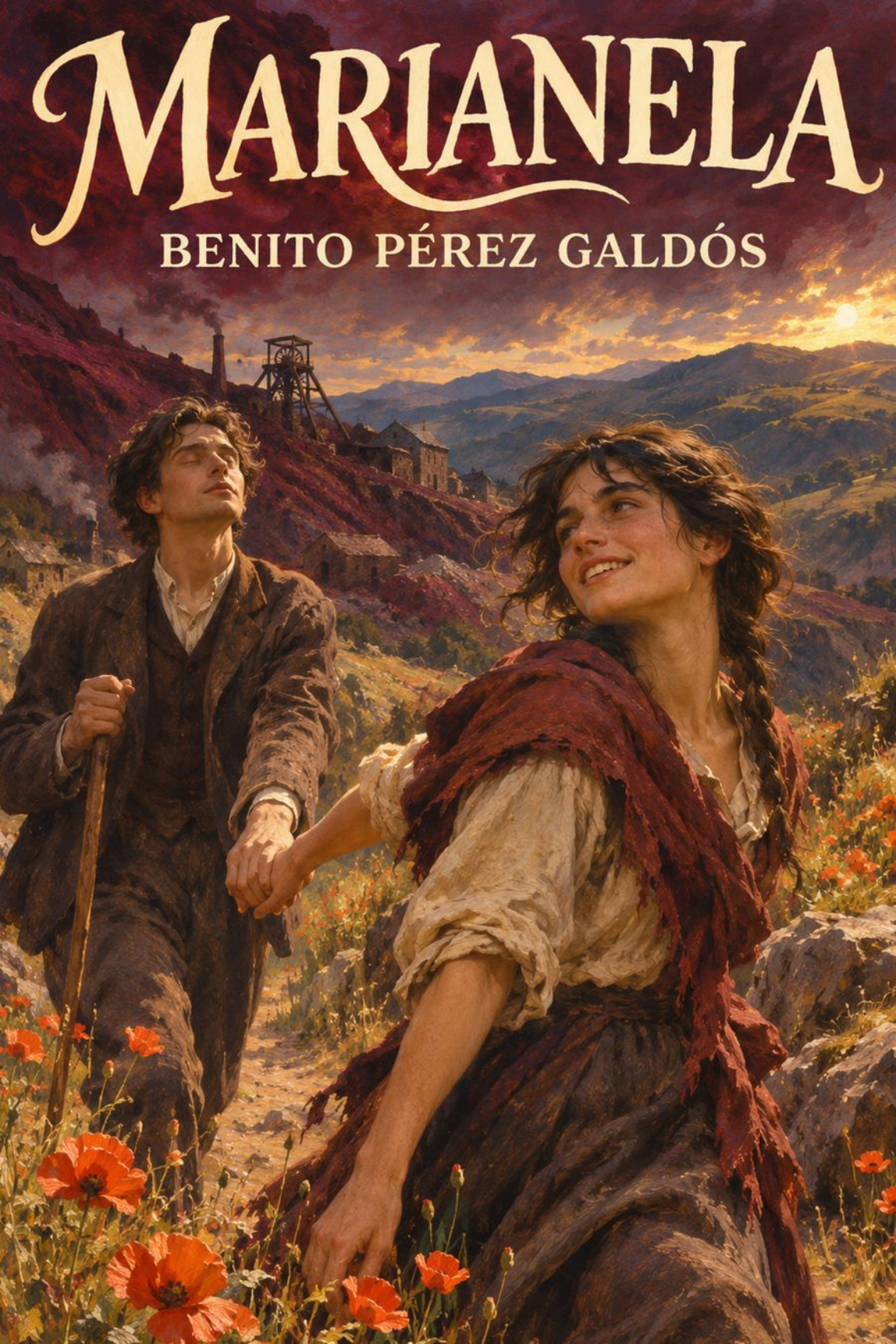
MARIANELA

BENITO PÉREZ GALDÓS

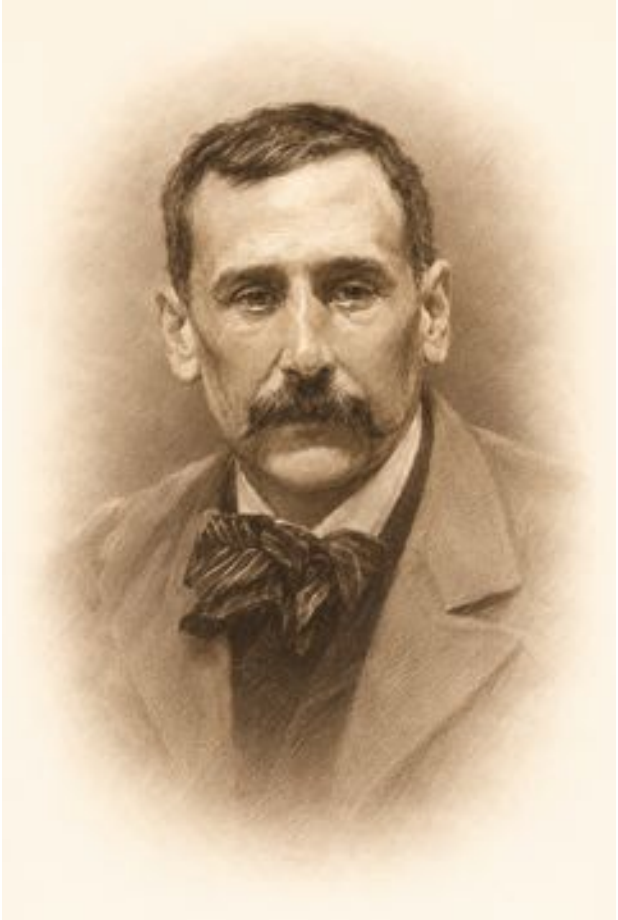


Marianela

Benito Pérez Galdós

Translated by Clara Bell

THE AUTHOR



Benito Pérez Galdós

1843–1920

Illustration after Joaquín Sorolla's 1894 portrait.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Benito Pérez Galdós

Benito Pérez Galdós was born in the Canary Islands and became one of Spain's best-known novelists. His novels explore how people make choices within the expectations and social arrangements of nineteenth-century Spain.

Marianela takes place in a mining district. The young Nela guides Pablo, who is blind, through the hills. The possibility that he might regain his sight changes what both imagine their lives will be.

Sources: Biblioteca Nacional de España and the 1883 Gottsberger edition.

ABOUT THIS EDITION

The historical Clara Bell translation, with her preface and all twenty-two chapters.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

Those who have read "Gloria" will, it is hoped, hail with pleasure another work by the same writer, Perez Galdós—different it is true, but in its way not less delightful.

The strongly-marked humor and darkly-painted tragedy of "Gloria" are not to be found in "Marianela;" the characters are distinct and crisply sketched, but with a tender hand, the catastrophe is pitiable, rather shocking; the whole tone is idyllic.

I have not hesitated to translate literally the Spanish words of endearment; for though they are foreign to the calmer spirit of our northern tongue they are too characteristic to be lost, and they are strangely pathetic as the only outlet found for the imprisoned spirit of the hapless little heroine.

CLARA BELL.

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CHAPTER I.
GONE ASTRAY.

The sun had set. After the brief interval of twilight the night fell calm and dark, and in its gloomy bosom the last sounds of a sleepy world died gently away. The traveller went forward on his way, hastening his step as night came on; the path he followed was narrow and worn by the constant tread of men and beasts, and led gently up a hill on whose verdant slopes grew picturesque clumps of wild cherry trees, beeches and oaks.—The reader perceives that we are in the north of Spain.

Our traveller was a man of middle age, strongly built, tall and broad-shouldered; his movements were brisk and resolute, his step firm, his manner somewhat rugged, his eye bold and bright; his pace was nimble, considering that he was decidedly stout, and he was—the reader may at once be told, though somewhat prematurely—as good a soul as you may meet with anywhere. He was dressed, as a man in easy circumstances should be dressed for a journey in spring weather, with one of those round shady hats, which, from their ugly shape, have been nicknamed mushrooms (*hongo*), a pair of field-glasses hanging to a strap, and a knotted stick which, when he did not use it to support his steps, served to push aside the brambles when they flung their thorny branches across so as to catch his dress.

He presently stopped, and gazing round the dim horizon, he seemed vexed and puzzled. He evidently was not sure of his way and was looking round for some passing native of the district who might give him such topographical information as might enable him to reach his destination.

"I cannot be mistaken," he said to himself. "They told me to cross the river by the stepping-stones—and I did so—then to walk on, straight on. And there, to my right, I do in fact, see that detestable

town which I should call *Villafangosa* by reason of the enormous amount of mud that chokes the streets.—Well then, I can but go 'on, straight on'—I rather like the phrase, and if I bore arms, I would adopt it for my motto—in order to find myself at last at the famous mines of Socartes."

But before he had gone much farther, he added: "I have lost my way, beyond a doubt I have lost my way.—This, Teodoro Golfin, is the result of your 'on, straight on.' Bah! these blockheads do not know the meaning of words; either they meant to laugh at you or else they did not know the way to the mines of Socartes. A huge mining establishment must be evident to the senses, with its buildings and chimneys, its noise of hammers and snorting of furnaces, neighing of horses and clattering of machinery—and I neither see, nor hear, nor smell anything. I might be in a desert! How absolutely solitary! If I believed in witches, I could fancy that Fate intended me this night to have the honor of making acquaintance with some. Deuce take it! why is there no one to be seen in these parts? And it will be half an hour yet before the moon rises. Ah! treacherous Luna, it is you who are to blame for my misadventure.—If only I could see what sort of place I am in.—However, what could I expect?" and he shrugged his shoulders with the air of a vigorous man who scorns danger. "What, Golfin, after having wandered all round the world are you going to give in now? The peasants were right after all: 'on, straight on.' The universal law of locomotion cannot fail me here."

And he bravely set out to test the law, and went on about a kilometre farther, following the paths which seemed to start from under his feet, crossing each other and breaking off at a short distance, in a thousand angles which puzzled and tired him. Stout as his resolution was, at last he grew weary of his vain efforts. The paths, which had at first all led upwards, began to slope downwards as they crossed each other, and at last he came to so steep a slope that he could only hope to get to the bottom by rolling down it.

"A pretty state of things!" he exclaimed, trying to console himself for this provoking situation by his sense of the ridiculous. "Where have you got to now my friend? This is a perfect abyss. Is anything to be seen at the bottom. No, nothing, absolutely nothing—the hill-side has disappeared, the earth has been dug away. There is nothing to be seen but stones and barren soil tinged red with iron. I have reached the mines, no doubt of that—and yet there is not a living soul to be seen, no smoky chimneys; no noise, not a train in the distance, not even a dog barking. What am I to do? Out there the path seems to slope up again.—Shall I follow that? Shall I leave the beaten track? Shall I go back again? Oh! this is absurd! Either I am not myself or I will reach Socartes to-night, and be welcomed by my worthy brother! 'On, straight on.'"

He took a step, and his foot sank in the soft and crumbling soil. "What next, ye ruling stars? Am I to be swallowed up alive? If only that lazy moon would favor us with a little light we might see each other's faces—and, upon my soul, I can hardly expect to find Paradise at the bottom of this hole. It seems to be the crater of some extinct volcano.... Nothing could be easier than a slide down this beautiful precipice. What have we here? ... A stone; capital—a good seat while I smoke a cigar and wait for the moon to rise."

The philosophical Golfin seated himself as calmly as if it were a bench by a promenade, and was preparing for his smoke, when he heard a voice—yes, beyond a doubt, a human voice, at some little distance—a plaintive air, or to speak more accurately, a melancholy chant of a single phrase, of which the last cadence was prolonged into a "dying fall," and which at last sank into the silence of the night, so softly that the ear could not detect when it ceased.

"Come," said the listener, well pleased, "there are some human beings about. That was a girl's voice; yes, certainly a girl's, and a lovely voice too. I like the popular airs of this country-side. Now it has stopped.... Hark! it will soon begin again.... Yes, I hear it once more. What a beautiful voice, and what a pathetic air! You might

believe that it rose from the bowels of the earth, and that Señor Golfin, the most matter-of-fact and least superstitious man in this world, was going to make acquaintance with sylphs, nymphs, gnomes, dryads, and all the rabble rout that obey the mysterious spirit of the place.—But, if I am not mistaken, the voice is going farther away—the fair singer is departing.... Hi, girl, child, stop—wait a minute!..."

The voice which had for a few minutes so charmed the lost wanderer with its enchanting strains was dying away in the dark void, and at the shouts of Golfin it was suddenly silent. Beyond a doubt the mysterious gnome, who was solacing its underground loneliness by singing its plaintive loves, had taken fright at this rough interruption by a human being, and fled to the deepest caverns of the earth, where precious gems lay hidden, jealous of their own splendor.

"This is a pleasant state of things—" muttered Golfin, thinking that after all he could do no better than light his cigar.—"There seems no reason why it should not go on for a hundred years. I can smoke and wait. It was a clever idea of mine that I could walk up alone to the mines of Socartes. My luggage will have got there before me—a signal proof of the advantages of 'on, straight on.'"

A light breeze at this instant sprang up, and Golfin fancied he heard the sound of footsteps at the bottom of the unknown—or imaginary—abyss before him; he listened sharply, and in a minute felt quite certain that some one was walking below. He stood up and shouted:

"Girl, man, or whoever you are, can I get to the mines of Socartes by this road?"

He had not done speaking when he heard a dog barking wildly, and then a manly voice saying: "Choto, Choto! come here!"

"Hi there!" cried the traveller. "My good friend—man, boy, demon, or whatever you are, call back your dog, for I am a man of peace."

"Choto, Choto!..."

Golfin could make out the form of a large, black dog coming towards him, but after sniffing round him it retired at its master's call; and at that moment the traveller could distinguish a figure, a man, standing as immovable as a stone image, at about ten paces below him, on a slanting pathway which seemed to cut across the steep incline. This path, and the human form standing there, became quite clear now to Golfin, who, looking up to the sky, exclaimed:

"Thank God! here is the mad moon at last; now we can see where we are. I had not the faintest notion that a path existed so close to me, why, it is quite a road. Tell me, my friend, do you know whether the mines of Socartes are hereabout?"

"Yes, Señor, these are the mines of Socartes; but we are at some distance from the works."

The voice which spoke thus was youthful and pleasant, with the attractive inflection that indicates a polite readiness to be of service. The doctor was well pleased at detecting this, and still better pleased at observing the soft light, which was spreading through the darkness and bringing resurrection to earth and sky, as though calling them forth from nothingness.

"*Fiat lux!*" he said, going forward down the slope. "I feel as if I had just emerged into existence from primeval chaos.... Indeed, my good friend, I am truly grateful to you for the information you have given me, and for the farther information you no doubt will give me. I left Villamojada as the sun was setting.—They told me to go on, straight on...."

"Are you going to the works?" asked the strange youth, without stirring from the spot or looking up towards the doctor, who was now quite near him.

"Yes, Señor; but I have certainly lost my way."

"Well, this is not the entrance to the mines. The entrance is by the steps at Rabagones, from which the road runs and the tram-way that they are making. If you had gone that way you would have

reached the works in ten minutes. From here it is a long way, and a very bad road. We are at the outer circle of the mining galleries, and shall have to go through passages and tunnels, down ladders, through cuttings, up slopes, and then down the inclined plane; in short, cross the mines from this side to the other, where the workshops are and the furnaces, the machines and the smelting-house."

"Well, I seem to have been uncommonly stupid," said Golfin, laughing.

"I will guide you with much pleasure, for I know every inch of the place."

Golfin, whose feet sank in the loose earth, slipping here and tottering there, had at last reached the solid ground of the path, and his first idea was to look closely at the good-natured lad who addressed him. For a minute or two he was speechless with surprise.

"You!" he said, in a low voice.

"I am blind, it is true, Señor," said the boy. "But I can run without seeing from one end to the other of the mines of Socartes. This stick I carry prevents my stumbling, and Choto is always with me, when I have not got Nela with me, who is my guide. So, follow me, Señor, and allow me to guide you."

CHAPTER II.
GUIDED RIGHT.

"And were you born blind?" asked Golfin, with eager interest, arising not only from compassion.

"Yes, Señor, born blind," replied the lad, with perfect simplicity. "I only know the world by fancy, feeling and hearing. I have learned to understand that the most wonderful portion of the universe is that which is unknown to me. I know that the eyes of other people are not like mine, since they are able to distinguish things by them—but the power seems to me so extraordinary, that I cannot even imagine the possibility of its existence."

"Who knows ..." Golfin began. "But what strange scene is this, my friend? What a wonderful place we are in!"

The traveller, who had been walking by the side of his companion, stood still in astonishment at the weird view which lay before him. They were in a deep basin resembling the crater of a volcano; the ground at the bottom was broken and rough, and the sloping sides still more so. Round the margin and in the middle of the vast caldron, which looked even larger than it was in the deceptive chiaroscuro of the moonlit night, stood colossal figures, deformed caricatures of humanity, monsters lying prone with their feet in the air, with arms spread in despair, stunted growths, distorted faces such as we see in the whimsical wreathing of floating clouds—but all still, silent, and turned to stone. In color they were mummy-like, a reddish bistre; their action suggested the delirium of fever arrested by sudden death. It was as though giant forms had petrified in the midst of some demoniacal orgy, and their gestures and the burlesque grimaces of the monstrous heads had been stricken into fixity, like the motionless attitudes of sculpture. The silence which prevailed in this volcanic-looking hollow was itself terrifying. One might fancy that the cries and shrieks of a thousand voices had been petrified too, and had been held there locked in stone for ages.

"Where are we, my young friend?" asked Golfin. "This place is like a nightmare."

"This part of the mine is called La Terrible," replied the blind boy, not appreciating his companion's frame of mind. "It was worked till about two years ago when the ore was exhausted, and now the mining is carried on in other parts which are more profitable. The strange objects that surprise you so much are the blocks of stone which we call *cretácea*, and which consist of hardened ferruginous clay, after the ore has been extracted. I have been told that the effect is sublime, particularly in the moonlight; but I do not understand such things."

"A wonderful effect,—yes—" said the stranger, who still stood gazing at the scene, "but which to me is more terrible than pleasing, for it reminds me of the horrors of neuralgia.—Shall I tell you what it is like? It is as if I were standing inside a monstrous brain suffering from a fearful headache. Those figures are like the images which present themselves to the tortured brain, and become confounded with the hideous fancies and visions created by a fevered mind."

"Choto, Choto, here!" called the blind lad. "Take care now, Señor, how you walk; we are going into a gallery." And, in fact, Golfin saw that his guide, feeling with his stick, was making his way towards a narrow entrance distinguished by three stout posts.

The dog went in first, snuffing at the black cavern; the blind boy followed him with the calm indifference of a man who dwells in perpetual darkness. Golfin followed, not without some instinctive trepidation and repugnance at an underground expedition.

"It is really wonderful," he said, "that you should go in and out of such a place without stumbling."

"I have lived all my life in these places, and know them as well as my own home. Here it is very cold; wrap yourself up if have you a cloak with you. We shall soon be out at the other end." He walked

on, feeling his way with his hand along the wall, which was formed of upright beams, and saying:

"Mind you do not stumble over the ruts in the path; they bring the mineral along here from the diggings above. Are you cold?"

"Tell me," said the doctor, gaily. "Are you quite certain that the earth has not swallowed us up? This passage is the gullet of some monstrous insectivorous brute into whose stomach we miserable worms have inadvertently crept.—Do you often take a walk in this delectable spot?"

"Yes, often, and at all hours, and I think the place delightful. Now we are in the most arid part—the ground here is pure sand—now we are on the stones again. Here there is a constant drip of sulphurous water, and down there we have a block of rock in which there are petrified shells. There are layers of slate over there. Do you hear that toad croaking? we are near the opening now; the rascal sits there every night; I know him quite well. He has a hoarse, slow voice."

"Who—the toad?"

"Yes, Señor; we are near the end now."

"So I see; it looks like an eye staring at us—that is the mouth of the corridor."

No sooner were they out in the air again, than the first thing that struck the doctor's ear was the same melancholy song as he had heard before. The blind boy heard it too; he turned round to his companion and said, smiling with pride and pleasure:

"Do you hear her?"

"I heard that voice before and it charmed me wonderfully. Who is the singer?"

Instead of answering, the blind boy stopped and shouted with all the force of his lungs: "Nela! Nela!" and the name was repeated by a hundred echoes, some quite close, others faint and distant. Then,

putting his hands to his mouth for a speaking-trumpet, he called out:

"Do not come to me, I am going that way. Wait for me at the forge—at the forge!"

He turned to the doctor again and explained:

"Nela is a girl who goes about with me; she is my guide—my *Lazarillo*. When it was dusk we were coming home together from the great meadow—it was rather cool, so, as my father forbids my walking out at night without a cloak, I waited in Romolinos' cabin, and Nela ran home to fetch it for me. After staying some little time in the hut, I remembered that I had a friend coming to see me at home and I had not patience to wait for Nela, so I set out with Choto. I was just going down La Terrible when I met you. We shall soon be at the forge now and there we must part, for my father is not pleased when I go home late, and Nela will show you the way to the works."

"Many thanks, my little friend."

The tunnel had brought them out at a spot even more wonderful than that they had left. It was an enormous gulf or chasm in the earth, looking like the result of an earthquake; but it had not been rent by the fierce throbs of planetary fires, but slowly wrought by the laborious pick of the miner. It looked like the interior of a huge shipwrecked vessel, stranded on the shore, and broken across the waist by the breakers, so as to bend it at an obtuse angle. You could fancy you saw its ribs laid bare, and their ends standing up in an irregular file on one side. Within the hollow hull lay huge stones, like the relics of a cargo tossed about by the waves, and the deceptive light of the moon lent so much aid to the fancy that Golfin could have believed that he saw among the relics of a ship's fittings, corpses half devoured by fishes, mummies, skeletons—all dead, silent, half-destroyed and still, as if they had long been lying in the infinite sepulchre of the ocean. And the illusion was perfect when he presently heard a sound of waters, and a regular splash

like the dash of ripples in the hollow of a rock, or through the skeleton timbers of a wrecked vessel.

"There is water hereabouts," he said to his guide.

"The noise you hear,"—replied the other, stopping,—"and which sounds like—what shall I say—like the gurgle you make when you gargle your throat?..."

"Exactly—and where is that gurgle? Is it some rivulet that runs near here?"

"No, Señor; over there to the left there is a slope, and beyond it a wide mouth opens in the ground, a cavern, an abyss without any known bottom. La Trascava they call it. Some say that it runs down to the sea at Ficóbriga, and others think that a river flows at the bottom of it which goes round and round, like a wheel, and never comes out anywhere. I fancy it must be like a whirlpool. Some again say that down there is a constant gust of air coming out of the interior of the earth—as we blow when we whistle—and that this blast meets a current of water; then they quarrel, and struggle, and fight, and produce that noise that we hear up here."

"And has no one ever been down into this cavern?"

"It can only be got into in one way."

"How?"

"By jumping into it. Those who have gone in have never come out again; and it is a great pity, for they might have told us what goes on in there. The other end of the cavern is a long way off from this, for two years ago, when some miners were working they came upon a rift in the rock where they heard the very same sound of water as you hear now. This rift must, no doubt, communicate with the inside galleries, out of which the blast blows and into which the water rushes. By daylight you can see it plainly, for you need only go a few steps to the left to reach the spot and there is a comfortable seat there. Some people are frightened to go there, but Nela and I sit there to listen to the voice down inside the

cavern—for really, Señor, we can fancy we hear it talking. Nela declares and swears that she hears words, and can distinguish them quite plainly. I must confess I never heard any words; but it goes on murmuring like a soliloquy or a meditation, and sometimes it is sad and sometimes gay—sometimes angry, and sometimes good-humored and jolly."

"And yet I can make nothing of it but a gurgle," said the doctor laughing.

"It sounds so from this spot.—But we must not stop now, it is getting late. You must be prepared to go through another gallery."

"Another?"

"Yes—and this one branches off into two in the middle. Beyond that there is a labyrinth of turns and zigzags, because the miners have to make galleries which, when they are worked out, are deserted and left to their fate. Go on Choto."

Choto slipped into a little opening that looked scarcely bigger than a rabbit-hole, followed by the doctor and his guide, who felt his way along the dark, narrow, crooked passage with his stick. There could be no better evidence of the delicacy and subtlety of the sense of touch, extending beyond the skin of a human hand through a piece of senseless wood. They went forwards, at first in a curve, and then round corner after corner, and all the way between walls of damp, and half-rotten planking.

"Do you know what this reminds me of?" said the doctor, perceiving that his guide took pleasure in similes and comparisons. "Of nothing so much as the thoughts of perverse man. We represent the consciousness of evil, when he looks into his conscience and sees himself in all his vileness."

Golfin fancied that he had used a metaphor rather above his companion's comprehension; but the blind boy proved that he was mistaken, for he said at once:

"For those to whom that inner world looks dark and gloomy, these galleries must be dismal indeed; but I, who live in perpetual darkness, find here something which has an affinity with my own nature. I can walk here as you would in the broadest road. If it were not for the want of air in some parts and the excessive damp in others, I should prefer these subterranean passages to any place I know."

"That is an idea of brooding fancy."

"I feel as if there were in my brain a narrow passage—a rabbit-hole—like this that we are walking in, and there my ideas run riot grandly."

"Ah! what a pity that you should never have seen the azure vault of the sky at mid-day!" the doctor exclaimed involuntarily. "Tell me, does this dark hole—in which your ideas run riot so grandly—lead out anywhere?"

"Oh yes! we shall be outside quite soon now. The vault of the sky you said—I fancy it must be a perfect, equal curve, which looks as if we could touch it with our hands, but we cannot really."

As he spoke they got out of the tunnel; Golfin drawing a deep breath of relief, like a man who has cast off a burthen, exclaimed as he looked up at the heavens:

"Thank God that I see you once more stars of the firmament. Never have you seemed to me more beautiful than at this moment."

"As I was going along," said the blind boy, holding out his hand which held a stone, "I picked up this piece of crystal—now do you mean to say that these crystals, which to my touch are so sharply cut, so smooth and so neatly packed side by side, are not a very beautiful thing? They seem so to me at any rate." And as he spoke he broke off some of the crystals.

"My dear fellow," said the doctor with great feeling and compassion, "it is sad indeed that you should not be able to know that this stone is hardly worth looking at, while over our heads

there hang the myriads of marvellous lamps that sparkle in the heavens." The boy threw back his head and said in a voice of deep regret:

"Is it true that you are there, you little stars?"

"God is infinitely great and merciful," said Golfin, laying his hand on his young companion's shoulder. "Who knows—who can say—much stranger things have happened—are happening every day." As he spoke, he looked close into his face, trying to see the lad's eyes by the dim light; fixed and sightless, he turned them in the direction in which he heard the speaker's voice.

"There is no hope," Golfin muttered.

They had come out on an open space. The moon, rising higher and higher, illuminated undulating meadows and high slopes, which looked like the ramparts of some immense fortification.—To the left, on a level plateau, the doctor saw a group of white houses crowning the slope.

"There, to the left," said the boy, "is my home—up at the top. Do you know that those three houses are what remain of the village of Aldeacorba de Suso. All the rest has been pulled down at different times in order to dig mines; all the soil underneath is iron ore, and our fore-fathers lived over millions of wealth without knowing it."

He was still speaking when a girl came running to meet them, a tiny scrap of a child, swift of foot and slightly built.

"Nela, Nela!" cried the blind boy. "Have you brought me a cloak?"

"Here it is," said the girl, putting it over his shoulders.

"Is this the songstress? Do you know you have a lovely voice?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the boy, in a tone of innocent admiration, "she sings beautifully! Now, Mariquilla, you must show this gentleman the way to the works, and I must go home. I can hear my father's voice already; he is coming to look for me, and he will be sure to scold me.... I am here, I am coming!"

"Make haste in, my boy!" said Golfin, shaking hands with him. "The air is fresh, and you might take cold. Many thanks for your company. I hope we may be good friends, for I shall be here some little time. I am the brother of Cárlos Golfin, the engineer of the mines."

"Oh! indeed.... Don Cárlos is a great friend of my father's. He has been expecting you these two days."

"I arrived this evening at the station at Villamojada, and they told me that Socartes was not far, and that I could come up on foot. So, as I like to see the country and get exercise, and as they told me it was 'on, straight on,' I set out, and sent my luggage in a cart. You saw how I had lost my way—but there is no evil out of which good does not come.... I have made your acquaintance, and we shall be friends, very good friends perhaps. Go in, good-bye; get home quickly, for the autumn evenings are not good for you. The little Señora here will be so good as to guide me."

"It is not more than a quarter of an hour's walk to the works, quite a short way. But take care not to stumble over the rails, and look out as you cross the inclined plane. There often are trucks on the road, and in this damp weather the ground is like soap.—Good-bye, Caballero, and my very good friend.—Good-night." He went up the slope by a narrow flight of steps cut in the soil and squared by beams of wood; Golfin went straight on, guided by Nela. Does what they said deserve a separate chapter? In case it should, I will give it one.

CHAPTER III.
A DIALOGUE WHICH EXPLAINS MUCH.

"Wait a moment my child, do not go so fast," said Golfin, himself standing still. "I want to light a cigar."

The night was so still, that no precautions were needed in striking the light to guard it from the wind, and when the doctor had lighted his cigar he held the wax match in front of Nela, saying kindly:

"Show me your face, little one."

He looked in the child's face with astonishment; her black eyes shone with a red spot, like a spark, for the instant while the match lasted. She looked a child, for she was but a tiny creature, extremely thin and undeveloped; but she seemed like a little woman, for her eyes had not a childlike expression, and her face had the mature look of a nature which has gone through experience and acquired judgment—or will have acquired it soon. In spite of this anomaly, she was well-proportioned and her small head sat gracefully on her lean little body. You might have said she was a woman seen through a diminishing-glass; or, again, that she was a child with the eyes and expression of a grown-up person. In your uncertainty, it was hard to say whether she was astonishingly forward or lamentably backward.

"How old are you?" asked Golfin, shaking his fingers free of the match which was beginning to burn them.

"They say I am sixteen," said Nela, gazing in her turn at the doctor.

"Sixteen!" exclaimed Golfin. "Much less than that, child! You are twelve at most to judge by appearances."

"Holy Virgin! They say I am quite a phenomenon," said the girl in a tone of weariness of the subject.

"A phenomenon!" repeated Golfin laying his hand on her hair. "Well, perhaps so. Now, come along—show me the way."

Nela set out resolutely, keeping but a little way in front of the traveller but rather on one side of him, to show her just appreciation of such illustrious company. Her nimble little feet, which were bare, were evidently familiar with the ground they trod, with the stones, the puddles and the thistles. She wore a plain frock of scanty breadth, and the rudimentary simplicity of her garb, as well as the loose flow of her thick, short hair, which fell in natural waves, had a stamp of savage independence rather than of abject poverty. Her speech, on the other hand, struck Golfin by its modest propriety, indicating a formed and thoughtful mind. Her voice had a gentle inflection of kindliness, which could not be the result of education, and her glance was restless and shy, whenever she was not looking at the sky or the earth.

"Tell me," said Golfin. "Do you live in the mines? Are you the child of any of the workmen employed here?"

"They say I have neither father nor mother."

"Poor little girl! and you work in the mines?"

"No, Señor. I am of no use at all," she replied without raising her eyes.

"Well, you are modest, at any rate."

The doctor bent down to look closely at her face; it was small and freckled all over with little mole-like spots. Her forehead was narrow, her nose sharp but not ill-shaped, her eyes black and brilliant, but their light shone but sadly. Her hair, naturally of a golden brown, was dull for want of care, and from exposure to the sun, wind and dust. Her lips were so thin as to be hardly visible, and always wore a smile, but it was like the faint smile of the dead who have died dreaming of Heaven. Nela's mouth was, strictly speaking, ugly, still it deserved a word of praise from the point of view expressed in the line from Polo de Medina: "A mouth is sweet that asks for nothing." [1] In fact, neither in word, look, or smile,

did the poor child betray any of the degrading habits of the beggar. Golfin stroked the sad little face, holding it under the chin and almost encircling it with his big fingers.

"Poor little body!" he said. "Providence has not been over-generous to you. Who do you live with?"

"With Señor Centeno, the overseer of the beasts belonging to the mines?"

"You do not seem to have been born in luxury.—Who were your parents?"

"They say my mother sold peppers in the market at Villamojada. She was not married. She had me one All-Saints' day, and then she went to be wet-nurse at Madrid."

"A highly estimable woman!" muttered Golfin ironically.

"And no one knows who your father was?"

"Yes, Señor," said Nela with some pride. "My father was the first who ever lighted the lamps of Villamojada."

"Wonderful!"

"I ought to tell you," said the little girl with the gravity befitting the dignity of history, "that when the town council first had lamps hung up in the streets, my father was entrusted with the care of lighting and cleaning them. I was nursed by a sister of my mother's—not that she was married either, as they tell me. My father had quarrelled with her—they all lived together as I have heard—and when he went out to light the lamps he used to put me in his basket, with his lamp-chimneys and cottons and oil. One day when he went up to light the lamp on the bridge, he put the basket on the parapet, and I rolled out and fell into the river."

"And you were not drowned!"

"No, Señor; for I fell on the stones. Holy Mother of God! I was a dear little thing before that, they tell me."

"Yes, I am sure you were," said the stranger with an impulse of loving-kindness. "And so you are still.—But tell me what next. Have you lived long in the mines?"

"Thirteen years, they say. My mother took me back after my tumble. My father fell ill, and as my mother would not do anything for him, because he was wicked to her, he was taken to the hospital where they say he died. Meanwhile my mother came to work in the mines. They say the overseer discharged her one day because she drank so much."

"And your mother went.... Go on, I take a real interest in the good woman; she went...."

"She went to a very big hole over there," said the child, standing still and speaking with intense pathos, "and she threw herself in."

"The devil she did! That was coming to a bad end. I suppose she did not come out again?"

"No, Señor," said Nela with perfect simplicity. "She is there still."

"And since that catastrophe, poor child," said Golfin kindly, "you have stayed at work here. Mining work is very hard labor and you have taken the hue of the soil; you are thin and ill-nourished. This life is enough to ruin the strongest constitution."

"No, Señor; I do not labor. They say I am not good for anything and never shall be."

"God forbid, silly child! why you are a treasure."

"No indeed," insisted the girl, "I cannot work at all. If I take up ever so small a load, I fall down, and if I am set to any hard work I faint away before long."

"You are as God made you—and if you fell into the hands of any one who knew how to treat you, you would work very well."

"No, Señor, no indeed," she repeated as energetically as though it were in her own praise that she spoke, "I am no good to any one—only in the way."

"Then you are a mere vagabond?"

"No, Señor, for I attend on Pablo."

"And who is Pablo?"

"That young blind gentleman, whom you met in La Terrible. I have been his guide for the last year and a half. I take him everywhere; we go for long walks in the fields."

"He seems a good fellow, this Pablo."

Nela again stood still and looked up at the doctor, and her face glowed with enthusiasm as she exclaimed:

"Holy Virgin! He is the best and dearest creature in the whole world! Poor fellow!—and he is cleverer without eyes than all those who can see."

"Yes, I liked your master. Does he belong to the place?"

"Yes, Señor; he is the only son of Don Francisco Penáguilas, a very kind and very rich gentleman who lives in the houses at Aldeacorba."

"Tell me, why are you called Nela? What does it mean?"

The child shrugged her shoulders, and after a pause, she said:

"My mother's name was María Canela, and so she was called Nela; they say it is a dog's name. My name is María."

"Mariquita."

"María Nela they call me, or sometimes Canela's girl, and some say Marianela, and some merely Nela."

"And your master, is he fond of you?"

"Yes, Señor; he is very good to me. He says he sees with my eyes, for I take him everywhere, and tell him what everything is like."

"Everything that he cannot see?" The stranger seemed much interested in this conversation.

"Yes—I tell him everything. He asks me what a star is like, and I tell him all about it in such a way that it is the same to him as if he could see it. I explain it all—what the planets are like, and the clouds, and the sky, and the water, and the lightning, the weather-cocks, the butterflies, the mists, the snails, and the shapes and faces of men and animals. I tell him what is ugly and what is pretty, and so he gets to understand everything."

"I see; your work is no trifle. What is ugly and what is pretty! There is nothing.... You decide upon that question? Tell me, can you read?"

"No, Señor.—I tell you I am good for nothing."

She said this in a tone of perfect conviction, and the gesture that emphasized her protestation seemed to add: "You must be a great blockhead to fancy that I am good for anything."

"Would you not be glad if your friend, by the grace of God, should recover his sight?"

The girl did not answer at once, but after a pause she said:

"It is impossible."

"No, not impossible, only difficult and doubtful."

"The engineer who manages the mines did give my master's father some hope of it."

"Don Cárlos Golfin?"

"Yes, Señor. Don Cárlos has a brother who is an eye-doctor, and they say he gives sight to the blind, and makes those who squint look straight."

"What a clever man!"

"Yes; and when the eye-doctor wrote to Don Cárlos that he was coming to see him, his brother wrote to him to bring his instruments with him to try if he could make Pablo see."

"And has this good man been here yet?"

"No, sir; for he is always travelling about in England and America, and it seems it will be some time yet before he comes. Pablo laughs at it all, and says no man can give him what the Holy Virgin has denied him from his birth."

"Well—perhaps he is right. But are we not nearly there? For I see some chimneys which pour forth smoke darker than the bottomless pit, and a light too, which looks like a forge."

"Yes—here we are. Those are the roasting furnaces, which burn day and night. There, in front, are the machines for washing the ore; they only work by day. To the right-hand is the chemical workshop, and down there, last of all, the counting-house and offices."

The place seemed to lie in fact as Marianela indicated. In the absence of any wind a mist hung over the spot, shrouding the buildings in heavy, gaseous fog, and giving them a confused and fantastic outline against the moonlit sky.

"This is a pleasanter place to see for once than to live in," said Golfin, hastening onwards. "The cloud of vapor wraps round everything, and the lights have dim circles round them, like the moon on a sultry night. Which is the office?"

"Here, we are almost there."

After passing in front of the furnaces, where the heat made them hurry on, the doctor perceived a house which was no less dingy and smoky than the others, and at the same instant he heard a piano being played with a vigor bordering on frenzy.

"We have music here. I recognize my sister-in-law's touch and execution."

"It is Señorita Sofía who is playing," said María.

The lights of a busy household shone in the windows, and the balcony on the ground-floor was wide open. A small spark was visible, the spark of a cigar. Before the doctor could reach the spot,

the spark flew off, describing a parabola of fire, and breaking into a thousand twinkling specks—the smoker had shaken the end off.

"There is that everlasting smoker!" cried the doctor, in a tone of affectionate delight. "Cárlos, Cárlos!"

"Teodoro!" exclaimed a voice from the balcony. The piano ceased like a singing-bird scared by a noise. Steps sounded through the house. The doctor gave his guide a silver coin, and ran up to the door.

CHAPTER IV.
STONY HEARTS.

Retracing her steps and jumping over the obstacles in her path, Nela made her way to a house on the left of the machine-sheds, and close to the stables where the sixty mules belonging to the establishment stood in grave meditation. The residence of the overseer, though of modern construction, was neither elegant nor even commodious. The roof was low, and it was too small by far to give adequate shelter to the parent couple of the Centenos—to their four children—to their cat—and to Nela into the bargain; but it figured, nevertheless, on the parchment plans of the settlement under the ostentatious name of "overseer's residence."

Inside, the house seemed to afford a practical illustration of the saying which we have already heard so emphatically stated by Marianela; namely, that she, Marianela, was of no good to anyone, only in the way. Somehow, in there, room was found for everything—for the father and mother, for their sons and their sons' tools, for a heap of rubbish, of the use of which no irrefragable proof has been found, for the cat, for the dish off which the cat was fed, for Tanasio's guitar, for the materials of which Tanasio made his *garrotes*—a kind of lidless hamper—for half a dozen old mule-halters, for the blackbird's cage, for two useless old boilers, for an altar—at which Dame Centeno worshipped the Divinity with offerings of artificial flowers and some patriarchal tapers, a perennial settlement for flies—in short, for everything and everybody excepting little María Canela. Constantly some one was heard to say: "You cannot take a step without falling over that confounded child, Nela!" or else:

"Get into your corner, do.—What a plague the creature is; she does nothing, and lets no one else do anything."

The house consisted of three rooms and a loft. The first of these served not only as dining-room and drawing-room, but also as the bedroom of the two elders; in the second slept the two young

ladies, already grown-up women, and named *La Mariuca* and *La Pepina*. Tanasio, the eldest of all, stored himself in the garret, and Celipin, the youngest of the family and nearly twelve years old, had a bed in the kitchen—the innermost room, the dingiest, dampest and least habitable of the three rooms which composed the mansion of the Centenos.

Nela, during the many years of her residence there, had inhabited various nooks and corners, going from one to another, according to the exigencies of the moment, to make way for the thousand objects which served only to curtail the last scanty accommodation left for human beings. On some occasion—the precise facts are unknown to history—Tanasio, whose feet were as crippled as his brain, and who devoted himself to the manufacture of large hampers made of hazel rods, had placed in the kitchen a pile of at least half a dozen of these bulky trophies of his art. Marianela looked on, casting her eyes sadly around, and finding no corner left into which to creep; but the predicament itself inspired her with a happy idea, which she at once acted upon. She simply got into one of the baskets, and there passed the night in sound and blissful sleep. In fact, it was comfortable enough, and when it was cold she pulled another basket on the top. From that time, so long as there were *garrotes* (a local name for these coarse, open baskets) to be found, she never was at a loss for a crib, and the others would say of the child: "She sleeps like a jewel."

During meals, in the midst of a noisy discussion on the morning's work, a voice would suddenly say in rough tones: "Here!" and Nela would have a plate given her by one of the family, big or small, and would seat herself against the big chest to eat what she had got, in silence. But towards the end of the meal sometimes the master's harsh bleating voice would be lifted up saying, with a perfunctory air of benevolence: "Mother, you have given poor Nela nothing." And then *Señana*, a compound name abbreviated from Señora Ana, would move her head about as if trying to see some minute and remote object between the bodies of her own children,

saying as she did so: "What, are you there? I thought you had stayed at Aldeacorba."

At night, after supper, the family repeated the Paternoster over their beads and then, staggering like bacchantes, and rubbing their eyes with their fists, Mariuca and Pepina went to their beds, which were snug and comfortable and covered with patchwork quilts. In a few minutes a duet of contralto snoring was heard which lasted without intermission till morning dawned. Tanasio went up to the higher regions and Celipin curled himself round on a heap of rags, not far from the basket into which Nela disappeared from sight.

The family thus being disposed of, the parents sat up for a while in the living-room, and while Centeno, seating himself with a stretch close to the little table and taking up a newspaper, made a series of grimaces to convey his bold intention of reading it, his wife took a stocking full of money out of the family chest, and after counting it and adding or taking out a few pieces, carefully restored it to its place. Then she took out sundry paper packets containing gold pieces and transferred some from one parcel to another. Meanwhile such remarks as these were made. "Mariuca's petticoat cost thirty-two *reales*. I gave Tanasio the six *reales* he had to pay. We only want eleven *duros* [2] to make up the five hundred."

Or, on the other hand:

"The deputies agreed."—"Yesterday a conference was held, etc...."

Señana's fingers did her sums, while her husband's forefinger passed doubtfully and waveringly along the lines, to guide his eye and mind through the labyrinth of letters. And these sentences gradually died away into monosyllables; one yawned, then the other, and at last all sunk into silence, after extinguishing the lamp by which the overseer of the mules had been cultivating his mind.

One night, when all was quiet, a creaking of baskets became audible in the kitchen. It was not perfectly dark there, for the shutters of the little window were never shut, and Celipin Centeno, who was not yet asleep, saw the topmost baskets, which

were packed one inside the other, rising slowly like a gaping oyster-shell, and out of the opening peeped the nose and black eyes of Nela.

"Celipin," she said, "Celipinillo, are you asleep?" and she put a hand out.

"No, I am awake; Nela, you look like a mussel in its shell. What do you want?"

"Here, take this, it is a *peseta* [3] that a gentleman gave me this evening—the brother of Don Cárlos. How much have you got now? This is something like a present; now I have given you something better than coppers!"

"Give it here and thank you very much, Nela," said the boy, sitting up to reach the money. "You have given me nearly thirty-two *reales* now, a copper at a time. [4] I have it all safe here, inside my shirt, in the little bag you gave me. You are a real good girl."

"I do not want money for anything; but take good care of it, for if Señana were to find it, she would think you would get into some mischief with it and thrash you with the big stick."

"No, no, it is not to get into mischief," said the boy vehemently, and clenching the money to his breast with one hand, while he supported himself on the other. "It is to make myself a rich man, Nela, a clever man like some I know. On Sunday, if they will let me go to Villamojada, I must buy a spelling-book to learn to read, although they will not teach me here. Who cares! I will learn by myself. Do you know, Nela, they say that Don Cárlos is the son of a man who swept the streets in Madrid, and he, all by himself, learnt everything he knows."

"And so you think you can do the same, noodle."

"I believe you! If father will not take me away from these confounded mines, I will find some other way; ah! you shall see what sort of a man I am. I was never meant for that Nela. You just wait till I have collected a good sum, and then you will see—you

will see how I will find a place in the town there, or take the train to Madrid, or a steamboat to carry me over to the islands out there, or get a place as a servant to some one who will let me study."

"Dear Mother of Heaven!" exclaimed Nela, opening her oyster-shell still wider and putting out her whole head. "How quiet you have kept all these sly plans."

"Do you take me for a fool? I tell you what Nela, I am in a mad rage. I cannot live like this; I shall die in the mines. Drat it all! Why, I spend my nights in crying, and my hands are all knocked to pieces and—but do not be frightened, Nela, at what I am going to say, and do not think me wicked—I would not say it to any other living soul...."

"Well?"

"I do not love father and mother—not as I ought."

"Oh! if you say such things I will never give you another *real*. Celipin, for God's sake, think of what you are saying."

"I cannot help it. Why, just look how we go on here. We are not human beings, we are brutes. Sometimes I almost think we are less than the mules, and I ask myself if I am in any way better than a donkey—fetching a basket of the ore and pitching it into a truck; shoving the truck up to the furnaces; stirring the mineral with a stick to wash it!—Oh dear, oh dear!" ... and the hapless boy began to sob bitterly. "Drat—drat it all! but if you spend years upon years in work like this, you are bound to go to the bad at last, your very brains turn to iron-stone.—No, I was never meant for this. I tell my father to let me go away and learn something, and he answers that we are poor, and that I am too full of fancies.—We are nothing, nothing but brutes grinding out a living day by day.—Why do you say nothing?"

But Nela did not answer—perhaps she was comparing the boy's hard lot with her own, and finding her own much the worse of the two.

"What do you want me to say?" she replied at last. "I can never be any good to any one—I am nobody. I can say nothing to you.... But do not think such wicked things—about your father I mean."

"You only say so to comfort me; but you know quite well it is true, and I do believe you are crying."

"I ... no."

"Yes, you are, I am sure."

"Every one has something to cry for," said María in a broken voice. "But it is very late, Celipin; we must go to sleep."

"No indeed, not if I know it!"

"Yes, child; go to sleep and do not think of such miserable things. Good-night."

The shell closed and all was silent.

We hear a great deal said about the hard and narrow materialism of cities, a dry rot which, amid all the splendor and pleasures of civilization, eats into the moral cohesion of society; but there is a worse and deeper disease; the parochial materialism of country villages—which ossifies millions of living beings, crushes every noble ambition in their souls and shuts them into the petty round of a mechanical existence, reducing them to the meanest animal instincts. There are many more blatant evils in the social order as, for instance, speculation, usury, the worship of mammon among men of high culture; but above all these, broods a monster which secretly and silently ruins more than all else, and that is the greed of the peasant. The covetous peasant acknowledges no moral law, has no religion, no clear notions of right and wrong; they are all inextricably mixed up in his mind with a strange compound of superstition and calculating avarice. Behind an air of hypocritical simplicity, there lies a sinister arithmetic which, for keenness and intelligibility, far transcends the methods of the best mathematicians. A peasant who has taken a fancy to hoard copper coin, and dreams of changing it presently into silver and then the

silver into gold, is the most ignoble creature in creation; he is capable of every form and device of malice known to man, combined with an absence of feeling that is appalling. His soul shrinks and shrivels till it is nothing more than a minim measure. Ignorance, coarseness, and squalor complete the abominable compound and deprive it of all the means of veiling the desolation within. He can only count on his fingers, but he is capable of reducing to figures all moral sense, conscience and the soul itself.

Señana and Centeno, who, after many struggles, had contrived to earn their "morsel of bread" in the mines of Socartes, were able to make, with the added toil of their four children, a daily wage which they would have regarded as a princely fortune in the days when they wandered from fair to fair selling pots and pipkins. It should be mentioned with regard to the intellectual powers of Centeno, that his head, in the opinion of many persons, rivalled the steam-hammer in the workshops for sheer hardness; with no disparagement to that of dame Ana, his wife, who seemed to be a woman of much prudence and discrimination, and who governed her household as carefully as the wisest prince could govern his dominions. She bagged the wages, earned by her husband and children, with the best grace in the world, and they amounted to a neat little sum; and each time the money was brought home, she felt as if the very sacrament itself were being carried in, so intense was her delight at the mere sight of coin.

Señana afforded her children very little comfort in return for the fortune she was accumulating by the labor of their hands; however, as they never complained of the utter and debasing misery in which they lived, as they betrayed no wish for emancipation, nor for a breath of any nobler life worthier of intelligent beings, Señana let the days slip on. Many indeed had slipped away before her children slept in beds, and many, many more before their brawny limbs were covered with decent garments. She gave them regular and wholesome meals, following in this respect the rules most in vogue; but eating in her house was

a melancholy ceremony nevertheless, a mere doling out of fodder, as it were, to human animals.

So far as mental nourishment was concerned, Señana firmly believed that her husband's erudition, acquired by much miscellaneous reading, was amply sufficient to credit the whole family with learning, and for that reason she forbore to cram the minds of her progeny even with the amount of instruction which is given in schools. The elder ones helped her, and the youngest lived free of pedagogues, buried alive for twelve hours out of every twenty-four in brutalizing toil in the mines, so that the whole family swam at large and at leisure in the vast and stagnant ocean of dulness.

The two girls, Mariuca and Pepina, were not destitute of charms, though youth and robust growth were the chief. One of them read fluently, but not the other, and, so far as knowledge of the world was concerned, it is easy to suppose that some rudimentary information, at least, was not lacking to girls who lived with a perfect chorus of nymphs of all ages and every grade of respectability—or the contrary—perpetually employed in mechanical work which left their tongues free to wag. Mariuca and Pepina were buxom and well grown, and as erect and strong as Amazons. They wore short petticoats, displaying half the calf of the leg which, as well as their broad feet, was bare, and their rough heads might have supported an architrave as stoutly as those of Caryatides. The russet dust of the iron ore which colored them from head to foot, like all in the mines, gave them the appearance of massive figures in terra-cotta.

Tanasio was a lethargic being; his want of character and ambition verged on idiocy. Confined to the house from his earliest years, incapable of taking any exercise, of feeling either annoyance or pleasure, or of fulfilling any task, the boy, who was born to be a machine, had sunk into something not superior to the roughest tool. The day which found such a creature able to originate an idea,

would infallibly see the total subversion of the order of nature; for, hitherto, no stone has been known to think.

The relation of this family to their mother was that of abject submission on their part, and unlimited despotism on hers. The only child who ever dared to show symptoms of rebellion was the little one. Señana, with her narrow capacities, could not at all understand this diabolical ambition to be something better than a stone. Was there—did he suppose—any happier or more exemplary life than that of a stone? She would not admit that it might be changed, even for that of a rolling stone. Señana loved her children—but there are so many ways of loving. She placed them above every other consideration—so long as they submitted to work perpetually in the mines, to pour all their earnings into one bowl, to obey her blindly, to cherish no wild aspirations nor wish to appear in fine clothes, not to marry too young, nor to learn any mischievous trash and cram their heads with school-work, since "poor folks"—she would say—"must always remain poor and behave as such, and not be wanting to jabber in the style of the rich city folks, who were eaten up with vices and rotten with sin."

I have described the manners and customs which prevailed in the Centeno's house in order that the reader may understand the life to which Nela was doomed, a helpless, forsaken creature, alone, useless, incapable of earning a day's wages; alike without a past and without a future, with no right to anything on earth beyond a bare subsistence. Señana gave her this, and firmly believed that her generosity was nothing short of heroic. Many a time would she say, as she filled Nela's little platter: "What a reward I am laying up for myself hereafter in Heaven!" And she believed it as if it were Gospel. No true light could penetrate her thick skull as to the saintly exercise of charity; she could never have understood that a kind word, a caress, a loving and gentle action, which may make a wretch forget his misery, are infinitely more precious—aye, and more heroic—than the broken meat left from a bad meal. It was but a chance that she did not give them to the cat, who, at least, was far more kindly spoken to. Nela never heard herself addressed as

michita, little pet, precious darling—nor by any other of the sweet and endearing names that were lavished on the cat.

Nothing ever suggested to Nela that she was born of human beings, like the other inhabitants of the house. She was never punished; but she felt that this immunity arose from their contemptuous pity for her feeble frame, and certainly not from any special esteem or care for her person. No one had ever taught her that she had a soul ready to bring forth good fruit if she cultivated it with care, nor that she bore within herself, like other mortals, that spark of the divine fire which is called human intelligence, and that this spark might be fanned to beneficent light and flame. No one had ever told her that her grotesque smallness included in itself the germ of every noble and delicate sentiment, and that those tiny buds might open out to lovely flowers, with no more cultivation than a herb that we glance at now and again. No one had told her that she had a right, by the very sternness of Nature in creating her, to certain tender cares which the strong can dispense with—the healthy and those who have parents and a home; since under the laws of Christian jurisprudence the helpless, the poor, the orphan, and the destitute, are all alike worthy of protection.

On the other hand, everything combined to impress upon her, her absolute resemblance to a rolling stone, which has not even a shape of its own, but takes that which the waters give it or the kick of the man that spurns it. Everything told her that her place in the house was something below the cat, whose sleek back received the only caresses ever bestowed on anyone, and the blackbird that hopped about its cage. And of them, at any rate, no one said in heartless compassion: "Poor creature! it is a pity she did not die!"

CHAPTER V.
LABOR AND A LANDSCAPE WITH FIGURES.

The smoke of the furnaces, which all night through were wide awake and panting out their hot, hoarse breath, caught a silvery gleam as its wreaths rolled into the distance; the faint smile of dawn fell upon the remotest peaks of the mountains, and, by degrees, the hills that guard Socartes came out of the darkness, the huge slopes of rust-colored earth and the blackened buildings. The bell of the works rang out shrilly its call "to work, to work," and hundreds of sleepy souls came out of the houses, huts, hovels, holes even. Doors creaked on their hinges; the mules came reluctantly out of the stables, making their way to their watering-place, and the whole establishment, which had just now looked like a city of the dead lighted up by the infernal glare of the furnaces, came to life and began to stir its thousand arms.

The steam soon was seething in the boilers of the great steam-engine, which supplied the motive power both for the workshops and the washing-mills. The water, which performed the principal part in the operations, began to flow through the raised conduits from which it fell on the cylinders. Files of men and women just risen from their beds, made their way down to the scene of labor, and at length the cylindrical sieves began to revolve with hideous groaning; the water rushed from one to the other, pulverizing the dark earth which tumbled on in muddy eddies and cataracts, from trough to trough, till it settled at last in a fine chocolate-brown powder. The sound was as of a thousand hungry jaws chewing grit and sand; the play of light on water and soil made it as dazzling as a kaleidoscope, and the clatter was like some enormous hollow drum, filled with pebbles and potsherds. It was impossible to look on without turning giddy at the incessant whirl of a vast skein, as it were, of threads of water, some clear and transparent, others stained red by the ferruginous clay; nor could

any human brain that was not accustomed to the spectacle, picture to itself this mad struggle of toothed wheels which never ceased biting at each other, of cogs, that met, and caught, and rolled away again, of screws which, as they turned, shrieked in pitiless clamor for oil.

The washing was all done in the open air. The connecting belts came humming down from the machinery sheds; other belts began to revolve, and at the same time a rhythmical stamping was heard, a slow and awful tramp like a giant's step, or a fearful throbbing inside mother earth. This was the great hammer which had begun to beat; its stupendous blows moulded the iron like a paste, and those huge wheels, and beams, which look as if made to last forever, began to twist and writhe like the limbs of men in torment, while the hammer, with its monotonous impact, created new forms as strong as the rocks which are the work of ages. For the results of labor have a strange resemblance to the results of patience.

Men so black, that they look like hewn and animated coal, gathered round the fiery objects that were taken from the forges, and seizing them with those prolonged hands known as tongs, set to work to hammer them. It is a strange kind of sculpture, this, which has fire for its inspiring genius and a steam-hammer for its chisel. Wheels and axle-trees for thousands of trucks, and the damaged portions of the washing-machinery, were repaired here, and picks, spades and barrows were made. At the back of the workshops saws hissed through blocks of timber, and the iron, which had been formed for labor by fire of wood, now cut through the sturdy fibre of trees hewn by the axe from their native spot.

Meanwhile, the mules had been harnessed to long trains of trucks which carried off the waste earth to add it to the slopes already made, or fetched the mineral to be washed. They looked like immense reptiles, crawling up and down to meet each other, and always passing close but without any jar or collision. They crept into the mouths of the tunnels, and their resemblance was really perfect to the wriggling creatures that shelter in such damp clefts

and caves; and when the recalcitrant mules kicked and shied in the bowels of the earth, it was easy to fancy the Saurians were fighting and screaming at each other. In the deepest recesses of all, hundreds of men were tearing up the earth with picks, inch by inch, to win the hidden treasure; these were the sculptors of the strange and enormous figures which stood in awful gravity and silence to confront the man who should venture to invade their mysterious domain. The miners hewed down here, bored holes there, dug farther on in one place, scraped down the wall in another, broke up the limestone, chipped out the pretty flakes of mica and shale, pounded down the calcareous clay, picked out the hematite and pyrites, crushed the fine, white marble—rolling and stirring it incessantly till it should yield zinc silicate—for zinc may be called the silver of Europe, which, being a metal of which you cannot make saucepans, is destined to become the fount of wealth and civilization. Is it not on zinc that Belgium has hoisted her standard of moral and political greatness? Aye, tin even has its epic!

The sky was clear and bright; the sun rose unclouded on the scene, and the wide settlement of Socartes flashed from dark neutrality into redness. The sculptured rocks, the heaps of ore, the hillocks of waste soil that rose on every side like Babylonian mounds, were red; the ground, the trucks and carts, the machinery, the water and the laborers that gave life to Socartes. The brick-colored tone was universal, with faint shades of difference in the earth and the houses, the metal and the people's garments. The women at work at the washing looked like a crowd of nymphs, come down in the world, and cast in red ironstone. A rivulet of crimson fluid ran through the bottom conduit to join a crimson river—you might fancy it the sweat of these toiling men and machines, of muscles and of iron.

Nela stepped out of the house. Even she, though she did not work in the mines, was faintly tinged with the universal ruddle, for the finely-powdered metal spared no one. In her hand she held a hunch of bread which Señana had given her for breakfast, and as

she ate it she walked on quickly, lost in thought and not lingering to amuse herself. She had soon passed the workshops and, going up the inclined plane and the steps before mentioned, she reached the houses of Aldeacorba. The first of these was a handsome and stately mansion, large, well-built, and cheerful looking, but lately restored and painted; with stone boundary walls, decorated eaves and a broad escutcheon surrounded by granite foliage. And the escutcheon itself would be less missed than the climbing vine, whose long and leafy branches looked like whiskers—growing, as whiskers do, on each side of a face, of which the two windows served as eyes, while the escutcheon was the nose and the long balcony the mouth, always widely grinning. And to complete this whimsical air of personality, a beam stuck out from the balcony intended to attach a rope to support an awning, and with this addition the face was seen as smoking a cigar. The roof was in the shape of a cap and in it there was a window that might represent the tassel. The chimneys could only be the ears. It was one of those faces in which a physiognomist reads plainly, peace of mind, ease of circumstance and a quiet conscience.

In front of it was a little court-yard enclosed by a wall of adobe, and on one side was a pretty orchard. As Nela went in she met the cows coming out to pasture, and after exchanging a few words with their driver—a formidable youth, about four feet high and ten years old—she went straight up to a stout gentleman, whiskered, grey-haired and florid, with a kind face and pleasant smile, and a half-military and half-rustic air; he was in his shirt sleeves and braces, and his hairy arms were bared to the elbow. Before the little girl addressed him, he looked up at the house and called out: "Here is Nela, my boy!"

A lad at once made his appearance, remarkably tall, grave and erect, his head held somewhat stiffly and his eyes fixed and vacant like lenses. His face was like marble, carved with exquisite sharpness, and his skin was as fine and soft as a girl's; there was not a feature or a line which was not of that supremely beautiful type of manliness which was the outcome of a thousand years of

Hellenic thought. Those eyes even, so purely sculpturesque in their lack of sight, were large, grand and brilliant. Their fixity lost its strangeness when you remembered that behind them all was night. In the absence of the faculty which is the cause and origin of facial expression, this blind Antinous had the cold serenity of marble, endowed with form by the genius of sculpture and with life by a vital spark. A breath, a ray of warmth, a mere sensation would suffice to animate the beautiful stone which, while it possessed every charm of form, was devoid of that consciousness of its own beauty, which is born of the faculty of seeing it.

He looked about twenty, and his strong and graceful frame was in every respect worthy of the incomparable head that crowned it. Never was a more lamentable injustice done by Nature, than to this perfect example of humanity as to beauty, blest, on one hand, with every gift, and bereft, on the other, of the sense by which man has most in common with his fellow-man and gains familiarity with all the marvels of creation at large. The injustice was such, that these splendid gifts were useless—it was as though after creating all things the Creator had left them in darkness, so that he could not himself take pleasure in his works. And to make the privation more conspicuous, the young man had mental lights of the highest order and a very superior intelligence. To have this and to lack the faculty of conceiving the idea of visibility, of form as distinct from mere matter, and at the same time to be as beautiful as an angel; to have all the faculties of a man and be as blind as a vegetable! It was strange and hard. We, alas! know not the secret of these terrible injustices; if we did, then indeed the gates would be open to us which hide the primordial secrets of moral and physical duty; we should understand the fathomless mysteries of inherited woe, of evil and of death, and might take measure of the dark shadow which always haunts life and all that is good in it.

Don Francisco Penáguilas, the young man's father, was more than good, he was admirable; judicious, kind, genial, honorable and magnanimous, and well educated too. No one disliked him; he was the most respected of all the rich land-owners in the country

side, and more than one delicate question had been settled by the mediation—always equitable and intelligent—of the *Señor de Aldeacorba de Suso*. The house in which we now find him had been the home of his infancy. In his youth he had been to America, and on returning to Spain without having made his fortune, he had joined the National Guard. He then returned to his native town where, having inherited a good fortune, he devoted himself to husbandry and to breeding cattle, and at the period of our story he had just come into another and even larger sum.

His wife, who was an Andalusian, had died very young, leaving him the one son who, from his birth, was found to be deprived of the most precious of the five senses. This was the one drop which embittered the tender father's cup. What was the use of reminding him that he was wealthy, that fortune favored all his undertakings and smiled on his house? For whose sake did he care about it all? For one who could see neither the thriving beasts, the flowery meadows, the overflowing granaries, nor the orchard with its abundant crop. Don Francisco would gladly have given his own eyes to his son, and have remained blind for the rest of his days, if such an act of generosity were possible in this work-a-day world; but, as it was not, Don Francisco could only carry his devotion into practice by giving the hapless youth every pleasure which could alleviate the gloom of the darkness in which he lived. For him he was indefatigable in the cares and the endless trifling details of forethought and affection of which mothers have the secret—and fathers sometimes, when the mother is no more. He never contradicted his son in anything which might console or entertain him within the limits of propriety and morality. He amused him with narratives and reading, watched him with studious anxiety, considering his health, his legitimate amusements, his instruction and his Christian education; for, said Señor de Penáguilas, whose principles were strictly orthodox: "I would not have my son doubly blind."

Now, as he came out of the house, he said affectionately:

"Do not go too far to-day, and do not run—good-bye."

He watched them from the gate till they had turned the corner of the garden wall, and then he went indoors, for he had many things to do; to write to his brother Manuel, to buy a cow, to prune a tree, and to see whether the guinea-hen had laid.

CHAPTER VI.
ABSURDITIES.

Pablo and Marianela went out into the country, preceded by Choto, who ran on and danced round them, leaping with delight, and sharing his caresses with great impartiality between his master and his master's guide.

"Nela," said Pablo,—"it is a lovely day; the air is soft and fresh, and the sun warm without being scorching. Where shall we go?"

"Let us go straight on through the meadows," replied Nela, poking her hand into one of the pockets of the lad's coat. "What have you brought me to-day?"

"Search and you will find," said Pablo laughing.

"Ah! Holy Virgin! chocolate! how I love chocolate!—nuts—and something done up in paper. What is it? Oh, Blessed Virgin! a sweetie! Do not I like sweeties! How rich I am! We do not have such good things to eat at home, Pablo. There is no luxury in our food; there is no luxury in our clothes either, to be sure. In fact, no luxury of any sort."

"Where shall we go to-day?" repeated the blind lad.

"Wherever you like, child of my heart," replied Nela, eating the sugar-plum and tearing up the paper it had been wrapped in. "I hear and obey, king of the world."

The child's black eyes sparkled with happiness; her sprightly little birdlike face smiled and wrinkled with satisfaction, and was not still for an instant, as though fitful flashes came and went there like dimpling light on wavelets in a pool. This helpless little creature, whose spirit seemed imprisoned and confined in the feeble body, expanded and rose elastic when she was alone with her master and friend. With him she at once became original, bright and intelligent; she had feeling, grace, refinement and fancy. When she

left him, the dark doors of a prison seemed to close on her once more.

"But I tell you we will go wherever you like," remarked the blind youth. "I like to do what you like. If you wish we will go to the clump of trees beyond Saldeoro—but just as you like."

"Yes, yes, delightful!" exclaimed Nela, clapping her hands. "And as there is no hurry, we can sit down whenever we are tired."

"There is a nice place near the spring—do you remember, Nela? And there are some large tree-trunks, which seem to have been left there on purpose for us to sit upon, and we hear so many, many birds singing, that it is quite glorious."

"And we can go past the mill-stream that, you say, talks and mumbles the words out like a tipsy man. Oh! what a lovely day and how happy I am!"

"Is the sun very bright, Nela? Though if you say 'yes,' I shall be none the wiser, since *bright* has no meaning for me."

"It is very bright indeed, *Señorito mio*. But what does it matter that you cannot see it? The sun is not at all pretty; you cannot look in its face."

"Why not?"

"Because it hurts."

"Hurts what?"

"Hurts the eyes. How do you feel when you are happy?"

"When I am out with you, just we two together in the fields?"

"Yes."

"Oh! I feel inside me a sort of freshness, a springing up of something sweet and soothing...."

"That is just it; now you know how the sun shines bright."

"What with freshness?"

"No, no—silly boy."

"What then?"

"Oh, like that."

"Like that? But what is that?"

"Like that," Nela insisted again.

"I see, it is a thing that cannot be explained in words. Do you know I used to have a notion of day and of night. It was daytime when people talked, it was night when people were silent and the cocks crowed. Now I estimate it differently; it is day when you and I are together, and it is night when we are apart."

"Ah, Holy Mother!" exclaimed the girl, shaking back the elf-locks that hung over her forehead.—"To me, who can see, it is exactly the same."

"I mean to ask my father to let you come and live in our house, so that I may always have you with me."

"Good, good!" cried Marianela clapping her hands once more. And as she spoke, she skipped on a little way in front and picking up her skirts with a great deal of grace began to dance.

"What are you about?" asked the blind boy.

"Child of my heart, I am dancing, I felt so happy that I thought I must dance."

However, they now had to get over a little fence, and she slipped her hand into his. After surmounting this obstacle, they went along a lane hedged in on each side by luxuriant ivy and brambles. Nela held the branches back that they might not scratch her companion's face, and at last, after going down-hill for a considerable time, they went up a slope shaded by chestnut and walnut trees. When they had reached the top Pablo said:

"If you do not mind we will sit down here. I hear some people going past."

"They are the people returning from the market at Homedes. To-day is Wednesday. The high-road runs just below and we can rest here before going on."

"It is the best thing we can do. Choto, come here."

The trio seated themselves.

"The place is full of flowers," said Nela. "What beauties!"

"Pick me some. Though I cannot see them, I like to hold them in my hand. I fancy I can hear them."

"Here are some lovely ones."

"As I hold them in my hand I fancy that they make me feel and understand—I cannot tell you how—that they are pretty and gay. There is something inside me, that they seem to belong to, and that answers to them. Do you know, Nela, I fancy that I can really see, inside, as it were."

"Oh! yes, I quite understand—we have everything inside us there. The sun, the flowers, the moon and wide blue sky, with all the stars—we have them all there; I mean that besides all the beautiful things outside us, and around us, we carry others with us in our minds. Here you have a flower—and another, and another—six, all quite different. Now, what do you think flowers are?"

"Flowers," said the blind youth, puzzled and lifting them to his face. "Flowers are I fancy as if the earth smiled; but, in truth, I know very little about plants and flowers."

"Merciful Mother! what terrible ignorance!" cried Nela, stroking her friend's hands. "Flowers are the stars of the earth."

"What an extravagant fancy! And what are the stars then?"

"The stars are the eyes of those who have gone to Heaven and look down on us."

"Well, but then the flowers...."

"Are the eyes of those who are dead and have not gone straight to Heaven," said the girl, with all the decision and conviction of a Doctor of Theology. "The dead are buried in the ground; but as they cannot lie still there without just peeping out at the world, they put forth something which takes the form of a flower. When, in a field there are many, many flowers, it is because—once upon a time, long ago, a great many people were buried there."

"No, no," said Pablo very seriously. "Do not believe such nonsense. Our holy religion teaches us that the spirit quits the flesh and that our mortal life comes to an end. What is buried, Nela, is a mere shell of useless clay which can neither think, nor feel, nor even see."

"The books say so—but Señana says that books are full of lies."

"But faith and reason say so too, dear Nela. Your imagination makes you believe a number of foolish things, but by degrees I will show you your errors, and you will have true and right ideas about everything in this world and the other."

"Aye, aye! I know, lessons at three for a penny!—And you wanted to make me believe that the sun stands still and the earth spins round and round it! How can you know, you who cannot see. Merciful Heaven! May I die on the spot, if the earth is not as steady as a rock and the sun running on. *Señorito mio*, I do not set up for learning, but I have spent many hours of the day and night in looking at the sky, and I know how the machine works.—The earth is below and full of islands, some large and some small. The sun comes up on this side and goes down out there. It is God Almighty's palace."

"Foolish child!"

"But why not? Ah! you have never seen a fine day and clear sky; why, child, you could fancy blessing was dropping down from it. I do not think there could be wicked people—nobody could be wicked—if they would only turn up their faces and see the great eye that looks down upon us."

"Your religion is full of superstition, my little Nela. I will teach you something better."

"Nobody has taught me anything," said María very simply. "But I myself, whoever may object, have found out in my own head a great many ideas that comfort me, and so when a good idea occurs to me, I say: 'Of course, it must be so; it cannot be otherwise.' At night, when I am alone at home, I wonder what will become of us when we die, and I think how much the Holy Virgin loves us."

"Yes, she is our loving Mother."

"And I look up at the sky and I feel her close over my head, just as when you go up to any one, you feel the warmth of their breath. She looks at us night and day through all the lovely things there are in the world—do not laugh at me."

"Those lovely things...?"

"Are her eyes, of course. Oh! you would understand it if you had eyes yourself. You have not seen a white cloud, a tree, a flower, running water, a little child, a little lamb, the sparkling dew, the moon sailing across the sky, and the stars, which are the eyes of the good men who are dead...."

"They would not want to go up there if they lie under the ground throwing out flowers."

"Only hear this all-knowing fellow! Why they stay down there only till they are purified of sin, and then they mount and fly up there. Yes, I believe it, simpleton. Why, what can the stars be if they are not the souls of those who are saved? Do not you know that stars sometimes come down? I, I myself, have seen them fall; down, down, leaving a ray of light behind them. Yes, Señor, the stars come down when they have something to tell us here below."

"Oh, Nela!" Pablo exclaimed eagerly. "Your wild imaginings, absurd as they are, charm and captivate me, for they betray the innocence of your soul and the strength of your fancy. All your errors even are part of an earnest disposition to know the truth,

and of great gifts, which would be very superior talents if they were cultivated by reason and education. You must acquire one precious accomplishment of which I am deprived—you must positively learn to read."

"To read!—And who is to teach me?"

"My father will; I will ask him to teach you. You know he never refuses me anything. What a pity it is you should live in such a wretched way; your mind is a mine of treasures. You are goodness and sweetness itself and have a lovely imagination. God has given you a large share of all the gifts that are in his store and part of himself; I know it well—I cannot see what is outside, but I can see within, and I know all the wonders of your spirit that you have shown me since you have been my guide.—It is a year and a half now, and it seems like yesterday, that we first began our walks together—and yet, no; I have known you a thousand years. How is it that there is such a close relationship between your feelings and mine? Just now, for instance, you have talked all sorts of extravagant nonsense, and I, who know the truth about the world and religion, I was stirred to enthusiasm as I listened to you. I feel as if it were a voice speaking in my own heart."

"Holy Mother!" exclaimed the girl, folding her hands. "And can he see something else that I feel?"

"What is that?"

"That I was put into the world expressly to be your *lazarillo*, and that my eyes would be of no use at all, if it were not to guide you and to tell you how beautiful the world is."

The blind boy turned his head suddenly and eagerly, and putting out his hands to touch the child by his side, he said anxiously:

"Tell me, Nela—what are you like?"

But Nela did not answer; the question was a stab to her heart.

CHAPTER VII.
MORE ABSURDITIES.

By this time they were rested, and they went on till they reached the beginning of the grove beyond Saldeoro. Here they turned off into a clump of ancient walnut trees, of which the trunks and roots made a sort of step-ladder in the soil, with mossy hollows and backs so perfect for seats, that the hand of man could have made no better. From the top of the slope trickled a thread of water, tumbling from stone to stone, till it fell exhausted into a little basin constructed to be a reservoir to feed the conduit by which the neighboring houses were supplied. Before them the land sloped gently away, affording a lovely panorama of green hills with scattered groves and villas, and meadow plains where hundreds of cattle grazed and wandered peacefully. Quite in the background, between two lofty heights which were the farthest limit of the land, lay a wide segment of purely blue sea. It was such a landscape as makes a man feel to the utmost his relations to infinity and eternity.

Pablo had seated himself on the trunk of a tree, resting his left arm on the edge of the basin; with his right hand he pulled at the boughs which hung low enough to touch his forehead, on which now and again the sunbeams played, as the boughs stirred.

"What are you doing, Nela?" asked he, after a pause, not hearing the steps, the voice, nor even the breathing of his companion. "What are you about, and where are you?"

"Here I am," said Nela, laying her hand on his shoulder. "I was looking at the sea."

"Ah! it must be a long way off."

"It is visible between the hills of Ficóbriga."

"Very large—immensely large—so wide that you might look all day, and not have done looking—is it not?"

"There is only a piece to be seen from here—like the bit you cut off with your teeth when you put a slice of bread in your mouth."

"Yes, yes—I understand. Every one says there is nothing in the world so beautiful as the sea, because it is so grandly simple.—Listen, Nela, to what I am going to say—but what are you doing?" Nela had grasped a bough of the tree with both hands, and was swinging by it lightly and gracefully.

"Here I am, *Señorito mio*. I was wondering why God should not give us human creatures wings to fly like birds. How delightful it would be just to give a flap and a whisk, and up we should go, and in one flight we should be at the top of that peak between Ficóbriga and the sea."

"But though God has not given us wings he has given us thought instead, which flies faster than any bird, since it can fly up to God himself.—Tell me, child, of what good would wings be to me, if God had denied me the gift of thought?"

"But I should like to have both. And if I had wings I would pick you up in my little beak to take you out of this world, and carry you up ever so much higher than the clouds." The blind lad put out his hand to stroke Nela's hair.

"Sit down by me; are you not tired?"

"Just a little," she said, sitting down and laying her head with childlike confidence on her master's shoulder.

"You are breathing fast, Nelilla, you are very tired; it is with trying to fly.—Well, what I want to say to you is this: Talking of the sea put me in mind of a thing my father read to me last night. You know that ever since I was old enough, my father has been in the habit of reading to me every evening different books of science, or history, or art, or mere amusement. I might say that these readings make up all I know of life. The Lord, to compensate me for being blind, has given me a very good memory, and it has turned these readings to good account; for though there has been no regular method in them, I have contrived to put some order into the ideas

that have penetrated to my understanding. How I have enjoyed listening and learning about the admirable laws and order of the universe, the harmonious circling of the stars, the motion of atoms, and above all, those grand principles which govern our souls and minds. I have enjoyed history too, which is a true account of all the things men have done in former times; for though, my child, they have always done the same wicked and foolish things, they have nevertheless gone on improving, some of them doing their utmost—but without ever succeeding—to attain that perfection which belongs to God alone. And finally, my father has read me some deeper and more mysterious things that cannot be understood at once, but when they are thought over and considered they occupy and charm the mind. He does not enjoy that sort of reading very much, as he does not altogether follow it, and it has tired me sometimes, while at other times it has delighted me. And there is no doubt that when you have an author who explains himself clearly, such subjects are very interesting. They deal with cause and effect, the rationale of all we think, and how we think, and teach us about the essential nature of things."

Nela did not seem to understand a single word of what her friend was saying, but she listened attentively with her mouth wide open; to inhale, if possible, the essences and causes of which her master was discoursing, opening her beak like a bird watching the movements of a fly he wants to catch.

"Well, then," he went on, "last night he was reading me some pages about Beauty. The author, in discussing Beauty, said that it was the outcome and radiance of goodness and truth, with many other ingenious comparisons so well thought out and expressed, that it was a pleasure to listen."

"And was that book," said Nela, anxious to prove herself equal to the occasion, "like one father Centeno has.... *The thousand and I don't know how many nights*?"

"No, no, goose-cap; it is a book on Beauty in the abstract, you will not understand—on ideal Beauty—and yet you must understand

that there is a sort of Beauty which cannot be seen, nor touched, nor perceived by any of our senses."

"For example, like the Virgin Mary," interrupted Nela, "whom we cannot see nor touch, because her pictures are not herself, but only her likeness."

"You are quite right; it is just like that. Thinking over this, my father shut the book, and talked of one thing and another. We spoke then of beauty of form, and my father said: 'This unfortunately you can never understand.' But I said I could. I said that there could only be one type, and that would apply to all."

Nela, caring little enough for such subtleties, had taken the flowers out of her companion's hands, and was arranging their colors to her taste.

"I have a clear idea about this," the blind lad went on, vehemently, "an idea that I have been quite in love with for some months. Yes, I am sure, quite sure of it; I want no eyes to see that, and I said to my father, I have an ideal of enchanting beauty, a type which includes every possible perfection, and that type is Nela. My father began to laugh, and said 'yes.'"

Nela turned as scarlet as a poppy, and could not answer a word. During a short spasm of terror and pain, she felt as if the blind boy were looking at her.

"Yes, you are the most perfect beauty imaginable," Pablo went on, eagerly. "How could it be possible that your goodness, and innocence, and freshness and grace—your imagination, your sweet and lovely soul, which have all combined to enliven and comfort my dark and melancholy life—how, I say, could it be possible that they should not be embodied in a person as lovely? Nela, Nela," and his voice trembled with anxiety.—"Tell me—are you not beautiful—very pretty?"

Nela was silent; she instinctively put her hands up, and stuck into her hair some of the half-faded flowers she had gathered in the meadows.

"You will not say? You are modest. Indeed, if you were not, you would not be the sweet little soul that you are; the logic of Beauty would be at fault, and that cannot be. You do not answer?"

"I ..." murmured Nela timidly, not ceasing her occupation, "I do not know—they say that I was very pretty as a baby—but now...."

"You are still?"

María, in her utter confusion, could only say:

"Now—well, you know that people talk nonsense—and make stupid mistakes—sometimes those who have eyes see least."

"Yes indeed, well said! Come here and kiss me."

Nela did not instantly obey, for having succeeded in fixing a sort of garland of flowers in her hair, she now felt an eager wish to see the effect of the adornment in the clear mirror of the reservoir. For the first time in her life she felt an impulse of vanity, and leaning on her hands, she bent over the basin.

"What are you doing?" asked the blind lad.

"I am looking at myself in the water, which is just like a looking-glass," she replied, confessing her vanity with perfect simplicity.

"You need not do that. You are as lovely as the angels round the throne of God." He had fired himself with enthusiastic imaginings.

"The water is ruffled now," said the girl, "and I cannot see myself plainly. It is trembling as much as I am. There, now it is quieter, now it is still again.—I can see myself now, very well."

"And see how pretty you are! Come here, my child?" added the blind youth, holding out his arms.

"I ... pretty!" she said, in anxious confusion. "Well, what I see in the pool is not so ugly as they say. The fact is, there are a great many people who do not know how to see."

"Aye, a great many."

"If only I were dressed as other girls are!" exclaimed Nela, with a touch of pride.

"You shall be."

"And the book said I was beautiful?" asked Nela, appealing to every source of conviction.

"I say so, and I always speak the truth!" cried the boy, carried away by his eager imagination.

"Maybe it is so," said Nela, moving away from her not too flattering contemplation. "Maybe that men are very stupid, and do not see things as they really are."

"Human nature is liable to a thousand errors."

"I do believe it," said Mariquilla, greatly comforted by her friend's words. "What can they see to laugh at in me?"

"Oh! how miserable is the lot of man!" cried the blind boy, driven to wild absurdity by his raving fancy. "The gift of sight may lead him into many errors—may betray him into a misapprehension of abstract truth—and abstract truth proves that you are beautiful, without any stain or blemish of ugliness. If any one tells me the contrary, I will give him the lie. Away with their theories of form. Oh, fool! into what sins your eyes may mislead you! Nela, come here, I want to have you by my side and kiss your beloved head."

She threw herself into his arms.

"Sweet, lovely darling!" he exclaimed, clasping her passionately to his breast. "With all my soul I love you!"

Nela did not speak. Her heart was full of innocent and tender devotion, overflowing with pure delight. The youth, trembling and throbbing, held her more closely than ever, saying:

"I love you more than my life. Angel of God, love me too or I shall die!"

María freed herself from his embrace, and he remained lost in bewilderment. She, the tiny woman, felt an overwhelming and irresistible impulse to look at her face once more in the water. She gently stole up to the edge, and there against the green background she saw the insignificant little face, with its black eyes, its dull coloring, its sharp nose—not altogether ugly that nose—the short, unkempt hair, and the birdlike, eager expression. She leaned farther over the stone brim to see her body; it was pitiably made and mean. The flowers in her hair fell into the water, making circles in it, and the image wavered. She, poor child, felt as if her heart were being torn up by the roots, and she staggered backwards, murmuring:

"Mother of God! how hideous I am!"

"What are you saying, Nela? I thought you spoke."

"I did not say anything—son of my soul.—I was only thinking.—Yes, it is high time we should turn homewards. It will soon be dinner-time."

"Well, come along, you shall dine with me, and bye-and-by we will go out again. Give me your hand; I will not have you leave me."

When they reached home, Don Francisco was in the forecourt with two other gentlemen; Marianela recognized the engineer of the mines and the stranger who had lost his way in La Terrible the night before.

"Here are the *Señor ingeniero*," said she, "and his brother—the gentleman of last evening."

All three men gazed with evident interest at the blind youth as he approached.

"We have been expecting you some time, my son," said the father, taking his hand and introducing him to the doctor.

"Let us go indoors," said the engineer.

"Blessings on all men of science with good hearts!" exclaimed Don Francisco, turning to the doctor. "Walk in, gentlemen; happy is the hour when you enter my house."

"Now, let us study the case," murmured Golfin.

When Pablo and the two visitors had gone in, Don Francisco turned to Mariquilla, who was standing transfixed and doubtful in the middle of the court-yard, and said kindly:

"You see, Nela, you may as well go home. My son will not be able to go out this afternoon." And then, seeing that still she did not move, he added:

"You may run round to the kitchen. Dorotea will give you something nice."

CHAPTER VIII.
AND YET MORE.

The following day Pablo and his guide set out at the same hour; but, as the sky was overcast and a disagreeable breeze was blowing which threatened to become a south-westerly gale, they decided on making their walk a short one. Crossing the village green of Aldeacorba, they went along the great slope above the mines to the west, intending to go down into the excavations.

"Nela, I must tell you something that will make you leap with joy," said the blind lad when they were at some distance from the house. "My heart is bursting with happiness.—I feel as if the whole Universe, all the sciences, history, philosophy, natural history—all that I have ever learnt had got inside me, and was dancing in procession. You saw those two gentlemen who were waiting for me yesterday...."

"Don Cárlos and his brother...."

"He is a famous doctor who has been all over America, making wonderful cures.—He is come to see his brother, and as Don Cárlos is a great friend of my father's, he asked his brother to examine me. How kind and gentle he is! First he sat talking to me; he asked me a number of questions, and told me all sorts of pleasant and amusing stories. Then he told me to sit quite still; I felt his fingers on my eyelids, and after a long time he said something I did not understand—medical terms, and my father never read me anything about medicine. Then he led me close to the window, and while he examined my eyes with some instrument the room was as quiet.—Then he said to my father: "It is worth trying." They said more, but in a low voice that I might not hear, and I think they talked partly by signs. When the visitors were gone, my father said to me: 'Son of my soul, I cannot conceal from you the joy that is in me. This man, this angel from Heaven, has given me a hope—a very faint hope—but we cling most to a hope when it is smallest. I try to give it up by telling myself it is

impossible—no, almost impossible—but it sticks to me like a burr.'—This was what my father said, and I could hear in his voice that he was crying. What are you doing, Nela? Are you dancing?"

"No.—Here I am, close to you!"

"But you used to dance when I told you anything that made me happy. Where shall we go to-day?"

"It is a dull day—we will go as far as Trascava, that is a sheltered spot, and then go down into La Terrible."

"Very well, just as you like.—Oh, Nela! If only it could be true; if God would have pity on me, and grant me the joy of seeing you. Even if I could only see for one day, and were blind again the next, how I would thank Him."

Nela said nothing. After feeling at first intensely happy, she now walked on thoughtfully, with her eyes fixed on the ground.

"Many wonderful things happen in the world," Pablo went on. "And God's mercy works in strange ways—strikes as suddenly as his wrath. It comes upon us unexpectedly, after long punishment and torment, just as his anger falls on us in the midst of happiness which has seemed secure and eternal—do you not think so?"

"Yes—what you hope will be accomplished."

"How do you know?"

"My heart tells me so."

"Your heart tells you! And why should not such warnings come true?" cried Pablo, fervently. "Yes—such chosen souls as yours can, in some cases, foresee the issue. I have noticed it in myself, for, as I am not diverted from self-inspection by seeing things outside me, I have perceived sometimes that I had a whispered presentiment that was quite inexplicable. Then when some event or other has come to pass, I have said to myself with astonishment: 'I knew all this beforehand.'"

"The same thing happens to me," replied Nela. "Yesterday you told me you loved me dearly, and when I got home I said to myself: 'It is very strange, but I knew something of this.'"

"It is wonderful, dear little one, how perfectly our souls are one. United by our own wish and will, nothing is wanting but a bond of union. That bond shall be tied if I really gain the precious sense that I have never enjoyed. The idea of seeing would never have taken possession of my mind if I did not cherish above all things the idea that through it I should love you better. The acquisition of that power can be nothing to me but the faculty of admiring in a new kind of way what I already admire so truly by the way of love.—But I fancy you are sad to-day."

"Yes, I am; and to tell you the truth, I do not know why. I am very happy and very sad, both at once. The day is so gloomy—it would be better if it never were day at all, always night."

"Nay, nay, things are good as they are. Day and night! If God ever grant me to know the difference, how happy I shall be! Why are you stopping?"

"We have come to a dangerous bit. We must turn aside a little way to get to the path."

"Ah! La Trascava! This slippery grass slopes down till it is lost in the chasm. Whatever falls down there does not come up again. Let us go away, Nela; I do not like this place."

"Silly boy, it is a long way from this to the mouth of the chasm. And it is very pretty here to-day."

Nela stood still and detained her companion by the arm, looking down at the mouth of the gulf which opened in the earth, in shape like a funnel. The sloping sides of this narrow, deep basin were covered by extremely fine turf; at the very bottom a large oblong rock lay on the grass among brambles, fennel shrubs and rushes, and an immense variety of gay-colored flowers. The stone looked like a large tongue. You felt, rather than saw, that by the side of it there was an opening, an abyss, hidden by plants, such as Don

Quixote had to cut away when he slid into the cavern of Montesinos.

Nela seemed never tired of looking.

"Why do you say that the horrible Trascava looks pretty?" asked Pablo.

"Because it is so full of flowers. Last week they were all dead and over, but now they have bloomed afresh, and it really is lovely to look at. And there are such numbers of birds there, and of butterflies too, sucking honey from the flowers. Choto, Choto, come here—do not frighten the poor little birds."

The dog, who had run down the slope, came galloping back at Nela's call, and the fluttering republic of birds returned to take possession of their common property.

"I have a perfect horror of the place," said Pablo, pulling the girl's arm. "Now, shall we go as far as the mines? I know the way there, and feel on my own ground; we will go round behind el Barco.—Choto, go on in front, do not get under my feet."

They went down a path cut into steps and soon reached the basin formed by digging out the earth and ore. Leaving the zone of vegetation, they suddenly crossed the boundary line of a geological zone, so to speak, an enormous trench, whose sides, wrought by the pick and shovel, displayed an interesting section of stratification, where the different layers showed the greatest variety of colors and earths. This was the place where Teodoro Golfin had fancied himself in the hull of a wrecked vessel, worn away by the waves—and its popular name *el Barco* (the ship), had been suggested by that very resemblance. By day, however, the spectator was chiefly struck by the sections of the strata with their sulphurous and carboniferous veins, black sedimentary deposits, lignites, in which jet frequently occurred, streaks of ferruginous earth that looked as if they had been mixed with blood, and large, even layers of slate, split in a thousand places by human devices, bristling with splinters and riven into fissures and clefts, looking

like wounds seen through a strong magnifier; while a thread of water, stained with oxide of iron, that flowed down the middle, might be taken for blood.

"Where is our seat?" asked the young man. "Let us go there; we shall be sheltered from the wind."

Out of the bottom of the great cutting they went up by a rough foot-path, that had been made between broken stones and earth overgrown with rank fennel, and at the top they sat down under the shelter of an enormous crag, rent across the middle. The two halves of the rock, standing opposite each other, with their jagged faces, looked for all the world like two yawning jaws trying to meet and close.

"How pleasant it is here!" Pablo said. "Sometimes there is a disagreeable draught through this chasm, but I do not feel it to-day. What we hear is the trickling water down inside the bowels of La Trascava."

"It is very quiet to-day," observed Nela. "Would you like to lie down?"

"That is a good idea! Last night I could not sleep, for thinking of all my father had said to me, of the doctor, of my eyes.—All night I felt as if a hand went into my eyes and opened a closed and moss-grown door." As he spoke he stretched himself at full length and laid his head on Nela's knees.

"A door," he went on, "which was quite in my inmost feeling, opened, as I tell you, showing a way into a room where the idea that haunts me was shut up. Oh! Nela of my heart, best beloved, idolized darling, if only God would grant me the sense I lack. Then I should think myself the happiest of men—for I am almost that already, merely from having you to be the friend and companion of my life. Very little is needed to make us two one—nothing but to see you and rejoice in your beauty, with that joy in seeing which I cannot even comprehend, since I have only a vague conception of it. I have a questioning spirit only because I have no power to see

for myself. I fancy it will be like a new way of loving you. I think of nothing but your beauty, still, there is something in it which I cannot realize as my own."

"Hark!" said Nela suddenly, with evident interest in something quite distinct from what her friend was saying. "Do not you hear?"

"What?"

"Down in there—La Trascava—it is talking."

"Superstitious child! water cannot talk, my Nela. What language could a driblet of water speak? There are but two things which speak, my sweet: the tongue and the conscience."

"And La Trascava," said Nela, turning paler. "It is a whisper only: 'Yes, yes, yes,' it says. And sometimes I can hear my mother's voice, saying quite plainly. 'My little girl, it is very pleasant down here.'"

"It is all your fancy. Well, fancy talks too; I forgot that. My imagination sometimes chatters so fast, that I have to tell it to be silent. Its voice is loud, persistent, intolerable; that of conscience is deep, calm, convincing; there is no answering or refuting it."

"Now it sounds as if it were crying," said Nela, still listening to the bubbling water. "It is dying away little by little."

Suddenly a light gust came up from the chasm.

"There, it sighed deeply—did not you hear? Now I hear the voice again; it is speaking low, and it says to me in a whisper, a tiny whisper in my ear...."

"Well, what does it say?"

"Nothing," said María shortly, after a pause. "You say it is all nonsense—you may be right."

"I will get all these absurd ideas out of your head," said the blind youth taking her hand. "We are going to live together all our lives. Oh! Heavenly Father! If I am never to enjoy the blessing of which

Thou didst deprive me at my birth, why hast Thou allowed me to hope? Hapless wretch that I am, if I am not born anew under the hands of Doctor Golfin. A new birth indeed—a new life! Oh! my darling, I swear to you by the image of God that exists in my soul, glorious, real and immutable, that you and I will never part by my will. I shall have eyes, Nela, eyes to delight in your presence, and then I will marry you. You will be my beloved wife—life of my life, and the joy and pride of my soul.—And do you say nothing to this even?"

Nela bent her head down over the lad's handsome face; she wished to speak, but could not for emotion.

"And if God will not after all vouchsafe me this mercy," added Pablo, "still you will not leave me, still you will be my wife—unless it horrifies you to think of marrying a blind man. Indeed, my dearest, I ought not to inflict such a burden on you. You will meet some good man who will love you, and who will make you happy. Your wonderful kindness, your noble feelings, your sweet face, must win many hearts and inspire the purest love in all who have to do with you—your future cannot fail to be bright and happy. I swear to you that I shall love you as long as I live; seeing or blind, I devote myself to you before God in the fullest, most perfect, and most unbounded love.—Will you not speak to me, Nela?"

"Yes—I love you dearly—very, very dearly ..." said Nela, putting her face close to his. "But do not be anxious to see me. Perhaps I am not so nice as you fancy."

As she spoke, Nela felt in her pocket and brought out a piece of silvered glass, a dull and useless fragment of a cheap mirror, which had been broken a week since in the Centeno household. In this she looked at herself. The image was all awry, and in consequence of the small size of the looking-glass she was obliged to study it a bit at a time, first one eye and then her forehead, till, holding it farther off, she could command a view of half her face at once. But alas! the result of her investigations was sad enough—as she looked in the glass, the tears started from her eyes.

"Nela, I felt a drop on my forehead—it is raining."

"Yes, my child, it seems to be raining," said Nela with a gulping sob.

"No—you are crying.—Something in my heart tells me so. You are goodness itself; your soul and mine are united by some divine and mysterious bond; they can never be parted—is it not true? they are two halves of one whole.—Are they not?"

"Quite true."

"Your tears give me a plainer answer than words could. You love me do you not, and will always love me, just the same whether I recover my sight or remain blind?"

"The same, just the same!" cried Nela vehemently.

"And will always stay with me?"

"Always."

"Then listen," cried the blind lad in passionate rapture. "If I had to choose between remaining blind and losing you, I would choose...."

"You would choose to remain blind! Oh! merciful Mother of Heaven! how happy—how happy I am!"

"I would choose not to see your sweet face with these eyes, for I can see it in my soul as clearly as truth. You live here, in my heart, and to me you are more lovely and enchanting than anything on earth."

"Oh! yes, yes," cried Nela half-crazed. "I must be beautiful—I must be lovely!"

"Listen," said Pablo, "I have a presentiment, a sure anticipation. It is as though the voice of God within me promised me that I should have my sight, that I shall see you, that we shall be happy. Do you not feel it yourself?"

"I—yes, I feel sure you will see...."

"I shall see your face—what happiness!" cried the blind boy in the high-pitched ecstatic tone, which was peculiar to him in moments of excitement.—"But I see it already, I see it now in my heart as plainly as the truth in my soul."

"Yes, yes, oh! yes," Nela repeated wildly, with wide-open eyes and quivering lips. "It is true, I am, I must be, beautiful!"

"Bless you, sweet one!"

"And you," she said gravely, kissing his forehead. "Now, are you not sleepy?"

"Yes, I am beginning to be sleepy. I did not sleep all night. And I am so comfortable here."

"Then sleep, my child...."

And she began to sing a lullaby. In a few minutes he was asleep; but Nela sat listening to the voice of La Trascava, which said: "Daughter come ... daughter come."

CHAPTER IX.
THE BROTHERS GOLFIN.

Teodoro Golfin did not waste his time at Socartes. The first day after his arrival he spent several hours in his brother's laboratory, and during the following days he went from one part of the mines to another, examining and admiring all he saw—here the awful might of natural forces, and there the power and enterprise of human skill. At night, when all was still in the busy village, and nothing was awake but the snorting furnaces, the worthy doctor, who was an enthusiastic musician, listened with delight to his sister-in-law's piano; Señora Sofía, was Don Cárlos' wife, but their children were all dead.

The two brothers were devotedly attached to each other. Born in the humblest rank of life, they had struggled hard in early youth to rise above ignorance and poverty, often on the point of giving way to the difficulties that beset them; but the impetus of manly determination was so strong in them, that at length, gasping for breath, they reached the longed-for land, rising superior to the beating waves in which vulgar souls splash and struggle in a perpetual state of shipwreck.

Teodoro, who was the eldest, was a medical man before Cárlos was qualified as an engineer, and he helped him to the utmost so long as the younger brother needed it, and when he saw him fairly started, he took the step to which his enterprising spirit had long aspired, and set out for South America. There he practised with other celebrated physicians, gaining fame and wealth. After a short visit at home, in Spain, he returned to the New World, and even after a second voyage home he went back again; but during each of these expeditions he made a short tour in Europe to avail himself of the advances made in ophthalmic science which he particularly cultivated.

He was a man of unpolished manners, dark and with an expression at once intelligent and sensual; his lips were thick, his

skin opaque and hairy, his eyes bright and keen; his frame was robust and his constitution sound, though somewhat injured by the South American climate. His large, round face, his prominent brow, his short, rebellious hair, the flash of his eyes and his thick, square hands, had led to his being spoken of as "the black lion." In truth, he was like a lion, and like the king of beasts, he never lost an opportunity of asserting the estimation in which he held himself. However, this vanity of a really distinguished man was the most pardonable of vanities, for it consisted chiefly in his persistently displaying his two great titles of fame and honor, namely: his devotion to surgery and the lowness of his origin. He spoke incorrectly, from his utter inability to elaborate phrases with ease and elegance. His rapid and broken sentences followed the course of his ideas, which were as swift as the electric spark.

"We," Teodoro would say, "although we have sprung from the grass by the way-side, which is the lowest origin conceivable, have grown into stalwart trees. Long live labor and human enterprise! I cannot but think that we Golfins, though Heaven knows where we came from, must have some English blood in our veins. Even our name seems to me to be of purely Saxon origin. I give it this etymology, *Gold-find*, or, as you may say, Gold-finders. Well, and my brother finds it in the bowels of the earth, while I find it in that marvellous miniature universe: the human eye."

At the period of our story he had just arrived via New York and Liverpool, and, as he declared, he now meant to remain at home; but no one believed it, for he had said so many times before and had not kept his word.

His brother Cárlos was a gentler being, placid, studious, a slave to his duties, and devoted to mineralogy and metallurgy to the point of caring far more for these two branches of learning than for his wife's society. But the couple lived, nevertheless, in perfect harmony; or, as Teodoro said, in an isomorphous state, crystallizing on the same system. As for himself, when matrimony was spoken of, he would say:

"To me, marriage would be an epigenesis, a pseudo-morphous crystallization, that is to say, a mode of crystallization which would not harmonize with my nature."

Sofía was a very good woman, who had been very handsome, but whose beauty was daily losing character and expression from her unfortunate tendency to stoutness. She had been told that an atmosphere charged with coal smoke had a tendency to reduce fat, and for this reason she had come to live at the mines, without ever leaving them the whole year through. The horrible air, charged with dust, calamine and smoke, annoyed her much however. She had no child alive, and her principal occupation consisted in playing the piano and in organizing societies of benevolent ladies for giving the poor help in their homes, and for maintaining hospitals and schools.

At Madrid, for many years her energy had been prodigious, a real model for all who feel prompted to acts of charity. With the help of two or three ladies of rank, equally devoted to their humble and suffering neighbors, she had organized more than twenty dramatic performances, and as many fancy balls, six bull-fights and two cock-fights, all for the benefit of the poor.

Among her other manias, which were apt to be but transient, however, was one which perhaps is less commendable than that for helping the needy, and which consisted in surrounding herself with dogs and cats, devoting herself to these animals with an affection really worthy to be called love. Lately, since she had lived at Socartes, she had kept a toy-terrier which had been brought to her as a commission from England by Ulises Buli, the head of the machinery department. This was a delicate and slender creature, as tricky and amusing as a child. It was called Líli, and had cost a small fortune in London—as dogs go.

On fine days the trio walked out together; when it was wet they played and sang, for Sofía had a modest pipe which, at Socartes, passed for singing. The deputy engineer had a deep bass voice, and Teodoro likewise was *basso profondo*. Cárlos could sing but a

little higher, so that the whole effect was somewhat like a priestly choir, in which Sofía's treble came out as if she were a priestess being carried off to be immolated. All the pieces they sang were—or at any rate sounded like—priests offering a sacrifice, and a priestess being sacrificed.

On the days when they walked far they took with them a sort of picnic afternoon meal. One evening—it was at the end of September, and six days after the doctor's arrival at the mines—the party were returning homewards in the following order: Líli, Sofía, Teodoro, Cárlos. The path was too narrow to allow of their walking two and two. Líli wore a little sky-blue coat or gaberdine with his mistress's initials worked upon it; Sofía carried her parasol like a gun over her shoulder, and Teodoro had his stick in precisely the same position with his hat hanging on the end of it; it was one of his favorite whims to walk out bare-headed. They were passing above La Trascava when Líli, leaving the path, with his elastic little legs like springs, began to run on the turf that covered the slope to the chasm. First he ran, but then he slipped on the grass. Sofía gave a cry of terror. Her first impulse, prompted by an almost maternal feeling, was to run after the little beast that was in no real danger; but her husband stopped her, saying: "The devil may have Líli if he wants him—but he will come back. It is impossible to go down, the turf here is so slippery."

"Líli, Líli," cried Sofía, hoping that her touching appeal would arrest the creature on the road to perdition, and bring him back to the path of virtue and duty. But the tenderest adjurations had no effect on the rebellious soul of Líli, who went lower and lower. From time to time he looked up at his mistress with his bright, black eyes, which seemed to say: "For mercy's sake do not be so foolish."

At the large, moss-grown, white rock, which lay like a lid at the very mouth of the chasm, Líli stopped. All stood with their eyes fixed on the spot, and they at once perceived something moving there. They supposed it to be some beast of prey hiding behind the

rock; but Sofía gave another shriek of astonishment rather than of terror, and exclaimed:

"It is Nela.—Nela what are you doing there?"

On hearing her name called, the girl appeared greatly disturbed, and colored deeply.

"What are you doing there, mad child?" repeated the lady. "Take up Líli and bring him back to me. Heaven have mercy on us! but what next will that creature be doing? Just look at the place she has put herself in! It is all your fault that Líli went down there—what an example to set the poor little animal. It is all your fault that he behaved in this naughty, wilful way."

"That child is a perfect limb of mischief," said Don Cárlos to his brother. "Only look at the place she has got to."

While, on the top of the slope, they were thus discussing her, Nela, down at the bottom, was trying to catch Líli, who, more wilful and daring than he had ever been before in the whole course of his monotonous existence, constantly eluded her grasp. His mistress shouted to him in vain to "be good and behave himself," while he, ignoring the most elementary principles of duty, went on leaping and frisking, looking up at her, from time to time, with consummate impudence, as though to say: "My good lady, just go on with your walk and leave me in peace."

At last, however, the sportive little beast got entangled among the briars which grew in the hollow, and there his little great-coat got him into dire trouble; the poor dog, finding it impossible to escape from the brushwood, began to bark lamentably for help.

"He will be lost, he will be killed!" wailed the Señora. "Nela, Nela, if you will only save him, I will give you a fine, big dog. Save him—go carefully—hold fast."

Nela went boldly to the rescue; setting her foot on the brambles and stout-stemmed creepers that grew over the rift, and holding on by one hand to the rock, she put out the other to take hold of

Líli's tail, by which she pulled him out of the tangle in which he had been caught. Then, patting and coaxing him, she mounted in triumph to the top of the slope.

"It is your fault, all your fault," said Sofía crossly, and boxing the dog's ears very gently. "What on earth made you go down into that hole—you know he goes after you wherever he finds you—hussy that you are!"

And then she kissed her recovered treasure and gave him one or two mild slaps, and after having assured herself that his precious skin was whole, she pulled his little coat straight, which had got dragged over his head, and gave him to Nela, saying:

"Take him, and carry him in your arms, for he must be tired, and such a long scamper may do him harm. But take care of him—go on in front.—Take great care of him—you see I am close behind to keep an eye on you."

The family party set out again, with Nela leading the way. Líli looked at his mistress over Nela's shoulder, and seemed to say: "My good mistress, what a simpleton you are!"

Teodoro Golfin had said not a word during the whole of Líli's agitating escapade, but when they had started on their way once more and were crossing the fields, where the three could walk abreast without inconvenience, the doctor said to his brother's wife:

"I cannot but think, dear Sofía, that you are unreasonably devoted to the little dog. To be sure a dog that cost two hundred *duros*, is indeed a dog among dogs. Still, I cannot but ask myself how it is that you have spent time and money in making a great-coat for his highness the terrier, while it has never occurred to you to buy a pair of shoes for Nela."

"Shoes for Nela!" exclaimed Sofía laughing. "What for, I should like to know. She would have worn them through in two days. You may laugh at me as much as you please—well, I admit that my affection for Líli amounts to an extravagance; still, you cannot

accuse me of want of charity.—Nor indeed, I must say, should I ever allow you to take such a liberty," and as she spoke she drew herself up with a solemn look of offended dignity. "As to knowing how to exercise charity with due prudence and judgment, I believe I may hold my own with any one, be it whom it may—for charity does not consist merely in giving without rhyme or reason, not knowing whether your alms are well or ill-bestowed. Do you suppose you can teach me anything? My dear Teodoro, I am quite as experienced in such matters as you are in the treatment of eyes."

"I know, I know, my dear.—You have done wonders. You need not tell me for the fiftieth time of all the dramatic entertainments, balls and bull-fights, you have got up for the benefit of the poor, nor of the lotteries, which have brought in large sums; though, after providing food for any number of idle vagabonds, there has been but a small fraction left for the sick and suffering! All these facts only go to prove to my mind the singular state of a society, which cannot be charitable without dancing, bull-fights or lottery tickets.—No, we need not discuss all that; I know and admire those heroic achievements; they have their good side, and that not a small one. But you and your gay friends very rarely put yourself in connection with any poor soul, to learn from his own lips the cause and history of his misery, or to discern what kind of wretchedness it is that oppresses him—for there are, actually, some troubles so extraordinary that the gift of a few coppers can do nothing to alleviate them, no, nor even a morsel of bread."

"Here we have our philosopher well astride on his hobby," said Sofía spitefully. "Pray how do you know what I have ever done, or what I ought to do?"

"Nay, do not be vexed," said Golfin; "for all my discourse tends to a single point, and that is that Nela should have shoes."

"Very well, then to-morrow morning I will buy her a pair."

"No—for I will buy them myself this evening. Do not poach on my preserves, Señora."

"Here—Nela," cried the lady, seeing that she had gone some distance ahead. "Do not go so fast; keep in sight that I may see what you are about."

"Poor little creature!" said her husband. "Who could guess she was sixteen years old!"

"She is dreadfully stunted, miserable little thing!" exclaimed Sofía. "I cannot help asking, why God should permit such creatures to live? And again I ask myself, what in the world can be done for her? Nothing—nothing, but to feed and clothe her after a fashion—but you see, she tears everything she puts on. She cannot labor because she faints away—she has not strength enough to do any kind of work. She skips from stone to stone, or climbs the trees, playing and chattering the whole day long and singing like the birds; what clothes she has are soon reduced to rags...."

"And yet," said Cárlos, "I have noticed that she is very intelligent. There is a great deal of acuteness and cleverness under that simple exterior and wild rusticity. No, no, Nela is no fool by a long way. If any one had taken the trouble to teach her anything, she would have learnt it better, perhaps, than most children. Would you believe it? Nela has a great imagination; but lacking, as she does, the most rudimentary knowledge, it has of course, made her sentimental and superstitious."

"In point of fact she is in the condition of all primitive races," said Teodoro. "She is at the pastoral stage of civilization."

"Only yesterday," Cárlos went on, "I was passing by La Trascava and I saw her sitting exactly where we found her again just now. I called her and made her come to me, and I asked her what she was doing there; and with the most perfect simplicity she told me she was talking with her mother.—You know, perhaps, that Nela's mother threw herself into that chasm."

"That is to say that she killed herself," said Sofía. "She was a woman of bad character and worse feeling, from all I have heard of her. Cárlos was not living here then, but they say she drank like a

stoker. And I ask you: Do these vile creatures, who end a life of sin by committing the greatest crime of all—Suicide—deserve any pity from the human race? There are things too horrible to contemplate—wretches that ought never to have been born. Teodoro may argue as much as he likes, but I cannot help asking you...."

"Ask nothing, my dear sister," said Teodoro warmly. "For I could only reply that the suicide deserves our deepest and fullest pity. So far as abuse goes, heap it on her by all means, and as much as you please; but at the same time it might be as well to enquire what were the causes that brought her to such a fearful extremity of desperation—and I may add that if society had not wholly abandoned her and left her no way out but the yawning door of that hideous abyss which seemed to invite her...."

"Abandoned by society! Well, some must be ..." said Sofía flippantly. "Society cannot take care of every one. Look at the statistics of population—only look, and you will see how many poor there are to provide for. Besides, supposing society does overlook some—what is religion for?"

"I am speaking of those poor wretches who add to all their other miseries, ignorance, which is the greatest of all. An ignorant soul, debased and superstitious, has none but the vaguest and absurdest ideas of God. The sense of something Great and Unknown, instead of withholding him, impels him to crime. It is rarely indeed that the thought of religion is of any good to those who vegetate in stolid ignorance. No intelligent friend ever goes near them, neither master nor priest; the only superior they ever come into contact with, is the judge who tries them.

"It is strange to see how inexorably you condemn what, after all, is your own work!" he went on, twisting the stick on which his hat was still mounted. "You stand looking straight before you, seeing at the very threshold of your own comfortable homes a crowd of neglected creatures, deprived of everything that childhood needs, from parents to playthings—you see them, I say, without its ever

occurring to you to raise them an inch in the world, by telling them that they too are human beings, and giving them some of the ideas they so deplorably lack, without ever dreaming of ennobling them by lifting them out of their brutalizing, mechanical toil, to some intelligent work; you see them dwelling in filthy hovels, ill-fed, sinking lower day by day in their savage squalor, and it never occurs to you to spare for them a little of the comfort and luxury that surround you! You save all your energies to declaim against murder, robbery and suicide, without ever reflecting that you are, in fact, keeping open school for these three crimes."

"You seem to forget that there are houses of refuge, hospitals, asylums ..." said Sofía tartly. "Read statistics, Teodoro, and you will see the number of miserable creatures.... Read statistics."

"I do not read statistics, my dear sister, and your statistics count for nothing with me. Asylums are good—not that they can ever solve the great problem of orphanage. A hapless orphan, dropped in the streets or in the fields, bereft of all personal affection, and cared for only by a town council—rarely, indeed, is the vacuum filled which yawns in his soul for the love of a parent—not to speak of the vacuum where self-respect, honor, and responsibility ought to be, and so rarely are found. And on that point I have an idea of my own—but, perhaps, it will appear to you absurd...."

"Tell us, at any rate."

"The problem of orphanhood, and the miseries of infancy, will never be completely and finally solved, any more than the rest of our great social problems; still, it will be lightened when custom, supported by law—yes, by law, you see I am in earnest—when custom and law insist that every orphan, whatever its birth—do not laugh—has a right to claim adoption by some married couple in easy circumstances, and who have no children. By this plan, there will be no childless parents, and no fatherless children."

"Yes, by this plan," retorted Sofía, "we should be parents to Nela!"

"And why not?" said Teodoro. "At the same time you would not waste two hundred *duros* in buying a dog, nor the livelong blessed day in talking nonsense to his highness, Master Líli."

"And why are rich bachelors to be exempt under this delightful law? Why should not they also be burthened, each with his orphan?"

"I have no objection ..." said the doctor; he was looking at the ground. "But what is this? Blood?"

They all looked down, and at regular intervals they saw small spots of blood.

"Mercy!" cried Sofía, covering her eyes. "It is Nela—see, it is where she has trodden; these are her footmarks."

"Oh yes! I see. It was when she went into the brambles to fetch your precious dog. Nela, come here."

Nela, whose right foot was bleeding a good deal, came hobbling back again.

"Give me my poor Líli," said the lady, taking the dog out of the ragged child's arms. "Do not hurt him; does it hurt you much? Poor little thing.—Oh! how it is bleeding.—I cannot bear to look at it." And Sofía turned her back to spare her sensitive nerves, hugging Líli more closely.

"Let us see what has happened," said Teodoro, lifting Nela up and seating her on a high stone that was at hand. Then, putting on his spectacles, he said: "It is quite a trifle, only a few scratches; there is a thorn in here I rather think.—That hurts you? Yes, just so, here is the villain.—Wait a minute. Now, Sofía if you cannot look on at a surgical operation, you had better walk on."

While his sister went slowly forward to save her nervous system this terrible shock, Golfin took a small case out of his pocket and a pair of tweezers out of the case, and in less than a winking the thorn was extracted.

"That is a brave little woman," he said to Nela, who had not even winced. "Now we will tie this foot up." And he bound it round with his handkerchief. Marianela jumped down to walk and Cárlos offered her his hand.

"No, no—come here," said Teodoro. He took the little girl under the arms, and with a rapid and dexterous twist perched her on his right shoulder.

"If you do not feel safe hold on to my hair," he said. "It will not come off. Now, you must carry the stick with the hat."

"What a ridiculous sight!" said Sofía, in fits of laughter as they came up with her. "Teodoro, with Nela on his shoulder, and then the stick and Gessler's hat on the top...."

CHAPTER X.
NOBODY'S CHILDREN.

"There you see a man ready for anything and everything, my dear Sofía," said Teodoro. "It is the result of our education, is it not, Cárlos? of having had no coddling in our childhood, and having been accustomed from our tenderest infancy to the idea that no one could be our inferior? Men who have made themselves, as we have done, who, without any mortal help nor any safeguard but strong will and high ambition, have been able to triumph in the struggle for existence—the devil's in it, but they are the only people who really know how to help the helpless! I will not tell you half the things I have been able to do in my life—treating my neighbor as myself—for fear of falling into an ugly trick of singing my own praises; for fear too of making you envious, in spite of your raffles and benevolent lotteries—enough of that."

"Nay, tell us, or tell us some other time."

"No, no, such things should be kept secret for modesty's sake. I am bound to confess that I cannot boast of any considerable store of that lovely grace; I am not lacking in vanity, and one of the things I am vainest of, is of having been a beggar, of having asked charity from door to door, of having walked barefoot with my brother Cárlos, and slept in corners under door-ways, without a roof, without shelter, without a home of any kind. Some wonderful spirit of energy and determination burned within me—whence it came I know not; but I felt that before us lay two paths, one to prison and one to glory. I took my poor little brother on my shoulders—just as I am carrying Nela—and I said: 'Our Father which art in Heaven—save us!' And he saved us. I learnt to read, and then I taught my brother; I served many masters, who gave me food and let me go to school. I saved my pittance. I bought a money-box, and scraped enough together to buy some books. How I began medicine, I do not know; but somehow I did, while my brother was earning a living as an errand boy in a shop."

"What are you talking about?" exclaimed Sofía much annoyed, for this was a theme she particularly disliked. "I cannot help asking; what is the use of recalling all these childish details? Besides, you exaggerate them greatly."

"I exaggerate nothing," said Teodoro with triumphant jollity. "Just listen, Señora, and say nothing. I speak of what I know with the authority of experience. Hear me all ye poor, all ye helpless ones, and ye forsaken little ones! I took to medicine, God knows how; I learnt, God knows how. A worthy man—blessings on his memory! gave me good counsel and helped me with money; I loved the science, but how could I study without ceasing to work for my living? This was a terrible dilemma. Do you remember, Cárlos, when we both went to ask for employment in the barber's shop, in the old *calle de Cofreros*? [5] Never in our lives had either of us had a razor in his hand, but we had to earn our bread by shaving. At first we only looked on—do you remember Cárlos—and then we wielded the noble instruments ourselves.—Bleeding was the making of us. Then I began to study anatomy; a noble, a glorious science! but my school-work became a serious matter, and I had to give up working for the worthy barber.—He cried, positively cried, the day I left him; he gave me two *duros*, and his wife made me a present of a pair of her husband's old trousers.—Then I went as a valet. God was always merciful in giving me good masters. My love of study interested these dear, kind people, and they allowed me as much spare time as possible. I sat up to study; nay, I studied in my sleep. I was like a monomaniac, for while I did the washing, I repeated the names of the different parts of the human frame. I remember, that as I brushed my master's clothes, I studied muscular anatomy—as I folded a sleeve I would say to myself: '*deltoid*, *biceps*, *supinator*, *flexor*, *cubitalis*;' and over his trousers I would repeat, '*glutaeus*, *psoas*, *gemellus*, *tibialis*.' In that house they used to give me broken food, which I carried to my brother, who was living with a worthy man who bought and sold old clothes. Do you remember, Cárlos?"

"I remember well," said Cárlos with feeling. "And I am grateful to the good soul who gave me a roof over my head in return for some trifling service in keeping his accounts. And it was there that I was so lucky as to come across the retired Colonel, who taught me the elements of mathematics."

"Well! you have not a rag that you blush to display to all the world!" snorted Sofía.

"My brother asked me for bread," Teodoro went coolly on, "and my answer was: 'Bread? work at mathematics.' One day my master gave me tickets of admission to the Theatre de la Cruz; I took my brother, and we enjoyed it enormously, but Cárlos caught a cold and inflammation of the lungs. That was a dreadful, a terrible business; it was a blow at the very root of our existence, a shot in our backbone. But who is cast down? On we had to go.—He must be cured. A physician who had taken a great fancy to me, undertook to doctor him."

"It was nothing less than a miracle that he saved my life in that squalid hole—a perfect museum of old clothes, old iron, and old leather."

"God was on our side—I see it plainly. Oh! I knew very well in whom I trusted," Teodoro went on, with the fervid rapid eloquence, which was as characteristic of the man, as his black elf-locks and leonine countenance. "But, for my brother to have medicine, I had to do without clothes. The Pharmacopeia did not admit of tailors' bills—nay, prescription after prescription—first my cloak went, then my overcoat, then my shoes were turned into pills. However, my master stood by me. I got some clothes once more, and my brother was outside the house again. The doctor said: 'He will get quite well in the country.'—'The country,' said I, and I thought it over; then he may go to the School of Mines. My brother was a good mathematician, I taught him some chemistry, he soon took a fancy to rocks and stones, and before he went into the school he had begun going out into the fields to pick up pebbles. Well, I meanwhile went on my way, beaten by winds and

waves; every day I knew something more of medicine. A famous operator took me as his assistant; then I was no longer a mere menial—I was a servant to science. My master fell ill, I nursed him like a Brother of Charity—but he died, leaving me a legacy. God bless me! but it was a fortune! It consisted of a walking-stick, a machine for making cigars, a hunting-horn, and four thousand *reales* in money. My brother bought books and I bought some clothes, and as soon as I was decently dressed, I began to get patients. It really seemed as if folks fell ill on purpose to give me employment. On—straight on! Years and years went by; at last, after many miseries I saw, far off, the way to a refuge. Still, my brother and I sailed on without any too severe toil, and we were never melancholy; God smiled upon our souls. Well, indeed, for us! God held out his hand to us, as it were. I began to study the eye and soon could operate for cataract, but I wanted something more than this. I was earning money, no doubt, but my brother cost me all I earned. At last, however, Cárlos passed out of the schools. Three cheers for the brave—none but the brave win the day. I saw him settled at Riotinto with a good salary, and then off I went to America. I was a sort of Columbus, the Columbus of labor; a sort of Cortés; I discovered a New World for myself, and having discovered it, I conquered it."

"You are your own trumpeter," said Sofía laughing.

"If there are still heroes to be found you are one of them," said Cárlos with eager admiration for his brother.

"Well, set to work now, noble Demi-god," said Sofía, "crown your achievement by working a miracle, and restore to sight a man blind from his birth.—Look, there is Don Francisco coming out to meet us."

And, in fact, mounting the ridge which shuts in the mines to the west, they had come to Aldeacorba, and past the house of Penáguilas, who, pulling on his coat in the utmost haste now came hurrying towards them. Darkness was falling fast.

CHAPTER XI.
THE PATRIARCH OF ALDEACORBA.

"The cows are just being milked," he began, without wishing them good-evening. "I thought you would all like some milk. I hope to see you well, Señora Sofía—and you Don Teodoro. The sight of you is good for sore eyes. But what is the matter with María Canela—a little lame paw? How long have you been so spoiled, little one?"

The whole party turned into the court-yard. They could hear the deep lowing of the cows, which had just been driven to their stables, and the homely sound, with the fresh country smell of the hay, which the laborers were carrying from the lofts, soothed the senses and the mind. The doctor seated Nela on a stone bench, while she, speechless with surprise and respect, dared not budge an inch, but could only wonder at this delightful state of things.

"And where is Pablo?" the engineer enquired.

"He is just gone down into the garden," said Señor de Penáguilas, as he offered Sofía a rustic seat. "You might run off and join him Nela."

"No, no, I do not wish her to go yet," said Teodoro detaining her. "Besides, she is going to have some milk with us."

"Do you wish to see my son this evening?" asked Penáguilas.

"No, yesterday's examination was quite satisfactory," replied Golfin. "The operation can be performed."

"And successfully?"

"Ah!—as to that I cannot say. How great a pleasure it would be to give sight to a young fellow who so richly deserves it, I need not tell you! Your son has a most superior intelligence, a brilliant imagination, and a most delightful nature. His total ignorance of the outer, visible world, only throws his beautiful qualities into

relief; they stand out in conspicuous simplicity, with the naked charm and dignity of a work of Nature, untouched and unspoiled by the hand of man. He is full of idealism, it affects all his thoughts—a grand and beautiful idealism. It reminds me of a colossal mass of unwrought marble—a block as it lies in the quarry. He knows nothing of reality, he lives a charmed life, a life of pure illusion. If we could but give him sight! Still, I say to myself—supposing that by giving him sight we should make him a man instead of an angel.—It is a question that raises doubts in my mind. However, we are bound to try to make a man of him; it is the duty of science; we will drag him out of the world of fancy into that of reality, and then, with his powerful mind, he would rapidly gain accurate information and sound judgment. He would soon acquire the invaluable power of estimating the true relative value of things."

Three cups of milk were now brought in, white, warm, fragrant, and frothy to the very rim. Penáguilas handed a cup first to Sofía, and the two gentlemen took the others; but Teodoro Golfin offered his to Nela, who was overwhelmed with bashfulness and refused to touch it.

"Come, little woman," said Sofía, "do not be so rude; take what is given you."

"Another cup of milk for Don Teodoro," said Don Francisco to the servant. And then they heard the milk as it flowed into the pails from the full udders of the cows.

"He will appreciate the true relative value of things," said Don Francisco, repeating the doctor's last words, which had made a deep impression on his mind. "That is an admirable observation, Don Teodoro. And with regard to the subject under discussion, I must explain to you the doubts I have felt for some days past. But I may as well sit down." And Don Francisco seated himself on a stool he had in his hand. The others had already been accommodated with chairs brought out of the house, and Nela was

still perched on the stone bench. The milk she had drunk as she was bidden had left a thin white moustache on her upper lip.

"I must tell you Don Teodoro that for some days I have been very uneasy at the excited state in which my son has been; I attribute it to the hope that has been held out to him—but still, there is something else—something more than that. You know that I am in the habit of reading to him out of various books. I believe that this reading has done much to fire his imagination and instruct his mind, and that many ideas have been developed in his brain, which are, as it were, above the comprehension of a blind man. I do not know whether I am making myself clear."

"Perfectly."

"There is no end to his discussions and arguments; I am astounded by the depth and acuteness of his remarks, though I feel that his knowledge is mixed up with a thousand misconceptions, from want of method and from his ignorance of the visible world."

"It could not be otherwise."

"But the strangest thing is that, carried away by his imagination—which is like a young Hercules fettered with chains within a dungeon, and struggling to burst its bonds and break down walls...."

"Good, very good, well said."

"His imagination, I was saying, cannot rest in the darkness of his sense, and strives to reach our world of daylight, making up for his want of sight by the boldness of its assumptions. Pablo has a wonderful spirit of enquiry, but it is like a noble bird whose wings are clipped. For some few days he has been almost delirious; he does not sleep and his passion for information has been almost madness. At all hours of the day he asks for some new book, and at every pause he makes the keenest observations, but with such a mixture of simple innocence, that he makes me laugh. He asserts and maintains the absurdest things, and if I contradict him—I am really afraid of his going out of his mind—of his brain softening. If

you could only see how melancholy and how disputatious he sometimes is. He takes up an idea and, come what may, it is impossible to get it out of his head. Now, for some days, he has had a fixed idea, which is as touching as it is preposterous. He will have it that Nela is pretty."

They all laughed, and Nela turned scarlet.

"That Nela is pretty!" exclaimed Teodoro kindly. "Well, and so she is."

"Oh! sweetly pretty, particularly with that moustache!" said Sofía.

"She has a dear little face of her own," repeated Teodoro, putting his hand under her chin; "Sofía, lend me your handkerchief. Come, we will get rid of the moustache."

Teodoro returned the handkerchief to Sofía after wiping Nela's face. Don Francisco told the girl to go and join the blind boy, and she hobbled away.

"And if I contradict him," he then went on, "my son tells me that, perhaps the gift of sight has weakened my perception of the true aspect of things—a quaint paradox!"

"Do not contradict him at all, and for the present discontinue your readings. For a few days we must adopt a regimen of absolute tranquillity. The brain must be treated with the utmost consideration before attempting any operation of this kind."

"If it is indeed God's will that my son should receive his sight," said Penáguilas devoutly, "I shall regard you as the greatest and most beneficent of men. The darkness of his eyes is the darkness of my life; that black shadow has saddened all my days, and clouds all the wealth and ease of which I am master. For I am rich—but of what use are riches? How can I care for the things he cannot see. Only a month ago I fell heir to a fine fortune—you know, Don Cárlos, my cousin Faustino died at Matamoros. He had no children, so my brother Manuel and I are his heirs. It is throwing pearls before swine—not as regards my brother, who has a

daughter, a sweet girl, old enough to marry—but so far as I am concerned, a wretched man who can never see his son enjoy the best pleasures of a respectable and easy position."

A long silence followed, interrupted only by the gentle lowing of the cows in the adjoining stable.

"And then," added the worthy father in melancholy tones, "he knows nothing of the pleasures of work, the greatest pleasure of all. Ignorant, as he is, of the beauties of Nature, what can he know of the delights of the country or the charms of agriculture? I cannot imagine how God can bear to deprive a human creature of the pleasure of admiring a fat beast, a tree loaded with pears, or a green pasture; of seeing the fruits of the earth in their abundance; of sending out the laborers to their day's toil, and reading the signs of the weather in the sky. For him life is simply a fevered dream—it is lonely too; solitary, for he can never have the comfort of a family round him. When I die what family will the poor blind boy have? He will not want to marry, nor will he find a woman of good family who would engage herself to him, in spite of his wealth; nor, indeed, could I advise him to marry. So that when Don Teodoro gave me a hope, I felt as if heaven was opened to me; I had visions of a young and happy and sensible marriage; cherubs—my grandchildren—fluttered round me; I saw my tombstone graced and fragrant with the blossoms of a future generation, and the loving care which even after death should follow me to the grave.—You cannot enter into all this; you cannot know how my brother, who is as good as gold, God bless him!—as soon as he heard of my hopes, began to plot and plan and dream.—Here, this is what he says"—and he took out a parcel of letters which he turned over for a few minutes without finding the one he wanted.—"Well, to make a long story short, he was beside himself with delight and he said to me: 'I will marry my Florentina to your Pablo, and so we shall get compound interest on the half million of *pesos* left by cousin Faustino.'—I can see him, poor old Manuel, rubbing his hands and strutting about as his way is when he has hit on a good idea. I am expecting him and his daughter to

arrive at any hour; they are coming to stay with me for the 4th of October, and to see what comes of this attempt to bless my son with the light of day."

By this time it was growing dark and the party of four became aware of a most appetizing vapor issuing from the house, and announcing a savory farm-supper. The village patriarch, who seemed the very incarnation of the spirit of the place—a tranquil melancholy—spoke again presently: "My brother's happiness and my own depends on my having a son, whom I may propose as a husband for his daughter, who is as sweet and fair as the Holy Virgin, as we see her represented when the angel of the Lord comes to say: 'The Lord is with thee.' My blind boy is not the man—but my Pablo, with his eyesight, would realize my fondest dreams and bring the blessing of God into my house."

They were all silent, deeply impressed by the worthy father's simple and pathetic utterances, and he himself raised his rough, brown hand, hardened by labor, to wipe away a tear.

"What have you to say to all this?" Cárlos asked his brother.

"I can say no more than that I have conscientiously examined the case, and can find no sufficient reason for saying it is hopeless, as the other distinguished operators have said whom our good friend has consulted. I cannot pledge myself to succeed, nor can I think it impossible. The examination I made yesterday revealed no defect or injury in the retina, and no disease in the optic nerve. If the retina is perfect, all that is needed is the removal of some impediment in front of it. The crystalline lens often becomes opaque—sometimes hard and stony—and this is what does the mischief. If all the other parts of the organ are healthy and work—but, in the commonwealth of the eye, many individual portions are only too ready to become atrophied by idleness."

"So that, in short, it amounts simply to congenital cataract," said Penáguilas eagerly.

"Oh no, Señor; if it were no more than that, it would be a happy thing for us! All that would be needed would be to get rid of the part that does its duty so badly. It ought to let the light in and instead of that, it is congested, degenerate, stony, and as opaque as a wall. No—there is something more than that, Don Francisco. The iris is defective, the pupil must be taken in hand.—Still, I can laugh all these details to scorn if, when I enter into possession, as it were, of this dormant organ, I only find the choroid and the retina uninjured. If, on the other hand, when I have removed the opaque lens and let the light in, I find complete amaurosis—if it were only partial, that would be something—but if it is total.... When the nerve of sight is dead we can do nothing. The deep mysteries of life are closed against us. There is nothing for it but patience. This case is to me a most interesting one; there are symptoms which lead me to believe that the internal function is unimpaired. The retina, as Sovereign lord, seems quite disposed to receive the light I shall introduce to it, and that high functionary, the vitreous humor, will probably find it no novelty. If from long want of exercise it has sunk into a state of incipient glaucoma—a kind of melancholy—we will treat it for that. All will then be well in that darkened chamber. But there is another thing to be considered. A fissured iris, and an ordinary cataract usually admit some gleam of light, and our patient sees not a glimmer. This made me hesitate. In fact, the sclerotic too is very much thickened; the impediments to the admission of light are many and serious.... However, we shall see, Don Francisco. Have you courage for anything?"

"Courage! What should I have courage for?" asked Don Francisco.

"Sir, you will want all your courage if...."

"Well, if...?"

"If, after undergoing a painful operation, your son is still as blind as before. I said to you, plainly: The case is not desperate; shall I operate?"

"And I answered, and I answer once more; Yes—operate; and God's will be done. Onwards!"

"Aye, onwards! You have taken my motto."

Don Francisco rose and wrung the surgeon's hands, that were so like a lion's paws.

"In this climate the operation may be favorably performed early in October," Golfin went on. "To-morrow we will decide on the regimen to which we must subject our patient. Meanwhile we will be going, for it is fresh up on this hill."

Penáguilas pressed shelter and supper on his friends, but they would not accept. They set out homewards with Nela, whom Teodoro insisted on taking with him, and Don Francisco kept them company as far as the works.

Soothed by the silence and beauty of the night, they fell into conversation on lighter themes—on the yield and profits of the mines, and other local matters. The Golfins having reached home, Don Francisco turned back alone and heavy-hearted, walking slowly, with his eyes fixed on the ground. He was thinking of the terrible days of doubt and hope, of expectation and anxiety which were coming on him. Presently he was met by Choto, and the pair lazily climbed the wooden stair. The moon gave them light, and the old man's shadow went up in front of him, broken by the steps into a zigzag monster that leaped from plank to plank. The dog trotted by its side and Don Francisco, in the absence of any other mortal to whom he could confide the thoughts that wearied his brain, presently said:

"Oh Choto! will it succeed?"

CHAPTER XII.
DOCTOR CELIPIN.

That worthy, Señor Centeno, having refreshed his mind with the dull columns of his newspaper, and 'Señana,' his wife, after enjoying the more intoxicating delights of counting and feeling the coin in the stocking, had taken themselves to bed. Children first and parents after, they had all marched off to their respective couches. First there was the mumbled Litany, sounding like some muttered gibberish; then yawns, while the sluggard fingers made the sign of the cross—and then the stony-hearted family slept.

When the house was as still as the grave itself, a soft rustling began to be audible in the kitchen, like the stirring of bats coming out of their hiding nooks to see life. The hampers opened and Celipin heard these words:

"Celipin—look here; I have got something nice for you to-night."

Celipin could see nothing, but he put out his hand and took from Nela's two *duros*. Having assured himself of their genuineness by touch—since he could hardly have done so by sight—he remained speechless with astonishment.

"Don Teodoro gave them to me," added the girl, "to buy myself a pair of shoes. But I do not want shoes; so I give them to you, and so you will get on faster."

"Hurrah! You are as good as the Holy Virgin, Nela—I want very little more now, and when I have got another half-dozen or so of *reales*—you shall see what Celipin is made of."

"Aye, and listen to me, child; the man who gave me that money ran about the streets barefoot begging when he was a boy, and now...."

"You do not mean it! Don Teodoro? And now he has such lots of money. They say six mules could not carry it all."

"Yes, and he slept in the streets, and was an errand boy, and had no breeches—in short, was poorer than a rat. And his brother, Don Cárlos, lived in an old-clothes shop."

"Lord save us! What wonderful things we live to hear of! Well, I will go and find an old-clothes shop where I can live."

"Well, and after that he became a barber to earn a living and be able to study."

"Ah...! Look here then; I have a great mind to go straight into a barber's shop; I shall soon have to shave myself, and I am brisk and quick enough, thank God!—Only wait till I get to Madrid—shaving on one hand and studying on the other, at the end of two months I will know everything. Look here, it has just struck me that I am made to be a doctor.—Yes, a doctor, what with feeling pulses and looking at tongues, that is the way to fill your pockets."

"Don Teodoro," Nela went on, "had much less than you, for you will soon have five *duros*, and with five *duros*, you can get almost everything. Don Teodoro and Don Cárlos were like the birds that fly about without house or home, all alone in the world. Well, by managing well, they got learned. Don Teodoro studied dead bodies, and Don Cárlos studied stones, and so they learnt to be gentlemen, and men of importance. And that is why Don Teodoro is such a friend to the poor. Celipin, you should have seen him this evening when he jumped me upon his shoulder—and then he gave me his cup of milk and looked at me as if I were a lady."

"All strong, active men, are the same," said Celipin sharply. "You will see how brave and fine I shall look when I wear a long cloak and a high hat; and I will wear those stockings on my hands—gloves they call them, and never take them off excepting to feel a pulse—I will have a stick with a gilt knob and will wear such clothes! nothing shall ever touch my skin but fine linen. Lord love you child! but you will laugh to see me!"

"Do not be fancying that you can rise to such things at once—you who are as bare as an egg," said the girl. "You must go step by step, learning one thing to-day and another to-morrow. I advise you, before you learn to cure sick folks, to learn to write; and so you ought, if it is only to leave a letter for your mother, asking her to forgive you, and telling her that you are gone away from home to improve yourself, to make your way like Don Teodoro, and become a clever doctor."

"Do not talk nonsense child. Who does not know that writing comes first? Only let me get a pen in my hand, and you will see me flourish away at the letters, and what beautiful fine strokes I will make up and down, like Don Francisco Penáguilas' name at the end of a letter.—Write? do not talk to me—in four days you will see what letters I will write.—Aye, you shall hear them read and see what grand ideas I can hatch out, and set them down too, in such fine words as will make you all look foolish. Bless you child! but you have no notion how clever I can be. I feel it inside my head here, buzzing and humming, *burumbum, burumbum,* like the water in the boiler of a steam-engine. It will not let me sleep, and I feel as if all the sciences in the world came rushing in and flapped blindly about like bats, wanting me to study them.—All the sciences—I must learn them all; I must not leave out one.—Well, you will see."

"But there must be a great many. Pablo Penáguilas knows them all, and he told me that there are a great, great many, and that a man's whole lifetime is not enough to learn even one."

"Never do you believe him.—Well, you will see what I can do."

"And the best of all is what Don Cárlos learns; why, only think, he picks up a stone and makes brass of it; indeed, they do say he makes silver, and even gold. Learn that science, Celipillo."

"Do not you be mistaken, Nela; there is nothing like knowing how to take a wrist and look at a tongue, and tell in a minute in what corner of a body the mischief lies. They say that Don Teodoro can take a man's eye out and put him in a new one, that he can see with as well as if he had been born with it. Just think what it is to see a

man dying, and to make him hale and sound again only by making him swallow half-a-dozen flies, let us say, stewed down on a Monday with hazel twigs gathered by a maid named Juana—I say that is something worth doing.—Yes, you shall see, you shall see what I will do. Doctor Celipin de Socartes. I tell you my fame will reach as far as Havana."

"Good, good!" cried Nela, delighted. "But remember, you must be a good boy, because the reason your parents have taught you nothing, is only because they were not clever enough, and so, as you are clever, you must pray for them to the Holy Virgin, and not forget to send them some of all the money you are going to get."

"I will be sure to send them some. You see, it is not because I owe them any grudge that I am going to run away; and before long, very soon, you will see a porter come up from the station so loaded with big parcels that he can hardly stand, and what will they be? Why, petticoats for mother and the girls, and a tall hat for father—and you—I will send you a pair of ear-rings."

"You are in a hurry with your presents," said Nela, smothering a laugh. "Ear-rings for me!"

"Stop; I have just got another idea. Shall I tell you? It is that you should come with me; two of us together we should help each other to earn money and to learn. For you are clever too, I am too sharp not to see that; and you can learn to be a lady as I can to be a gentleman. Oh Lord! how I should laugh to see you playing the piano like Doña Sofía."

"What a simpleton you are! Why I am no good for anything. If I went with you, I should only be a clog and burden to you."

"But they say now that Don Pablo is going to be made to see, and when he can see, you will have nothing to do in Socartes. What do you think of my plan? Why do not you answer?"

There was a long pause, during which Nela made no answer. Celipin asked her again but got no answer.

"Go to sleep, Celipin," she said from the bottom of the baskets. "I am dreadfully sleepy."

"If my brain will let me sleep, God save us!"

And a minute later he was dreaming of himself in the semblance of Don Teodoro Golfin, fixing new eyes in old sockets, splitting open fragments of rock, and snatching sick men from the jaws of death by means of doses of flies, stewed on a Monday, with hazel twigs picked by a maiden. He saw himself dressed with gorgeous garments, his hands encased in perfumed gloves, and riding in a coach drawn by swans instead of horses, invited by Kings and courted by Queens, attending ladies of distinction, lauded by nobles, and carried in triumph by all the peoples of the earth.

CHAPTER XIII.
BETWEEN TWO BASKETS.

Nela had shut herself into her baskets to be alone; we will follow her, however, and look in upon her thoughts. But first we must give a little more of her history.

Having entirely lacked all instruction in her infancy, having equally lacked all those soft endearments, which unfailingly open the mind to recognize certain truths, Marianela's powerful imagination had conceived a strange set of ideas, a wild and fanciful theogony, and a highly whimsical scheme of cause and effect. Teodoro Golfin's comparison of Nela's mind with the early stage of a primitive race was a particularly happy one. In her, as in them, the fascination of the marvellous was the predominant sense; she believed in supernatural agencies, apart from the one and supreme God, and saw in all natural objects an abstract personality, by no means cut off from all communication with men. In spite of all this, however, Nela had some knowledge of the Gospel. It had never been taught her, to be sure, but she had heard such things talked of. She saw that people went to a function they called the Mass, and she understood the idea of a sublime sacrifice; but beyond this her notions could not go. The contagion of a common feeling had accustomed her mind to reverence the image of the Crucified God; she knew it should be kissed, and she even could repeat some prayers that she had learnt mechanically; she knew whatever she wanted she could ask of God—but this was all. The absolute neglect in which her whole nature had been left until the time of her acquaintance with Pablo Penáguilas was the cause of this confusion, and her friendship with this strange being, who, shut up in darkness, nevertheless with his mind's eye boldly investigated all the problems of life, had come to her too late. Nela's system of philosophy, of her own fabrication, had already petrified—a strange compound of paganism and sentimentality. At the same time it must be said that Marianela, though her spirit ranged so far outside the common atmosphere, was well endowed

with good sense, and could form a sound judgment on the things of daily life, as has been seen in the advice she gave to Celipin. This, no doubt, was due to the native soundness of her mind.

The strongest instinct of her nature was her love, nay her secret passion, for physical beauty wherever she saw it. Nothing could be more natural than this impulse in a human soul growing up in total solitude, so far as society and teaching were concerned, and in constant intercourse, in close intimacy we may say, with Nature and all its sublime or gracious beauty—light, color, eloquent inarticulate voices, and infinite variety of form. And Marianela's admiration had assumed the guise of worship; in obedience to a law, which also governs the primitive race, she had personified all the beauty she saw around her and worshipped it in a single incarnation, ideal but human. This divinity of her imagination she called the Virgin Mary, a conception she had derived from the domain of religious thought, of which she knew so little. And the Virgin Mary would not have become her cherished ideal, if she had not joined to her moral perfections all the physical gifts of beauty and grace; if her aspect had not been noble and attractive, at once human and divine; if it had not seemed to Nela the epitome in which were concentrated all the glory of light, the sober peace of darkness, the music of running waters, the grace and sweetness of flowers, the freshness of the dew, the low complaining of the wind, the spotless purity of the mountain snow, the loving glances of the stars, and the solemn majesty of the clouds, as they ride across the vault of heaven.

The person of God himself she conceived of as terrible and austere, inspiring respect rather than love. All that was gracious was bestowed by the Virgin, and she was the giver of all that human creatures could ask for. God frowned, while She smiled; God chastised, but She forgave; this last notion was by no means a strange one. It is accepted with almost absolute faith among the laboring classes of the rural parts of Spain. Nor is it at all uncommon, when we find a strong imagination joined to extreme ignorance, to meet with the fusion which existed in Nela's mind of

all the beauties of Nature with the beautiful personification which combines all the æsthetic charms of the Christian ideal. If the darkness in which Nela dwelt had only been more complete, if she had but been rather more destitute of religious notions, she would have been an utter pagan and have worshipped the moon, the woods, the rivers, fire and the sun. This was Nela as her life in Socartes had made her, and such she remained till she was fifteen. After that, her comradeship with Pablo and her frequent talk with the lad, whose ideas were so broad and so sound, had somewhat modified her tone of thought. But she still allowed supreme sovereignty to physical beauty; she still superstitiously adored the Virgin as the embodiment of all the loveliness of Nature, and, in a way, of all moral law; crowning her system with the most extraordinary ideas as to death and the life to come.

* * *

Curling herself up in her basket, Marianela's reflections took this form:

"Holy Mother of God! Why—why did you not make me beautiful? Why did you not look down on me as soon as I was born? For the more I look at myself, the uglier I seem to grow. Oh! why am I in this world at all? Of what good can I be? Who can care for me? One single soul, Lady Mother, only one, and he only because he cannot see me. What is to become of me when he sees me and casts me off? for it is impossible that he should ever love me when he sees my miserable little body, my freckled face, my ugly mouth, my sharp nose, my dirty brown skin—all my hideous little self—of no good to any one but to kick perhaps. What is that? Only Nela—nothing at all. She is of no use to any one but the blind boy. If his eyes are opened, if he turns and looks at me, I shall drop down dead.

"He is the only being to whom 'Nela' is anything more important than the cats and the birds. He loves me. Loves me as lovers love their sweet-hearts, as God intends human beings to love each other.—Oh Lady Mother! now that you are going to work a

miracle and let him see, make me beautiful or strike me dead, for I shall not be wanted any more in this world. I am good for nothing and ever shall be, excepting to one person. Am I sorry then that he should be able to see?—No, no, not that, no. I want him to see; I would give my own eyes for him to see with his; I would give my life. I hope Don Teodoro can work the miracle as they say. Blessings on all wise men! What I do not want is that my master should ever see me. Before I will let him see me, oh Mother! I will bury myself alive, I will throw myself into the river.—Yes, the earth shall cover my ugliness. I ought never to have been born."

She writhed in her narrow basket, and then she went on:

"All my heart and thought are for him. That poor, blind man, who has taken it into his head to be fond of me—he is the first being in the world to me next to the Virgin Mary. Oh! If only I were tall and handsome; if I had the figure, and the face, and the color—above all, the color—of other girls! If I could only make a lady of myself and dress myself up.—And then my greatest joy would be to think that his eyes liked to look at me. If I were like other girls, even like Mariuca—how soon I would find a way of getting taught and being made a lady of. Oh Mother Mary, Queen of the world! The only creature that loves me, I am going to lose: he will leave me. Why did you ever let him love me, and let me love him? It ought not—never—to have been."

The tears poured down her cheeks; she folded her arms and turned over, and even when half asleep she still was speaking to herself:

"Oh, how much I love you, child of my soul! Love me too, love me very much. It is Nela who is no good to any one.—Love me very much. Let me give you a kiss—here on your head.—But do not open your eyes, do not look at me. Shut them—so."

CHAPTER XIV.
HOW THE VIRGIN MARY APPEARED TO NELA.

The thoughts which fade and fly as sleep overcomes us, very commonly lurk in some hole or corner ready to take us by storm again as soon as we wake. Thus it was that Mariquilla, who, having fallen asleep with her head full of strange fancies of the Virgin, of the blind lad, and of her own ugliness which, she longed so wildly to see changed into wonderful loveliness, woke with the same ideas in her brain when Señana's call roused her in her basket. As soon as her eyes were open, Nela put up her usual prayer to the Virgin Mother—a sort of Litany, compounded of the ordinary Litany to the Virgin and of certain clauses of her own devising, and forming altogether an address which would look strange enough if it were written down. Among other things, Nela's prayer said:

"Thou didst appear to me in my dreams last night, oh Lady! and promise to comfort me to-day. Now I am awake, and still I feel as if I saw thy face just before me, and far lovelier than all the grand and lovely things in the world." And as she spoke she turned and gazed round her. Noticing in herself the utter vagueness with which she did so, she thought to herself: "Something has come over me."

"What is the matter, Nela?" asked Señana, seeing the girl stand with her eyes wide open and fixed on a spot in space. "Do you see a vision, simpleton?"

But Nela did not answer, her mind was absorbed in self contemplation.

"What ails me?" she asked herself. "It cannot be anything evil, or wicked, for I do not feel the black ugly figure of a devil inside me, but something heavenly: a beautiful face, a smile and a look which—if I am in my right mind—are those of the Virgin Mary

herself. Oh Lady Mother! Can it be true that thou wilt give me comfort to-day? And how?—By giving me what I prayed for last night?"

"Now then, brat!" screamed Señana in her harsh tones, like a cracked bell. "Go and wash your ugly little snout."

Nela went at once. Her spirit had felt a shock as of a sudden gleam of great hope. She looked at herself in the quivering surface of the water, and her heart shrank within her.

"No difference," she muttered. "As ugly as ever; the same child's face with a woman's years and a woman's heart!"

But after washing herself she went through the same experience as before—a sort of agony of anticipation, and, in spite of her narrow vocabulary, Nela could classify these feelings as presentiments.

"Pablo and I," said she to herself, "have often talked of how we feel when something sad or something pleasant is going to happen. Pablo told me that just before an earthquake people have strange sensations; there is something in the air, and the beasts feel it too. Is there going to be an earthquake, I wonder?" And she knelt down and felt the ground with her hand.

"I cannot tell. But something is going to happen, and I cannot doubt that it will be something good.—The Virgin told me last night that to-day she would comfort me. What has come over me? The Heavenly Queen seems to be close to me. I cannot see her, but I feel her—before me—behind me...."

She went close by the machines for washing the ore towards the inclined plane, looking about her with eager eyes. There was nothing to be seen but the arms and wheels of iron, toiling with fiendish shrieks amid the hideous confusion of whirling cylinders, lashing the water to powder, as it seemed, and breathing out dust and smoke. Presently, when she had gone some little distance, she stopped; putting her hand to her forehead, and fixing her eyes on the ground in all the bewilderment of doubt: "The question is," said she to herself, "am I happy or am I sad?"

She looked up at the sky, half wondering to see it appear the same as on other days—and it was a lovely day—and then she walked on faster, to reach Aldeacorba as soon as possible. Instead of going through the gallery in the mines and up the wooden steps, she kept above the hollow way, along by the gutter that bordered the inclined tram-way, intending to get out into the fields, and walk straight on by the level road to the village. This way was much the prettiest, and she almost always chose it, for that reason. It went by lanes full of sweet and gay flowers, where crowds of bees and butterflies fluttered and sipped; there were thickets of bramble loaded with the black fruit beloved of children; clumps of cherry-trees overgrown with honeysuckles, and enormous ilex, tall, spreading, densely shady, and proud, it would seem, of their wide, black shadows.

Here Nela went more slowly, uneasy in herself, puzzled at her own sensations, and at the anxious excitement that stirred in her. Her rapid fancy presently hit upon a formula to express the state of her feelings, and remembering having heard it said of such and such a one, "the devil is in him," she said to herself: "The angels are in me, the Virgin Mary is with me this day. What I feel are the wings of her angels fluttering inside me. Thou art near me, Lady Mother, I see you and yet I do not see you—as we see with our eyes shut."

She shut her eyes, and then she opened them again. She had just passed a grove of trees and turned an angle of the road to go to a place where she knew of a bramble copse, the greenest, prettiest, and most fruitful in all the neighborhood. There were luxuriant ferns too, honeysuckle, wild vine, and other climbing plants, all clinging and tangled together in mutual dependence.

Nela heard a rustle in the brushwood close to her, and turning round she saw—Merciful Heaven! There, in a frame of greenery, stood the Immaculate Virgin herself—the face, the eyes, which in their gaze seemed to have all the calm beauty of the sky. Nela stood silent, petrified; with a feeling at once of devotion and terror.

She could not stir, nor cry out, nor hardly breathe, nor take her eyes off this beatific vision.

It stood among the verdure, the face and figure to the waist perfectly displayed. This was—yes, certainly—the very presence of the Maiden of Nazareth, whose moral loveliness every painter has endeavored to express by means of physical beauty, from St. Luke downwards through eighteen centuries. Have not men indeed seen that sacred form with the eyes of sense—with the eyes of Albert Dürer—of Rafael—of Van Eyck—of Bartolomé Murillo? It was under the Rafaelesque aspect that she now appeared to Nela, the most realistic of all, if realism can mean the nearest approach of perfect human beauty to an artistic representation of divine goodness. The oval of her face was less narrow than the Seville painter's type, and had more of the tender roundness of the Italian form. Her eyes, which were finely shaped, were gentleness itself, with a softness and sweetness as far removed from indifference, as from the lightning glow of the eyes of Andalucia; the brows that overarched them were delicately curved, and as fine as if they had been traced with a paint-brush. Her forehead was unshadowed by any cloud of weariness or sadness, and her lips, which were rather full, parted in a smile that revealed the pearliest teeth that ever bit into the apples of Paradise. And so, without in the least intending it, I have compared her to our Mother Eve—wide as the distance is between her who yielded to the Serpent and her who set her heel on his head; but the beauty of a lovely girl is enough to betray us into such unlucky blunders. To put a finishing touch to this imperfect description of the divine vision which had so utterly dismayed poor Marianela, it must be said that her complexion was of that faded rose color, or warm clear brown which gives an enchanting glow to the faces of those glorious pictures which successive generations, of believers and heretics alike, have worshipped in ecstasy.

After the first shock of surprise was over, the first thing that Nela observed, and which confused her judgment greatly, was that the fair Virgin wore a blue ribbon round her throat, a detail she had

never before seen in any picture or dream of the Virgin Mary; then she perceived that her shoulders and bosom were covered by a dress in every respect similar to that worn by other ladies; but the thing which puzzled and disturbed her most was that the fair creature was picking blackberries—and eating them.

She was beginning to draw accurate inferences from this remarkable behavior, when she heard a loud man's voice calling:

"Florentina, Florentina!"

"I am here, Papa—here, eating blackberries."

"Naughty child—how can you like to eat blackberries? What next whim will you take? Have I not told you that they are only fit for the poor children that run about the country, and not for a young lady who has been properly brought up.—Do you hear? And lived in good society."

Nela saw the speaker come towards them. He was a man of advanced middle age and medium height, rotund, and with a ruddy countenance that seemed to radiate satisfaction as the sun radiates light. His legs were thin, his nose was large, and his person decorated with a variety of splendid objects, among which a thick watch-chain was conspicuous, while he wore a broad-brimmed hat of fine black felt.

"Come, come, child," said Don Manuel Penáguilas, for he it was, "respectable people do not eat blackberries nor skip and jump about like that. There, you have torn your dress—I do not care about the dress, for I can buy you another as I bought you that—I only speak because the people here who see you might think you had no dress but the one you have on."

Nela, who by this time understood the case, looked at the young lady's dress. It was good and handsome, but her face betrayed unmistakably the transition—and a rapid one—from the position of a rich peasant's daughter to that of a fine lady. Every detail of her attire, from her shoes to her comb, stamped her as the daughter of the people in holiday clothes. But the girl's natural grace and

beauty were so transcendent, that no deficiency, as measured by any conventional standard of elegance, could dim them. It was not to be denied, however, that her whole individuality cried out for a short peasant's skirt, hair dressed in plaits with a bunch of poppies to adorn it with affected simplicity, a sleeveless bodice, a coral necklace—in short, the costume which good taste and the nature of things would have suggested, without any admixture of the devices of the fine lady.

As the young girl came out from among the brambles, Don Manuel perceived Nela, at the moment when she had just recovered from her delusion, and he called out as he turned to her:

"Hallo! and who are you? Why, look Florentina, it is Nela, the little body that waits upon your cousin. You remember—I spoke of her to you? And how are you now-a-days?"

"Very well, Señor Don Manuel. And you.—How are you, Señor?" asked Mariquilla without taking her eyes off Florentina.

"Perfectly well—as you see. This is my daughter.—Well, what do you think of her?"

Florentina had just set out on a butterfly chase.

"My dear child, where are you going? What do you want now?" said the father, visibly annoyed. "Now do you think it looks well that you should be running after an insect like some poor child? You must not be so wild, my child. Young ladies brought up in good society do not do such things—never do such things...."

It was a trick with Don Manuel to repeat the last clause of his sentences to give them emphasis.

"Ah! do not be cross, Papa," said the girl, returning from her fruitless chase to shelter herself under the protecting brim of the paternal hat. "You know how much I love the country and that I am half crazy when I see trees and flowers and meadows. And in that dismal town of Campó I never see anything of the kind...."

"Oh! but you must not say anything against Santa Irene de Campó; it is a famous town where you find every comfort and convenience, and a great deal of very distinguished society. It stands in the foremost ranks of civilization—yes, of civilization. You can admire the beauties of Nature while you walk properly by my side. I admire them too, but without cutting capers or turning somersaults. You can tell when a young person has moved in good society only by her way of walking and looking at the scene around her. This way of calling out at every minute: Ah! Oh! Look there, Papa!—How pretty!—and pointing to a fern, perhaps, or an oak-tree, or a rock—a thorn-bush even, a brook—is not at all in good taste—people will think you have lived in a desert. So come and walk by me.—Nela will show us the way home, for, to tell you the truth, I do not know where we are."

"If we turn to the left, past that old house," said Nela readily, "we shall be there directly.—But here comes Don Francisco."

And, in fact, Don Francisco came on towards them, calling out: "The chocolate is getting cold."

"What would you have my good fellow.—This child was so anxious to scamper across the country that she would not wait, so we went springing from bush to bush like goats—just like goats from bush to bush."

"Well come in now, come home. Nela do you come too, and have some chocolate," said Penáguilas, laying a hand on the child's head. "Well, and what do you think of my niece? Is not she pretty?—Florentina, when you have had your chocolate, Nela will take you and Pablo for a walk, and you will see all the beauties of the neighborhood—the mines, the wood, the river...."

Florentina sent a kind glance to the hapless little creature who, as she ran by her side, seemed to have been formed by Nature expressly as a foil and contrast to one of the loveliest and most perfect of her creations.

When they reached the house the table was ready laid with the chocolate pots full of the thick and nutritious beverage, and a small hillock of slices of bread. There too were the *mantequilla* (a sort of cake), duly decked with fern leaves, and no lack of other household dainties. The bright glasses of crystal water reflected and magnified all these gastronomical objects.

"Here we have something to support life," said Don Francisco, seating himself.

"And you will have some chocolate too, Nela," said Pablo. He had hardly spoken when Florentina had offered her the chocolate pot, and everything that was on the table was pressed on her acceptance. She refused at first, but the Señorita insisted with so much kindness and gentle grace, that she had at last no choice. Don Manuel cast side glances at his daughter, not feeling perfectly satisfied with her advance in the arts and manners of the best society, since one of the most important points, in his estimation, consisted in a delicate appreciation of the shades of civility due to different people according to their rank and position, "showing to each neither more nor less than was appropriate by the rules of social distinction; since, by this means, each would keep his place, while true dignity would hold its own and observe that happy medium of courtesy, which was not too haughty or reserved to the rich, nor too humble and condescending to the poor—not too humble to the poor."

When they had done breakfast, Don Francisco said:

"Now, you children, go out for a walk. Pablo, this is the last day that Don Teodoro will allow you to walk out. You three go and have a run, while my brother and I go over the farm.—Fly away birds!"

There was no need to speak twice; the beauty of the day was invitation enough, and the three young people set out for the fields.

CHAPTER XV.
THE THREE CHILDREN.

The town-bred damsel thoroughly enjoyed the open and smiling meadows without the trammels of her father's social dogmas, and as soon as they were at some little distance from the house she took to running and leaping, swinging now and then from the branches of the trees as she passed them. She pinched the blackberries with the tips of her fingers, and when she thought them ripe she would pick three, one for each mouth.

"This is for you, cousin," she said, putting it to his lips, "and this is for you, Nela, and this little one is for me."

Then as the birds flew across she could not resist the temptation to wave her arms as if she too could fly. "Where are the little rascals off to I wonder?" she said. She must need gather a branch from every oak-tree and split open the acorns to see what was in them, then she bit into one, and finding it bitter, tossed it away. No botanist, mad on Latin names and classification, could have been so eager to collect all the flowers that grew under her feet, as if to bid her welcome to their native soil, and she gathered enough in half an hour to adorn every button-hole in her cousin's cloak, to make a garland for Nela's hair, and then one for her own.

"My cousin would like to see the mines," said Pablo. "Do not you think we might go down?"

"Yes, let us go down—this way, Señorita."

"Oh! but I do not like to go through tunnels, they frighten me dreadfully. I really cannot go through a tunnel ..." said Florentina, following them. "Cousin, do you and Nela walk about here often? Oh! but this is beautiful—I could live here all my life. Blessings on the man who is going to give you the power of enjoying this lovely world!"

"God grant it! And it will all look much more lovely to me who have never seen it, than to you who are tired of it all. But do not suppose, Florentina, that I do not understand what beauty is; I can feel it in my own fashion, and my fancy almost, almost makes up for my want of sight."

"That is strange.—But say what you will," replied Florentina, "we will have some good fun when you can see."

"Maybe," said the blind boy, "that I may not find much to say that day."

Nela meanwhile was absolutely speechless.

When they had reached the crater of La Terrible, Florentina was greatly struck by the grand spectacle of the limestone rocks, left on the ground after the ore had been extracted. She compared them to huge masses of sugar loaves piled one on another; then, after looking a second time, she said they were like gigantic dogs and cats turned to stone at the critical moment of a furious fight.

"Let us sit down on this slope," she said, "and we shall see the trains go by with the mineral, and besides we can see these stones which are very curious. That large rock in the middle has a wide mouth—do you see, Nela?—and out of the mouth sticks a toothpick; it is a tree that has grown all alone there. It looks as if it were laughing at us, for it has eyes too; and there, farther on, is one with a hump, another smoking a pipe, and two pulling each other's hair; there is one yawning, another asleep and drunk, and another head downwards supporting a cathedral on his feet; then there is one playing the guitar, with a dog's head and coffee-pot on it like a cap."

"What you are saying," observed the blind man, "proves to me how differently things are seen by different eyes, and that the precious gift of sight sometimes travesties them strangely, changing their natural form into something whimsical and unreal; for, after all, what you see before you are neither cats nor men, toothpicks, cathedrals, nor coffee-pots, but merely limestone rocks and masses

of calcareous stone stained with oxide of iron. And it is your eye that burlesques so simple a fact."

"You are right, cousin; and for that very reason I say it is our imagination that sees, and not our eyes. Nevertheless our sight is useful—to inform us, for instance, of certain things which poor people have not got and which we who are rich can give them." And as she spoke she touched Nela's dress.

"Why does not this dear little Nela wear better clothes?" she went on. "I have a number of frocks and I will give her one—and a new one too, into the bargain." Marianela, covered with blushes and confusion, did not raise her eyes.

"That is a thing I can never understand: why some have so much and others so little. I get quite angry with Papa when I hear him abusing those who wish that everything should be divided so that all should have an equal share. What do they call those people, Pablo?"

"Socialists—communists ..." said the lad smiling.

"Well, those are the people for me. I vote for a redistribution, so that the rich should give the poor all they have too much of. Why should this orphan go barefoot when I wear shoes? Even wicked people ought not to be destitute, much less good ones. Now, I know that Nela is very good, you told me so last evening, and your father said so too. And she has no parents, no one to care for her. How is it that there are so many, many, miserable creatures in the world? My bread burns my mouth when I remember how many there are who have none at all. Poor little Nela! such a good child, and so forlorn! It seems impossible that to this day you should have lived without being loved, without any one to give you a kiss nor to cuddle and pet you as we pet little children—my heart aches to think of it."

Marianela was as completely petrified with astonishment as at the first sight of the apparition. Then she had seen the Virgin Mary, now she heard her very words.

"Listen, little one," the Holy Maiden went on, "and you, Pablo, listen too. I must help and comfort Nela—not as we help the beggars by the road, but as we try to help a brother whom we find unexpectedly. Did you not tell me that she has been your companion, your *lazarillo*, your guide through the darkness? That you saw with her eyes and trod in her steps? Nela is mine as much as yours then, and I shall take charge of her. I will dress her and give her everything she can want to live decently, and teach her a hundred things to make her useful in the house. Papa told me that perhaps I might always have to live here; and, if so, Nela will live with me; with me she will learn to read, to say her prayers, to sew and to cook; she will learn so many things that she will know as much as I do. What do you think of my plan? She will soon be nothing short of a young lady. My father will not prevent me I know. Indeed, last evening he said to me: 'Florentinilla perhaps, perhaps, before long I shall not rule you any longer; you may have to obey another master....' Well, be that as it may, Nela shall be my friend. Will you love me? dearly? You have lived so neglected—as the wild flowers grow in the fields—that you do not even know how to say thank you—but never mind I will teach you; oh! I have to teach you so many things."

Marianela, who had been making stupendous efforts not to cry as she listened to these splendid promises, could at last hold in no longer and, after screwing up her face for a minute, burst into tears. The blind boy sat silent, lost in thought.

"Florentina," he said presently, "you speak and think differently from most other people. Your goodness is as infinite and as enthusiastic as that which has filled the world with martyrs and peopled heaven with saints."

"What an extravagant way of putting it!" said the girl laughing, and she rose to gather a flower that had attracted her attention at some little distance.

"Is she gone?" asked Pablo.

"Yes," said Nela, gulping down her tears.

"Do you know?" said Pablo, "I fancy my cousin must be rather pretty. When she arrived last evening I felt the greatest antipathy towards her; I cannot tell you what a dislike I took to her. But to-day I fancy I can see her, and that she must be rather pretty."

Nela began to cry again.

"She is like an angel!" she said with a flood of tears. "She looks as if she had just come straight from Heaven. Body and soul she is exactly like the Holy Virgin Mary."

"Oh! do not exaggerate," said Pablo uneasily. "She cannot be so lovely as you say. Do not imagine that because I have no eyes I cannot feel who is beautiful and who is not."

"No, no, you cannot feel it, you do not understand.—Oh! you are mistaken, quite mistaken."

"No, no. She cannot be so beautiful," the blind lad insisted, turning very pale as he spoke. "Nela, darling of my heart, do you know what my father told me? That if I recover my sight I am to marry Florentina."

Nela could not answer; her tears continued to flow in silence, pouring down her burning cheeks and dropping on her hands. But not even the bitterest tears could give expression or relief to her intense grief. It was immeasurable, infinite, that was all she knew.

"I know why you are crying so much," the blind youth said holding her hands very tightly in his own. "But my father will not insist on making me marry against my will. For me there is no wife in the world but you. When my eyes can see, they will care for no beauty but your heavenly face; all others will be but shades, too remote and dim to attract my gaze. Oh God! what is a human face like? How does the soul stand revealed in flesh? If light cannot avail to give another aspect to thought and fancy, of what use is it at all? That which we conceive of and that which is—are they not one and the same thing? Are not the idea and the form the same to each other as fire and heat? Can they be separated? And can you

cease to be the fairest in the world to me, the sweetest and best beloved, when I am lord of the vast domain of the visible?"

Florentina now rejoined them, and they talked as they went home; but nothing more was said of sufficient interest to be set down here.

CHAPTER XVI.
THE VOW.

Nothing of importance occurred on the two following days, but then there came one on which the deed was done, the wonderful, crowning, fateful deed. Teodoro Golfin, in whose hands the surgeon's knife was as the chisel of a Genius, had attempted to amend one of Nature's most delicate works. Unflinching and calm he took possession, as it were, in virtue of his science and experience, of the marvellous speck in which the glorious scheme of the Universe is epitomized and concentrated. The task before him was nothing less than to stand face to face with the mystery of Life; to investigate and discover the causes which hindered a living eye from taking cognizance of things visible. For this a firm soul was needed and a tender hand. The delicate tissue of the cornea must be divided, the crystalline lens removed, carefully avoiding the hyaloid membrane and the vitreous humor; the dimensions of the pupil must be increased by an incision, and the condition of the inner chamber of the eye ascertained by induction or by examination.

Few words were spoken after this daring expedition into a microcosm—an enterprise not less bold than the attempt to measure the distance between the stars, or to gauge the infinite realms of space. Those who were present sat in silent suspense, as they might await the resurrection of a dead man or the creation of a new world. Golfin said nothing definite either:

"Iris contractile," he muttered. "Retina sensitive.... Nerves living and sound...." And yet the function, the fact, the act of seeing—where was that?

"Time will show," said Don Teodoro, as he carefully adjusted the bandages. "Patience."

And his leonine face expressed neither disappointment nor triumph, neither hope nor doubt. Science had done all she could; it

was almost like an act of creation, like many others she has enabled us to perform in this nineteenth century. Nature, thus boldly defied and resenting such an intrusion on her secrets, held her peace.

The patient was strictly forbidden to see any one but his father, who waited on him; no one else was admitted. Nela went several times to enquire for the invalid; but she never crossed the threshold, she waited outside till Don Manuel should come out, or his daughter, or some member of the household. The young lady, after giving her the fullest information and painting in lively colors the anxiety they all felt, would go out to walk with her. One day Florentina insisted that Nela should show her where she lived, and they went down to Centeno's hovel; the squalid interior horrified and disgusted Florentina; above all, the baskets which served as the orphan's bed.

"Well, Nela will very soon come to live with me," said Florentina, getting out of the stuffy hole as fast as she could, "and then she will have a bedroom just like mine, and will dress and feed as I do."

Dame Centeno and her two girls stood open-mouthed with astonishment at this speech. They began to think that the hapless and neglected orphan must have found her father in some Prince or King, as the orphans do in the tales.

When they had left the house behind them Florentina said to her companion: "Pray to God day and night that He may grant my dear cousin the blessing which we all enjoy and which He has denied to him. What an anxious state we live in! If he gains his sight a thousand delightful things will follow and many difficulties will be removed. I have made a solemn vow to the Virgin; I have promised that if she grants my cousin his sight I will take under my care the very poorest creature I can find, and give her all that can make her entirely forget her poverty, making her my own equal in every respect, as happy and as comfortable as I am. And it is not enough merely to give her clothes, or set her down to a table with plenty of soup and meat. No, there is another charity which is

worth more than all the broken food and frippery in the world—kindness, respect, consideration, and a name. I will give her these too, and teach her to respect herself. I have found the person I want, María—it is you. I have promised the Holy Virgin from the bottom of my soul that if she will bestow the gift of sight on my cousin, you shall be my sister. You shall be the same as myself, in my house, exactly like my sister." As she spoke Nela's Virgin clasped the girl in her arms and kissed her on the forehead.

It is impossible to give any idea of the poor little vagabond's feelings in this crowning hour of her life. An instinctive dread kept her away from the house at Aldeacorba, a dread that was dimly mixed up with the personality of her young benefactress, like the figures we see in a nightmare; while, at the same time, she felt tender admiration and reverence for her. Now and again, in her innocent bewilderment, she fancied it must be the Virgin Mary in her actual presence; in no other way could she conceive of the kind-heartedness which smiled upon her, like the realms of Paradise, from the open soul of Florentina, with its purity, tenderness, gentleness, and gracious consolations. Nela's honest instinct made her feel and understand at once that she could not hate her self-constituted sister. Hate her! How could she? She felt she must love her with all the strength of her soul. Her aversion and repulsion sank to the bottom like a sediment after fermentation, and there decomposed and vanished, their elements recombining to intensify the admiration and respect she felt for her benefactress. Still, though the feeling had disappeared, the cause remained—the sentiment which, as it could no longer flourish singly in her soul, with that masterful exclusiveness which is characteristic of such passions, revenged itself by producing that utter dejection which is the very demon of melancholy.

At Centeno's they remarked that Nela did not eat, that she seemed wearier than usual, that for long intervals she sat as silent and motionless as a statue, and that she sang no longer, day or night. Her incapacity for exertion had become absolute helplessness, and

Tanasio, having sent her to buy him some tobacco, she sat down in the road and remained there for the rest of the day.

One morning, just a week after the operation had been performed, she went up to the engineer's house, and Sofía said to her: "A gift for good news Nela! Have you heard? They have taken off the bandages to-day, and they say he can see, that he will see quite well. Ulysses, the foreman of the works, has just been to tell us. Teodoro has not been here, but my husband has gone to Aldeacorba—we shall know the truth very soon."

Nela, as she heard it, felt more dead than alive, and crossing her hands she exclaimed: "Blessed be the Holy Virgin who has worked this wonder!—She, she alone has done it."

"You are glad little one?—No wonder, for now Señorita Florentina will keep her promise," said Sofía in a bantering tone. "Allow me to congratulate you, Señorita Doña Nela.—Why it is like a lottery! What a big prize, Nelilla! And yet you may not be grateful—no, you will not. I never yet knew any poor who were grateful. They are all proud, and the more you give them the more they ask.—Well, it is a settled thing that Pablo is to marry his cousin, and it is a very good match; they are a handsome pair and she seems no fool—and she has a sweet pretty face; what a pity to spoil such a face and figure by dressing so villanously! No, no, if I want to dress well I will not apply to the dressmaker at Santa Irene de Campó."

As she spoke Don Cárlos came in; he was radiant with satisfaction and delight.

"A complete success!" he shouted as he reached the door. "Next to God stands my brother Teodoro!"

"It is quite certain?"

"As sure as daylight—I never believed it could be.—And what a triumph, Sofía! What a triumph! It is my greatest pride and happiness to be my brother's brother. He is the king of men.—Yes, as I say: First God, and then Teodoro!"

CHAPTER XVII.
A FUGITIVE.

The wonderful good news flew through Socartes. Nothing else was talked of in the smelting-houses, in the workshops, in the washing-mills, on the tram-way, in the deepest diggings, and on the top of the hill, in the bowels of the earth or the open light of heaven. Various interesting commentaries were added: that in Aldeacorba it was thought for a moment that Don Francisco was out of his wits with joy; that Don Manuel meant to celebrate the happy event by giving a grand banquet to all the hands employed in the mines; and, finally, that Don Teodoro was a great man, whom all blind men, present or to come, might indeed esteem, "as the apple of their eye."

Nela could not venture to go to the house at Aldeacorba. A mysterious force seemed to hold her back. She wandered all day round and about the mines, gazing from afar at the Penáguilas' house, which in her eyes, looked transformed. Her spirit was full of a strange compound of the sincerest joy and an overwhelming shamefacedness, of noble devotion and with it the unendurable aching, so to speak, of an intensely sensitive self-consciousness.

She found some surcease from the turmoil of her brain in that motherly solitude which had contributed so largely to the formation of her character, and in dreaming over the beauty of Nature, which always lifted her soul to closer communion with the Divinity. The clouds in the sky and the flowers of the field affected her mind as others are affected by the pomp of altars, the eloquence of preachers and the study of the meditations of the mystics. In the solitude of the open country she thought and said a thousand things that she never dreamed were aspirations and prayers. She looked towards Aldeacorba, and said to herself:

"I will never go there again.—All is over and done.—Of what use can I be now?"

With all her ignorance she understood that the struggle in her soul arose from her incapacity to hate any one; on the contrary, she was constrained to love her friend and her enemy alike, and just as thistles turned into flowers under the miraculous touch of some Christian martyr, Nela perceived that her jealousy and aversion were graciously blossoming into admiration and gratitude. That which could undergo no change was the feeling we have described as self-conscious shame, and which urged her to keep herself quite apart from any events which might henceforth occur in Aldeacorba. It was a special aspect of the sentiment which in civilized and educated persons is called *amour propre*, which includes in itself the capacity for self-depreciation. The connection, however, between her feeling and that which has so large a share in the actions of cultivated persons, consisted in the fact that both were founded on a punctilious sense of dignity. If Marianela could have expressed herself in their language she would have said:

"My dignity will not allow me to submit to the horrible degradation you would put upon me. It is God's will that I should endure this humiliation—so be it; but I cannot stand by and see myself deposed and discrowned. May his blessings fall on the head of her who, by a law of nature, must fill the place I once occupied—but I have not the courage to put her there with my own hands."

But not being able to utter her pain in these words, she could only say: "I will never go to Aldeacorba again—I will never let him see me. I will run away with Celipin, or I will go to my mother. I am of no use now to any one."

Still, even while she said this, it struck her as very sad that she should have to give up the divine protection of that Heavenly Maiden who had appeared to her in the darkest hour of her life, and cast her sheltering mantle over her! To think that after seeing the vision realized which had so often appeared to her in dreams of thrilling beatitude, she must renounce it—to have heard herself called by a gentle voice, that offered her a sister's love, a happy

home, position, a name, and a luxurious existence—and then be unable to obey the invitation with joy, alacrity and thankfulness—to reject the hand which would snatch her from a life of degradation and misery, and make a lady of the wretched vagabond, raising her from the rank of a domestic animal to that of a loved and respected woman!...

"Woe, woe!" she cried, clutching her bosom as if her fingers were talons: "I cannot, never, never.... Nothing in the world shall ever take me to Aldeacorba! Virgin, mother of my soul, take me, take me.... Mother, will you not come and fetch me!"

As night came on, she went home; on her way she met Celipin with a stick in his hand and his cap hung on the end of it.

"Look here, Nelilla," said the boy: "Is not this how Don Teodoro carries his hat? Just now I was passing the pool at Hinojales and I looked at my reflection in the water. My! was not I surprised—I thought I looked just like Don Teodoro Golfin. Some day this week we will set out to become learned and useful persons. I have got as much money now as I want, and you will see, no one will dare to laugh at Señor de Celipin."

For three days Nela kept out of the way, wandering about the neighborhood of the mines, following the course of the river along its rugged banks, or hiding herself in the quiet recesses of the wood of Saldeoro. The nights she spent in her basket, but she could not sleep. One night she timidly called her companion:

"Celipin—when?" and Celipin replied with all the solemnity befitting a regular expedition:

"To-morrow."

The two adventurers rose at day-break, and both went their way; Celipin to his work, and Nela to carry a message from Señana to the engineer's housekeeper. On her return she found Señorita Florentina, who was waiting for her at Centeno's house. María was surprised and alarmed at seeing her, though her instinct told her of the end and object of this visit.

"Nela, my little sister," said the girl with engaging gentleness: "Why are you behaving so strangely? Why have you not been near us all these days? Come, Pablo wishes to see you. Do you not know that now he can say: 'I want to see this thing or the other?' Do you not know that my cousin is no longer blind?"

"Yes—I know it," said Nela, taking the hand Florentina held out to her and covering it with kisses.

"Come along then; come at once. He is always asking for 'Señora Nela.' And to-day you must be there when Don Teodoro takes the bandage off—it is the fourth time. Oh! the first day—when he first tried it! What a day that was! When we knew for certain that my cousin was born again, as I may say, to the light of day—we almost died of joy.—And the first face he saw was mine.—Come along, quickly." But María drew her hand out of her Virgin's clasp.

"Have you forgotten my promise, my vow?" Florentina went on, "or did you think I was talking at random? But indeed, nothing I can do seems enough to show our Mother of Mercies my gratitude for the grace she has shown us. I should like that, on this day, not a creature that the whole world contains should be sad. I should like to divide my happiness, and fling it abroad on all sides, as the sower casts the seed; I should like to go into every wretched dwelling and say: 'All your troubles are ended. I have a remedy for them all.'—But it is impossible; no one can do that but God. Still, as my powers are not equal to my will, let me at any rate do what I can—and these are not mere words, Nela. Come with me, away from this hovel; bid farewell to everything that has made part of your misery and your loneliness. For you may have an affection, even for your wretchedness, my child."

Marianela did not, however, say good-bye to anything; and as none of the family were indoors at that hour, she did not wait for them. Florentina went out, leading by the hand the poor little girl whom her noble impulses and christian feeling had adopted to be her equal; and Nela allowed herself to be led, from sheer incapacity to offer any resistance. She felt as though some

superhuman power had taken her in hand and was carrying her along, fatally and inevitably, as the angels bear a soul away to Heaven.

They took the path by Hinojales, where the vagabond child had seen Florentina for the first time. As they turned into the lane the young lady said to her companion.

"Why have you not been to the house? My uncle says that you have so much natural modesty and delicacy that it is a pity you should not have been educated. Was it delicacy that kept you from coming to ask for what, by God's mercy, you had so happily gained? Without doubt my uncle is right.... You should have seen the poor dear man that day—he said he should not be sorry to die!—Do you see? My eyes are still red with crying so much. And last night my uncle and my father and I never went to sleep; we were making plans for all the family and building castles in the air all night—Why do you say nothing? Why are you so silent? Are you not as glad as I am?"

Nela looked up in the girl's bright face and made a faint effort to resist the gentle hand that held hers.

"Come along—what is the matter? You look at me so strangely Nela."

She did indeed; the hapless child's eyes wandering vaguely from one object to another, ended by fixing themselves on the Virgin of her fancy, with a strange glitter of apprehension.

"Why does your hand tremble so?" Florentina went on. "Are you ill? You are as pale as death and your teeth are chattering. If you are ill I will cure you, I myself can cure you. From this day you will have some one to care for you, and pet you, and make much of you. And I shall not be alone you know, for Pablo is very fond of you—he told me so. We both love you dearly and he and I shall be like one person.—He wants to see you. Just fancy how full of curiosity a man must be who has never seen anything at all; but you cannot think how—from being so clever as he is, and having

an imagination which seems to have given him a number of ideas which blind people scarcely ever have—from the first moment he knew what was pretty and what was ugly. A bit of scarlet sealing-wax pleased him at once and a piece of coal he thought hideous. He admired the beauty of the sky and was disgusted at the sight of a frog. Everything that is beautiful excites him to an enthusiasm that is almost delirium; everything ugly fills him with horror, and makes him tremble as we do when we are frightened. My appearance must have pleased him, for he exclaimed as soon as he saw me: "Oh! cousin, how pretty you are! Thank God for having bestowed sight on me so that I can see you!"

Nela had gently withdrawn her hand from Florentina's grasp and fell on the ground as if suddenly stricken to death. The young girl bent over her, saying in coaxing tones: "Oh! what is it ails you? Why do you look at me so?" Marianela fixed her eyes on the Holy Virgin's face with a miserable stare; still their expression was not one of aversion, but rather a gaze of agonized entreaty, like the last look of a dying man imploring mercy from the image of the Saviour, and believing it to be God himself.

"Señora," murmured the child, "I do not hate you—no indeed I do not hate you. On the contrary, I love you dearly—I adore you." And taking up the hem of Florentina's dress she pressed it to her dry lips and kissed it fervently.

"But whoever supposed you would hate me?" said the young girl greatly bewildered. "I know that you love me. But you frighten me—get up."

"I do love you, dearly, dearly; I adore you," repeated Nela, kissing the feet of her benefactress. "And yet I cannot—I cannot...."

"What cannot you do—for God's sake! get up." Florentina put out her arms to help her up; but Nela rose without any assistance, and springing away to a safe distance, she repeated, bursting into a flood of tears:

"I cannot Señorita, I cannot."

"What?—in Heaven's name! what has come over you?"

"I cannot go there." And she pointed to Aldeacorba, where the roof of Don Francisco's house was visible among the trees.

"And why?"

"The Blessed Virgin knows," replied the child with prompt decision. "May the Holy Virgin bless you!" She made a cross with her fingers and kissed it; she was registering a vow.

Florentina took a step towards her and María, understanding the loving impulse, flew to meet her; she laid her head against her friend's bosom, and murmured as she sobbed: "Kiss me—for God's sake! give me one kiss!"

Florentina kissed her tenderly, and then freeing herself with a start, or rather a wild and sudden leap, the child—or woman—fled to a brake close at hand; the brushwood seemed to open and swallow her up.

"Nela, Nela—little sister!" cried Florentina in much distress.

"Farewell, child of my eyes!" said Nela, turning round to look at her once more; and she vanished in the copse.

Florentina listened to the rustle of the branches, as the hunter listens to the rush of the prey that has escaped him. Then all was silent; not a sound was to be heard but the vague monotone that fills the atmosphere at noon in the open country—a sound which seems to be the whisper of our own thoughts as they go forth towards all that surrounds us. Florentina stood amazed, powerless, speechless, deeply distressed—as if she had just seen some fond illusion snatched from her gaze. She did not know what to think of it all, and even her unbounded kind-heartedness, which often crippled her judgment, could supply no explanation.

She had been standing in the same spot for some little time, her head drooping, her cheeks tingling, and her blue eyes full of tears, when Teodoro Golfin happened to come upon her, making his way at an easy pace from Aldeacorba homewards. The doctor was

greatly astonished to find the young lady alone and with an expression of vexation and regret which, far from diminishing her beauty, added to it and made it more interesting.

"What ails the girl?" he exclaimed with some anxiety. "Why, Florentina, what is the matter?"

"A dreadful thing, Señor Golfin," said Florentina, wiping her eyes. "I was thinking—considering how many terrible things there are in the world."

"And what are these terrible things, Señorita? Where have you been? Can anything have happened to you?"

"Provoking things—and of all things there is one which is more provoking than all the rest."

"What is that?"

"Ingratitude, Señor." And pointing to the copse of bramble and fern, she added: "It was in that direction."

She went up to the highest spot at hand to see farther into the distance. "Quite out of sight!" she said with a sigh.

"Quite," said the surgeon laughing. "Don Manuel told me that you were devoting yourself to collecting butterflies. They are ungrateful creatures indeed not to wish to be caught by you."

"It is not that—I will tell you all about it if you are going to Aldeacorba."

"I was not going, as I have just come away, fair damsel; but if you will tell me all about it—be it what it may—I will go back again. I am all ears for your story."

CHAPTER XVIII.
NELA DECIDES THAT SHE MUST GO.

Nela wandered about alone all day, and at night she prowled round the house at Aldeacorba, creeping as near to it as she dared without running the risk of being discovered; whenever she heard footsteps she stole away like a thief. Then she went down into the crater of La Terrible, whose grewsome aspect somehow suited her gloomy mood; she lingered there some time looking up at the stone giants that stood round it, and then she climbed up one of them to see the lights of Aldeacorba. There they were, sparkling above the slopes of the mine against the dark background of earth and sky. After gazing at them for a while as if her hungry eyes had never seen lights before, she quitted La Terrible and went towards La Trascava. But before she reached it she heard footsteps, and turning round, she saw Master Celipin coming along the path at a brisk determined pace. He had a small bundle hanging from a stick over his shoulder, and his step, as well as his air and attitude, announced a full determination never to stop till he should have paced the whole circumference of the globe.

"Celipe!—Where are you going?" cried Nela, detaining him.

"Nela ... you out here! We thought you were with Señorita Florentina, eating ham, and turkey, and partridges all day long, and drinking lemonade and syrups. What are you doing here?"

"And you—where are you off to?"

"You ask me that, now? Why do you ask me since you know quite well," answered the boy, jerking the stick and bundle. "You know very well that I am going to learn all I can and make money. Did I not tell you it would be to-night?—And here I am, as glad as can be—a little sorry, too, when I think that father and mother will cry. You see, Nela, the Blessed Virgin favored us to-night, for father and mother began to snore sooner than usual; and I had my bundle

ready, and I climbed up to the window and got out of it.—Now are you coming or not?"

"Yes, I am coming," said Nela with sudden decision, taking the arm of the adventurous Celipin.

"We will take the train, and we will go in the train as far as we can," said Celipin with liberal enthusiasm. "And then we must beg till we get to Madrid, where the King of Spain lives; and when once we have got there, you can go as a servant in the house of some Marquis or Count, and I will go into another, and at the same time I can study, and you can have a heap of fine things. And I can teach you a little of all I learn—only a little, not too much; for you women have no need to be as learned as we doctors must be."

Before Celipin had ended his speech, they had set out on their road, trotting on as fast as though they already saw in the distance the turrets of the city "where the King of Spain lives."

"Let us get out of the regular path," said Celipin, his practical talents rising to the occasion: "If they see us they will lay hands upon us and give us a good thrashing."

But Nela drew her hand away from her fellow-adventurer's, and sitting down on a stone, she said: "I am not going."

"Nela! what a little fool you are! You have not a brave heart like mine; a heart as big as the rocks in La Terrible!" said Celipin, with a braggart air. "What the devil are you afraid of? Why will you not come?"

"I—oh!—why should I?"

"Do not you know that Don Golfin said that the work here is turning us all to stones? I do not want to be a stone—not I."

"I—why should I go?" repeated Nela with disconsolate bitterness. "You have time enough—for me, it is too late."

And Nela's head sunk on her breast and she sat for some time insensible to the persuasive eloquence of the Hippocrates of the

future. The idea that she was about to cross the boundary of the spot of earth where she had lived so long, and where her mother slept the sleep of the dead, made her feel as if she were being torn up by the roots. The beauty of the place in all its variety seemed to claim her by a sort of relationship; the rare and fleeting joys, nay, the very misery she had known there; the memory of her friend and of the happy hours when they had walked in the woods or sat by the spring at Saldeoro; all the feelings of admiration or of sympathy, of love or of gratitude, which had grown and blossomed in her soul among these scenes—these flowers—these clouds—these rustling trees—these frowning rocks—inseparable as it were from the loveliness or the grandeur, the progress and the immutability of all these works of nature, were so many roots from her heart, and dragging them up from the soil was bitter anguish.

"No—I am not going," she repeated.

And Celipin argued and talked as if, having by some miracle reached the goal of his career, he belonged to all the academies present and to come.

"You are going home then?" he asked, seeing that his oratory was as unavailing as that of the academies themselves commonly is.

"No."

"You are going to Aldeacorba?"

"No; not there either."

"Then you will go to where Señora Florentina lives."

"No, no—not there."

"The devil's in it—but where are you going then?"

Nela did not answer; she sat looking at the ground with an expression of dismay, as if she saw there the fragments of the most beautiful and precious thing on earth—fallen and lying broken at her feet.

"Well then, Nela," said Celipin, exhausted with his long harangue, "I must leave you and be off, for they might follow me, and find me. Would you like me to give you a *peseta* as a parting gift to-night?"

"No, Celipin, I want nothing.—Go, you will be a rich man yet. Take care of yourself and do not forget Socartes and your father and mother."

The traveller had a sensation highly improper in a man of so much importance and dignity—a strong disposition to cry; but swallowing down this inopportune emotion, he said:

"How should I ever forget Socartes? You need not have said that—I shall never forget my father and mother, nor you, for you helped me to do this.—Good-bye, Nelilla—hark! I hear footsteps!"

Celipin shouldered his staff with a resolution that symbolized his courage to defy all the dangers of the wide world; but his valorous display was wasted, for a dog only came running up to them.

"It is Choto," said Nela, trembling all over.

"A bad sign!" muttered Celipin, setting forward; and he disappeared in the darkness.

A stone was lost to geology, and the world would be the richer by a great man!

Nela shivered as the dog leaped upon her and caressed her. The affectionate creature, after jumping round and round her, whining and barking with so much expression that it was almost like speaking, set off running as fast as he could towards Aldeacorba. You might have thought he was in chase of some wild game. Choto—unlike some orators—seemed to speak when he barked.

* * *

Just at this time Teodoro Golfin was coming away from the Penáguilas'. He was met by Choto, who, with voluble haste, told him—I know not what. It was a fervent, fitful address, delivered

between his gasps for breath and gushes of eager anxiety. Golfin, though he understood several languages, was not strong in the canine tongue, and paid no particular heed. Choto leaped up and round him, jerking out barks from his moist jaws, some short and sharp as insults, others soft and coaxing, and then again threats. Teodoro meanwhile stood still, his attention was struck by the dog's manner; and Choto, seeing that he had made himself understood to a certain extent, began to run in a contrary direction to Golfin's homeward road. The doctor followed him. "Very well," he muttered, "that way then."

Choto retraced his steps, as if to make sure that Golfin was following him, and then he trotted on again. At some little distance from the house Golfin heard a voice saying:

"Well, Choto, what is it you want?"

He suspected at once that it was Nela. He paused and listened, hidden in the shadow of a beech-tree, and soon perceived a little figure standing out from the stone wall and walking very slowly. The shadows of the brambles prevented his seeing her very distinctly. He set out to follow her at some little distance, quitting the path and walking on the turf, so as to make no noise. Beyond a doubt it was Nela. He recognized her perfectly when they got upon open ground, where there were no dark shadows cast by trees or shrubs.

The girl now went faster and faster; at last she began to run, and Golfin ran too. After this unequal race had gone on for some distance, Nela sat down on a stone. At her feet was the sloping basin of La Trascava, black and hideous in the gloom. Golfin waited a moment; then he very softly went nearer to the girl. Choto was seated in front of her, squatted on his hind quarters, with his fore paw stretched out, and gazing at her with the gravity of a sphinx. Nela stared into the depths below, and suddenly starting to her feet she began to go quickly down the slope—slipping rather than running. With one bound Teodoro stood by the abyss, roaring in stentorian tones: "Nela! Nela!"

He looked down, but could see nothing in the dark chasm; he could hear Choto whining as he ran round and round the ridge, lower and lower in spirals, as if he were being sucked in by some eddy in the dreadful gulf. Teodoro thought of going down himself and cautiously took a step or two; then he called again, and a voice from below answered: "Señor."

"Come up this minute."

No answer.

"Come up, I say."

Presently he could just see the child's face in the lowest visible depths of the horrible chasm. Choto, after snuffing at the opening, came up again, round and round the basin as before; Nela too was climbing up, but very slowly. Indeed, she stopped, and repeated feebly: "Señor?..."

"I tell you come up. What are you doing here?"

Nela came a little further.

"Come—quickly. I have something to tell you."

"To tell me?"

"Yes—something I must tell you at once."

Nela crawled up; but Teodoro did not feel sure that he had triumphed till he had seized her hand and held it tightly to lead her away with him.

CHAPTER XIX.
NELA IS TAMED.

They walked on a short distance without speaking. Teodoro Golfin, for all his learning, wisdom, and eloquence, felt as ignorant and as helpless as Nela, and less disposed for speech than usual. She followed him unresistingly, and he accommodated his steps to those of the child-woman, like a man taking a boy to school. At a turn in the road where three enormous white stones stood up, weather-worn till they looked like bleached skeletons, the doctor sat down, and placing Nela in front of him, as if she were on her trial for some grave delinquency, he held her by both hands and said solemnly:

"What were you going to do there?"

"I—where?"

"Down there. You know very well what I mean. Answer me plainly, as you would answer your confessor or your father."

"I have no father," replied Nela with a faintly mutinous accent.

"That is true—but suppose me to be your father, and answer me. What were you going to do?"

"My mother is down there," she answered dully.

"Your mother is dead. Do you not know that dead people are gone to another world, or altogether away?"

"She is there," said Nela positively, and looking back towards the spot she had left.

"And you thought you would go to her. Is that it? That is to say, you meant to kill yourself."

"Yes, Señor, that is it."

"And do you not know that your mother committed a great sin in killing herself, and you would do the same if you followed her example? Were you never taught that?"

"I do not think anyone ever told me anything of the kind. And if I want to kill myself, who is to prevent me?"

"But you yourself—without being told—cannot you feel that God cannot be pleased with us for getting rid of our lives? Poor child—left to your own instincts without any teaching, or religion, or loving and disinterested guidance!—What ideas can you have of God, of a future life, of death? What makes you fancy your mother is there? Do you call a few lifeless bones your mother! Can you believe that she is still alive, thinking of you and loving you down in that pit? Did no one ever tell you that when once our souls have left our bodies they never return to them again? Do you not know that a tomb, a grave, whatever it may be, never contains anything but dust and foul corruption? What do you think God is like? Like some grand and solemn man who sits above us with his arms folded, and who allows us to play with our lives, while, in His place, we see some sprite, hobgoblin or fetich of our fancy?—Your master, Nela, who is so wise and good, did he never talk to you about such things?"

"Oh! yes he did.—But it is of no use to tell me them now...."

"Of no use now—when you want to kill yourself? Tell me, silly child, did you think that by throwing yourself into that hole you would be any better off?"

"Yes, Señor."

"In what way?"

"I should feel none of the things I feel now, but something else, much better—and I should be with my mother."

"I see you are more silly than wicked," said Golfin laughing. "Now, be quite honest with me. Do you owe me any grudge?"

"No indeed. I owe no one any grudge—least of all you, Señor, who have been so kind to me, and have made my master see."

"Very good—but that is not all; I not only want you to like me, but you must trust me and tell me all your little secrets. Strange little secrets are hidden in your mind, little woman, and you must tell them all to me—every one. You will see, I shall not be hard upon you; I shall make a very kind father confessor."

Nela smiled a forlorn smile; then bending her head, she fell on her knees.

"No, silly child, that is not the way; sit down by me—come here," said Golfin, gently drawing her to a seat by his side. "I fancy you were going crazy for want of some one to whom you could tell everything; is it not so? And you are to conceal nothing. You are indeed alone in the world, poor child.—Come, Nela, let us see; tell me first of all why—now be very attentive—why you took it into your head that you wanted to kill yourself?"

Nela did not answer.

"I saw you happy enough, and content with life to all appearance, only a few days since. Why have you suddenly gone mad in a single night?"

"I want to go to my mother—" replied Nela, after hesitating a moment. "I do not want to live any longer. Of what good am I in the world? Is it not much better that I should die? And if God will not make me die, I will kill myself, my own way."

"This notion that you are of no use is at the bottom of all your miseries, poor little creature! Curses on him—or on them, for they are many—who ever put it into your head. They are all equally responsible for the neglect, the isolation, and the ignorance in which you lived. You are of no use! God knows what you might have been if you had fallen into other hands! A refined nature is yours, perhaps an exquisitely superior one.—But good Heavens! If you put a harp into clumsy hands what can they do with it but break it.—Because your fragile frame is not strong enough to break

stones and carry earth like those brutes in human form Mariuca and Pepina, who shall say that you are of no use? Were we all born to toil like mere animals? Are you to be forbidden to have any intelligence, any feeling, any of the gifts of nature which no one has ever cultivated in you? Nonsense! You are of some use; you might be of great good if you only fell into hands that could mould you and train you."

Nela, whose intuition gathered the purport of this speech, though the words were beyond her, was deeply impressed. She kept her eyes fixed on Teodoro Golfin's rugged, shrewd, and expressive countenance. Her heart was full of astonishment and gratitude.

"Still there is a mystery about you," the dusky, leonine doctor went on: "The most perfect opportunity was offered you to escape from your miserable lot, and you refused it. Florentina, who is an angel if ever there was one, was ready to adopt you as a friend and a sister; I never knew an instance of greater kindness and generosity.—And what have you done? Fled from her like a wild thing.—This is sheer ingratitude—or some other feeling which I cannot at all comprehend."

"No, no, no," cried Nela, much distressed, "I am not ungrateful. I adore Señorita Florentina; she seems to me not to be made of flesh and blood like the rest of us; I do not deserve even to look upon her...."

"Well, my child, you may mean what you say; but from your behavior we can only conclude that you are ungrateful—most ungrateful...."

"No, no," sobbed Nela. "I am not, indeed I am not ungrateful. I was afraid—I knew—that you would all think me ungrateful, and that was the only thing that troubled me when I was going to kill myself.—But I am so stupid; I did not know how to ask pardon of the Señorita before I ran away, nor how to explain it all."

"I will make your peace with Florentina; and even if you wish never to see her again, I will undertake to tell her and convince her

that you were not ungrateful. Now, open your heart to me and tell me everything; what makes you so miserable and desperate? However wretched a human being may be—however great his misery and loneliness, he does not take his own life unless he has some overpowering reason for hating it."

"No, Señor—so it seems to me."

"Then you hate your life?"

Nela was silent for a minute. Then, crossing her arms, she exclaimed vehemently.

"No—no. I do not hate it; on the contrary, I want to find it!"

"A pretty way you were going to work to look for it!"

"I thought that when you were dead you would have everything you could not get here. If not, why is death always, always calling us to come? I have dreams, and when I dream I see all who are dead happy and at peace."

"You believe in dreams?"

"Yes, Señor.—I look at the trees and the rocks that I have seen here ever since I was born, and in their face...."

"Come, come—the trees and rocks have faces?"

"Yes—everything that is lovely can see and speak.—And they say to me: 'Come to us—die, and you will live quite happy.'"

"What a lamentable fancy!" Golfin muttered to himself. "A perfectly pagan spirit!"

And he added aloud:

"But if you want to live, why did you not accept Florentina's offer? I come back to the same question."

"Because—because—what the Señorita offered me was worse than death!" cried Nela vehemently.

"How unjustly you think of her kind charity. There are, of course, beings so wretched that they prefer a low and vagabond existence to the dignity of a superior position. You are accustomed to a free life in direct contact with nature, and you prefer this debased freedom to the sweet affections of home life. Have you been so happy then in this mode of life?"

"I was beginning to be happy...."

"And when did you cease to be happy?" After a long pause, Nela replied:

"When you came here."

"I—what harm have I done you?"

"None, none—nothing but the greatest good."

"I have given your master his sight," said Golfin, looking at Nela's face with the narrow attention of a physiologist. "Do you not thank me for that?"

"Much, Señor, very much," and she gazed up at him with eyes full of tears.

Golfin watched her closely, so as not to miss the slightest change of expression which might guide him to a comprehension of the girl's feelings, as he went on:

"Your master told me that he loved you dearly, when he was blind; and now that he can see, he constantly asks for Nela. He knows very well that for him the whole outer world was filled by one person—Nela; and the sight which has been mercifully bestowed on him is of no value to him, unless he can use it to see Nela."

"To see Nela—but he never shall see Nela—Nela will never let him see her!" she exclaimed excitedly.

"Why not?"

"Because she is so ugly.—He may have cared for María Canela when his eyes were shut; but now that they are open and he can see the Señorita, he can never, never care for a poor little dwarf."

"Who knows but...."

"It is impossible," she said positively.

"It is your fancy—you cannot tell whether your master will be pleased with you or not till you try. I will take you to the house."

"I will not go—I cannot go!" she cried, starting to her feet and standing in front of Teodoro, who was utterly astounded at the determination of her gesture and the flash of her black eyes, which both revealed her resolute nature.

"Be calm, be easy—come here," he said persuasively. "It is true that you are not very pretty—but a sensible man does not think so much as you fancy of mere outside beauty. You are too self-conscious, little woman."

But Nela, paying no sort of heed to the doctor's moralities, and as resolute in her attitude as she was in her opinion, gravely went on as if pronouncing sentence:

"There ought to be nothing ugly in the world.—Nothing that is ugly ought to be allowed to live."

"But, my child, if all we ugly people were to be obliged to take ourselves out of the world, it would be left almost depopulated. Poor, unhappy, little simpleton! But this notion of yours is not a new one. Other persons had it before you, centuries ago; persons with an imagination like yours—living, as you have lived, in the midst of Nature, and lacking the light which your ignorance and loneliness have deprived you of, and which they had not, because it had not then dawned on the world.—But you must be cured of this delusion; you must reflect that you have your portion of gifts more precious than beauty—gifts of the mind, which neither fade with time, nor change with the caprices of taste. Seek for them in your soul and you will find them. They will not perish as beauty

would which, seek it as you may in your looking-glass, you will never find. But seek out these really good and precious gifts; cultivate them, and when you see them thriving and blooming, all this misery you are suffering will vanish—take my word for it. And meanwhile you will soon rise superior to the wretched situation in which you now are, and acquire a beauty which may not perhaps charm the eye, but which will be a source of pride and happiness to yourself."

This wise advice was either not heard or not heeded by Nela; she sat down again by Golfin and gazed fixedly in his face. Her small eyes, more eloquent just then than the finest could have been, seemed to say:

"And what is the upshot of all these fine speeches, learned Sir?"

"Now you see," Golfin went on, warming to his subject, and giving it, in spite of himself, the character of a psychological lecture—"there is one important question, and that is...."

But Nela had guessed it, and covered her face with her hands.

"There is nothing strange in it—on the contrary, it is the most natural thing that could happen to you. You have a sensitive temperament and an excitable imagination. You and your master had led a life together of free and poetic communion with nature, and of most perfect and innocent intimacy. He is as wise and clever as a man can be, and as handsome as a statue. His beauty, when blind even, seemed formed to delight the eyes of those who could see. His kindness of heart too, and generous spirit are enough to charm and win the love of any woman. It is not strange that they should have captivated you—a child so womanly—or a woman looking so like a child.—Do you love him so much? More than anything else in the world?"

"Yes, yes—Señor," the girl sobbed out.

"And you cannot bear the idea of his ceasing to love you?"

"No—Señor."

"And he used to say loving words to you and make you promises?..."

"Yes, oh yes, Señor. He told me I should be his companion as long as he lived—and—and I believed him."

"And why should you not?"

"He said he could not live without me, and that even if he ever could see he would still love me. I was quite happy; I was ugly, and little, and ill-made, but I did not care, for he could not see me; and in his darkness he thought I was pretty.—And then...."

"Then," said Golfin gently, for he was filled with pity. "I see the fault is all mine."

"Fault, no; for you did a good deed. You are very, very good. It is good to have given him his sight. I know, I tell myself, that it is good; but after that I must go away, quite away—for he will see Señorita Florentina and will compare me with her—and Señorita Florentina is as pretty as the angels, and I—it is like comparing a piece of broken glass with the sun! Of what good can I be? I dreamed that I ought never to have been born! Oh why was I ever born? God made a mistake; he gave me an ugly face, and a miserable little body, and such a large heart! But of what use to me is a large heart?—It is a torment and nothing else. Woe is me! If I did not keep it under, it would hate and detest a great many people. And yet I do not want to hate people—I do not know how to hate them, and I would rather bury my miserable heart than live to learn to hate; bury it, so that it should not torment me any more."

"You are tormented by jealousy, and by your sense of humiliation. Poor little one, you are indeed alone! Neither the knowledge you lack, nor the home you have never had, nor the work you cannot do would avail to save you from this. But tell me, what do you feel about the protection and kindness that Florentina offers you?"

"Terror! Shame!" exclaimed Nela, opening her eyes wide in horror. "To live with them—to see them constantly! For they will marry—my heart tells me they will marry; I dreamed it, I know it."

"But Florentina is very kind; she will love you dearly."

"Yes, and I love her—but not at Aldeacorba!" cried the girl in wild accents. "She came to rob me of what was mine—for he was mine—yes, Señor, he was indeed. Florentina is like the Blessed Virgin—I will pray to her, yes, Señor, and worship her; but I do not want her to take away what is my own—and she will take it away—she has taken it away already! And where am I to go to; what am I, what good am I in the world at all? I have lost everything and I want to go to my mother."

She walked away; but Golfin seized her as a wild beast clutches its prey, and held her tightly by the wrist. As he did so he felt her quick and fluttering pulse.

"Come here," he said. "From this moment, whether you like it or no, you are my slave. You are mine, and you are to do nothing but what I tell you. Poor little soul, full of eager feeling, of fervent fancy, frankness and superstition—you have a nature framed for all that is good; but it has been ruined by the wild life you have led, by neglect and want of training, and even the most elementary teaching! What a hideous state of society we live in, which forgets its duties so utterly, and leaves a precious creature like this perish!—Come here; I am not going to let you quit my side. I have hunted you down and caught you—caught you in a trap in the midst of the woods, in some sylvan wilderness, and now I shall try to teach you and train you. We will see if this rough diamond cannot be cut and polished. Ah! you do not even know how ignorant you are; and I shall open a new world to your mind, show you a thousand wonderful things that you have never understood, though you have a vague and dim idea of some of them. Tell me, cannot you feel in your soul a germ—how shall I explain myself? a bud, of that rarest and most beautiful grace: Humility? The mother of all the virtues; which, strange to say, makes us actually happy

when we see ourselves subordinate to others? Have you never felt the impulse of self-denial, which makes us rejoice in sacrificing ourselves for others, in making ourselves small that some one else may become great?—But you will learn this, child; you will learn to lay your ugliness at the feet of beauty, to look on with calm satisfaction and joy at the triumphs of others, to fetter that great wild heart of yours and bring it into subjection, so that you shall never feel envy nor rage, but will love your neighbor as yourself, and rise superior to all who may have injured or hurt you. You shall be made all that Nature meant you to be when she endowed you at your birth. Hapless child! Born in a Christian country, and not even a Christian! Your soul dwells in a sort of poetic worship of nature.—You cannot understand me, little one, but so it is. You are in the state of those primitive peoples of whom the memory even hardly survives—governed by your instincts and passions, while beauty is your dearest idol. Eighteen centuries have been devoted in vain to spiritualizing humanity, so far as you are concerned. And as to the selfish world which has left you to such a fate!—What name does it deserve? You have lived in these mines, a solitary soul, not taught a single letter, not even sent to an infant school, though you would have learnt little enough there; not even given the most imperfect teaching in that religion of which your nation boasts. Why, you have never been inside a church except to stare at some ceremony which to you had no meaning; you cannot even mutter a prayer that you understand; you know nothing of the world, or of God, or your own soul....

"But you shall know all this; you shall be a different creature. You shall no longer be hapless little Nela, but a good, and honest, and useful woman."

It would be rash to assert that Nela had understood all this speech, which Golfin declaimed with such vehemence and fervor that he entirely forgot the person to whom he was speaking. But the little outcast felt a curious fascination, and the spirit of her friend's utterances sank gently into her soul, and soothed it, and compelled her to blind assent. His power over the untaught girl was that

fateful and irresistible control which a superior mind exercises over an inferior one. Sad but unresisting, her head drooped against the surgeon's shoulder.

"Come along," Golfin said resolutely.

Nela trembled from head to foot; a cold sweat stood on her face, and Golfin felt that her hands were icy-cold, and her pulses beating violently; but he failed to attribute this physical condition to her mental anguish; he held her hand more firmly and repeated: "Come—it is cold here."

His power over her was so great that she rose as he did, and they went a little way together. But then Nela stopped, and fell on her knees.

"Oh, Señor!" she cried in an agony: "Do not take me away with you."

She was very pale, and looked wrecked by physical and mental misery. Golfin tried to pull her up; but her helpless frame did not stir by any strength of her own. It was clear she must be carried like a senseless corpse.

"One day," said Golfin, "not very long since, almost in this very place, I took you on my shoulders to carry you. Now I must do the same it seems."

He lifted her in his arms; her hot breath seemed to burn his face. She was drooping, fading, dying like a plant torn up from the soil, and with its roots laid bare.

As they got nearer to Aldeacorba, Golfin felt some life returning to the dead weight in his arms. Nela raised her head, and threw up her hands in despair, but she said nothing.

They went in; all was silent. A maid servant came to meet them, and by Teodoro's desire she conducted him noiselessly to Florentina's room.

Florentina was alone. By the light of a fast-dying lamp she was kneeling on the floor, her elbows resting on the seat of a chair, and praying with absorbed devotion. She was startled at seeing a man at her door at so late an hour, but her alarm at once gave way to surprise, when she saw the burden Golfin bore in his strong arms.

Her astonishment was too great for speech when the doctor, carefully depositing his load on a sofa, said:

"I have caught her you see.—What do you say to that? Am I a good butterfly hunter?"

CHAPTER XX.
A NEW WORLD.

We must now go back a few days.

When Teodoro Golfin first removed the bandage for a few moments from Pablo Penáguilas' eyes, the boy uttered a cry of terror. Every impulse made him shrink from all he saw; he put out his hands as though by pushing away one object he could get away farther from the rest. Luminous space was to him like a vast void into which he felt as if he must fall; and the instinct of self-preservation made him close his eyes to feel himself safe. However, his father, the surgeon, and the rest of them, persuaded him to try once more, for all were equally anxious; he looked again, but his terror was no less. The images of all he saw, rushed into his brain with such sudden violence and confusion—with a sort of storm and assault, as it were—that he felt as if they were falling upon him bodily. The distant mountains seemed to lie within reach, and the persons and objects that were near him seemed, literally, to strike his eyes.

Golfin noted these phenomena with the most eager interest; this was the second case of cure of congenital blindness which he had had the opportunity of studying. The others hardly dared to be glad; they were so bewildered and alarmed by the agitating effects produced on the patient by the first exercise of the function of sight. To Pablo himself it was a series of delightful experiments. His nerves and his imagination were so seriously excited the surgeon thought it prudent to compel him to rest.

"Now," he said, smiling, "you have seen enough for to-day. You cannot step out of darkness into light, into the wide domain of the sun, as you would walk into a theatre. This is a new birth, with pain as well as joy in it."

Presently the young fellow was so eager to try his newly-found power once more, that Golfin consented to open a crack, as it were, upon the outer world.

"My whole mind," said Pablo, trying to explain his first impressions, "seems bathed in beauty—a beauty I had never dreamed of before. What were the things which rushed in upon me and filled me with terror? It was the sense of size, of space, which I had never before conceived of but in a very imperfect manner, and which dawned upon me clear and terrible; as if I were being dragged up to the highest mountains and down to the deepest abyss. It is all grand and beautiful, but it makes me tremble. But I want to feel it all once more. All the glory and loveliness that I gazed at has made me feel bewildered and humbled; it was like some serene and majestic presence bending down to meet me. The whole universe seemed to be rushing towards me and I was startled and terror stricken—the sky looked like a vast space, watching, listening—I cannot put it into words.—It was vacancy, but strangely full of expression. All that landscape of sky and mountains looked at me, came down upon me—but it was all so cold, and grand, and stern. Let me see something delicate, something gentle and lovable—Nela! Where is Nela?"

Golfin once more relieved him of the bandage, and giving him a pair of suitable spectacles, he left him free to look about him.

"Oh! is that Nela! Merciful Heaven!" exclaimed Pablo enchanted.

"This is your cousin Florentina."

"Ah!" said the lad, coloring with confusion.

"That is my cousin. I had no idea any person could be so beautiful.—Oh! thank God for giving me the faculty which enables me to see anything so lovely. Cousin Florentina, you are like the most lovely music—like the most perfect embodiment of some delicious harmony.—And Nela, where is she?"

"You will have time enough to see her," said Don Francisco delighted. "Try now to be calm."

"Florentina, Florentina!" repeated Pablo excitedly. "What is it in your face that makes me feel as if the spirit of God himself was shining through it? You stand in the midst of a glory which must, to be sure, be the sun. Beams, rays seem to shine from your face.—Ah! at last I know what the angels are like—and your dress, your hands, your hair, seem to fill me with some new and strange sensation. What is it?"

"He is beginning to see color," muttered Golfin to himself. "He perhaps perceives every object surrounded by the colors of the spectrum. But he cannot estimate degrees of distance."

"I seem to have you inside my eyes," Pablo went on. "You seem to have become part of my thoughts, and the sight of you comes upon me like a memory; but a memory of what? I never saw any thing or any body before. Can I have lived before I came into this world? I know not—but I knew your eyes. And you, father—where are you? I have seen you—yes I have pictured you too—you are just what I have loved. And now my uncle? You are very much alike.—And where, where is that dear good Golfin?—bless him!"

"Here, minding my patient," said the surgeon coming forward. "Here I am as ugly as sin.—As you have never seen a lion or a Newfoundland dog, you can have no idea of my style of beauty. They say I am exactly like those two noble beasts."

"All good kind souls!..." said Pablo.

"But my cousin is the prettiest—oh! infinitely the prettiest. But Nela, for pity's sake, where is Nela?"

They told him that his *lazarillo* never came to the house, and that they had been too busy to go to look for her, and he was extremely distressed at this intelligence. They succeeded in soothing him, and as they feared he might become feverish, they persuaded him to go to bed and try to sleep.

The next day he was in a state of great prostration, but his vigorous nature triumphed over everything. He begged to have a glass of

water and when he saw it, he exclaimed: "I feel as I were drinking at the mere sight of water."

His expressions were equally vivid and picturesque about everything he saw which struck his fancy strongly. After correcting the defective sphericity of the eye by means of glasses, which he tried one after another, Golfin began to direct his attention to the differences and combinations of colors, and the young man's sound mind and taste never failed in distinguishing the ugly from the beautiful. Indeed, he felt these two attributes as two absolute and distinct ideas, without connecting them in any way with any notion of utility or, on the other hand, of goodness. A butterfly which flew by accident into his room enchanted him, but an ink-bottle he thought simply horrible, though his father explained to him that it could not be otherwise, since its use was to hold ink to write with. When he was shown two prints, one of the Crucifixion, and one of Galatea riding in a shell and escorted by Tritons and Nymphs, he preferred the second—which was a great scandal to Florentina, who promised herself that she would teach him to hold sacred things far above everything profane. He watched their faces with the keenest attention, and the wonderful coincidence of facial expression with language astonished him excessively. When he saw the maids and other women about the place, he was greatly annoyed if they were ugly or commonplace; indeed, his cousin's beauty made him indifferent to any other woman. In spite of this he wanted to see them all; his curiosity was like a raging thirst which nothing could satisfy. Every day he was disappointed at never seeing Nela; but he was so fond of Florentina that he could not bear her to leave him for a moment.

On the third day Golfin said to him: "You have now made acquaintance with a great many things—the marvels of this visible world. Now—you must see yourself."

He brought a mirror, and Pablo looked in it.

"That is I!" he exclaimed with simple admiration. "It is difficult to believe it. How have I come inside that hard still sheet of water?

What a wonderful thing glass is! It seems as if it could not be true that men made that stony atmosphere.—My word! but I am not an ugly fellow!—What do you say cousin? And you, when you look in this, do you see yourself as pretty as you are? No, impossible. Look up into the sky and you will find your image there. You may believe you see an angel when you only look at yourself!"

That evening, when he was alone with her and she was giving him some little help he needed as an invalid, Pablo said to her:

"Cousin, my father read me, I remember, a passage in history about Christopher Columbus who discovered a New World, which no European had ever seen before. That navigator opened the eyes of the Old World, so that they saw another and more beautiful one. I cannot help thinking of him as a man like Teodoro Golfin, and of Europe as a blind man to whom America and its wonders were like a revelation of light. Well, and I have seen a New World.—You are my America, you are that first and lovely island where Columbus set foot on land. He never saw the continent, with its vast forests and immense rivers, and I too perhaps have not yet seen what is loveliest of all...." He broke off and sat sunk in thought; then presently he asked:

"Where is Nela?"

"I cannot think what has come over the poor child," said Florentina. "I suppose she does not wish to see you."

"She is bashful and very shy," replied Pablo: "She is afraid of troubling us in the house. Florentina, I must tell you—in confidence, that I love her dearly; you will love her too. I have a most eager wish to see my good little comrade and friend."

"I will go and look for her to-morrow morning myself."

"Yes, do—but do not be gone long. When I do not see you I feel very lonely; I have become accustomed to see you, and these three days have been centuries of happiness.—Do not rob me of a minute. Last night my father told me that after having seen you I ought never to want to see another woman."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed the girl blushing. "There are plenty much prettier than I am...."

"No, no; they all say no." Pablo vehemently declared, turning his blindfold eyes towards his cousin, as if he could see her even through his bandages. "They used to tell me so before, and I could not believe it; but now that I have seen the world and know what beauty is, I believe it—yes indeed I do. You are perfectly lovely; there is no one—there can be no one more lovely.—Give me your hand." And he grasped it eagerly in both of his.

"I laugh now," he went on, "to think of my absurd blind man's vanity, of my foolish attempts to realize the true aspect of things without seeing them. I believe that as long as I live I shall never forget the surprise that the reality was to me. Reality! Oh, the man who knows it not is blind indeed, a perfect idiot!—Florentina I was an idiot."

"No, cousin, you were always very clever and so you are still. But do not let your fancy work too vividly now. It will soon be time to go to bed. Don Teodoro particularly said that I was not to let you talk so late, because it keeps you from sleeping; if you do not keep quiet I shall go away."

"Is it night already?"

"Yes, quite night."

"But day or night I love to talk to you," Pablo persisted, tossing over on his bed, on which he was lying dressed and very restless. "I will be silent on one condition, and that is that you do not go away from my side, and that, from time to time, you pat the bed with your hand that I may know that you are there."

"Very well, so I will, and this is the first sign of life," said Florentina, laughing and patting the mattress.

"When I hear you laugh, I feel as if a breath of sweet fresh air blew round me, and all my senses help in some way to remind me of

you. Your image lives in my memory so vividly, that even with my eyes bandaged I can see you still the same."

"Will you have done chattering or must I fetch Don Teodoro?" said the girl gaily.

"No, no—stay quiet. I cannot be silent—if I were to be silent all my thoughts—all I can see in my brain—would only torment me twice as much. And you want me to go to sleep! Sleep! But I have you in here, Florentina, making a turmoil in my brain, and driving me crazy. I am so full of joy and rapture that I have no words to express them. All last night I fancied I was talking to you and to Nela.—Poor little Nela! I am most curious to see her.—Desperately curious."

"Well, I will find her to-morrow. Now, have done with your talking; if you do not cease I shall go."

"No, stop. I will only talk to myself. I will say all the things I say to you at night when I fancy we are alone together—I will remember what you say to me."

"I?"

"Well, the things I can fancy I hear said in your voice—Now, do you be silent, Señorita. I am alone now with my own imaginings."

The next day when Florentina came up to her cousin's room, she said:

"I brought Maraquilla up here and she ran away. Ungrateful little thing!"

"And you did not look for her?"

"Where was I to look? She ran away from me. This evening I will go out again and hunt her till I find her."

"No, no; do not go out," said Pablo eagerly. "She will come back, she will come of her own accord."

"She seems out of her mind."

"Does she know that I can see now?"

"I myself told her. But really I am sure she has lost her wits. She says that I am the Holy Virgin and kisses my dress."

"That shows that you have produced the same impression on her as on every one else. Nela is so sweet. Poor little girl! We must take care of her, Florentina, and be kind to her—do not you think so?"

"She is ungrateful I am afraid," said Florentina sadly.

"No, never think so. Nela could not be ungrateful. She is a good child—I am very fond of her. She must be found and brought here to me."

"I will go."

"No—not you," said Pablo positively, taking his cousin's hand. "Your duty, most undutiful cousin, is to take care of me. If Golfin does not come soon to take off my bandage and put on my glasses, I shall do it myself. I have not seen you since yesterday, and I cannot bear it—I cannot bear it. Is Don Teodoro come?"

"He is down stairs with your father and mine. He will come up quite soon. Have patience; you are as bad as a school-boy."

Pablo writhed with irritation.

"Light, light!" he cried. "It is a crime to keep me in the dark so long. I cannot live like this—I shall die. I want what is the bread of life to me; I want the use of my eyes. I have not seen you to-day, cousin, and I am wild to see you. I am hungry, thirsty to see you. Oh! thank God for real knowledge! Thank God for having created you, sweetest of women, a combination of every beauty.—And yet, if after having created beauty, God had not given us hearts to feel it, how imperfect his work would have been! Light! light!..."

Teodoro came up and opened the gates of the outer world to him, filling his soul with joy, and he passed a quiet day talking of a variety of subjects. Not till the evening did his thoughts revert to that point in his past life, which seemed to be diminishing and

fading in the distance, like vessels which on a clear day are lost on the horizon. It was in the tone of a man who recalls some long past circumstance, that Pablo asked: "Has not Nela made her appearance?"

Florentina replied that she had not, and they talked of other things.

In the course of the night, at a very late hour, Pablo heard the noise of voices in the house. He fancied he heard those of Teodoro Golfin, of Florentina, and of his father. But after that he slept quietly, though haunted in his dreams by the images of all he had seen and the phantoms of all he imagined. His dreams, which began tranquilly and smilingly, afterwards became agitated and painful, for in some deep recess of his soul, as though it were a vast cavern suddenly lighted up, rose a medley array of the beautiful and the hideous forms of the outside world—of passions awakened and memories buried—convulsing his whole soul. The following day, as Golfin had promised, he left his room to move about the house.

CHAPTER XXI.
EYES THAT KILL.

The room which had been assigned to Florentina at Aldeacorba was the pleasantest in the house. No one had used it since the death of Pablo's mother; but Don Francisco, deeming his niece worthy to be lodged there, had the room neatly arranged and added some little elegancies which had been quite unknown to it in his wife's lifetime. The balcony looked southwards and over the garden, so that the room was always flooded with light and perfume, and cheered by the happy song of birds. Florentina herself, during her few days' stay, had given it the stamp, so to speak, of her own individuality; all sorts of small properties and trifles betrayed the nature of the woman who lived in it, as you may know a bird by its nest. If there are some persons who would make a hell of a palace, so there are others who have only to enter a hovel to make it a Paradise.

It was that very stormy day—I say that day, for I cannot name the date; I only know that it was a day. It had rained all the morning; then the sky had cleared, and at last, high above the misty whiteness of the lower atmosphere, a rainbow threw its glorious arch. One end rested on the oaks of Ficóbriga, close to the sea, and the other on the woods of Saldeoro. Supreme in its simplicity the rainbow can be compared to nothing else, any more than an absolutely ideal and typical form can be. A rainbow is the epitome, the alpha and omega, of visible color.

Florentina was in her room, not threading beads, nor embroidering satin with gold thread, but cutting out garments from patterns made of newspaper. She was squatting on the floor, in the attitudes of a fidgetty child at play; now sitting on her heels, now on all fours, and plying the scissors without a moment's respite. By her side was a heap of pieces of woollen stuff, calico, cotton print, and other materials that she had been, that very morning, to buy at Villamojada, in spite of wind and weather; and snipping here, and

cutting there, she was fast evolving sleeves, skirts, and bodies. They were not perhaps models of dressmaking, nor was the exactitude of the patterns to be entirely relied on, for they also were of her own devising; however, she would have been the first to acknowledge their shortcomings, and she hoped that good-will might conduce to a happy result. Her worthy father had said to her, as he saw her sitting to work:

"Bless me, child! one would think there were no dressmakers in the world. You cannot imagine how it annoys me to see a young lady of good position crawling about on the floor with shears in her hands.—It is not at all the right thing. I cannot bear that you should work to clothe yourself even, and am I to submit to see you working for others? What are dressmakers for—heh? What are dressmakers for?"

"A dressmaker would do it much better than I shall," replied Florentina laughing. "But then you see it would not be my doing, Papa; and to do it myself is the very thing I most want."

He left her to her own devices; but not alone, for in the middle of the alcove, between the bed and the wardrobe, stood an old-fashioned sofa and on the sofa lay two blankets, and at one end, on a pile of pillows, lay a weary little head. The face was haggard and colorless—asleep. Sunk rather, in an uneasy lethargy, broken now and again by violent starting and terrors. However, a calmer state had supervened by mid-day, when Florentina's father came into the room again, followed by Golfin. The surgeon went up to the sofa and leaned over Nela, watching her face.

"She seems to be sleeping more quietly now," he said: "We must have no noise."

"What do you think of my daughter?" said Don Manuel, laughing. "Do you see all the trouble she is taking. Now be quite impartial, Don Teodoro: Is there any reason why she should vex me? Honestly, when there is no necessity for taking so much trouble, why should she do so? What pleasure can it be to me to see my daughter wasting all I give her for pin-money; wasting it on others;

and besides this mania for low occupations—for low occupations...."

"Let her please herself," replied Golfin, looking down admiringly at the girl. "Every young lady has her own way of wasting her pin-money."

"And I am not to object if her charity brings her to destitution, to bankruptcy!" exclaimed Don Manuel, marching up and down the room in pompous indignation, with his hands in his pockets. "Besides, is there no better method of charity than this? She wished to show her gratitude to God for my nephew's recovery—well and good—very proper, a very Christian feeling. But we shall see, we shall see."

He stopped in front of Nela and looked at her kindly.

"Now, would it not have been better," he said, "if, instead of bringing this poor girl into the house, my daughter had organized one of those grand charitable affairs, which are the fashion even at court, and which give all the best people in society an opportunity of displaying their good feeling? Why did you not think of holding a lottery? We could easily have sold any number of tickets among our friends, and have collected a handsome sum of money to give away to charitable asylums. Why, you might have got up an association among the gentry of Villamojada and the neighborhood, or have invited all our acquaintance at Santa Irene de Campó to join you, and have held meetings and collected a great deal of money.—Nay, why not have got up a bull-fight? I would have undertaken to provide the beasts and the men.—Or amateur theatricals?—Last night Doña Sofía and I were talking of that very thing. Learn from her, my dear, learn from her. The poor owe more to her than I can tell you. There are all the families who live by the employment they get in working the lotteries—there are all the professionals and subordinates who make money by the theatrical performances! Oh! my dear, the paupers in the workhouse are not the only poor! Sofía told me that they made a little fortune out of the masked balls they gave this winter. A good

deal of it was spent, of course, in gas, in renting the theatre, in service, and so forth—still there was a morsel of bread left for the poor after all.—But, if you do not believe me, read the statistics, child—read the statistics."

Florentina laughed, and found no better answer than to repeat the surgeon's apology for her:

"Every young lady has her own way of wasting her pin-money."

"But Don Teodoro," remonstrated Don Manuel, in great disgust: "You must admit that no one else does it as my daughter does."

"I quite admit it," said Golfin with meaning, and looking at the girl: "No one is like Florentina."

"And yet—with all her faults," said the father, drawing her to him: "With all her faults, I love her better than my life. This little hussy is worth her weight in gold.—Come, tell me, which do you like best, Aldeacorba de Suso, or Santa Irene de Campó?"

"I do not dislike Aldeacorba."

"Ah! little puss. I see which way the wind blows. Do you know that at this very moment my brother is talking seriously to his son? Family affairs! Well, and something very good is to come of it all—look, Don Teodoro, at my daughter's face; it is as red as roses in May. Now, I am off to hear what my brother has to say—what my brother has to say." And the worthy man departed.

Golfin went back to Nela.

"Did she sleep last night?" he asked.

"Very little. I heard her sobbing and crying all night. But to-night she shall have a good bed, for which I have sent to Villamojada, and I will put her in the little room next to mine."

"Poor little Nela!" said the doctor. "You cannot imagine what an interest I feel in this hapless creature. Some people would laugh at it, but we, at any rate, are not made of stone. What little we have done to improve the condition of this poor child, ought to be done

for a large proportion of the human race. There are many thousands of beings in the world in the same plight as Nela. Who knows them? where are they? They are lost in the desert of society—for society has its deserts—in the dark places of life, in the solitudes of field labor, in mines, in factories. We pass them without even seeing them—we give them alms, perhaps, but without knowing them.—How are we to be cognizant of so base a class of humanity! At first Nela attracted me because I thought that hers was an exceptional nature; but, as I have thought more, I have felt that hers is after all only one of the commonest cases. It is an instance of the condition to which a highly-organized moral nature must be reduced, a nature apt for good, apt for learning, apt for virtue, but which can never develop its powers in the neglect and isolation to which it is condemned. They live blind in spirit, just as Pablo Penáguilas lived blind in body, though he possessed the latent faculty of sight."

Florentina was listening with eager sympathy and intelligence to the surgeon's speech.

"Look at her," he went on: "There she lies; she has a beautiful fancy, acute feelings, and can love with devotion and tenderness. She is gifted with a remarkable aptitude for every grace of mind, while, at the same time, she is full of the grossest superstitions; her religious ideas are vague, monstrous, and heterodox, and her moral sense needs guidance as much as her natural intelligence. She has had no education but what she has been able to give herself; like a tree that gets no nourishment but that of its own withered and fallen leaves, she owes absolutely nothing to any one else. In all her life she has never been taught a single lesson, never heard a word of loving counsel, nor a precept of pious dogma; she is guided entirely by ill-understood examples which she adapts to her own instincts and desires. Her criticisms are all her own, and as she is full of imagination and feeling, and the strongest native impulse of her soul is to worship something, she has worshipped Nature, after the fashion of primitive races. All her ideals are

naturalistic—and if you do not quite understand what I mean, dear Florentina, I must explain myself more exactly another time.

"She has a really artistic passion for form and beauty. Her whole nature and her affections all centre round this idea. The gifts and graces of the mind are to her an unknown realm of beauty, a hardly-discovered land, of which she knows only so much as some traveller might of a new country on whose shores he had been shipwrecked. The great news of the gospel—the greatest achievement of the spirit of humanity—has hardly even sounded in her ears; she has the same faint suspicion of it that Asiatic nations may have of European culture—and if you do not quite understand me, dear Florentina, I must explain myself more exactly another time.

"But she is very capable of making rapid progress in a short time, and of rising to a higher level, nay to our own. Show her a little light and she will fly across the centuries—she has wandered from the track, and cannot see far, but give her light and she will find her way again. No one yet has ever put the torch in her hand, for Pablo Penáguilas, in his own ignorance of all external truth, contributed largely but unconsciously to increase her errors. Such a fantastic and extravagant idealist was not the best master for a nature like hers. We must set truth before the poor child, who is like a being raised from the dead of a remote past; we will teach her to know the graces of the mind; we will bring her down to our own century; we will give her soul a strength which as yet it has not, and put a noble Christian conscience in the place of her savage naturalism and wild superstitions. We have an admirable field to work in, a virgin soil on which to sow the seed of centuries of growth. We may make time fly fast over her head, showing her the truth it has revealed, and so create a new being—for indeed, dear Florentina, it is the same thing as creating a new being—and if you do not quite understand me, I must explain myself more exactly another time."

Florentina, though she made no pretensions to learning, thought that she did understand what Golfin had meant by his quaint and original harangue. She herself was about to add some remarks on the subject; but at that moment Nela woke. Her eyes timidly wandered round the room, and then rested alternately on the two faces that looked down at her.

"You are not frightened?" said Florentina gently.

"Frightened—no Señora; you are very kind—and the Señor too."

"Are you not glad to be here? what are you afraid of?"

Golfin took her hand. "Speak frankly and truly," he said: "Which of us do you like best—Florentina or me?"

Nela made no reply, and the others smiled; but the child remained moodily grave.

"Now, listen to me, you silly little thing," the surgeon went on: "You have to make up your mind to live with one of us. Florentina will stay here; I shall go away. Decide for one or the other—which do you like best."

Marianela looked from one to the other without finding any definite answer; finally her eyes rested on those of Golfin.

"I believe I am the man of her choice.—But that is not fair to Florentina, Nela; she will be vexed."

The poor child smiled and, putting out a feeble hand to Florentina, she murmured:

"I do not want to vex her."

But even while she spoke she turned ashy pale; she strained her neck, her eyes seemed starting out of her head—she was listening to a sound that was full of terrors to her. She had heard footsteps.

"He is coming!" exclaimed Golfin, sympathizing in his patient's alarm.

"Yes, here he comes!" cried Florentina, and she flew to the door.

It was he. Pablo had opened the door and walked softly into the room—straight in, from the habit he had acquired during years of blindness. He came in smiling, and his eyes, freed from the bandage, which he had himself removed, looked straight before him. They were as yet unaccustomed to the muscular action which makes them turn, and were hardly aware of objects lying out of the direct line of vision. It was literally true of him—as it is of many who never were blind in their lives—that he only saw what was directly under his eyes.

"Cousin!" said he going towards her: "Why have you not been to see me to-day? I have had to come to look for you. Your father told me you were doing some work for the poor—so I suppose I must forgive you."

Florentina did not know what to say; she was annoyed. Pablo had not observed either Golfin or Nela, and Florentina, intending to keep him from approaching the sofa, went towards the window; then, picking up some pieces of stuff, she sat down as if she were going to sew. The full light of the sun fell upon her, shedding a vivid glow on all her left side and giving the most charming relief to her pretty head with its russet brown hair. Her beauty seemed radiant; like the very personification and incarnation of light. Her hair was somewhat in disorder, and her thin morning dress followed the graceful lines of her slender figure, while her simple and dignified pose was worthy of the noblest ideals of art.

"Cousin," she said with a slight frown on her pretty brow, "Don Teodoro has not yet given you leave to-day to take your bandage off. That is not right."

"He will give me leave presently," said the young man laughing. "And it cannot hurt me; I am really quite well. And if it did do me harm, I should not care.—No, I should not care if I became blind again, after having seen you."

"And what good would that be to you?" said Florentina reprovingly.

"I was alone in my room, my father is gone out—after speaking to me about you. You know what he said."

"No, I know nothing about it," said the girl, with her eyes fixed on her work.

"But I know.—My father is very kind and reasonable, and we are very fond of each other.... Well, when my father had left me, I took off the bandage and looked out at the fields; I saw the rainbow and I felt quite overcome with admiration, and with religious feeling too, Florentina—I do not know why that grand spectacle, which I had never seen before, should have given me so intense a feeling of the harmony of creation. I do not know why, looking at the perfect blending of its colors, I could not help thinking of you. I do not know why, as I saw the rainbow, I said to myself: 'I have felt this all before.' I felt again exactly as I felt when I first saw you, Florentina, my darling. My heart seemed ready to burst my bosom, and I could not help crying. I cried a great deal and my tears blinded me again for a few minutes—I called you and you did not answer—when I could see again, the rainbow had vanished. I went to look for you, I thought you were in the garden—I went down stairs, up stairs, and here I am. And now, here, I find you so lovely that I feel as if I had never seen you rightly till to-day—never till to-day, because now I have had time to learn to compare you with others. I have seen several women, and they are all horrible by your side. I find it hard to believe that you have lived through the years of my blindness.—Nay, nay. What I believe is that you came into being at the moment when light dawned upon my comprehension; that my own mind created you at the moment when I first was lord of the visible world. They had often told me that there was not a living creature to compare with you, and I would not believe it—but I believe it now, as surely as I believe in the light of heaven!"

And as he spoke he fell on one knee.

Florentina, startled and abashed, looked up from her sewing.

"Cousin—for pity's sake!" she murmured.

"Cousin for pity's sake!" exclaimed Pablo, with frank enthusiasm. "Why, why, are you so lovely? My father is most reasonable; I can say nothing against his arguments or his kindness.—Florentina, do you know I thought I could never love you; I thought I could love some one—not you. But what can I do? Thank God my love and my reason are one! My father, to whom I confessed my mistake; told me that I had loved a hideous monster. But now I can say that I worship an angel. The ignorant blind man can see, and at last pay due homage to real beauty. And yet I cannot help trembling—do you not see me tremble?—Seeing you I have but one desire, and that is, to take you in my arms and clasp you to my heart, enfolding you, holding you tightly—very tightly."

And Pablo, who was now kneeling on both knees, clasped his arms across his breast.

"Oh! I do not know what I feel!" he went on, stammering, and turning pale with agitation. "Every day I discover some new world, Florentina. First I discovered the world of light, to-day I have discovered another. Is it possible that you, so lovely—so divine—are to be mine, the wife of my heart?"

He seemed about to fall to the ground in a fainting-fit, and Florentina leaned forward to support him. Pablo took her hand, then lifting her wide loose sleeve, he kissed her wrist and arm with eager passion, counting the kisses.

"One—two—three—four—ah! I am dying!"

"Be quiet, stop," cried Florentina, standing up, and making her cousin rise too. "Doctor Golfin will you scold him."

"Your bandage on, at once!" cried Teodoro: "Go to your room and keep quiet."

The young man, in the utmost confusion turned to that side of the room and brought his eyes to bear on the surgeon, standing by the sofa that was covered with blankets.

"Are you here, Don Teodoro?" he said going up to him.

"Yes, I am here," said Golfin very gravely. "You ought to go back to your room and put the bandage on again. I will go with you."

"I am perfectly well—but, of course, I will obey—only, first let me see what is here."

He was looking at the blankets and, between them, at a ghastly head, anything but fair to look upon. In fact Nela's nose seemed to have become sharper, her eyes smaller, her mouth less well-formed, her face more freckled, her hair thinner, and her forehead lower. Her eyes were closed, she breathed with difficulty, her livid lips were parted, and the hapless child seemed to be at her last gasp, with the look of death on her face already.

"Ah!" exclaimed Pablo: "My father told me that Florentina had given shelter to some poor creature. How good of her! You—poor child, you may be thankful, for you have fallen into the hands of an angel!—Are you ill? In my house you shall want for nothing; my cousin is the very image of God on earth.—This poor child is very ill; is she not doctor?"

"Yes ..." said Golfin, "she must be left alone and hear no more talking."

"Then I am gone."

Pablo put out his hand and laid it on the head which seemed to his unaccustomed eyes the most terrible symbol of all human misery and wretchedness. Nela raised her eyes and fixed them on her master. Pablo felt as if they gazed at him from the depths of a tomb, so profound was their expression of sorrow and despair; then Nela freed one hand from beneath the coverings—a feeble, burning, rough little hand—and took that of the young man. At her touch Pablo shuddered from head to foot, and uttered a cry that came from his very soul.

There was a terrible pause—one of those lulls which precede the catastrophes of life as they do the convulsions of nature, as though to add to their solemnity.

Then, in a quavering voice that thrilled the by-standers with its tragical sadness, Nela spoke:

"Yes, *Señorito mio*," she said, "I am Nela."

Slowly, and as if she were lifting some too heavy weight, she raised her master's hand to her dry lips and kissed it—kissed it again—and then, with a third attempt, her lips remained motionless on the lad's hand.

They were all silent—looking at her. The first to break the silence was Pablo.

"Is this you ..." he said, "you...." And the thoughts that crowded on his mind checked his utterance of any. He would have liked to discover some new language in which to utter them, just as he had already discovered the two new worlds—of light, and of the love of external beauty. He could do nothing but look at her—look at Nela and remember that darkened world in which he had lived, his passions and the dreams and errors of his blindness all wandering and lost in its obscurity. Florentina, wiping away her tears, leaned over Nela to look into her face, and Golfin, watching her and knowing too well what he saw, exclaimed in a voice like a knell:

"It has killed her. The sight of you has killed her!"—then turning to Pablo he said sternly: "Go, at once, to your room."

"Dying! dying so, without any cause!" cried Florentina in despair, and laying her hand lightly on Nela's brow.

"María!" she said, "Marianela!"

She called her by her name again and again, leaning over her and looking at her, as we might look over the margin of a well at some one who has fallen into it and who is drowning in the depth and blackness of its waters.

"She does not answer!" said Pablo, horror-stricken.

Golfin, watching her ebbing vitality, perceived that her pulse still throbbed under his touch. Pablo bent over her, and putting his lips close to her ear, he called her once more:

"Nela, Nela my friend—my dear!"

She turned a little, opened her eyes, and moved her hands. She looked as if her spirit had returned from some far away flight. Seeing Pablo's gaze fixed upon her with anxious curiosity, she turned aside abashed and alarmed, and tried to hide her face as if she were a guilty thing.

"What is the matter with her?" asked Florentina vehemently. "Don Teodoro, save her if you are a man.—If you do not save her you are a charlatan!..."

The young girl's charitable instincts were spurring her to positive rage.

"Nela!" repeated the lad in the deepest distress, and not yet recovered from the shock which the sight of his little comrade had given him: "You seem to be afraid of me—what have I done to you?"

The dying girl put out her hand to clasp Florentina's, and pressed it to her breast, and then she did the same with Pablo's; afterwards she once more pressed them both with all the strength she could command. Her sunken eyes looked from one to the other, but her gaze was vague and remote; it seemed to come from some inner depth of darkness and despair, as though she were indeed the drowning wretch in the well, sinking lower every instant. Suddenly her breathing became difficult; she sighed, and clutched the two hands she held with convulsive energy.

Teodoro had turned the house upside down; had sent for medicines and powerful stimulants, and was doing all in his power to arrest the swift extinction of this young life.

"It is hard," he said, "to stop a drop of water that is trickling, falling away—down, down, and within an inch or two of the great Sea.—But I will try."

He sent away every one but Florentina, whom he kept in the room. But the stimulants and irritants with which he endeavored to bring back ebbing life to the frail body, only served to restore some little muscular action, and in spite of this she was sinking every minute.

"It is cruelty!" cried Golfin desperately, as he snatched away the mustard and the irritants. "We are tormentors and torturers. It is like setting dogs on a dying man that the pain may keep him alive to suffer. Away with it all!"

"And is there nothing to be done?"

"Nothing—but what God will do."

"But what is the matter with her?"

"Death!" he shouted with a delirious rage of grief, ill-befitting a medical man.

"But what illness is it that has brought her to death?"

"Death!" he repeated.

"You do not understand me; I want to know of what...?"

"Of death.—How can I tell you whether it is shame, or jealousy, or wounded pride, or grief, or disappointed love, that has killed her? A strange catalogue of symptoms! No, no—we know nothing—nothing but useless details."

"What! Doctors!"

"I tell you we know nothing—a little on the surface that is all."

"And this, what is this?"

"A sudden attack of inflammation—meningitis perhaps."

"And what is that?"

"A name.... Death!"

"But is it possible that any one should die—like this—without any known cause, without any sort of disease? Oh! Don Teodoro, what is the matter with her?"

"How should I know?"

"But you are a doctor?"

"Of eyes—not of passions."

"Passions!" exclaimed Florentina, looking down at the senseless girl. "You—poor child—what passions are you dying of?"

"Ask your future husband."

Florentina stood lost in utter amazement.

"Poor thing!" she cried with a choked sob. "Can mere grief kill in this way?"

"When I picked her up at *la Trascava* she was in a high fever."

"But that is not enough; no, not enough to kill her!"

"You say it is not enough. God and Nature say that it is."

"It is as if she had been stabbed."

"Remember what those eyes—now closing forever—saw a short while since. Remember that a blind man loved her and that he is blind no longer; that he has seen her—seen her! The shock was a death-blow...."

"Oh what a terrible mysterious...."

"No, it is no mystery," cried the surgeon, almost wildly. "It is the awful collapse of an illusion; the rude blow of reality; the miserable destroyer which has come between two noble souls. And I—I brought that reality home to them!"

"Oh it is a wretched mystery!" repeated Florentina, not understanding the current of his thoughts.

"A mystery? No," repeated Teodoro with increasing agitation: "It is bare reality; the sudden swallowing up of a whole world of illusions. Reality to him meant a new life—to her, anguish, suffocation, humiliation, sorrow, contempt, an empty life, jealousy,—Death!"

"And all for...."

"And all for one pair of eyes opened to see light—and reality. Reality! I cannot get the word out of my brain. It seems to be written there in letters of fire."

"All for one pair of eyes.—And grief can kill so quickly—without giving us time to try a remedy?"

"I do not know," said Golfin, bewildered, confounded, helpless, in view of the mystic characters of the Book of Life and Death, which science may pore over but may not decipher its dark riddle.

"You do not know!" cried Florentina desperately. "Then why are you a doctor?"

"I do not know, I do not know!" he reiterated, striking his dishevelled head with his heavy hands.—"Yes, one thing I know, and that is that we know nothing but the skin-deep phenomena of life. I—I am a mender of eyes and nothing more."

He fixed his gaze with absorbed attention on the little figure which was hovering on the border-land between a living woman and a corpse. "Soul!" he exclaimed in a tone of bitter questioning: "What is passing in you now?"

Florentina burst into tears.

"The soul!" she murmured, and her head drooped on her breast: "It is fled!"

"No ..." said Teodoro, taking Nela's hand. "There is still some life left—but so little, that it would seem as if the soul were indeed far away and had left only the breath behind."

"Lord have mercy!" exclaimed the young girl and began to pray.

"Alas! hapless spirit!" murmured the surgeon. "You were but ill-lodged indeed...."

They both bent over her, watching her closely.

"Her lips are moving," cried Florentina. "She is speaking."

Yes, her lips parted; she said something—a word, two, three.

"What is she saying?" each asked the other; but neither of them could understand her.

She spoke perhaps in the tongue that is known to those who live the life eternal.

This was the end; her lips moved no more; they remained half-open showing a row of little white teeth. Teodoro bent over her and, kissing Nela's forehead, he said in a steady voice:

"Woman, you did well to quit this world." But Florentina's voice was choked with tears and sobs as she said: "I wanted to make her happy, and she would not be."

CHAPTER XXII.
FAREWELL.

Strange and wonderful to tell! Nela, who had never in her life had a room, nor clothes, nor shoes, nor food, nor sympathy, nor relations, nor any earthly thing of her own, not even a name—was buried in a style which caused no small amount of envy among the living in Socartes. This posthumous splendor was the bitterest irony ever known in these metalliferous regions. Señorita Florentina, acting on her generous impulses, consoled herself for the disappointment of not having been able to help Nela alive, by the satisfaction of doing honor to her hapless remains after death. Some hard-hearted materialists criticised her severely; but, for our part, we regarded it as an additional proof of her refined kind-heartedness.

When Nela was carried to the grave, the curious who came to gaze at her, thought her almost pretty—wonderful to say! At least so they said. It was the first time a compliment had ever been paid her. The funeral was magnificent, and the priests of Villamojada opened their mouths wide in astonishment when they found themselves receiving money to pray for the soul of La Canela's daughter. It was bewildering, amazing, to think that a being whose social importance had been about equal to that of a worm or a fly, should prove the occasion of so much burning of tapers, of so much hanging of drapery, and of making so many choristers and sacristans hoarse. Nay, it was so astounding as to be positively amusing; nothing else was talked of for at least six weeks.

The surprise, and indeed—to be frank—the indignation of this worthy little world, culminated one day when two waggons, loaded with enormous blocks of fine white stone, were descried approaching by the high-road. In Señana's mind, particularly, a hideous subversion of ideas took place, a cataclysm resulting in mental chaos, when she brought herself to believe that those fine white stones were to build Nela's tomb. If an ox had taken to flying

or her husband to making speeches, it could not have roused her from her stupefaction.

The parish registers of Villamojada were searched, for of course it was indispensable that she should have a name now she was dead, though she had done without one during her life; as is proved by this very history, where she has borne various names. And this indispensable requisite having been found, and duly placed on the records of the dead, the magnificent tomb, which stood up proudly among the rustic crosses of the graveyard at Aldeacorba, had this epitaph engraved on it:

R. I. P.

MARÍA MANUELA TELLEZ.

RECALLED TO HEAVEN

October the 12th, 186...

And a wreath of flowers prettily carved in the marble, crowned the inscription. Many months later, when Florentina and Pablo Penáguilas had been some time married and no one—to tell the truth, for truth is the first consideration—no one in Aldeacorba de Suso remembered Nela any longer, some travellers of the tourist genus, in crossing that part of the country, happened to observe the grand marble sepulchre erected in the cemetery by the piety and affection of an exemplary friend, and were struck with admiration. Without more ado they proceeded to write down in their note-book these remarks, which were subsequently published under the title of "Sketches from Cantábria," in an English newspaper.

"The most remarkable object to be seen at Aldeacorba is a magnificent monument, erected in the cemetery over the grave of a young lady of rank, famous in that part of the country for her beauty. Doña Mariquita Manuela Tellez belonged to one of the noblest and wealthiest families in Cantábria, that of Tellez Giron y de Trastamara. Witty, romantic, and capricious, she took a fancy to

wander about the roads, playing the guitar and singing Calderon's odes, and she would dress herself up in rags to enable her to mix with the herd of beggars, pick-pockets, troubadours, bull-fighters, friars, *hidalgos*, gypsies, and muleteers, which at the great *kermesas*, constitute that motley scene of Spanish low life which still exists and always must exist, independent and picturesque, in spite of the railways and newspapers which have begun to force their way into the Spanish Peninsula.

"The *abad* [6] of Villamojada wept as he told us of the whims, the virtues, and the beauty of this wealthy gentlewoman, who, whenever she appeared at the balls, banquets, or *cañas* of Madrid, was distinguished for her aristocratic deportment. The number of *romanceros*, sonnets and madrigals composed in honor of this noble damsel by all the Spanish poets, is beyond all calculation." [7]

On reading this I saw at once that the worthy reporters had dreamed dreams. I determined to tell the truth, and the truth, as I have told it, has resulted in this book.

* * *

We must now bid farewell forever to this tomb. We will fix our eyes on another object, seek out another figure—searching diligently, for he whom we want is but a small personage, a minute insect, as it were, no larger on the face of the earth than the Phylloxera on the vine. But we have found him—there he is, tiny, squalid, a mere atomy. But he lives and breathes, and will grow great in time. Listen to his story, for it is an interesting one I promise you.

Well, Sir....

But no; it does not belong to this book. If you like the history of Marianela, in good time you shall hear that of Celipin.

THE END.

Footnotes:

[1] "Es tan linda su boca que no pide."

[2] A Spanish silver coin, equal in value to the U. S. dollar.

[3] A silver coin containing two reales.

[4] The copper piece is a *cuarto*. A *real* contains 34 *maravedis* and is worth about the same as the U. S. dime. The smallest Spanish coin is the *maravedi*. Four *maravedis* make a *cuarto*.

[5] Trunkmaker's street.

[6] In some provinces the rector of a parish.

[7] The point of this passage in the original is the misuse of Spanish words and the introduction of others which are not Spanish. Thus *Hidalgo* means a nobleman; and *Kermesas*, Fr., *Kermesse*, Dutch, *Kermis*, is a name for a fair peculiar to Holland and Belgium.

EDITION NOTE

The reading text was checked against the 1883 W. S. Gottsberger printing. The historical chapter sequence, dialogue and translator’s preface are retained.