"THE FIREBRAND."

BY S. R. CROCKETT.

Copyright, 1901, by S. S. McClure Co.

CHAPTER XLIX.

LIKE FIRE THROUGH SUMMER GRASS.

On the whole Rollo could not complain of his reception at the abbey of Montblanch. His heart had indeed been woe within him as he took his way up the long zigzags of the hill road. There was the very thorn branch which had brushed off his hat as he set forth so gladsomely with his new commission in his pocket, his comrades riding stanchly by his side, and the Abbot's horse between his knees.

Well, he had done his best. Things, after their manner, had turned out cross-grained—that was all. He had, thank heaven, enough of Mendizabal's generous draft left in his pocket to repay the Abbot for what he had spent upon their outfit. After returning the commission, it only remained as delicately as possible to impart the disastrous news of the coming dissolution of monasteries and the assumption of all conventual property by the state.

Then he would depart. Sarria and Concha were not so far off. He began to take heart even before he reached the great gate of the abbey.

No one could have been more cordially moved to see a long-lost brother than Don Baltasar Varela, the Abbot of Montblanch, to welcome his well-beloved Don Rollo.

And his noble nephew Saint Pierre—how did he do? Then that stolid solemn Englishman—did he know that his *priorato* had long been shipped from Barcelona, an arrangement having been made with the Cristino custom house.

"But the price? He has not paid it. I warrant that Mortimer knows nothing of the matter!" said Rollo, excited for his friend's credit and good name.

The Abbot smiled as he answered:

"Our agent in France," he said blandly, "has received and cashed a draft from some one of the same name in England—ah, there are none like the English for business the world over. But here is a letter, which has long been waiting for that young gentleman here."

"I will deliver it to him—immediately, and with great pleasure!" quoth Rollo.

The Abbot did not pursue the subject, but rising said courteously: "You will excuse me for the present. You know the library. You will find my father-confessor there, whom I think you have met. There are, also, works on travel and lives of the saints in various languages, exceedingly improving to the mind. And above all, you must dine with me to-night!"

Then the Abbot with a kindness which Rollo felt deeply, put off hearing the full story of his adventures till the evening. Dinner was served in the prior's own chamber, as before, but on this occasion much more simply—indeed, rather as two gentlemen might have dined at a good inn where their arrival had been expected and prepared for.

Rollo's simple heart was opened at the hospitality that was shown him. The beaming and paternal graciousness of Don Baltasar, the difference between what he had expected and what he found, wrung his soul with remorse for the message he had to deliver.

At last he was permitted to tell his tale, which he did from the beginning slurring only such matters as concerned his relations with Concha. And at the end of each portion of his story the Abbot raised a finger and said smilingly to his father confessor, who stood gloomily silent in the arch of the doorway, "A marvel—a wonder! You hear, Father Anselmo?"

And without moving a muscle of his implacable countenance the ex-inquisitor answered, "I have heard, my Lord Abbot!"

Then Rollo told of the plague and the strange things that had happened at La Granja, their setting out thence with the Queen Regent and the little Princess, their safe arrival upon the spurs of Moncayo, almost indeed at the camp of Gen. Elio. Then, with his head for the first time hanging down, he narrated their meeting with Cabrera, and that General's determination to murder the Queen Regent and her little daughter.

"Abominations such as that no man could endure," said Rollo more than once, as he proceeded to tell the tale of their delivery, of how he had despatched mother and daughter to the camp of Gen. Elio, of their subsequent capture by Espartero, and how he, Rollo Blair, had hastened all the way from Madrid to lay the whole matter before the prior.

"'Tis a marvelous tale, indeed, that our young friend tells—have you missed nothing?" inquired the Abbot of his father-confessor.

"Nothing," said the confessor, glaring down upon Rollo as a vulture might upon a weakly lamb on the meadows of Estramadura, "not a single word hath escaped me!"

Then Rollo delivered to the Abbot (who handed them forthwith to his reverend conscience keeper) all his commissions and letters of recommendation. With a drooping head and the tear in his eye he gave them up. For though he had enlisted in the Carlist cause purely as a mercenary he had meant to carry out his undertaking to the letter.

When at last Rollo looked up he found the gray eyes of the Abbot regarding him with a quiet persistence of scrutiny which perturbed him slightly.

"Have you anything more to tell me?" inquired the ecclesiastic, laying his hand affectionately on Rollo's shoulder. "You have done all that was possible for you. No man could have done more. May a continual peace abide in your heart, my son!"

"My father," said Rollo, laying a strong constraint upon himself, "I have indeed a thing to tell that is hard and painful. The monasteries throughout all Spain are to be suppressed on the 20th day of this month by order of the Madrid government."

As the words passed his lips the bland expression on Don Baltasar's face changed into one of fierce hatred and excitement. There was forced from his lips that sharp hiss of drawn breath which a man instinctively makes as he winces under the surgeon's knife.

Then almost immediately he recovered himself.

"Well," he said, "we cannot save the Abbey—we cannot save the Holy Church from this desecration. I have cried 'Pater mi, si possibile est, transeat a me calix iste' but now I say, 'Verum tamen non sicut ego volo, sed sicut Tu!'"

Then with a curious change of countenance (the difference between a priest's expression at the altar and in the sacristy when things have gone crossly) he turned to Rollo.

"Nevertheless," he said, "I do not deny that to you we owe all thanks and gratitude. Perhaps some day you shall be repaid!"

When Rollo looked round, the saturnine priest had disappeared. His host and he were alone. The Abbot poured out the coffee.

"You will take some of our famous liqueur," he said, calmly and graciously as ever. "The recipe has been in the possession of the Abbey for wellnigh a thousand years."

It seemed a pity that so many things which had lasted a thousand years should come to an end on the 20th of the month. Meantime, however, he imitated the nonchalance of the Abbot. The liqueur was not to be despised. Rollo held out his glass, scarcely knowing what he did. The Abbot poured into it a generous portion of the precious fluid. It was of the keen cold green known to painters as verditer—the colour of turnip leaves with the dew on them.

Don Baltasar drew a glass toward him across the table.

"I am no wine-bibber," he said, "my vows do not allow of it. But I will give you a toast, which, if you permit me, I will drink with you in the pure wine of the flint."

Rollo rose to his feet and stood looking at the prior out of his steadfast blue eyes. They touched their glasses ceremoniously, the elder, however, avoiding the gaze of the younger.

"May you be rewarded, not according to your successes, but according to your deserts," said Don Baltasar.

They drank, and Rollo, astonished by the strange, bitter-sweet taste of the liqueur, could only stammer: "I thank you, prior. Indeed, you are overkind to me. I only wish I had had—better news—better news to bring you."

And then somehow it appeared to the young man that a kind of waving blackness in wreaths and coils like thick smoke began to invade the room, bellying upward from the floor and descending from the roof. He seemed to be sinking back into the arms of the father confessor, Anselmo, who grimaced at him through the empty eye-sockets and toothless jaws of a skull. There were at least fifty abbots in the room, and a certain hue of dusky red in the shadows of the window curtains first made him shudder to the soul and then affected him with terror unutterable. Finally chaos whirled down darkling and multitudinous, and Rollo knew no more.

* * * * * * * * *

When the young man came to himself he was in altogether another place. He lay flat on his back with something hard under his head. His face seemed cold and wet. The place, as his eyes wandered upward, was full of shifting shadows and uncertain revealings of cobwebby roof spaces filled with machinery—huge wheels and pulleys, ropes and rings and hooks, on all of which the blown light of candles flickered fitfully.

To one side he could dimly perceive the outlines of what seemed like a great washer-woman's mangle.

After a while Rollo began to see his surroundings more clearly. Some one was sitting at a great table covered with black cloth. A huge crucifix swung over his head, upon it a figure of the Safety of the World, startlingly realistic.

"Who has brought him here?" he said aloud, uncertain whether or not he still dreamed. His voice sounded in his own ears harsh and mechanical.

Rollo tried to lift a hand in order to wipe his brow. He could move neither the right nor the left. Both appeared to be fastened firmly to some band or ring let into a framework of wood.

Then he heard a voice from the figure seated under the black crucifix:

"Bring forward the traitor! He shall learn the great mystery."

Rollo felt himself slowly lifted on his feet, or rather the entire wooden oblong to which his limbs were lashed was erected by unseen forces. He could discern the breathing of men very close to his ear.

"Listen," said a voice from the tribunal. "You, Rollo Blair, have not only betrayed the sacred cause of the blessed King Carlos, but what is ten thousand times worse, you have been a traitor to Holy Church battling against much wickedness in high places."

"Who charges me with these things?" cried Rollo, giving up a vain struggle for freedom.

"Out of your own mouth are you condemned," came the answer. "I who speak have heard your confession."

Then Rollo knew that Anselmo, the dark confessor, was his accuser and judge. His executioners he had yet to make acquaintance with. The voice from the tribunal went on, level and menacing.

"The Abbot of Montblanch may forgive a traitor, and he will. He may make and unmake pacts with a heretic if it please him. As for me, my conscience shall be clean as were those of blessed San Fernando, of Jimenez, of holy Torquemada, and of the most religious San Vicente Ferrar. Die you shall, as every traitor ought. But since I would not send an immortal soul quick to hell, I offer you this opportunity to be reconciled to Holy Church. I bid you disavow and utterly abhor all your treacheries and heretic opinions."

"I am sorry enough for my sins, God knows, if so be I must die," said Rollo, making a virtue of necessity, "but I have done no treacheries, and as for heresy—I have none too much religion of any kind. If you can help me to more and better I shall be grateful, without being too particular as to creed. But my father lived and died a good Presbyterian, and so, heaven helping me, shall I!"

The gloomy monk rose at these words, made the gesture of washing the hands, and then turning about, kissed the wood of the black crucifix.

"Lay the young man on the rack," he said, "when he is ready to recant and be reconciled, you know where to find me."

The two executioners of Anselmo's will were clad in black robes from head to foot, even their hands being hidden. A tall, pointed mask with eyeholes alone revealed anything human underneath, as, panting with the exertion, the men raised Rollo to the level of the huge table with the double rollers beneath. Then he felt his hand and feet one by one deftly loosened and refastened. The frame was taken from underneath him, and Rollo found himself stretched on the rack.

Then calmly seating themselves on a raised shelf close to his head, his two executioners removed their tall black hoods, apparently in order that they might wipe their beaded brows. But that they had a further purpose was immediately apparent.

With infinite surprise Rollo recognized Luis Fernandez and his brother Tomas. Luis smiled evilly as his ancient enemy rolled his head in his direction.

"Yes," he said, "I told you my turn would come. I only wish that we had also the pleasure of the company of your friend the outlaw, Ramon Garcia. But after all, that great maundering oaf would never have spoilt my plans but for your cursed interference. Twice, thrice, I had him trapped as surely as a sheep in a slaughter pen with the butcher's knife at his throat. And then you must needs come in my way. Well, every dog has his day, and now this day I shall square all reckonings."

Fernandez waited for Rollo to reply, but though his Scot's instinct was to give back defiance for defiance, he held his peace. After a pause the ex-miller of Sarria rolled a cigarette and continued serenely between the puffs:

"Now listen," he said, "this is my revenge. I have had to pay blood for it, but now it is mine. For this I sold myself to the monks, buckled to them, fetched and carried for them. To the poor mad Anselmo, with his petty inquisition and holy office, I became a bond slave. I knew you would come back hither and now I can do as I will. How much the prior knows or suspects of this pleasant subterranean retreat I am unable to determine. At any rate you cannot expect that he will be very much delighted with your performance. But, mark you, it is I, and not he, who will rack your body till you weep and howl for mercy. I have studied these dainty instruments. I alone put them in order—I, Luis Fernandez, whose home you broke up, whose house you burnt down to the bare blackened walls, whom you made desolate of the love of woman—"

"Nay," cried Rollo, hot on a sudden as El Sarria himself—"the love of Dolores Garcia never was yours—no, nor ever would have been in a thousand years."

"It would, I tell you!" responded Fernandez as fiercely. "I know these soft, still, easy-tempered women. They cannot do without a shoulder to lean upon. In time she would have loved me—aye, and better than ever she did that bulking man-mountain of a Garcia! Do you hear that?"

Rollo heard, but did not reply.

"So this is my sweet revenge," Fernandez continued, "the good father confessor prates of heretics and times for repentance. But he is mad—mad as Don Quixote, do you understand? I, Luis Fernandez am not mad. But if you have any reason for desiring to live, live you shall, on my terms. All I ask is that you answer me one question, or rather two—as the price of your life."

Only Rollo's eyes looked an interrogative. For the rest he held his peace and waited.

"Tell me where you have hidden Dolores Garcia, and at what hour and in what place Ramon, her husband, lays him down to sleep. If you declare truthfully these two things, I promise to leave you with three days' water and provisions, and to provide for your liberation at the end of that time. If not, I bid you prepare to die as the men died who have lain where you lie."

Rollo's answer came like the return of a ball at tennis.

"Señor Don Luis," he said "if I had ten Paradises from which to choose my eternal pleasures I would not tell you! If I had as many hells from which to select for you the tortures of the damned, I would not speak a word which might aid such a villain in his villainy! Let it suffice for you to know that Dolores Garcia is now where you will never reach her, and as for her husband—why, you cowardly dog, asleep or awake, sick or well, you dare not venture within a mile of him! Nay, I doubt greatly if you dare even face him dead!"

Fernandez rose and motioned his brother to the handle which turned the great wooden wheel at Rollo's feet. Then the young man lay still, listening to the dismal groanings of the ungreased bearings, and wondering almost idly what was about to happen to him.

* * * * * * * * *

"God in heaven, he is here! I tell you I heard him cry! Do you think I do not know his voice? I will tear up the floor with my fingers if you do not make haste."

It was Concha who spoke or rather shouted these words along the rabbit warren of passages which ran this way and that under the Abbey of Montblanch.

But it had been through Ezquerra and La Giralda that the dread rumor of danger to Rollo had first come to Sarria. The gypsies have strange ways of knowledge—moleruns and rat holes beneath, birds of the air to carry the matter above. Some servitor in the monastery, with a drop of black blood in him, had heard word dropped by Don Tomas Fernandez in his cups. The brothers, so he boasted, would not now have long to wait. The cherry had dropped into their mouths of its own accord thus Don Tomas, half-seas-over, averred—or at least his confessorship would shake the bough and the fruit would come down with a run. This sly Tomas also knew who would have Rollo's horse when all was over—a tostado not met with every day.

It was enough—more than enough. From Sarria to Espluga, in Francole, Concha raged through the villages like fire through summer grass. The abbey—the friars, the accumulated treasure of centuries, the power of pit and gallows, of servitude and holy office—all these were to end on the 20th of the month. Meantime, a man was being tortured, done to death by ghoulish friends of El Sarria, a friend of José Maria—nay, savior of two Queens, and the beloved of Generals and Prime Ministers! Would they help to save him? Ah, would they not!

Other rumors came up, thick and rank as toadstools on dead wood. There was such-an-one of the village of Espiena, such-an-other of Campillo in the neither Francole—they refused the friars this and the other! Well, did they not enter the monastery walls, never to be heard of more?

Given the ignorant prejudices of villagers, the hopes of plunder awakened by a lawless time and uncertain government, Concha, a prophetess, volleying threats and prophesyings, and what wonder is it that in an hour or two a band of 1,000 men was pouring through the gates of the great abbey, clambering over the tiles, and with fierce outcries diving down to the deepest cellars. But from gateway to gateway not a brother was found. All had been warned in time. All had departed, whither no man knew.

El Sarria, by his reputation for desperate courage, for a while kept the mob from deeds of violence and spoliation. But still Rollo was not found.

Concha, pale of face and with deep circles under her eyes, ran this way and that, her fingers bleeding and bruised. In her despair she flung herself upon one obstacle after another, calling for this door and that to be forced. And strong men followed and did her will without halt or question.

But of all others it was the cool, practical John Mortimer who hit upon the trail. He remembered how on their first visit to Montblanch Rollo himself at a certain place, near the door of the strong room in which the relics were kept, had declared that he heard a sound like a groan. And there in that very place Concha was driven with her bearing—she knew not whence—the voice of her love. It seemed to her that he called her name.

Men ran for crowbars and for hammers. The floor was forced up by mere strength of arm. The dislodging of a heavy stone gave access to an underground passage, and men swarmed down one after the other, El Sarria leading the way, a bar of iron like a weaver's beam in his hand.

The searchers found themselves in a strange place. The vaulting which they had broken through so rudely enabled them to scramble downward among great beams and wheels to a raised platform covered with moth-eaten black. The groaning which Concha had heard was silent, but as El Sarria held up his hand for silence they could hear something scuttling away along the dark passages like rats behind a wainscot.

Without regarding for the moment something vague and indefinite which lay stretched out on a strange mechanism of wood, El Sarria darted like a sleuth-hound on the trail up one of the passages into which he had seen a fugitive disappear. It was no long chase. The pursued doubled to the right under a low archway. The passage opened suddenly upon a kind of gallery, one side of which was supported on pillars and looked out upon the great gulf of air and space on the verge of which the monastery was built.

The quarry came into view as they reached the sunlight, dazzled and blinking—a smallish, lithe man, running and dodging with terror in the eyes of him. But he was no match for his pursuer, and before he had gained the end of the gallery the giant's hand closed upon the neck of his enemy.

Then Luis Fernandez, knowing his hour, screamed like a rabbit taken in a snare.

And through the manifold corridors of the abbey and up from underground rang the dread word "Torture!" "They have been torturing him to death in their accursed prisons. Kill! Kill! Death to the friars wherever found!"

For the blind mouths of downtrodden villagers, long dumb, had at last found a tongue.

Ramon Garcia looked once only into the face which glared up at him. In that glance Luis Fernandez read his fate. Without a word of anger or any sound El Sarria walked to the nearest open arcade of the gallery and threw his enemy over with one hand, with the contemptuous gesture of a man who flings carrion to the dogs.

Luis Fernandez fell 600 feet clear and scarce knew that he had been hurt.

"God grant us all as merciful a death," cried Concha, "little did he deserve it."

They untied Rollo from the trestle work of the rack which the miller of Sarria had used to gratify his revenge. At first he could not stand on his feet. His hands trembled like aspen leaves, and he had perforce to sit down and lean his head against Concha's shoulder.

"Nay, do not weep, little one," he said. "I am not hurt. You came in time. But" (here he smiled) "another turn of that wheel and I would have told them all."

Meanwhile the bannners were clanging. At the sight of Rollo's pale drawn face the populace went wild. Their mad clamor rose to heaven. All that night the abbey of Montblanch, with its garniture of stall and chapel, carven retables and painted picture, went blazing to the skies.

At such times men knew no half measures, drew no fine distinctions. For, especially in Spain, revolutions were never yet effected with a spray of rosewater. The great order of Our Lady of Montblanch, which had endured a thousand years, perished in one day for the vengeance of Luis Fernandez and the madness of the priest Anselmo.

But in the sacristy of a little chapel by the gate, safe from the spoilers' hand, but at irregularly by the bursting flames, and to which the wild cries of the iconoclasts penetrated, Concha sat nursing Rollo.

From time to time he would come off awaking with a start to find his hand clasped in that of his betrothed. Her ear was very near his lips, and when he wandered she soothed him with the tender croonings of a mother over a sick child, moaning and cooing over him with inarticulate love, her hands a hundred times lifted to caress him, but ever fluttering aside lest they should awake the beloved from his repose.

"Who is it?" he said once, more clearly than usual, yet with some remains of fear in his eyes very pitiful to see.

"It is I—Concha."

Ah, how soft, how tender at such times a woman's voice can be. The wind in the barley, the dove calling her mate, the distant murmur of a sheltered sea—these are not one half so sweet. The angels' voices about the throne—they are not so human. Children's voices at play—they have known no sorrow, no sin. They are not so divine.

"It is I—Concha!"

"Ah, beloved, do not leave me—they may come again!"

"They cannot. They are dead!"

Keen as the clash of rapiers, triumphant as trumpets sounding the charge, rang the voice that was erstwhile so soft, so tender.

"All the same, do not leave me! I need you, Concha!"

Who would have believed that this swift and resolute Rollo, this firebrand adventurer of ours, would have been brought so low—or so high. But his words were better than all sweet singing in the ears of Concha Cabezos. She clasped his hand tightly and smiled. She would have spoken, but could not.

"Ah, I knew you would not leave me!" he murmured, turning a little toward her. "It was foolish to ask."

Then he was silent for a moment, and as she settled his head more easily on an extemporized pillow, he glanced toward the closed shutters of the little sacristy.

"When will the morning come?" he asked wearily.

For answer Concha threw open the door and the new-risen sun shone upon his pale face.

"The morning is here," she said, with all the glory of it in her eyes.

CHAPTER L.

AVE CONCHA IMPERATRIX!

Thus ended the princely abbey and its inmates. And so it stands unto this day, a desolation of charred beams, desecrated altars, fire-scarred walls, roofless and o'ergrown, to witness if I lie. Time hath scarcely yet set its least finger-mark upon it. Under the white-hot southern sun, and in that dry, upland air, Montblanch may remain with scarce a change for many a hundred years. Ezquerra's hammer strokes are plain on the stones. The crowbar holes wherewith Sarria drove out the flagstones over the torture chamber—once called the place of the Holy Office—these any man may see who chooses to journey thither on mule back, jolting tartana, or by the plain song office of heel and toe.

As to the brethren they had had, thanks to Rollo Blair, due and sufficient warning. They had mounted their white mules and ridden over the mountains into France by a secret way long settled upon and laid with friendly relays of food and equipage.

Only the Father Confessor, the gloomy and fanatic Anselmo, was found dead in his bed, whether from excitement of reviving his ancient functions of inquisitor in chief, or from poison self-administered, was never rightly known or indeed inquired into. Men had other things to think of in those days.

On the day which followed the great spoliation, a man limped painfully and slowly along the ravine beneath the still smouldering turrets and gables of Montblanch.

Thirty yards or so beneath him he saw a congregation of vultures, the national and authorized scavengers of Spain. So thickly did these unholy fowls cluster that the man, being evidently curious, was compelled to throw several stones among them before he could induce them to move that he might catch a glimpse of their quarry.

Then having made his observation, he said: "Ah, brother Luis, you that were so clever and devised poor Tomas, giving him ever the rough word and the bitter jest, hath not that same poor Tomas the best of it now? He at least shall not be meat for vultures yet awhile. No, he will drink many a good draught yet—that is, when he hath sold the freehold of the mill and disposed of any outlying properties that are left. Luis liked red wine, I liked white and aguardiente. Ha, ha, Luis will never again taste the flavor of the Val de Penas he was so fond of—and the more will be left for Tomas."

He stood and meditated awhile. Then he struck his pockets lugubriously.

"I wish I had a cup of good aguardiente now," he muttered.

Anon his face brightened as he looked at a new dark object among the vulture folk.

"Caramba! I have it. It will help me over a difficulty. Brother Luis's pockets were always well lined. The birds have no need of golden ounces, nor do they carry off silver duros. Besides, this is the key of the strong box hidden in the ravine. Ah! I remember that he carried it about his neck. These can do no good now to Luis, or, indeed, for the matter of that, to any vulture alive. It were only kind and fraternal to take such things for a keepsake. I ever loved Luis. He was my favorite brother."

So saying, Don Tomas descended slowly to the body—for indeed he had been roughly used by the mob before they brought him to El Sarria, that the outlaw might do with him as with his brother. For they wanted to see the sight. The vultures slowly and reluctantly withdrew on heavily flapping pinons.

"Ah," meditated Tomas, as he went placidly about his gruesome business, "what a fine thing it is to be known for a man quiet and harmless. For Ramon Garcia said to me with a wave of his hand, 'There is the door. Get through it hastily and let me see your face no more.' Then to the robber crew he said, 'Without his brother, señors, this fellow is a serpent without the fangs, harmless as a blade of grass among the stones which the goats nibble as they wag their beards.'"

So after a pause this most respectable man finished his task and went his way, jingling full pockets and pleasing himself with meditations upon the abiding usefulness of a good character and of being in all things blameless, humble and a man of peace.

* * * * * * * * *

There dwells an old peasant now at Montblanch, who will guide you over the place for a real, and show you the place before the great altar where Ramon Garcia, sometimes called El Sarria, cast himself down. Then he shows you where the Abbot stood when he stopped the pursuit of the outlaws, to his own ultimate undoing.

"Yes, Excellency," he says, in a voice like green frogs croaking in the spring, "true it is as the sermons preached last Easter Day. For these dim old eyes saw it—also the chamber of the relics I will show you, and the cloisters with the grave of the Father Confessor Anselmo."

Last of all (but this will cost another real and is worth the money) the peasant guide shows you the place of the holy office. That black stain against the wall is where they burnt the last rack in Spain. One or two great wooden wheels with scarce a spoke remaining loom up, imagined rather than seen, in the shadows above.

"This way along a passage (take care of your honorable head), and I will show you the window from which Luis Fernandez was cast forth like the evil beast he was!"

"And was anything ever heard thereafter of the Prior or the Brethren?" you ask, looking around on all the wasted splendor.

The old man shakes his head, but there is something in his eye which, if you are wise, causes you to slip him a piece of silver.

"Nothing more," he says, "nothing!"

Then looking about him cautiously he adds: "But upon a certain evening near to the time of sundown there came one all clad in poor garments of leather, worn and frayed. He wore a broad hat, and the names of many holy places were cut on his staff—altogether such a wandering pilgrim the man was as you may see at any fair in Spain.

"And very humbly the penitent asked permission of me to view the ruins. So knowing him for a pilgrim and thinking that perchance he desired to say a prayer before the great altar (and also because I had no great expectations of a gift), I let him go his way, unattended, and so forgot about him. But when I came up out of my vegetable garden a little after sunset to close the great gate, such being the order of the governor of the province, who pays me a yearly stipend (4 duros it is, and very little, but I depend upon generous charity of those who, like your excellency, come hither)—well, as I say, coming out of my pottage garden, I remembered of this pilgrim. I went in search of him, and lo! he stood weeping in the place where the abbot's great chair had been.

"Then looked I in his face and all at once I knew him. It was Don Baltasar Varela—of a surety, the last Abbot of Montblanch. For many years I had known him as well as I knew my old dame. And through his tears he also knew that I knew him. So he said presently: 'Reveal not that I came thither, and I will give thee—this—together with my blessing!' And with one hand he gave me a golden ounce worth 60 pesetas—and more in these bad times. And with the other, as I kneeled down (for I am a good Christian), he bestowed upon me his episcopal blessing with two fingers, outstretched, being, as you remember, a bishop as well as an abbot!

"Then after he had stood awhile and the sun was quite gone down, Baltasar Varela, Abbot of Montblanch—the last they say of eighty-four, went out into the darkness, weeping very bitterly."

* * * * * * * * *

In another southern province far from the village of Sarria there is a white house with sentinels before it. They do not slouch as they walk nor lean bent-backed against a pillar when nobody is looking, as is the wont of Spanish sentries elsewhere. It is the house of the Governor of the once turbulent Province of Valencia. The Governor is one Gen. Blair, Duke of Castellon del Mar and hatted grandee of Spain, but he is known from Murcia even to Tarragona as "Don Rollo." For he has cleared the southern countries of Carlists, put down the Red Republicans of Valencia and Cartagena with jovial good humor, breaking their heads affectionately with his stout oak staff when they rioted. They had been accustomed to be shot in batches and rather resented the change at first, as reflecting on their seriousness. However, they have grown to understand the firebrand General and to like him. Usually they favor him with a private message a day or two before they intend to make a revolution. Whereupon Rollo goes himself into the woods and cuts himself a new stick of satisfactory proportions.

In this manner he has survived an abdication, two dictatorships and a restoration with undiminished credit, holding his province easily and asking from Madrid neither reenforcements of soldiers nor of money.

His wife is not receiving to-day, but in English fashion there are a few friends who drop in for dinner, habitués of the house, beloved comrades of Don Rollo's, with whom (for the Señora Concha is the old Concha still) his wife flirts a little, chats a great deal and gives them the best advice in return for boundless admiration and delight in her beauty and wit.

"Dolores," she says to a friend who has arrived and sits patiently folding her little hands on a sofa, "it was pretty of you to come in such a lovely gown—just to please these poor old bachelors. Here, Etienne, hold the baby, and be sure not to drop him, sir. There—what did I tell you! You have made him cry! Monster! Well, he shall be sent away, sweetest pet, that he shall! He is a buffalo of the marisma, a tiger of the jungle, an ogre out of a story-book—that he is, sweetest! There, La Giralda, take the darling away! Oh, and give him—but stay—I will come, too, else the little villain may howl till midnight."

She continues to talk quickly as she goes to the door.

"What a voice—just like his father's when he is in the place of arms and the men do not please him! There, sweetest" [she goes behind the curtain], "there!"

And, contented, the young man stills that parade voice of his into gentle murmurings like those of a bee within the bell of a flower.

Presently a tall young man comes striding in, in a plain uniform with the starred shoulder straps of the highest rank. Behind him is a broad-chested, bearded veteran, his chest blazing with decorations.

The younger man, whose hair gives promise of early threads of gray, enters with swift impetuosity, dashing a chance servitor out of the way and opening the inner door as if a gust of wind had been rioting through the corridors.

"Where is Concha?" he cries, as soon as he enters.

"Here!" replies a voice, a little muffled, it is true, from a neighboring room. "No—stay where you are! I shall be back in a moment."

"Ah, Etienne—John, how are you? Have they given you any breakfast? Etienne, any more loves? There are four pretty girls in the Plaza Villarasa. I saw them on the balcony as I rode through with the Saguntо regiment the other day——"

"Trust him for that!" comes the voice from behind the curtain.

"My Lord Duke," says Etienne in a master-of-ceremonies voice, "so long as I am permitted daily to gaze upon the beauty of your incomparable wife, how can this heart turn from that to the admiration of any meaner object?"

"What nonsense is he talking now?" asks Concha, returning demurely. "I know at least three girls of this city of Valencia who have the best reasons for expecting M. de Saint Pierre to make proposals for the honor of their hands. But what can you expect of such a wretch?"

"Well, Master Etienne," says Rollo, "you will now have a chance to forget Mistress Concha and make some fair Castilian happy. For I must send you immediately with these despatches to Madrid. You will stay a week and return with the answers. That will give such a lady killer ample time to bring matters to a head with the most hard-hearted of the señoritas of the capital."

"Ah," sighs Etienne, kissing a hand to Concha, as he appeared to take his leave, "your husband wrongs me. He who hath so much, misjudges me who have so little! Truly, I shall soon be able to say, turning about the old catch:

"My soul is in Valencia,
My body is in Madrid!"

"Well, John, this is great seeing," said Rollo, when Etienne had departed to see about horses and an escort, "what in the world has brought you hither? Surely your father cannot want you to make another £1,000 in order that you may have the right to attend his twirling spindles from 8:10 every morning to 5:30 every night?"

"Oh, I am a partner now," Mortimer answered, "even though my father insisted upon pocketing every penny of the profit on the Abbot's *priorato*. Strict man of business, my father! He said it would teach me in the future to be spry about getting my goods shipped. And when I explained, he only said that what had been possible for him here in England, sitting at ease in his arm chair, ought to have been possible for me on the spot, and with money in my pocket."

"And what did you do?" asked Rollo, smiling.

"Well, at any rate, I struck him for a commission on having secured the order, and the convent onions were good for the rest. So now I am a partner in the firm with a good quarter interest."

"And what are you doing here? More onions?" laughed his friend.

John blushed and looked down at the carpet. They had a carpet at the Governor's house—though in her heart Concha always wants to have it up when any one comes, lest they should tread upon it.

"No," he said slowly, "the fact is I think you spoiled me a bit for staying at home, for toil hours and—that sort of thing. So now I am to be foreign agent and buyer. I've been taking lessons in the language, and if you can't put any business in my way I shall be glad."

Rollo took him to the window by the arm.

"Do you see those fellows?" he demanded.

As he spoke he pointed to a detail of the wiry little Valencian soldiers in their white undress blouses and bragas.

"Now, John," he went on, "I can't get stuff here that won't tear the first time they do the goose-step or even sneeze extra hard. The contractors are thieves, every man Jack. What can you do for me? I have 20,000 of these fellows and lots more coming on, down in the huertas and rice fields."

"Heavens," cried John Mortimer, "this is an order indeed. Wait! I will let you know my best possible in a moment."

And he pulled out a notebook crammed with figures.

"I can give you very good terms, indeed," he said, after a moment. Concha jumped to her feet and clapped her hands.

"Oh," she cried joyously, "and I know Señor de Mendia, the head of the customs. And, Oh, Rollo, you and he can arrange all about getting it through, and all my dress stuffs as well. It will be quite an addition to our income if Don Juan sells you the stuff cheap."

For an instant Rollo looked a little indignant and then went up to his wife and kissed her.

"My dear," he said, "you can never understand. We don't do these things in our country."

At which John grinned incredulously.

"I have done business in Glasgow," he said, suggestively.

"At any rate," said Rollo, nettled, "I don't do them."

Here Concha pouted adorably and kicked a footstool with her slippered toe which certainly was not doing her any harm.

"I am sure we are very poor," she cried. "I wish that wretch Ezquerra, whom they have made a General of, had given us much more than he did. I think you should write to him, Rollo."

"Better keep in with Ezquerra," laughed the Governor, "you and I are rich enough, Concha, and baby shall have an ivory ring to cut his teeth upon. You shall have one new dress a year, and there are always enough vegetables in the garden with which to toss up a salad. Oh, we shall live, spelt one, we shall live!"

And he kissed her, not heeding the others.

"But why must we keep in with Ezquerra?" said Concha, still unsatisfied, "he was an executioner once."

"Well," said Rollo, "the fellow has been at his old trade again, it seems. He may be dictator any day now. They say he has ended the war in the north—murdered fourteen of his own brother-generals and bought fourteen of the other side. Bravo, Ezquerra, I always knew he would do something in the fine old style one of these days! But fourteen at a time is epic, even for Spain!"

"And so the war is ended—well, that is always one good thing, anyway!" said Concha, careless of the means. "Come, Dolores, let us go and look at the babies. These people want to talk politics. They don't want us. It's easy to see that!"

So, taking the arm of Dolores Garcia (who had glanced once at her husband when he came in, and never looked at him again), little Concha walked to the door sedately, as became a matron and the wife of a grandee. Then, in her old flashing manner, she turned about swiftly, and from her finger tips blew the company a dainty, collective kiss.

The curtain closed, leaving the three men all staring after her.

But in another moment it was put aside and Concha's pretty head peeped out.

"Rollo," she said softly, "you can come up when you like—when you have quite finished your politics—just to look at baby. He has not seen you since morning!"

THE END.

HIS DUAL EXISTENCE.

Mr. Lancaster's Own Story of a Most Remarkable Experience.

From the Denver Times.

Is the life of Joseph Lancaster a case of dual personality? The French school of psychology warmly advocates the theory that the human ego consists of two distinct parts or practically that there are to every individual two egos. Whether the duality existing is merely a manifestation of the subconscious and the conscious ego is a matter of philosophical conjecture, but the fact that Joseph Lancaster has been lost to himself for a year offers a psychological problem of no little magnitude.

Rumors of every kind have followed this man ever since his mysterious disappearance. It is an old story—how this wealthy Dawson City merchant went to Seattle ostensibly on business and dropped out of sight as completely as if he had never existed. As a psychic study the case of Joseph Lancaster knows no equal. For an entire year he was another being. He lost sight of his own identity, and now he has returned to his old life and has picked up the thread of existence just where it was broken off that day in Seattle twelve months ago.

The strangest plea for the theory of dual personality is the fact that Joseph Lancaster is to-day as bright as he was before the strange spell fell upon his life.

Personally, Mr. Lancaster is a man of striking individuality, and the devotion of his friends and business partner through the entire mystery is explained by the man's magnetism of character. Of handsome appearance, tall, well built and with a genial countenance Joseph Lancaster does not impress one as convalescing from a mental collapse. His dark brown eyes meet the visitor's steadily, and his intelligent conversation betokens the workings of an apparently well-balanced mind. To all appearances Joseph Lancaster is the same man who visited Denver thirteen months ago, and his recent experiences have left no lines in his smooth-shaven face, whose clear skin is accentuated by the heavy dark mustache.

As to the interim of self-effacement Lancaster can offer no suggestions and his relatives have considered the returned man's feelings, to the extent of refusing to worry him with a mental inquisition.

"For some time I had the feeling that my mind was on the verge of collapsing," said Mr. Lancaster, referring to the period which immediately preceded his transition of personality. "I suffered from insomnia and I felt the awful possibility of absolute insanity hanging over me. Yes, business affairs worried me and I felt that the only salvation for my mind was an escape from my surroundings. Then, too, I dreaded to bring an affliction upon my family and the fear of insanity drove me to a firm resolve. I was like a nervous man craving for an opiate. I longed for a quieting draught and a dose of oblivion was my earnest desire. I intended only a short absence, but nature must have intervened and changed my plans. That day in Seattle—I can tell you nothing subsequent, all I can say is that I came like a crash. Now I am myself again and wish to return to my old life."

Joseph Lancaster's return to Denver was marked by a peculiar coincidence. His train from Beaumont, Tex., arrived at 6 P. M. and P. I. Lancaster, coming from Seattle, arrived a few minutes later, and the two brothers met unexpectedly at the depot. P. I. Lancaster, who has been in Dawson City looking after his brother's interests, had come to Denver to welcome him, but the meeting at the depot was quite unlooked for.

Mrs. Lancaster, the mother, is in Denver at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Pauline Peyton, where the happy family reunion took place.

P. I. Lancaster left last night for Dawson City to look after his brother's affairs, for though Joseph Lancaster desired to return to Denver to Dawson his relatives prevailed upon him to rest a while before picking up the strenuous business life.

His interest in the Dawson business affairs is ardent, and the developments which have occurred during his absence have been explained to him by his brother Presly.

The keen insight into business methods which Joseph Lancaster evinces plainly shows a clear mental vision, and the fact that P. I. Lancaster has returned to Dawson to carry out his brother's instructions shows plainly that they regard his mental condition as unimpaired.

Joseph Lancaster will join his wife and two children in San Jose, Cal., within a few days, Mrs. Lancaster's illness preventing her from being present at the family reunion in Denver.

Two strong sidelights in the Lancaster mystery are the devotion of his business partner and his wife—generally, when trouble enters into the life of a man it can be traced to one of two sources—business or domestic infelicity. The proverbial "woman in the case" did not figure in Lancaster's affair, and his business was in excellent condition. Throughout