one moment the Count stood, rigid with pain and horror, and then, with something between a groan and a curse, he fell back lifeless upon the ground.

The uselessness—the barrenness—of revenge! The wondrous value of life! The utter littleness of the excuse for destroying it! The wild wish to change places with the dead! How can be justly rendered the feelings of a man—who is indeed a man—as for the first time he looks upon a fellow-creature whom he has done to death in cold blood? Within the short space of an hour or two Don Luis had passed through almost every phase of excitement that sweeps up in a lifetime. He had striven with fierce temptation, and overcome it. He had seen the fabric of his days crumble into the dust of a dream, and had drunk the humiliation of impotence. He had tasted the intoxi-

cation of a successful love, and bright visions of a new future. He had been buoyed up by the confidence of the lucky gambler, and then brought suddenly face to face with danger and death. And now there came upon him, as he stood and looked upon his late foe, the black cloud of despairing remorse. A moment ago he had been something more than a hero ;—one turn of his wrist and he knew himself to be less than a man. Where was his tenderness of soul? Where his boasted saintliness? Where his visions of a noble and a holy living? Had indeed the voice of Heaven come to him? What did it say? Did it call him to a life of self-sacrifice and glory? or did it cry, "*The voice of thy brother's blood appealeth unto Me from the ground*"?

But merciful oblivion came to him, and he knew no more.

The touch of De Genazahar's sword, and the consequent loss of blood, saved Don Luis from an attack of brain fever. When he finally awoke to consciousness, three days afterwards, and before he could realize afresh the horror of his situation, Currito, who happened to be at his side, could tell him that the Count was not mortally wounded—as had been

supposed—but was even now at his own home, and out of danger. Better medicine than this news could not have been forthcoming, backed up as it was by a vigorous and well-preserved constitution. His own wound was already closed, and, with due care and rest, the doctor assured him that he would soon be able to take his accustomed place again.

Before that could come about, however, Don Luis knew that he had a duty to perform—the making of a clean breast to his father of all that had taken place, and especially of the state of affairs between Pepita and himself. In reality Don Pedro was in possession of all details of the encounter with De Genazahar, and had been filled with no little pride at his son's prowess; but, as he did not refer to it, Don Luis could only suppose that the affair had been in some sort hushed up, for the benefit of the Casino. In the meantime his father's tenderness and devotion to him, during the days of watching, had been such as to make complete confidence—and without delay—more than ever incumbent upon him.

"Father," he began, in a hesitating and embarrassed way, when, one morning, after the doctor's visit, Don Pedro was sitting at the bedside, "father, I have been deceiving you horribly. I want to confess all my sins to you this morning."

"Look here, my boy!" replied Don Pedro with a

laugh, "if it is confessing that you want, I had better send for M. Ribas. I would not mind absolving you, but I am afraid you would not think much of the absolution. At the same time," he added, "if you have some secrets about which you want to talk to me, as to your best friend, go on—I will listen."

"My secret is a great wrong-doing,—one that I am almost ashamed to—"

"You need not be ashamed of telling your father anything or everything. Out with it!"

"I love—Pepita Jimenez, and she—"

"She?—loves you," said Don Pedro, filling in the broken phrase. "And on Saint John's eve you were with her in sweet discourse till past two o'clock in the morning. And for her sake you picked a quarrel with De Genazahar, and half killed him. If you had quite killed him it would have been only what he deserved. Precious secrets they are, dear boy, which you want to entrust me with! Why, there is not a dog or cat in Culejo that does not know all about it. You managed everything pretty cleverly except the two o'clock in the morning business. That you might have arranged better. You were seen coming out of the house, and of course everybody was told of it. And yet—I don't know! Pepita would have let the cat out of the bag if no one else had. Since you have been lying here she has been in a dreadful way,

coming twice a day to see how you were getting on, and sending Antoñona ever so many times more. I can assure you I have had my work set to keep my lady away from your bedside. I did say 'no' to that, because I knew it would be too much for you."

"Then I have nothing to tell you!" exclaimed Don Luis, feeling as if an immense burden had been taken from him, and yet covered with confusion. "Were you very much surprised? Are you very angry with me?"

"Surprised?—Angry?" echoed Don Pedro with a huge guffaw. "Not very! Wait a bit till you hear everything. Of course it is all news to folk here, and everybody is as astonished as you please. The disgust of his Reverence the vicar is a thing to be seen! He is crossing himself yet at the recollection of all your manifold labours in the Lord's vineyard the other night. But perhaps you will be surprised to hear that your fight with De Genazahar was the only piece of news for which I was not prepared. Ha! ha! ha!—we old people can hear the grass grow! It is not easy, you know, for a chicken to deceive its mother."

"Ah yes! I have tried to deceive you.—I know it. I have been a dreadful hypocrite."

"Nothing of the sort! I did not speak in that

way to blame you—or yet to make fun of you. I was only giving myself a pat on the back. But to tell the truth I have nothing to boast about. I have known exactly—for more than two months—how affairs were progressing between Pepita and yourself, but I only knew it all from your uncle. You wrote to him all your confessions, and he thought it advisable to let me know how matters stood. Listen—I will read you his letter upon the subject, and then my reply. The latter is the more important document of the two, perhaps, and I kept a copy of it."

So saying, Don Pedro took two letters from his pocket, and, with the remark, "The first is from your uncle, written on the 24th of April," read as follows:—

"MY DEAR BROTHER,—It grieves me sincerely to have to be a messenger of evil tidings to you. Unwillingly enough I fulfil the *rôle,* but it is a duty I cannot escape, and I can only trust that God will give you strength and patience sufficient for the trial. Luis has been writing me one or two somewhat strange epistles, in which, through a certain veiling of mystical exaltation, there is a plain enough indication that he has become ensnared by the charms or wiles of a lady whom he has met in your company,—the Señora D. Pepita Jimenez. I had been flattering

myself that his calling in life was fixed and sure, and that I should have the delight of giving to the Church a wise and virtuous minister—a model priest. These letters, however, have entirely destroyed the illusion. Romantic sentiment is evidently as strong in him as his religious devotion is weak, and I should say that the aforesaid widow—one of the great Barabbas family, I fear—will not experience any great difficulty in the way of his complete subjugation. I am writing to Luis, setting before him the absolute necessity of fleeing from the temptation, but I do not expect him to obey me. He is so far gone that I give him up for lost.

"For some reasons I am not sorry that this has happened now. If his disposition is towards the flesh-pots of Egypt it is infinitely better that it should be discovered in time, before he is compromised by other ties and obligations. And, looking at the affair in that light, it might be well for him to remain where he is, and be thoroughly tested by the touchstone of earthly passion, to see if the true metal of religious ardour or the dross of worldly desire predominates in his nature. But I cannot forget that the lady whom we should thus be making the reagent in our process is an object of some deep interest to yourself. Any such scandal as letting your son figure as your successful rival must be avoided at all hazards; and

one of my chief purposes, therefore, in writing to you is to propose that you should bring, or send, Luis back to me as speedily as possible. I can doubtless find some other means of probation."

Don Luis listened with averted face to this not over-complimentary picture of himself. He said nothing, however, and, after a moment's pause his father took up the second letter, and resumed :—

"So much for what your uncle says. Now for my reply."

"MY DEAR BROTHER, and honoured spiritual father,—I am infinitely obliged for your kind and sensible letter of the 24th.

"I consider myself, as a rule, pretty wide-awake, but I must say that this time I have been caught napping. That comes of being conceited. Pepita Jimenez—clever little monkey!—has been particularly nice to me ever since Luis came, and I was foolish enough to dream myself into happiness. Your letter has opened my eyes just in time. I see now that all these pretty ways—these junketings, playful compliments and what not else—have not been just on my account, but because I happen to be the father of a certain embryo parson.

"I am not above confessing that at first, as I read your letter, I felt rather sore; but I have since thought the business carefully over, and, upon the whole,

am inclined to be very well content with the turn matters have taken. Luis is a right good lad ;—I have really got very fond of him. I sent him to you to be brought up, as you know, partly because I was not everything that I ought to be, and partly because in a little place like Culejo I could not give him all the advantages I wanted him to have. You have done all I hoped by him, and something more than I hoped. You have prevented his growing up a savage, and you have very nearly managed to make him a holy father.

"Well—to have had a son in a niche would have been very flattering to one's vanity, no doubt. But then, you see, I should have been left in all probability without an heir—without any one to carry on the good old name, or to make right use of the money that I have put together with so much careful toil. I am not quite sure that it was not just that old resolve of Luis' to go and look after the morals of the Chinese, or the Indians, or the niggers in general, that made me think of marrying, and trying to fill up the gap he would leave. And, having once got the idea into my head, I naturally turned to Pepita Jimenez, who is as desirable a companion as a man could wish for. I am not quite sure that I understand your allusion to her as 'one of the Barabbas

family,' but if it is anything uncomplimentary I can assure you that you are utterly wrong. She is just too good for this world. If she were once more only sixteen years old, with a strong-minded mother to back up my suit, and if I had Don Gumersindo's eighty years, I should ask for nothing better than to have her for my sweet wife, that she might wreathe the grim face of old Death himself in flowers and smiles. But she is no longer timid sixteen, nor should I have the needful assistance of a stern mother. Moreover I am only fifty-five, so that, while I am cursed with a touch of asthma, and a variety of rheumatic and other ailments, I have not the perhaps counterbalancing virtue of an impending extinguishment. I am good for another twenty years at least, so you can calculate for yourself the ripe age to which she would have attained before she could get her freedom. An old—and yet young—man of fifty-five is no fit companion for a girl of twenty. After a year or two she would come to detest me, however good and gentle and loving she may be.

"That she is both wise and good, by the way, is shown by the fact that she has doubtless faced all these considerations, and has not secured me—as she might long since have easily done—from some sordid motive.

"So now, if she does not take me she takes my

son; and I can bring myself to be quite content—nay, even proud. She knows better than to bind herself to the worm-eaten old trunk, but she climbs by me—pretty trail of ivy that she is!—and twines herself about the fresh, green branch above, that is a part of myself. And may God bless them!

"Far from sending the boy back to you, then, I shall do all I can to keep him here—by force, if necessary. I shall plot vigorously against this same 'calling' that you all think so much of, and shall not rest till I see my new dreams and schemes of happiness accomplished. It will bring my own youth back again to see the pretty pair in their nest. And when the young birds come!—Don't you think that instead of his going to Australia, or Madagascar, and bringing home a lot of black or yellow little neophytes,—who would not smell very nice—it will be better for Luis to preach in his own home, and surround me with a troop of rosy little cherubs—*minus* wings—who will look at me with Pepita's eyes, climb upon my knee, and call me 'grand-dad'?

"I think I see them already, and feel them pinching my old calves! Forgive my ecstasies. You see I have never known much of domestic happiness—perhaps because, hitherto, I have not cared enough for it,—and so I am making up now for lost time.

"As I say, I am not going to leave this delicate matter to the mercy of fate. I am going to be prime mover in the business. You speak of Pepita as the reagent, and Luis as the ore. Then I am going to provide the blowpipe, so that the crucible may have a good blast under it, and the true metal may flow speedily. And my blowpipe will be Antoñona, of whom you may have heard as Pepita's faithful old servant. She is absolutely to be depended upon, and I have come to an excellent understanding with her. From her I have received ample confirmation of your letter, and she leaves me no room to doubt that Pepita is as much in love with Luis as any one could wish.

"Then I have also a second blowpipe, in the shape of M. Ribas, our vicar. He may be even more useful than Antoñona, without suspecting anything, or being suspected. He only has to be encouraged a little in his affection for the young folk, and in his garrulous ways, in order to develop into a perfect go-between. It will be the finest thing to see the dear good old soul, with nearly a century of wisdom and innocence at his back, transformed into a Cupid's messenger and agent, weaving an invisible and silken network around the unconscious children whom he himself destines for quite another fate!

"You see, dear brother, that, with such powerful engines at my command, I cannot fail to carry out my scheme. And I give you all this detailed notice of it that you may hold yourself at liberty to come and tie the knot,—or, at any rate, may be prepared with your blessing, and a handsome wedding gift."

As Don Pedro finished he laid down his papers, and looked up with a not-to-be-concealed air of self-complacency and triumph. But the unwonted sight of tears coursing down Don Luis' wan cheeks annihilated every feeling but one of supreme tenderness. No words of explanation, contrition or acquiescence were needed. But everything was said—said and sealed—in a long hand-clasp.

Three months later Pepita Jimenez, looking prettier than ever in her radiant happiness and trustfulness, stood by the side of Don Luis at the steps of the altar.

No one seemed particularly sorry that the Dean had been compelled, through the multiplicity of his engagements, to forego being present, and to content himself with sending his blessing, with an appropriate

offering. Some ill-natured people were so unsympathetic as to affirm that he did not care to expose himself to ridicule on account of his ill-success in the manufacture of saints, and that he stood in especial dread of Don Pedro's somewhat unsparing powers of raillery. Be that as it may, it was certainly fitting that M. Ribas should be the one to put the finishing touches to a work that owed its creation in no small degree to his kindly offices.

At night there was a great gathering—in Don Pedro's *salons*—of tenants, servants and half the gentry of the district. So gloriously mixed a ball—and so altogether successful—had never been known before. Where the host's "rheumatic and other ailments," of which he had spoken to his brother, had disappeared to, it would be difficult to say. There could be no doubt as to his being the youngest man present,—altogether out-shining the real hero of the evening in grace and lively wit. After the first prescribed fandango with Pepita, and the steady performance of such light and airy duties as dragging Doña Casilda, with her formidable presence, through a quadrille, his chief object seemed to be to search out the youngest and liveliest of the damsels who graced the proceedings—gentle or simple, it was all one to him—and test his powers of endurance against theirs, treating them, as he resigned the partnership, to

various gallant attentions by no means included in the programme.

For Don Luis and Pepita the greatest pleasure of the evening consisted in a letter which was delivered by a servant of De Genazahar's. The Count began by expressing his obligations to Don Luis for teaching him a lesson which he should not forget to his dying day ; he enclosed a sum sufficient to discharge his old debt to Pepita's estate, with interest, and, after craving the acceptance of a small offering which accompanied the letter, concluded by wishing the newly married pair long life and happiness.

Don Pedro happened to come up just as Don Luis was finishing the letter, and he, too, read it through gravely and without comment. Save that as he handed it back, he said, with a light and somewhat forced laugh, "Well,—I have been calling you my prodigal son. We may certainly put that down as your fatted calf."

EPILOGUE.

AND here we must bid adieu to Don Luis and Pepita Jimenez, and leave them to prosecute the fresh departure in life upon which they have entered under such bright auspices. It is not to be expected that Don Luis will ever lose sight of the ideal life of sacrifice, with its accompaniment of glory, to which he had formerly vowed himself, nor think without a twinge of self-abasement of his perhaps ignoble abandonment of cherished principles and purposes. Some of us, too, who have accompanied him through his early struggles and temptations, who have known the dangers which lurked within his young enthusiasm, and yet have fondly trusted that his erring feet would be finally led into more assured paths of holy undertaking, may sigh at times over the quick fate which has mocked at our hopes and auguries. Yet it will be strange if Pepita—whom, with all her waywardness, we have learned to love—does not succeed in charming away whatever of melancholy may mingle with the retrospect. And it will be stranger still if Don Luis fails to discover that a man may as surely keep

alive his ardour of devotion, and lay up for himself as great and abiding reward of strength and peace, at the domestic hearth, or in the sometimes despised enterprises of a narrow life, as in the anchorite's cell, or upon the widest battle-field of the Church Militant.

THE END.

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