

CONFESSION OF PERALTA-REAVIS, THE KING OF FORGERS.



JAS. A. REAVIS - CONVICT 1864

The land that Reavis tried to steal by means of his forged documents covered a larger area than the States of Vermont and New Hampshire combined. It was located partly in Arizona and partly in New Mexico.

THERE is a gaunt, white-haired, white-bearded man living in Denver to-day. His shoulders stoop, his clothes are worn and threadbare, hanging loosely from a bony frame. Often he is seen on the street with a dark-eyed woman of olive complexion who still retains traces of fierce Andalusian beauty. The pair are always accompanied by two children, twins, who have inherited the features and eyes of their mother. The four live in a lodging-house and at times they are hard pressed for the necessities of life.

The man is James Addison (Peralta) Reavis and the woman is his wife. He planned and barely failed of executing the most gigantic fraud that was ever conceived against this Government. At one time he had a fortune of millions within his grasp. Such famous men as Robert G. Ingersoll, Roscoe Conkling, Collis P. Huntington, William S. Wood, Reuben H. Lloyd, Phil B. Thompson, John W. Mackay, Ed S. Stokes, Bourke Cockran, Charles Crocker, L. M. C. Curry and H. D. Money espoused his cause and helped fight his case in the courts.

In the end, when his scheme was on the verge of success, when he was about to receive title from the Government to 12,500,000 acres of land valued at \$100,000,000, the Government succeeded in convicting him of conspiracy to defraud the Government. His scheme was exploded and he was sentenced to serve two years in a New Mexican prison. He served his sentence.

A few days ago he wrote a confession of the entire conspiracy. According to his statements the Government, although it spent \$100,000 in defending the cause, never hit upon the real facts. His conviction, he says, was secured upon a mass of false and perjured testimony. He himself, however, tells for the first time how he conceived and executed the fraud.

He tells how he met an Andalusian girl whose parentage was unknown, how he married her and built about her a mythical lineage proving that she was the descendant of one of the noblest families of Spain and the sole heir to the Peralta land grant of Arizona. He tells how he searched the archives of Spain and forged and stole ancient documents; how he and his wife were received by royal and noble families, and how he built up document by document a title to millions.

REAVIS' confession is as follows: I am of Scotch-Welsh antecedents with a traditional Spanish extraction in the remote generations. These of my great-grandparents fought in the revolution. I was reared in Henry County, Mo. In May, 1861, at the age of 18, I enlisted in the Confederate army and during my life as a soldier committed my first crime. I forged an order and being successful in this I raised a furlough, and before this expired I surrendered to the Union forces.

After the war I worked as a street car conductor but subsequently opened a real estate office in St. Louis. I was successful in forging a title to sustain a tax title to some valuable land I had bought, not knowing the title was imperfect. But these are incidents in my life that are of little interest. However, success in these early evils sowed the seed that later sprang forth into the most gigantic fraud of this century.

The plan to secure the Peralta grant and defraud the Government out of land valued at \$100,000,000 was not conceived in a day. It was the result of a series of crimes extending over nearly a score of years. At first the stake was small, but it grew and grew in magnitude until even I sometimes was appalled at the thought of the possibilities. I was playing a game which to win meant greater wealth than that of a Gould or a Vanderbilt. My hands constantly gained strength, noted men pleaded my cause and unlimited capital was at my command. My opponent was the Government and I baffled its agents at every turn. Gradually I became absolutely confident of success. As I neared the verge of triumph I was exultant and sure. Until the very moment of my downfall I gave no thought to failure. But my sins found me out and as in the twinkling of an eye I saw the millions which had seemed already in my grasp fade away and heard the courts doom me to a prison cell.

Now I am growing old and the thing hangs upon me like a nightmare until I am driven to make a clean breast of it all, that I may end my days in peace.

The first I ever knew of the Peralta grant was when Dr. George M. Willing walked into my real estate office in St. Louis and told me that he had a land grant of fabulous proportions in Arizona and wanted me to take hold of it. After a number of interviews I decided to give my whole time to the matter.

Just as I was about to start for the West my health gave away completely and I was forced to abandon the trip. For two years I remained an invalid at my father's home in Vernon County, Mo. One night I had a dream that warned me that I should start for California. I left immediately with scarcely any money and without preparations for the journey. Once in California my health improved and after two more years I returned to my father's home for my wife. She refused even to see me and to appease my conscience I placed what means I had accumulated



MRS. J.A. PERALTA-REAVIS - "THIRD BARONESS OF ARIZONA"



"PERALTA-REAVIS AS HE IS TO-DAY" DISCOVERED



Me el be viviente y el Rey in Ciudad de hecho de Arizona que he visto una cosa h B. Buena P.

HOW THE IDEA OF THE GREAT LAND FRAUD ORIGINATED BESIDE A REMOTE CAMP-FIRE IN ARIZONA.

I went immediately to Arizona and there, after much patient research and a trip to Mexico, learned that the Willing title was purely mythical. The way of it was this: October 20, 1864, in Black Canyon, Yavapai County, Arizona, there existed a mining camp, the principal persons of the camp being Dr. George M. Willing of St. Louis, Don Antonio Pablo Peralta, his son Miguel Peralta, Don Jose Ybarra, M. Bernato Guinness, Don Rafael Machado, Don Manuel Ramon and Charles Lovejoy, a friend of Willing. Among these originated the idea of the Peralta grant. Another mythical person executed a deed of this parcel to Dr. Willing, the paper reciting that the grant had been ceded to the father of the maker of the deed by the King of Spain for military services in 1558 and that he had been forced to abandon it on account of hostile Indians. It embraced 300 square leagues of land located along the Gila River, thirty leagues from east to west by ten leagues wide, resting its western border upon the eastern line of the Pima reservation.

One of the alleged witnesses, M. Bernato Guinness, was a Frenchman who afterward located in business in Los Angeles, Cal., but died before he explained his part in the matter, as did also Don Antonio Pablo Peralta. The only other Mexican, Don Rafael Machado of Rosario, Lower California, affirmed that a Spaniard named Miguel Peralta made the deed. The writing was more that of Don Pablo, and he recited in a nutshell all I could determine about the grant.

Willing represented that he had given a pack train of sixteen mules, valued at \$22,000, for the land. This recites in a nutshell all I could determine about the grant.

Becoming certain that Pinalto, the name given as the maker of the deed, was a myth, I forged the documents necessary to shift the title into the Peralta family. Immediately the Peraltas became so numerous that I realized that a title in their names would never do. After considering the matter several months I decided to again shift the title into some noble family of Spain that had become extinct.

In the meantime I traveled much in the towns where I could gain information concerning the men who might be interested in this title. I talked with old residents and stored my mind with many incidents that proved of great value in later years. But I will pass quickly over this period and come down to the time when the great fraud as it was presented to the Government be-

gan to take shape in my mind. During these travels I met a young Spanish girl. Her features rather inclined to the Jewish type; her eyes were large and of darkest hazel; a profusion of black and silken hair hung in a great mass below her waist; the delicate lines of her body and her exquisite grace and fascination told of noble Spanish ancestry. She was of splendid physique, elastic step and a superb dancer. She was at home in the water or on a horse and was an adept with rod, gun or lariat. I inquired into the history of this child of nature and found that she had been reared from her earliest recollection in the fastness of the mountains remote from civilization. No one knew the history of her birth. Investigation only threw a deeper mystery about her parentage. From a baby she had only Indian children for playmates, having been raised by a rancho's family who sold her into bondage to John W. Snowball and wife. Those who might have known her history had died, and the rancho claimed that the child was an Indian waif whose parentage was unknown.

I became infatuated with her and also saw in her a possible heir to the Peralta grant. I induced her to accompany me and returned to San Francisco. I made a satisfactory showing of a partial title (which I had forged with the aid of the Willing title) and John W. Mackay stood sponsor for me to go to Spain for the purpose of completing the title and determining of what lands the grant actually consisted. I had a guarantee of \$500 per

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ONE OF REAVIS' PURCHASED ANCESTORS.

Da Sofia Laura Michaela