THE QUEEN OF THE SAVANNAH

"A Story of the Mexican War"

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"A Story of the Mexican War"
(Illustrated)

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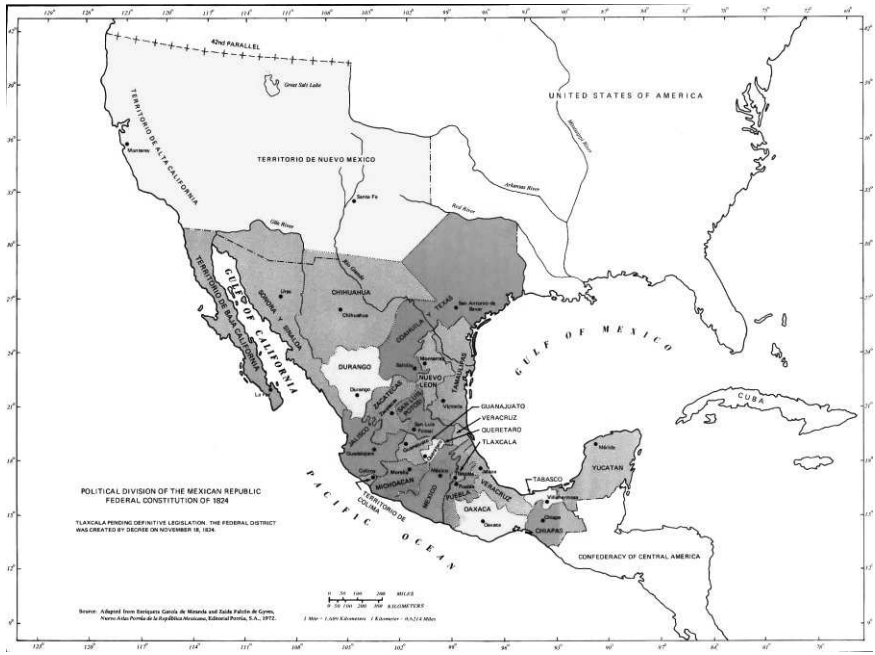
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THE QUEEN OF THE SAVANNAH
"A STORY OF THE MEXICAN WAR"
BY
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The Mexica Map in 1824



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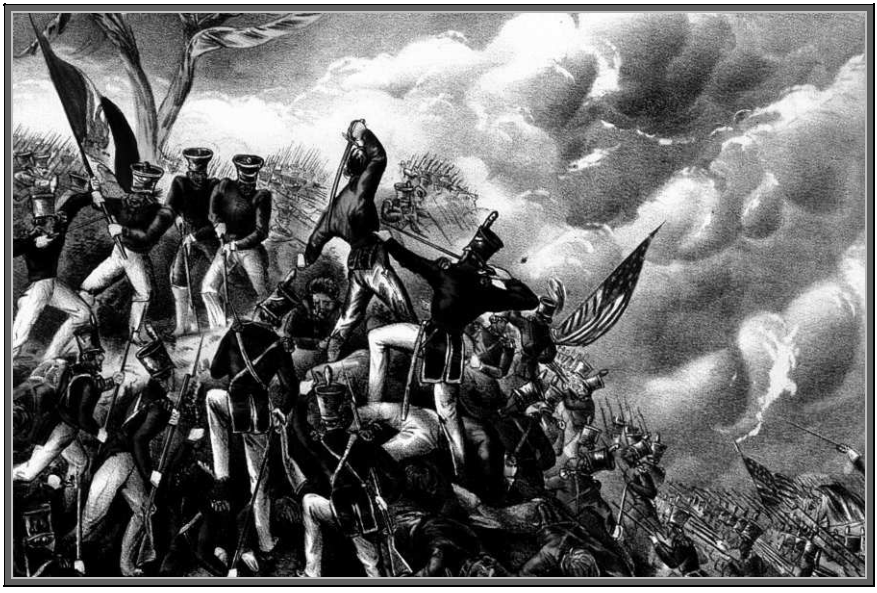
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PROLOGUE

CHAPTER I

THE EXPEDİTİON



The story begins on May 5, 1805, in one of the wildest and most abrupt portions of New Spain, which now forms the State of Coahuila, belonging to the Mexican Confederation.

If the reader will have the kindness to take a glance at a numerous cavalcade, which is debouching from a canyon and scaling at a gallop the scarped side of a rather lofty hill, on the top of which stands an *aldea*, or village of Indios mansos, he will at the same time form the acquaintance of several of our principal characters, and the country in which the events recorded in this narrative occurred.

This cavalcade was composed of fifteen individuals in all; ten of them were lancers, attired in that yellow uniform which procured them the nickname of *tamarindos*. These soldiers were execrated by the people, in consequence of their cruelty. They advanced in good order, commanded by a subaltern and an alférez—an old trooper who had grown gray in harness, who had long white moustachios and a disagreeable face. As he galloped on, he looked around him with the careless, wearied air of a man for whom the future reserves no hopes either of ambition, love, or fortune.

About twenty paces from this little band, and just so far ahead that their remarks reached the soldiers' ears in a completely incomprehensible fashion, three persons, two men and a woman, were riding side by side.

The first was a gentleman of about thirty years of age, of commanding stature; his harsh, haughty, and menacing features were rendered even more gloomy by a deep scar of a livid hue which commenced on his right temple and divided his face into two nearly equal parts.

This man, who was dressed in the sumptuous costume of the Mexican *campesinos*, which he wore with far from common grace, was named Don Aníbal de Saldibar, and was considered the richest hacendero in the province.

His companion, who kept slightly in the rear, doubtless through respect, was a civilized Indian, with a quick eye, aquiline nose, and a wide mouth lined with two rows of dazzling white teeth. His countenance indicated intelligence and bravery. He was short and robust, and the almost disproportioned development of his muscles gave an enormous width to his limbs. This individual must assuredly be endowed with extraordinary strength. His attire, not nearly so rich as

that of the hacendero, displayed a certain pretension to elegance, which was an extraordinary thing in an Indian.

This man's name was Pedro Sotavento, and he was majordomo to Don Aníbal.

As we have said, the third person was a female. Although it was easy to see, through the juvenile grace of her movements and her taper waist, that she was still very young, she was so discreetly hidden behind gauze and muslin veils, in order to protect her from the burning heat of the sun which was then at its zenith, that it was impossible to distinguish her features. Long black locks escaped from beneath her broad-brimmed vicuña hat, and fell in profusion on her pink and white shoulders, which were scarcely veiled by a China crape *rebozo*.

At the moment when we approach these three persons they were conversing together with considerable animation.

"No," Don Aníbal said, with a frown, as he smote the pommel of his saddle, "it is not possible, I cannot believe in so much audacity on the part of these Indian brutes. You must have been deceived, Sotavento."

The majordomo grinned knowingly, and buried his head between his shoulders with a motion which was habitual to him.

"You will see, *mi amo*," he replied, in a honeyed voice, "my information is positive."

"What!" the hacendero continued with increased fury, "They would really attempt resistance! Why, they must be mad!"

"Not so much as you suppose, mi amo; the aldea is large and contains at least three thousand *callis*."

"What matter? Suppose there were twice as many, is not one Spaniard as good as ten Indians?"

"In the open, perhaps so."

"What is that you say—perhaps?" Don Aníbal exclaimed, turning sharply round, and giving his majordomo a glance of supreme contempt. "Really, Sotavento, your Indian origin involuntarily abuses your judgment by making you regard things differently from what they really are."

"No, mi amo. The Indian origin with which you reproach me, on the contrary, makes me judge the situation healthily; and, believe me, it is far more serious than you imagine."

These words were uttered in a serious tone, which caused the proud Spaniard to reflect.

Pedro Sotavento had been in his service for a long time. He knew that he was brave and incapable of being intimidated by threats or rodomontade. Moreover, he had always been kind to him, and believed himself sure of his devotion, hence he continued in a milder key—

"That is the reason, then, why you insisted so strongly on my taking an escort when we passed the Fort of Agua Verde?"

"Yes, mi amo," he replied, giving the soldiers a glance of singular expression. "I should have liked it to be more numerous."

"Nonsense, had it not been through consideration for the señora, whom I am anxious not to terrify in her present condition, I would not have accepted a single soldier. We alone are more than sufficient to chastise these scoundrels, were there a thousand of them."

"Don Aníbal," the young lady here said in a soft and harmonious voice, "the contempt you profess for these poor people is unjust. Though they are of a different colour from us, and almost devoid of intellect, they are men for all that, and as such have a claim on our pity."

"Very good, señora," the hacendero answered savagely; "take their part against me, that will not fail to produce an excellent effect."

"I take no person's part, Don Aníbal," she continued, with a slight tremor in her voice. "I merely offer an opinion which I consider correct, that is all. But your outbursts of passion terrify me; perhaps it would have been better to leave me at the hacienda, as I expressed a desire."

"My family are never insulted with impunity, señora; I wished you to witness the vengeance which I intend taking for the insult offered to you."

"I made no complaint to you, Don Aníbal. The slight insult I received, even admitting that it was an insult, does not deserve so terrible a punishment as you purpose to inflict on these unhappy creatures. Take care, Don Aníbal. These men whom, in your Castilian pride, you obstinately insist on ranking with the brute beasts and treating as such, will grow weary one day. They already feel a profound hatred for you. The Indians are vindictive, and may wait perhaps for twenty years the opportunity to repay you the evil you have done them; but then their vengeance will be frightful."

"Enough, señora," the hacendero said roughly; "but while waiting for this vengeance with which you menace me in their name, I mean to treat them as they deserve."

The young lady bowed her head, and made no further remark.

"Oh!" the majordomo said, with a grin of mockery, "You can strike without fear, mi amo. The Indians have been too long accustomed to bend their necks for them ever to feel any desire to draw themselves up and bite the hand which chastises them."

These words were uttered with an accent which would have caused Don Aníbal to reflect seriously, had he not been so infatuated about his

real or supposed superiority over the unfortunate race that formed the subject of the conversation we have just reported.

The opinion expressed by the hacendero was not so erroneous as it might appear to a European. The Spanish name was at this period surrounded by such a prestige; the hapless Indians were reduced to such a state of degrading servitude and brutalization; they seemed to have so thoroughly recognized the superiority of their oppressors, that the latter did not even take the trouble to hide the contempt with which these degenerate remains of the powerful races they had vanquished in former times inspired them. They affected, under all circumstances, to make them feel all the weight of the yoke under which they bowed them.

Still, under present circumstances, the proud Spaniard committed a grave error. For this reason:

The Indians against whom he was marching at this moment were not attached by any tie to those whom three centuries of slavery had rendered submissive to the Spanish authority. They had only been settled for about thirty years, through their own free will, at the spot where they now were. This requires an explanation, which we will proceed to give, begging the reader to pardon this digression, which is indispensable for the comprehension of the facts which we have undertaken to recount.

There are races which seem destined by fate to disappear from the surface of the globe. The red race is of the number, for it has no fiercer enemy than itself.

The Indians, in lieu of making common cause against their oppressors, and trying to emancipate themselves from their tyranny, expend all their courage and energy in fratricidal contests of nation against nation, tribe against tribe, and thus help those who do all in their power to keep them down. These contests are the more obstinate,

because they take place between men of the same blood and even of the same family for originally frivolous causes, which, however, soon attain considerable importance, owing to the number of warriors who succumb to the rage and ferocity displayed on both sides.

Hence entire nations, formerly powerful, are gradually reduced to a few families, and in a relatively short period become entirely extinct, the few surviving warriors seeking their safety in flight, or going to claim the protection of another nation with which they soon become blended.

Hence we may account for the fact that the names of the tribes flourishing at the period of the discovery of America are now scarcely known, and it is impossible to recover any trace of them.

The first conquerors, impelled by religious fanaticism and an unextinguishable thirst for gold were, we allow, pitiless to their unhappy victims, and sacrificed immense numbers in working the mines. Still, to be just, we must state that they never organized those grand Indian hunts which the Anglo-Saxons initiated in North America; they never offered a reward of fifty dollars for every Indian scalp; and instead of driving back the Indian race before them, they, on the contrary, blended the native blood with their own, so that the number of Indians has been considerably augmented in the old Spanish possessions, while they will ere long disappear in North America, where they are hunted down like wild beasts.

According to a census made by the Washington Congress in 1858, the Indians scattered over the territory of the United States amount to 800,000.

In Mexico, where the population is only seven million, there are five million Indians and half-breeds; moreover, it is proved that in the time of Motecuhzoma the population never attained this high figure.

It results then from our remarks that the Spaniards who, during three centuries, incessantly massacred the Indians, succeeded in increasing their numbers; while the North Americans who are so philosophical and such philanthropists have attained a diametrically opposite result, and during the sixty years since they proclaimed their independence, in spite of all the efforts made to civilize the Indians, they have nearly exterminated those tribes which dwell on their territory.

It must be confessed that this is a most unfortunate result! We will stop here, for every thinking man will be enabled to draw the sole logical conclusion from our remarks without our dilating on them.

About forty years before the period at which our story begins, two of the most important tribes of the Comanche nation suddenly quarrelled after an expedition they had made in common against the Apaches, the irreconcilable enemies of the Comanches, with whom they alone dare to dispute the supremacy on the great prairies of the Far West.

This expedition had been completely successful: a winter village of the Apaches was surprised by night, the horses were carried off, and sixty scalps raised.

The warriors returned to the gathering place of their nation, singing, dancing, and celebrating their exploits, as they are accustomed to do when, in an expedition of this nature, they have killed several of their enemies without any loss on their own side. This had been the case on the present occasion. The Apache warriors, aroused from deep sleep, had fallen like ripe corn beneath the tomahawks of the Comanches as they sought to escape from their burning lodges without thought of arming themselves.

In spite of all the care taken in the division of the plunder that each tribe might be equally favoured, the chiefs did not succeed in satisfying

everybody; the warriors who thought themselves defrauded gave way to recriminations; tempers were heated, and, as always happens with men who constantly go about armed, they proceeded almost immediately from words to blows.

There was a battle; blood followed in streams, and then the two tribes separated, swearing a deadly hatred, though it was impossible to discover whence the quarrel originated, or which side was in the wrong. These two tribes were the "White Horse" and the "Red Buffalo."

Then a war began between these old friends which threatened to be indefinitely prolonged; but one day the Red Buffaloes, being surprised by their enemies, were almost entirely exterminated, after a fight that lasted two days, and in which even the squaws took part.

The vanquished, reduced to about fifty warriors and the same number of women and children, sought safety in flight, but being hotly pursued, they were compelled to cross the Indian border, and seek a refuge upon Spanish territory.

Here they drew breath. The Spanish government allowed them to settle in the neighbourhood of the Fort of Agua Verde, and granted them the right of self-government, while recognizing the authority of the king of Spain, and pledging themselves to be guilty of no exactions of any sort.

The Red Buffaloes, pleased with the protection granted them, religiously carried out the conditions of the treaty; they built a village, became husbandmen, accepted the missionary sent to them, turned Christians, ostensibly at least, and lived on good terms with their white neighbours, among whom they speedily acquired the reputation of being quiet and honest people.

Unhappily, perfect happiness is not possible in this world, and the poor Indians soon learnt this fact at their own expense.

The ground on which their wretched village stood was surrounded by the lands of the Hacienda del Barrio, which had belonged, ever since the conquest, to the Saldibar family.

So long as Don José de Saldibar was alive, with the exception of a few insignificant discussions, the Indians were tolerably at liberty; but when Don Aníbal succeeded his father, matters at once altered.

Don Aníbal signified to the chief cacique of the Red Buffaloes, that he must allow himself to be a vassal, and consequently pay to him not only a tithe of his crops, and the capitation tax, but also supply a certain number of his young men to work in the mines and guard the cattle.

The chief answered with a peremptory refusal, alleging that he was only dependent on the Spanish government, and recognized no other sovereign.

Don Aníbal would not allow himself to be defeated; he organized against the Indians a system of dull annoyance for the purpose of compelling them to give way; he cut down their woods, sent his cattle to grass in their fields, and so on.

The Indians suffered without complaining. They were attached to their wretched huts and did not wish to quit them.

This patient resignation, this passive resistance, exasperated Don Aníbal. The Indians let themselves be ruined without uttering complaints or threats; several of their young men were carried off, and they did not offer the slightest protest. The hacendero resolved to come to an end with these men whom nothing could compel to obey his will.

In spite of himself, he was terrified at the indifference of the Indians, which he fancied too great not to be affected; he went over in his mind all he had made the poor people suffer, and the injustice he

had done them, and came to the conclusion that they were preparing to take some terrible vengeance on him.

He determined to be beforehand with them, but he needed a pretext, and this Sotavento, his majordomo, undertook to provide him with.

This Sotavento, of whom we have already said a few words, was himself of Indian race. One of Don Aníbal's friends had warmly recommended him, and for twelve years he had been in the service of the hacendero, whose good and bad passions he had contrived so cleverly to flatter, with that suppleness of character natural to the redskins, that the latter placed the most perfect confidence in him.

Sotavento, naturally, carried out his master's orders zealously, and eagerly seized every opportunity to injure the Red Buffaloes, for whom he appeared to entertain a profound hatred.

After consulting with his master, Sotavento managed matters so that one day Doña Emilia, Don Aníbal's wife, who had hitherto defended the poor people of the aldea under all circumstances, and had even succeeded in saving them from several vexatious acts, was, while taking a walk, insulted by an Indian, or at least a man wearing their costume, and was so frightened that she was confined to her bed for several days.

The hacendero made the more noise about this insult, because, as his wife was *enceinte*, the fright she had undergone might have had very serious consequences for her.

He proceeded in all haste to the capital of the province, had a long interview with the governor, and then returned home, certain this time of gaining the end at which he had so long aimed.

He had been accompanied from the city by a juez de letras, an insignificant person, to whom we have not yet alluded, and who

appeared but little pleased with the duty confided to him, for he trotted timidly along upon a scrubby mule behind the soldiers.

Only stopping at the hacienda long enough to bid his wife mount her horse and come and see what was going to happen, Don Aníbal at once continued his journey, consenting with great difficulty, upon the repeated entreaties of his majordomo, to accept the escort the commandant of the Fort of Agua Verde offered him, for he was so eager to revenge himself.

The country the travellers passed through was extremely picturesque; from the elevation they had reached, they surveyed an admirable landscape closed in on the horizon by lofty forest-clad mountains. In the west spread out the immense sheet of water, known as the Agua Verde, which the beams of the setting sun tinged with all the prismatic hues. Besides this, they could see the Río Grande, which was lost in infinite windings, the Fort of the Bahia, situated on a point of the river, and the green prairies of the Indian border, which were agitated by mysterious movements.

In the meanwhile the Mexicans continued to ascend, we dare not say the road, for no roads of any sort existed at that period in this savage country, and we doubt whether any exist now, but the track which led to the aldea of the Red Buffaloes.

This track, cut by human hands on the sides of the hill round which it wound, became more and more scarped, and at last resembled a staircase, which would have mightily staggered a European traveller, but these horsemen did not even seem to notice the fact.

All at once, Sotavento, who had pushed on slightly ahead during the conversation between the hacendero and Doña Emilia, uttered a cry of surprise as he stopped his horse so short, that the noble animal trembled on its hind legs.

"What is the matter?" Don Aníbal asked as he spurred his horse.

"Look there!" the majordomo replied, stretching his hand.

"*¡Mil demonios!*" Don Aníbal shouted passionately, "What is the meaning of this? Who has warned the scoundrels?"

"*¿Quién sabe?*" the majordomo said with a grin.

Several trees, to which the branches and roots were still attached, had been thrown across the track, and formed a barricade about ten feet in height, which completely stopped the way.

The travellers were compelled to halt before this impassable obstacle.

The hacendero was startled for a moment, but soon, shaking his head like a lion at bay, he looked around defiantly, dismounted, and drawing his machete, walked boldly up to the barricade, while Sotavento, motionless and with folded arms, looked cunningly at him.

The lancers, whom this compulsory stoppage had enabled to catch up the first party, cocked their carbines at an order from their commanding officer, and held themselves in readiness to fire at the first signal.

CHAPTER II

REDKİNS AND WHİTESKİNS



Don Aníbal de Saldibar was gifted with a most energetic character and iron will; obstacles, instead of checking, only impelled him to go on at all risks, until he had carried out what he once resolved to do. In no case could any interference, however powerful its nature, have induced him to hesitate in accomplishing his plans, much less make him give them up. Possessing great physical strength and unusual skill in the management of weapons, he was courageous after the manner of wild beasts, through an instinct for evil and to smell blood. Still he had as much contempt for his own life as for that of his opponent, and he never tried to avoid peril, but, on the contrary, felt a secret pleasure in looking it in the face.

The soldiers who accompanied him had assuredly furnished proofs of their courage long before. Still it was with a start of terror they saw him advance calmly and carelessly toward this barricade of verdure, which rose silent and menacing before them, and behind which they expected at each moment to see spring up a band of enemies, exasperated by long sufferings, and resolved to defend themselves to the last extremity. In the probable event of a collision, the position of the Mexicans was most disadvantageous.

The soldiers, grouped on a path only three feet in width, having on their right a perpendicular granite wall, and on their left a deep barranca, into which the slightest false step might precipitate them, with no shelter of any description to fight men hidden behind a thick barricade, were almost certain of being defeated, if a hand to hand fight began with the Indians. Hence the old officer who commanded the escort shook his head several times with a dissatisfied air, after he had hastily examined the probable fighting ground.

The juez de letras and the two alguaciles who served him as a guard of honour, evidently shared the lieutenant's opinion, for they had stopped out of gunshot and dismounted, under a pretext of tightening their mules' girths, but in reality to convert the carcases of the poor brutes into a rampart.

As for Sotavento, sitting motionless on his horse about ten yards at the most from the felled trees, he was carelessly rolling a cigarette between his fingers, while pinching up his thin lips, and letting a viper's glance pass through his half-closed eyelids.

He seemed, in short, to take but very slight interest in what was going on around him, and was prepared to be a spectator rather than actor of the events which would in all probability occur.

The hacendero had approached the barricade. His face was unmoved; with his left hand resting on one of the branches, and his

body bent slightly forward, he was trying to peer through the intertwined branches and leaves at some of the enemies whom he supposed to be ambuscaded there.

Still, although this examination lasted for several minutes, and Don Aníbal, through bravado, prolonged it far beyond what was necessary, the deepest silence continued to prevail, and not a leaf stirred.

"Come," the hacendero said in a sarcastic voice, as he drew himself up, "you are mistaken, Sotavento, there is no one here. I was a fool to believe for a moment that these brutes would attempt to dispute our passage."

"Well, well," the majordomo said with a grin, "¿quién sabe? mi amo, ¿quién sabe? These brutes, as you very correctly term them, have not left their prairies so long as to have completely forgotten their Indian tricks."

"I care little," the hacendero answered drily, "what their intentions or the tricks they have prepared may be; dismount and help me to roll over the precipice these trees which obstruct the path; at a later date we will proceed to punish the persons who have thus dared to barricade the king's road."

Sotavento hung his head without replying, and prepared to obey; but before he had drawn his foot out of the stirrup the branches parted, and in the space thus left free appeared a man wearing a gold-laced hat with a military cock, and holding in his right hand a long silver-knobbed cane.

As this individual is destined to play a certain part in this narrative, we will draw his portrait in a few lines.

He was a man of lofty stature, with marked features and an intelligent physiognomy. His black eyes, sparkling like carbuncles, and full of cunning, had a strange fixity, which gave him, when any internal

emotion agitated him, an expression of cold ferocity impossible to describe. His complexion, which was of the colour of new red copper, allowed him to be recognized as an Indian at the first glance; although he had passed midlife, it was impossible to decide his age, for he seemed as vigorous and active as if only twenty years old; not a wrinkle furrowed his brow, not a single gray hair was perceptible in the thick black masses which fell in disorder on his shoulders.

Excepting his gold-laced hat, and his silver-mounted cane, which were the emblems of his rank as cacique or alcade of the aldea, his dress was very simple, and only consisted of worn velvet calzoneras, which but half covered his bare legs, and a gaily coloured zarapé, which was thrown over his shoulders.

Still, in spite of this miserable garb, this man had about him such an air of haughty dignity and innate superiority, that, on seeing him, his ridiculous attire was forgotten, and involuntary respect was felt for him.

This person was, in fact, the chief of the Red Buffaloes, their cacique, to whom the governor of the province had given the title of alcade.

His name was Mah-mih-kou-ing-atl, not a very euphonious name; but, like all Indian titles, it had a meaning, and signified literally "Running Water."

The hacendero and the cacique examined each other for a moment silently, like two duellists, who, before falling on their favourite guard, try to discover their opponent's weak point, and thus render their attack, if possible, decisive.

It was the first time they stood face to face, and hence the fixedness of their glance had something strange and fatal about it. Still, Don Aníbal's machete, raised against the barricade, fell without striking. The cacique, satisfied with this triumph, turned his head away with a gloomy smile. Each of these men had measured his foe, and found him

a worthy one. The spectators, dumb and motionless, anxiously awaited what was about to take place. Don Aníbal was the first to break the silence.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked, in a voice that betrayed dull passion; "By what right do you obstruct the king's highway?"

"Who are you, first, who question me in so haughty a fashion, and who authorizes you to do so?" the cacique answered drily.

"Who I am?" the Spaniard continued passionately, "Do you not know?"

"Whether I know or not is of no consequence; I wish to learn the fact from you. I am not acquainted with you, and do not wish to have any dispute with you."

"Do you think so, my master?" the hacendero retorted with a mocking smile, "If unfortunately you are mistaken, as you will speedily discover."

"Perhaps so," the Indian replied disdainfully; "but, in the meanwhile, as you have no right to enter my village with soldiers, in my quality of magistrate, I order you to withdraw, rendering you and yours responsible for the consequences of your disobedience in the event of your refusing to obey my orders."

While Don Aníbal listened to these words, with his arms crossed on his chest, and head thrown back, a smile of imperceptible meaning played around his lips.

"I fancy," he said ironically, "that you attach greater importance to your dignity of alcade than it really possesses, my master; but I have not come here to discuss with you. Will you, yes or no, let me pass?"

"Why do you not try to force a passage?" the cacique said.

"I am going to do so."

"Try it."

Without replying, Don Aníbal turned to the leader of the escort.

"Lieutenant," he said to him, "order your men to fire on that scoundrel."

But the old officer shook his head.

"Hum!" he remarked, "What good would that do us? It would only cause us to be killed like asses. Do you imagine that man to be alone?"

"Then you refuse to obey me?" the hacendero said with concentrated passion.

"¡Canarios! I should think I do refuse. I was ordered to defend you from attack; but not to sacrifice the men I command in satisfying a whim. This individual, the deuce take him! Were he ten times the Indian he is, has the law on his side, ¡Rayo de Dios! You waste your time in arguing with him, instead of coming to an end at once."

Don Aníbal listened to this remonstrance with ill-restrained impatience. When the lieutenant ceased speaking, he said with ironical deference, as he bowed to him—

"Pray what would you have done in my place, Señor Lieutenant?"

"¡Canarios! I should have acted in a different way. It is evident that we are not the stronger, and that if we attempt to pass as you propose, those red devils will only have to give us a push to send us rolling over the precipice, which, I suppose, would not exactly suit your views."

"Well?" the hacendero interrupted with an impatient gesture.

"One moment, hang it all! Let us act legally since it is necessary. The alcade's cane is at times stronger than the soldier's sword, and to break it you require a stronger cane, that is all. Have you not brought with you a sort of writer or juez de letras, flanked by two alguaciles? The scoundrel must have some sort of authority in his pocket. But what do

I know? Well, let the two black birds settle matters between themselves. Believe me, it is the only thing we can do in the present posture of affairs; we will see if these pícaros dare to resist a representative of his majesty, whom may Heaven preserve!"

"¡Viva Dios! you are right, Lieutenant; I perceive that I acted like an ass, and we ought to have begun with that. Give those persons orders to come up, if you please."

The cacique had listened to the conversation, leaning carelessly on his cane in the trench behind the barricade; but, on hearing the conclusion, which he doubtless had not anticipated, he frowned and looked anxiously behind him.

At a sign from the lieutenant, several soldiers went in search of the juez de letras and his two acolytes. But it was no easy task to bring them to the front: officers of justice have this in common with the crow, that they smell gunpowder a long distance off.

The poor devils, entrenched, as well as they could manage, behind their mules, were trembling all over, while waiting for the action to begin; when they saw the soldiers galloping toward them, they fancied their last hour had arrived, and they began commending their souls to Heaven, while repeating all the prayers they could call to mind, and beating their chests powerfully, as they invoked all the saints of the interminable Spanish calendar.

At the first moment the soldiers were greatly amused at their terror, and laughed heartily at their pale faces and startled glances. On hearing the lancers laugh, the juez de letras, who, apart from his poltroonery, was a clever and sensible man, began reflecting, and suspected that the danger was not so great as he had at first supposed it.

He got up, carefully arranged his attire, and asked the soldiers for news, which they gave him, laughing most heartily the while. The juez then drew himself up in a dignified manner, mounted his mule, and

addressed his alguaciles, who were still hidden behind a bend in the path—

"Well, scamps," he said to them, while attempting to reassume an imposing air, as became a magistrate of his importance, "what is the meaning of this? Heaven pardon me, but I believe you are afraid. Is that the way in which you sustain the honour of the gown you wear? Come, come, mount without further delay, and follow me smartly."

The alguaciles, abashed by this sharp reprimand, got on their mules, offering the best excuses they could, and ranged themselves behind their superior officer.

Still the worthy juez de letras was not so reassured as he wished to appear, and we are forced to confess that the nearer he drew to the barricade, the more formidable it seemed to him, and the less at ease did he feel as to the results of the mission he had to carry out.

Still, hesitation was no longer possible, he must bravely go through with the affair; and pluck up a heart. No one is so courageous as a poltroon driven into a corner; fear in him takes the place of bravery, and he becomes the more rash in proportion to his former terror.

The juez de letras gave a proof of this, for instead of halting a reasonable distance from the barricade, he advanced till he could almost touch it. Perhaps, though, this did not result entirely from his own will, for the soldiers had maliciously given the poor mule several vigorous blows with their chicotes, so that it pricked up its ears and dashed madly onward. The fact is, that, whether voluntarily or not, the juez found himself side by side with Don Aníbal.

The lieutenant's advice was, as he had said, the only mode of putting an end to the cacique's resistance. At the period when this story takes place, the liberal ideas which overturned and regenerated the old world had not yet reached the Spanish colonies, or, if they had reached them,

had not penetrated to the lower classes, who, besides, would not have understood them.

The King of Spain, owing to the system adopted by the Peninsular government, was revered, feared, and respected like a god; the lowest of his representatives, the mere flag hoisted over a conducta de plata, were sufficient to protect the millions that traversed the entire length of Mexico to be embarked on board the ships; in a word, it would not have occurred to anyone in New Spain that it was possible to rebel against the mother country or disobey the lowest or most insignificant of the officers of the sovereign beyond the seas.

Still, in spite of the knowledge of their power, the Spaniards were slightly alarmed by the coldly resolute attitude of the Indian cacique; the more so, because this man belonged to that haughty Comanche race which preferred to return to the desert sooner than bend beneath the Spanish yoke. It is true that Running Water, on settling on this side the border, had recognized the suzerainty of the King of Spain; but it was so recently that this fact occurred, that there was reason to fear lest the Red Buffaloes, driven to extremities by the countless annoyances they had endured, might be resolved to take an exemplary vengeance on their enemies, even though that vengeance entailed their utter ruin.

Such instances as this had already occurred several times in the colony. Another reason also heightened the apprehensions of Don Aníbal and his companions; in spite of the secrecy in which his plans were arranged and his rapidity of action, the Indians had been warned of what was being prepared against them, which was superabundantly proved by the measures they had taken to defend themselves against an attack which nothing could have led them to suspect.

The hacendero had, then, been betrayed; but who was the traitor?

At a sign from Don Aníbal, the juez de letras prepared with considerable assurance to exhibit his titles and quality. After securing

himself firmly in his saddle the magistrate drew a paper from a portfolio one of the alguaciles handed him, the contents of which he read in a loud, firm voice.

This document was to the effect that the Comanche Indians, called the Red Buffaloes, who had sought shelter on the Spanish territory, and to whom the government of his majesty had deigned to grant asylum and protection, had rendered themselves unworthy this protection by their misdeeds, a long list of which was quoted. The Viceroy of New Spain, listening to the repeated complaints which were made from all sides against them, recognizing them as ungrateful and incorrigible felons, withdrew the hand he had hitherto extended to protect them, and ordered, in consequence, that they should be compelled by all legal means at once to abandon their place of residence, and repass the border, after their village had been utterly destroyed in their presence. Any disobedience would be punished with death, etc., etc.

This document was listened to in religious silence by the cacique, with downcast head and frowning brow, but without the slightest mark of impatience, anger, or sorrow. When the judge had finished he raised his head, and looked at him like a man awakening from sleep.

"Have you ended?" he asked him in a gentle voice.

"Not yet," the magistrate answered, amazed and emboldened by this mildness, which he had been far from anticipating.

"Do so," he said.

The judge continued:

"Consequently I, Don Ignacio Pavo y Cobardo, juez de letras of the town of Mondovo, by virtue of the powers conceded to me by the most serene Governor of the Intendancy, summon you, alcade of the aldea of the Red Buffaloes, in the name of his Majesty, whom may Heaven preserve, to obey this order at once without any resistance."

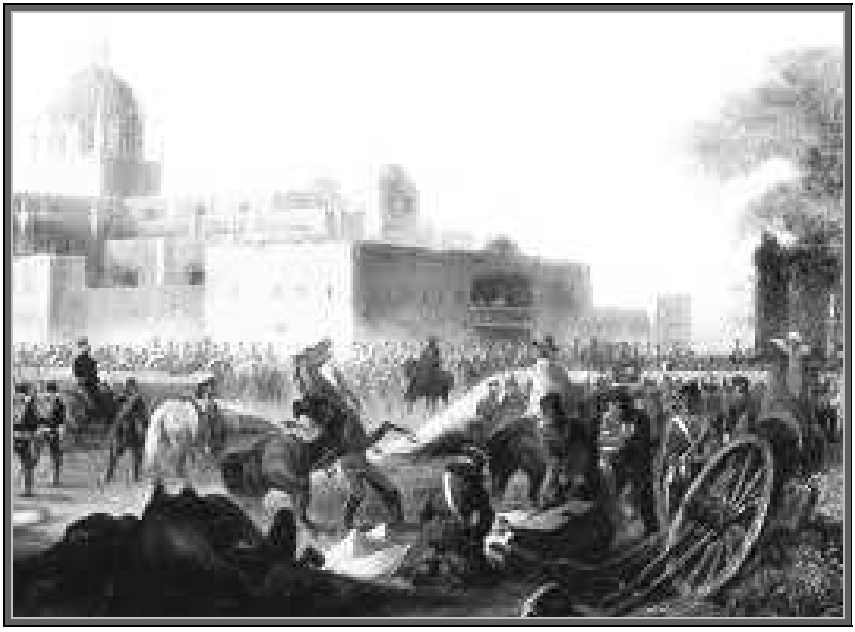
Running Water drew himself up, gave the spectators a glance of strange meaning; then, without uttering a word, he took off his hat, which he threw over the precipice, broke his cane across his knee, let the pieces fall at his feet, and said to Don Aníbal—

"You wish for war, be it so! I accept. You can now pass, and no one will oppose you."

He fell back a step, shouted in a thundering voice, "We shall meet again," and then disappeared.

CHAPTER III

THE RED BUFFALOES



The startled Mexicans looked at each other with dumb terror; for several minutes after the disappearance of the cacique they remained thus gloomy and hesitating, fearing a trap, and not daring to put faith in the words of an Indian.

At length the hacendero, ashamed of showing the terror he felt, haughtily raised his head, and angrily stamped his foot.

"¡Viva Dios!" he shouted, "Are we timid women to let ourselves be frightened by the threats of a maniac? I will go on, even if I should be murdered."

And before anyone dreamed of preventing him, he forced his way with great difficulty through the branches, machete in hand, and ready to sell his life dearly. But Running Water had told the truth; the passage was free far as eye could extend, and the path was entirely deserted. Don Aníbal rejoined his comrades.

"There is nobody," he said, with an accent of regret. "Aid me to throw these trees over the precipice, and let us continue our journey. Let us make haste though, for, if I am not mistaken, we shall find the resistance which is not offered us here at the village."

The path was soon cleared, and the trees hurled into the barranca, down which they rolled with a sinister noise. They continued their march, and at the end of an hour reached the plateau on which the village stood. But they found the huts a pile of smoking ashes, while a long line of flame was rapidly running along the side of the hill, and devouring the crops. The Red Buffaloes had not waited for the arrival of the king's people; they had themselves destroyed everything.

The Mexicans only found shapeless ruins; as for the Indians, they had disappeared, and it was impossible to discover in what direction they had fled. The old officer gazed for a moment pensively at this scene of desolation, and then walked up to Don Aníbal.

"Señor de Saldibar," he said to him solemnly, "take care!"

"Take care! I?" he answered haughtily, "Nonsense, Lieutenant, you are jesting."

"I am not jesting," the soldier answered sadly, "I have known the Indians for a long time. They never forgive an insult. For them to consent to consummate their ruin, and unresistingly abandon a spot which must for so many reasons be dear to them, they must be meditating a terrible revenge upon you; so, I repeat, take care."

In spite of his ferocious courage and indomitable pride the hacendero was struck by the tone in which these words were pronounced by a man whose courage could not be doubted; he felt a shudder pass over his limbs and his blood run cold in his veins; for a moment remorse entered his heart, and he regretted having driven to desperation these peaceable men, who only asked for their share of air and sunshine.

But stiffening himself almost immediately against this emotion, of which he had not been master, the haughty Spaniard smiled bitterly, and answered the officer with a look of defiance—

"What can such wretches effect against me? It is not I who have to fear; but they will have cause to tremble if ever they cross my path again; but as we have nothing more to do here, let us be off, for it is growing late."

The officer made no answer; he bowed, remounted his horse and ordered the bugles to sound. At the base of the hill the band separated; the escort returned to the fort of Agua Verde, and the hacendero, only followed by his wife and his majordomo, started in the direction of the Hacienda del Barrio. The juez de letras and the two alguaciles, who had not quite recovered from their terror, preferred to follow the soldiers in spite of the offer Don Aníbal made them of receiving them into his house.

The journey was sad, for the hacendero was dissatisfied, though he did not wish to show it. His plans had succeeded, it is true, but not in the way he had intended; hence, his vengeance was not complete.

These people, whom he wanted to drive from their hearths, on whom he wished to inflict chastisement for the insult offered his wife, had destroyed their village with their own hands, and they robbed him thus far of the pleasure of doing it.

Doña Emilia was sorrowful and thoughtful; this hatred, accumulated on her husband's head, which would doubtless fall on her, though she was innocent, terrified her. She did not dare express her feelings aloud, but she gave full scope to her thoughts, and with the exquisite sensibility, and prophetic intuition which loving women possess, she foresaw a future big with misfortune and gloomy catastrophes.

The majordomo appeared as careless and indifferent on the return as when he went to the village. Still, anyone who could have examined him carefully, and seen the wicked flash of his eye when he took a side-glance at his master, would have suspected that this man was playing a part, that he had taken a greater share in recent events than was supposed, that his indifference was feigned, and that he alone of the three travellers had a glad heart, although his countenance was sorrowful.

Anyone who had had this idea would perhaps not have been completely mistaken, for we must not forget that Señor Sotavento was an Indian, although he appeared a Christian, and almost civilized.

Nothing occurred to interrupt the monotony of the journey, no annoying accident troubled the tranquillity of the travellers, who reached the Hacienda del Barrio a little before sunset, at the moment when night was beginning to hide the valleys in the transparent shadows of dusk, while the tops of the mountains were still tinged with a pinkish light.

The hacienda was a substantial building of hewn stone, such as the first conquerors liked to erect to prove to the conquered that they would never abandon the soil of which fortune had rendered them masters. This house seemed a fortress, so massive was it; and built on the top of a rather lofty hill upon a rock hanging over the abyss, it could only be reached by a narrow, rugged track cut in the rock, on which two horsemen could not ride abreast. This track wound round

the side of the hill and led to the great gate of the hacienda, which was defended by a drawbridge, usually down, but which it would have been an easy task to raise. The walls, which were thirty feet high and of proportionate thickness, were surmounted by those *almenas* or battlements which were a sign of nobility, and which the old Christians, that is to say, the true Castilians, never failed to place above their houses; for the hacenderos must not be confounded with our farmers, for that would be a great error.

The hacenderos of New Spain are great landowners, whose possessions are often more extensive than one of our counties. In the time of the Spaniards, they led the life of feudal lords in the midst of their vassals, acting as they pleased, and only accountable to the Viceroy, who, residing in Mexico, or a great distance off, had something else to do than look after the way in which these feudatories managed their estates. The latter cultivated their land, worked their mines, fattened their flocks, and reared their horses, without anyone dreaming of asking any account of them as to the means they employed to augment their fortunes, or the manner in which they treated the Indians who fell to their share upon the grand division of the Mexican population among the conquistadors.

On this subject we will hazard a parenthesis. Since Mexico has proclaimed her independence, slavery is abolished *de jure* in the country, but still exists *de facto*. In this way: The rich landowners whom the philanthropic law utterly ruined, instead of crying out and complaining as certain slaveholders do in North America, hit on a clever and successful plan.

The hacenderos assembled their slaves and informed them that slavery was abolished, and that consequently they were free, and could go wherever they thought proper. The poor devils were, at the first moment, stunned by the news, and did not at all know what would become of them. In fact, while they were slaves, they lived without

having the trouble of thinking. They worked, it is true, but they were fairly fed, clothed after a fashion, and taken care of when ill. Now they were free, they would have to seek the food, clothing, and medicine which they had hitherto ready to hand without the trouble of looking for it. The question was a delicate one, for they had nothing at all.

The hacenderos appeared to take pity on their hapless fate; they were moved with compassion, and told them that, as they would require peons to do the Work the slaves had hitherto done, they would engage them at the rate of three reals a day, but they would have to feed and clothe themselves. "Moreover," the hacenderos added, "to facilitate your getting a start in life, which is rather difficult, we will advance you all you require, and stop it out of your wages. In this way you will be free, and you can leave us whenever you think proper, after paying off the advances we have made you."

The ex-slaves accepted with transports of joy and became peons. Then it came about that they could never pay off the advances, and as they still wanted food and clothing, the debt increased like the memorable snowball, and the peons were forced to give up all thoughts of leaving their masters, as they had no other than personal security to offer. The result is, that at the present day they are greater slaves than ever.

The only persons who gained by the transaction were the hacenderos. The reason is very simple: it has been calculated that the cost of maintaining a slave is six reals a day, and the peons cost them three. Hence there is a clear profit of one half; moreover, the masters supply the food and clothing, and heaven alone knows what price they charge the peons.

This is the way in which the Indians, who were slaves in the Spanish possessions, have become free, thanks to the declaration of

Independence. Is this progress? I do not think so. But to resume our story.

Days, weeks elapsed, and not a word was heard of the Indians; they seemed to have disappeared for ever. By autumn the recollection of the expedition faded away, and then it was utterly forgotten, and nothing was said about the Red Buffaloes or their threat of vengeance, which was regarded as braggadocio.

A year passed away, and we reach the second half of 1808. The political horizon was beginning to grow overcast; in spite of the care the Spanish government took to isolate the colonies, and prevent European newspapers entering them, the arrival of French troops in Spain was vaguely discussed; minds fermented and attempts at revolt were made in several provinces. Don Aníbal, who at this time was at Leona Vicario, whither he had taken his wife a few months before for her confinement, resolved to leave the town and return to his hacienda.

He was the more eager to carry out this resolution because the Indians of the Presidio de Río Grande, only a few leagues from his estate, had risen in revolt, and after burning the fort and massacring the garrison, had spread over the country like a torrent which had burst its dykes, and were plundering and destroying everything they came across. An atrocious fact was stated in connection with the capture of the Río Grande Fort, which heightened the hacendero's apprehensions, by leading him to suppose that his old enemies, the Red Buffaloes, were connected with this sudden insurrection.

Count Don Rodrigo de Melgosa, commander of the Presidio, and brother of the governor of the Intendancy, was detested by the Indians, whom he treated with the utmost rigour, and it was rumoured that he had several times been guilty of unjustifiable acts of cruelty and barbarity. When, after a desperate resistance, the Indians stormed the fort, they killed Colonel de Melgosa by pouring molten gold into his

mouth, saying that, "Since he was so fond of gold they were determined to make him eat it," and the unhappy man died under horrible sufferings.

Then the Indians cut off his head, wrapped it up in a zarapé, and sent this horrible trophy of their victory to the colonel's wife, who happened to be staying with her father-in-law at Mondovo. At the sight of this scalped and fearfully mutilated head, the unhappy woman all but went mad.

It was in vain that the governor—whose only son, quite a lad at time, was at the time in the fort with the colonel, and had disappeared, carried off by the Indians, or, as was more probable, had been sacrificed to their implacable vengeance—tried by all the means in his power to discover the man who had undertaken to deliver this horrible message; all his researches were fruitless, and the unhappy father, a prey to impotent despair, remained in the most perfect ignorance as to the fate of his child.

Strange to say, the murderers had designed on the victim's forehead a buffalo with their scalping knives. Don Aníbal knew that the buffalo was the totem, or emblem of the Indian tribe which he had so brutally expelled from his domain a year previously, hence his anxiety was great, for it was evident to him that the Red Buffaloes were the authors of the death of the unfortunate Colonel de Melgosa, and of the rape of his nephew.

He completed his preparations in all haste, said good-bye to Doña Emilia, whom, in spite of her entreaties, he would not consent to take with him, and started. Nine days later he reached his hacienda, where bad news was awaiting him; all was in disorder. This was substantially what he learned:

Most of his cattle had been carried off, as well as his manadas of horses; several peons had been killed in trying to prevent the robbery

of his animals; his fields had been fired and his vines uprooted, indeed the destruction was immense; and in order that the hacendero might be thoroughly aware who the culprits were, a long pole was found planted in the middle of a field, from which was suspended a half-tanned elk skin, on which a buffalo was drawn. This time there could be no mistake; it was really the totem of the hacendero's enemies, for the buffalo was red.

The hacendero burst into a frightful passion, and swore to take exemplary vengeance for this insult. He immediately wrote letters to several neighbouring hacenderos exposed like himself to the depredations of the marauders, and sent off couriers in all directions. The hacenderos, who were as desirous as he was to be freed from these demons, whose audacity, heightened by impunity, no longer knew any limits, and threatened, if they were left alone, to ruin the entire province, did not hesitate about joining Don Aníbal de Saldibar, and a veritable manhunt was organized against the redskins.

The Count de Melgosa, burning to avenge his brother's death, and, moreover, hoping to recover his son, placed two squadrons of dragoons at the service of the confederates, whose numbers were thus considerably augmented, and Don Aníbal, who took the command in chief by general acclamation, found himself at the head of a real army.

The hostilities commenced immediately. The confederates divided into three bodies and set out in search of the Indians. The preparations for the expedition had been made with such secrecy, that the redskins, who were far from suspecting what was going on, were surprised only a few leagues from the Hacienda del Barrio, in a valley on the banks of the Río del Norte, where they had established their camp.

Although suddenly attacked by an enemy superior in strength, the redskins did not the less try to defend themselves, and bravely opposed the white men. The combat was terrible, and lasted a whole day; the

Indians fought with that energy of desperation which doubles the strength and equalizes chances; they knew they had no quarter to expect, and hence preferred death to falling alive into the hands of their implacable foes. The massacre was terrible, and nearly all the redskins succumbed; some, but they were a small number, succeeded in escaping by leaping into the Río del Norte. The Mexicans took no prisoners; men, women, and children were pitilessly sacrificed.

After the battle, Sotavento, who had truly done his duty by his master's side, brought him a boy of about five or six years of age, who was crying bitterly, and who had been delivered to him during the massacre by a Canadian wood ranger. He declared that he had not the courage to kill the child, the more so because his pale skin might lead to the supposition that he was the son of a European. The hacendero shook his head angrily at the sight of the boy; still, not daring to prove himself more cruel than his majordomo, he consented to the poor little wretch being spared, and even carried his clemency so far as to allow him to be taken to the hacienda.

This battle ended the campaign. The confederates separated, satisfied with having exterminated their enemies and taken such a prompt revenge for their outrages. The redskins, at least for a lengthened period, would be unable to take their revenge, and the lesson had been perfect.

CHAPTER IV

THE CASCABEL



The French Revolution not only shook the old European thrones, which it made quiver to their foundations, but the terrible blow it dealt the world was so violent, that the counterstroke was felt even in the indolent and voluptuous Spanish colonies.

In response to the echoing footsteps of those generals of the young French Republic who marched from prodigy to prodigy, improvising soldiers and organizing victory, a lengthened electric current ran along all the coasts of the New World, and revealed to the inhabitants that, like their brethren in North America, they too might someday become free.

Like a deafening thunderclap, leaping across the Atlantic Ocean, the echo of the battles of giants of that Sublime epic power called the Empire, caused the hearts of Americans to beat, and inflamed them with a noble ardour which the Spanish Viceroys were powerless to extinguish.

The occupation of the Peninsula by French armies, by forcing Spain to defend her own territory, which had almost entirely fallen into the enemy's power, obliged her to concentrate all her strength in order to sustain the extraordinary struggle that was preparing, and compelled her to abandon her possessions beyond the seas to their own resources, while she could only form sterile vows that they might not slip from her grasp.

The colonies, which had long been worn out by the yoke the mother country implacably made them wear, considered the moment favourable; generous hearts were affected, and in an instant Peru, Mexico, Chili, Buenos Aires formed secret societies, whose common branches, passing through all classes of society, ended by enveloping the colonial governments in an inextricable net.

Then, when all preparations had been made, when the chiefs had been elected, soldiers enrolled, and the headquarters of revolt chosen, a long cry for liberty was raised to heaven on twenty sides simultaneously; the insurgents rose, calling their brethren to arms, and the systematic opposition of the conspirators was all at once followed by an obstinate war without truce or mercy, of the conquered against the conquerors, of the oppressed against the oppressors, whose watchword was Liberty or Death!

A holy war, an extraordinary struggle, in which the Americans, inexperienced, and having no acquaintance with arms, had but one insatiable desire, to shake off the yoke, an energy which no reverse could crush; and an unflinching resolution to oppose the old Spanish

bands, hardened by long fighting, and whom the habit of warfare rendered almost invincible in the sight of these men, in whom they inspired a species of instinctive and supernatural terror.

We will not describe here the history of this war, which was so grand, so noble, and so full of heroic devotion, affecting incidents, and traits of bravery, self-denial, and disinterestedness, worthy the most glorious days of antiquity; our task is more modest, and certainly more easy, for we will limit ourselves to penciling a few private details of this grand drama, which have been neglected by the disdainful muse of history, but which we believe will serve to complete the magnificent tableau of the struggle of progress against barbarism in the first years of the 19th century.

The Mexican revolution had this strange thing about it, that the clergy gave the first signal of revolt. In the provinces the Curas preached insurrection to their parishioners, and seizing a sword in one hand, a cross in the other, led them to the field.

Don Aníbal de Saldibar, although a *cristiano viejo*, that is to say, belonging to a family originally Spanish, and of which not a member had become allied with the Indians during several ages, did not consider himself obliged to join his fellow countrymen, but, on the contrary, attached himself to the insurrectionary movement.

Father Sandoval, chaplain at the Hacienda del Barrio, was to a great extent the cause of this determination. In Mexico, where the towns are far distant from each other, each hacienda has a chapel served by a priest, whose duty it is to baptize, marry, confess, and guide the Indians, but, before all, keep them in order by the fear of future punishment. Father Sandoval, about whom we shall have a good deal to say during the course of this story, was a simple-hearted, kind, intelligent man, gifted, with great energy of character, and his education