

The Castro Baby.

The sun climbing to its meridian above Little Long Valley on a certain Fourth of July, saw all the population of Maverick passing between the swinging doors of Sidney McLean's saloon.

The male population of Maverick usually gravitated in that direction in all seasons; in fact, a considerable number of them might be fairly said to live there, but even in its most prosperous days the Spread Eagle had never known such a pervasive air of feminine flutter and fashion, an air that the capacities of mail-order shopping makes possible even in Maverick.

The womenkind of Little Long Valley were not disposed to look favorably on the Spread Eagle. They were even known to view it with open hostility, and to account its inducements to idling and money-spending as only partially compensated for by the personal good qualities of its proprietor. To-day, however, there was in the bustle of coming and going, in the bunting that displayed itself about the front door, in the crescendo buzz of conversation and the rattle of knives and forks that issued from it, evidences that nowhere in the world could be mistaken for anything else than a fancy bazar.

The fact is, Maverick was undergoing a revival of religion. Maverick was accustomed to take its experiences of whatever kind spasmodically. It had lived through two mining excitements and a real-estate boom, and was still very far from learning moderation. The first excitement had given Maverick a definite location and a name, the second had built the Spread Eagle, which was originally a dance hall, and the land boom had built the railroad to within four miles of the town, where it had become discouraged and turned away into the fastnesses of the Nevada hills.

Now the revival of religion was responsible for the fancy bazar in Sidney McLean's saloon, because the Reverend Aaron Frear had decided to include Maverick in his fifty-mile circuit, a church edifice was needed, and the townspeople felt that they must rise to the occasion. The question of ways and means had crystallized around the idea of a bazar, where it had halted for some time in a nebulous state, for want of suitable quarters in which to materialize.

Then it was that Sidney McLean came forward with an offer of the Spread Eagle which, having been built in boom days, was sufficiently capacious. What the Reverend Aaron thought of this is not recorded—he did not hear of it until it was too late.

So the bazar was an accomplished fact, and that nothing might be lacking of its wonted features a traveling photographer, who had set up his tent on the mesa had offered "a dozen cabinets in our very best style" as a prize for the handsomest baby.

So Maverick had also a baby show. The voting was paid for at the rate of five votes for two bits. Maverick had not accustomed itself to smaller change, but it knew how to divide up and distribute the benefits, and the proceeds of the balloting went to swell the building fund.

It was surprising after all how many people could be gathered into Maverick when there was anything to bring them. There were, first of all, the townspeople, who were not any of them wanting, and a good number of farmers from the river bottom. There were owners of mines and the men who worked them; thirteen from the Reward, twenty from the Eclipse mill and smelter, and all the small and solitary mines among the desolate hills poured out their dwellers to make the great American holiday. There was the station agent's family from Lawton, and the weather bureau man from Black Mountain, and a man from Bodie who expected to be the next candidate for sheriff. Last of all there was Miss Mae McCracken. This should have been mentioned first. Miss McCracken was the operator

from Lawton; she was a very lively young lady with a fresh complexion such as is not often seen in the rainless, windy West, and spoke English with what she said was a French accent. Miss McCracken was popularly supposed to be as much of an attraction as the bazar.

There was another woman at Maverick that day who told herself that if she had known of the bay show she would not have come. She was the wife of the owner of the Minnietta, and her husband had sent her down to Maverick for the summer because the doctor had told him if he did not get his wife out of sight of the cliffs of Las Vegas he would soon have no wife. There was a grave at the foot of Las Vegas, a tiny grave that a woman's arm might well cover, dug there because about the Minnietta there was not soil enough to cover the smallest grave. The cliffs of Las Vegas showed white from the mine on the further side of the canyon, and the owner's wife watched them days long with wearying eyes, and could not sleep of nights hearing the coyotes howl and thinking of what lay at the foot of them. When it was moonlight the spectral cliffs were terrible in their loneliness, and when there was no moon the darkness was still more terrible, and one night when her husband had missed her he found her at the foot of Las Vegas covering the grave with her arms. It was then that he sent her to Maverick because she would go no farther. Now she sat and watched the mothers of children, and her heart was very bitter.

The balloting for the prize baby was at its briskest early in the afternoon, with the station agent's plumpest twin in the lead, and a rose-leaf morsel of humanity from the river farm a close second.

The man who expected to be sheriff had distributed his votes impartially among all the candidates and was now trying to tell Miss McCracken that if the prize had only been for the handsomest young lady he could make a close guess at the winner. Miss McCracken had heard something of the same kind a good many times that afternoon and was not particularly attentive.

"Oh, look," she cried; "if there isn't that Castro woman from the Six-Mile house, and she's brought her baby. I do believe she thinks it will take the prize too. Just see the way she has it rigged up. Do look, girls. Did you ever!" The girls looked, everybody within hearing of Miss McCracken's contagious giggle looked, to see the little Mexican mother, sitting shy and bewildered against the bunting-draped wall, clad in the thinnest of black cotton dresses, with the shabby reboso that preserved a lingering tradition of her race. The baby in her lap was pitifully quiet, its tiny, claw-like hands clinging to the mother's and the black eyes in the wasted little face dull with pain as they uneasily blinked. "For all the world like a little brown owl," said Miss McCracken, "but I suppose she thinks it is perfectly lovely."

The baby had on its best frock, and about its thin throat a string of large blue beads that had been the mother's most cherished ornament for years, and to the front of its dress she had pinned a bunch of limp and formless artificial flowers, a part of her wedding finery, carefully preserved. Nobody knew this—the flowers told their own story.

Then a strong voice took up the tale. "The woman is a fool," said the bluff doctor, who knew all the secret sorrows of Maverick. "A perfect fool! Walked all the way here in the blazing sun just to show off her kid, when it won't live a week at the outside, and she knows it. They're poor, too; Castro was out of work a long time. I told her there was no chance for it. It beats me what brings her here to-day."

But feminine instinct comprehends even that which is beyond the wisdom of doctors.

"Why, she wanted a picture of it and hadn't the money, and then she heard of the baby show. Of course she thinks it is beautiful—and it is,

too—" went on Miss McCracken, incoherently, "that is, it would be if it were not so skinny. Anyway, its eyes are perfectly lovely, and I mean to tell her so."

The sobered girl rose from her seat to carry out her intention, and there was a general movement of the women in the same direction, but the woman from the Minnietta had in the meantime quietly crossed over to the Senora Castro.

"Is it your baby?" she asked. The mother nodded, not daring to speak, lest disappointment should overwhelm her, for till now no one had spoken to her.

"She is very pretty," went on the questioner, "what do you call her?"

A thin smile bubbled up and broke across the mother's face.

"Her name is Mary Mercedes," she said, "but we call her Chiquita."

"Chiquita? That means 'Little One,' does it not?" And the fairer woman smiled back understandingly, as she lifted the child with a thrill of aching remembrance at its feather weight. It passed from hand to hand among the young matrons, while the mother's eyes followed the mite hungrily, as if she begrudged the moments spent out of her arms, though they were numb with the strain of carrying it for hours.

"It is better with me," she said pleadingly, and the women understood, and when she let it go again for a little while to the woman from the Minnietta, they understood that also. Everyone knew of the little grave at the foot of Las Vegas.

Women for whom, until then, the Castro family had not existed, went aside from their pursuits to praise and pet the Castro baby, and the mothers of the previously favored candidates, who had been on the point of heartburning, met each other carrying ice-cream to the Senora Castro, and smiled. By the middle of the afternoon it was apparent that she would have her photograph. Before the time appointed the balloting was closed, because it was time for the Castro baby to go home, and Mary Mercedes was declared the winner.

The man who would be sheriff covered himself with glory by the speech he made at the announcement, and Mary made a royal progress to the photographer's in the carriage that belonged to the station agent's twins.

The fancy bazar in the Spread Eagle saloon was carried out to its least arrangement, and the proceeds were such as to lead the Reverend Fear to add an especial clause of thankfulness to his Sunday morning petition. It had been an unqualified success, and the relaxation which followed was not too overwhelming to prevent all Maverick from turning out in carriages and wagons three days later along the dusty, shadeless road to the Six-Mile house.

The event which called them was its own justification. It was the burial of the Castro baby.

MARY AUSTIN.

The great gold medal of the Paris Salon of 1809 has been won by a San Franciscan, Jules Pages, who was a student at the School of Design here until 1802. He then went to Paris, and was exhibiting in the Salon in the following year. In 1805 he got "honorable mention," and in 1806 "mention anterieur." The following year he spent in this country, but in 1808 he exhibited again, and his picture lacked but two votes of being awarded the high honor which he has now won. The winning of this medal, which is worth intrinsically about forty dollars, carries with it three thousand francs, two years' study in Rome, and the privilege of competing for the Grand Prix de Rome, and places the painter "Hors Concours"—that is to say, his pictures hereafter must be passed by the Salon committee and must be hung on the line, and the artist himself is "out of the fight" for such honors as the Salon can bestow.