

CHAPTER IX.

DAY OF THE SANTOS INNOCENTES.—LETTING OFF A LAKE.—ARRIVAL OF THE DALE WITH HOME LETTERS.—THE DEAD YEAR.—NEWLY-ARRIVED EMIGRANTS.—EGG-BREAKING FESTIVITIES.—CONCEALMENT OF CHAVES.—PLOT TO CAPTURE THE ALCALDE.

SUNDAY, DEC. 27. The dramatic shepherds have just passed my door on their way to the mansion of Gen. Castro, where they are to perform their pastorals. Their drama is ill suited to the sacredness of the Sabbath: its grotesque appendages, in the person of the wild hunter and apocalyptic dragon, are but little short of a burlesque on the devotional chant of the shepherds. Indeed, there is not a truth connected with man's redemption which can derive any force from scenic representation. Every passage in the life of the Redeemer, every act that he performed, and every precept that he inculcated, are invested with a solemnity which should exempt them from the attempts of dramatic art. They have a significancy and force which transcend the evanescent triumphs of the stage. The tragedy of the Cross stands alone; no human passion can approach it; it is shielded in its sorrows by the divinity of the sufferer; its love overwhelmed angels; its agony awoke the dead.

MONDAY, DEC. 28. This is the festival day of the Santos Innocentes, and is devoted by the lovers of

fun to every kind of harmless imposition on the simplicity of others. The utmost ingenuity is exercised in borrowing, for every article lent has to be redeemed. Although aware of this, still, in a moment of forgetfulness, one succeeded in borrowing my spurs. A gentleman, who has lived here from his boyhood, lent his cloak, another his saddle and bridle, and a third his guitar. Two ladies performed feats that would have been difficult on any day. One borrowed money of a broker, and the other a rosary of a priest. It is rumored, but not credited, that a client has induced his lawyer to allow his case to be amicably adjusted; that a patient has actually persuaded his physician to permit the aid of nature in throwing off his disease; and that a customer has made a shop-keeper confess an imperfection in his wares. It is said, but doubted, than an old Spanish hidalgo, after being told that his son is engaged in marriage to a peasant girl, will probably sleep before he disinherits him. It is also said, though few believe it, that a wife, whose husband is going to sea, has consented that he shall take the family breeches with him. It is further stated, but on no good authority, that a political partizan has hesitated about voting for his candidate on account of his having been once sentenced to the penitentiary for sheep-stealing. Several other rumors are afloat, but they are not credited. One is, that a disappointed lover has persuaded himself that his suit has been rejected without any parental interference; another is, that a young collegian has writ-

ten a letter to his grandmother without quoting a word of Greek; another is, that a young clergyman has composed an entire sermon without anything about

“Fixed fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute.”

Another is, that a man of giant intellect and profound erudition has selected as his life-partner a woman of sense; another, that a lady who has had an offer of marriage and rejected it, has kept it to herself; another, that an old bachelor has come to the conclusion that he is less captivating with the girls than he was when younger; another, that a young military officer has taken tea with his aunt without having on his regimentals; that a midshipman has entertained a lady fifteen minutes without a gale or disaster; that a sexton had been seen shedding a tear; that a Mormon has confessed Joe Smith's Bible a little less authentic, from the absence of the original plates; that a Millerite has forgiven a debt, on account of the nearness of the last conflagration; that a mesmerite, on account of the death-intelligence conveyed by his clairvoyant, has gone into mourning; that an Englishman has been seen with a smile on his countenance without a plum-pudding in his stomach; that an American has said grace at his table without stopping to expectorate; that a Frenchman has stopped his prattle before death had stopped his breath; and, finally, that a new moon, with a drooping horn, has been followed by a dry month.

While these incredible rumors were afloat, the public ear was startled with the intelligence that a large ship had been driven on the rocks, just behind Point Pinos. The whole population rushed at once in that direction,—the women to see her go to pieces, the men to seize her cargo, and a widow, who has a son at sea, to save the sailors. But the ship proved to be the “Flying Dutchman,” with phantom hull and masts, and sails through whose gossamer the setting sun poured its effulgent beam. Some laughed as the spectral fabric dissolved, some grieved in silence over their loss, and one old wrecker hung himself with disappointment. Thus ended the day of the Santos Innocentes.

TUESDAY, DEC. 29. During the rains which prevail at this season of the year, a multitude of small streams rush from the hills which encircle Monterey into the lagoon which lies in the vicinity of the town. This natural basin, replenished by these foaming rivulets, presented this week quite a deep and spacious lake, and began to threaten with inundation the buildings upon its margin. As it lay several feet above the level of the sea, with only an intervening ridge of sand, it occurred to me that it would be a good scheme to cut a channel between the two. The work was easily accomplished; but my channel of two feet soon widened to forty, and the whole lake came rushing down in a tremendous torrent. It swept every thing before it, and carried two boats,

which lay on the beach, so far out to sea that they have not been seen or heard of since. Even the sea-birds, that have dashed about here among the breakers ever since they got out of their eggs, seemed frightened, and took wing. Their screams came back on the wind like the howling of wild beasts on a sinking wreck. The lake disappeared; its waters, where the stars had mirrored themselves in tranquil beauty, went off to join the roaring ocean, and left on its sandy bottom only a few floundering fish. How tame is a lake when its bottom is laid bare! It is like the heart of a coquette when the illusions of love have fled.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 30. The phantom ship, which rounded into our harbor a few weeks since, and departed without token or sign, turns out to be a good sound oak reality, in the shape of a sloop-of-war, honored with the name of Dale, bearing the stars and stripes, and commanded by Wm. W. M'Kean. She sailed from New York on the 6th of June, and has stopped on her way out at Rio de Janeiro, Valparaiso, Callao, Payta, and Mazatlan. She has brought a large mail for the Pacific squadron. What an eager breaking of seals there will be!

I am indebted to her for a large package of letters, and for the receipt of one which was written several weeks after she sailed. It was dispatched alone to Jamaica, thence by the mail steamer to Chagres, thence over the Isthmus to Panama, and thence by

the steamer to Callao, and then to Lima. Here it came into the care of my esteemed friend, Mr. M'Call, who forwarded it by the Dale. It brings me the intelligence of the birth of a son, and of the safety and happiness of a young mother over her first-born. Had this letter, in one of the many mischances to which it was exposed, failed of reaching me, months might have passed away without any intelligence to relieve my solicitude. There is a Providence, whose care extends to the condition of each one. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without his notice. But a long interval of waning moons must pass, and half the earth's circuit be traversed, before I can see that infant being whose dawning light has shed a gladness on my hearth. In this slow lapse of time what changes may betide, what fearful shadows may fall!

"My child, my child! when I shall reach my door,
If heavy looks should tell me thou art dead,
It seems as I should struggle to believe
Thou wert a spirit, to this nether sphere
Sentenced for some more venial crime to grieve;
Didst sigh, then spring to meet Heaven's quick reprieve,
While we wept idly o'er thy little bier!" COLERIDGE.

THURSDAY, DEC. 31. Com. Stockton is still encamped near San Diego, expecting to march in a few days for the town of the Angels. He has under his command detachments from the crews of the Congress, Cyane, and Portsmouth, with some thirty volunteers, and has with him several pieces of artillery. His plan evidently is, to attack the position of the

Californians from the south at the same time that Col. Fremont comes down upon them from the north. Hemmed in by these encountering forces, they will be obliged to surrender, or attempt a disastrous flight. Public expectation is on the tip-toe to learn the result; but several days must elapse before it can be known here.

FRIDAY, JAN. 1. Last night, while the sentinel stars were on their mid-watch, the old year resigned its sceptre, and departed amid the wailing hours to join the pale shadows of the mighty past. The strong winds, awaking in grief, shook the forest leaves from their slumbers, and poured from cloud and cliff their stormy dirge.

“As an earthquake rocks a corse
In its coffin in the clay,
So white Winter, that rough nurse,
Rocks the death-cold year to-day:
Solemn hours! wail aloud,
For your mother in her shroud.”

SHELLEY.

But nature never leaves the throne of time vacant. An heir to her wide domain was invested at once with the imperial purple, while woods and water-falls, the organ cloud and the sounding sea, sung his coronation hymn. The great tide of time moved on as before, rolling in events pregnant with the fate of nations. But men, blind to these momentous issues, hail the eventful year—in which perhaps their own coffins swing—with egg-nog! Out on their frivolity!

Their mirth is the bubble that paints the rainbow on Niagara's thundering verge.

SUNDAY, JAN. 3. The deceased year is in its grave, but its deeds remain. But few of them, it is true, are to be found in the archives of earth; they have been sealed up and transmitted, by invisible hands, to Heaven's high chancery. There they will remain, above the ranges of time and the wreck of worlds. When the sun's last ray has expired, every line and letter will flash out in characters of living light. It will then be seen that our minutest action here touches a string that will vibrate forever in the soul; and that issues of happiness or woe, vast as eternity, take their rise in the silent pulses of a hidden thought. We live between two worlds; every impulse we take from this throws an action into the infinitude of the next; we follow it ourselves soon and fast: once beyond the dim veil, we return no more; not a whisper comes back to those we love. We have gone like a shooting-star over the steep verge of night.

MONDAY, JAN. 4. It is mid-winter, and yet the robins are all out, singing as if the buds of May were bursting around them. You miss none of your favorites in meadow or grove. Hill and vale are echoing with their wild numbers. This is not a gush of music that is to be followed soon by silence; it is not an interval of sun-light that is to be succeeded by cloud and hail. All these charms belong to the

season, and make you forget that it is winter. You look to the sun, and see that he circles indeed far to the south; but you look around you and find the sparkling streams unfettered by frost, and hear the whistle of the ploughman as he breaks the glebe. You say to yourself, there is no winter in California.

TUESDAY, JAN. 5. Many of the emigrants who have recently arrived, are now with Col. Fremont at the south. By enlisting in this campaign, they will have an opportunity of seeing every important part of California, and will be able to locate themselves with some confidence in their selection of grounds. This will compensate them in some degree in foregoing their first year's tillage. Besides, they generally arrive here with very little means beyond their own enterprise. They are now receiving twenty-five dollars a month, and have but few temptations for spending it; they will consequently find themselves in funds, small to be sure; but there is a period in almost every man's life when a penny takes the importance of a pound. "It is more difficult," said the late Stephen Girard, "to make the first hundred dollars, than the next thousand." But with all due deference to that eminent economist, I have found it extremely difficult to make either, and when made, still more difficult to keep it. It has slipped out of my hands like a squirming eel in its slime. But this has very little to do with the emigrants. They will, it is hoped, soon be able to return to their families,

who are now scattered about in the missions, and in shanties on the Sacramento, without the comforts of life. They have suffered greatly from being massed together in these temporary lodgments; and have often, no doubt, wished themselves where they came from. The pioneers of civilization have always a rough path. They force the bear from his covert, not to make room for a palace, but that they may themselves take his jungle.

WEDNESDAY, JAN. 6. As I was sitting in the house of an old Californian to-day, conversing very quietly about the condition of the country, I felt something break on my head, and, starting around, discovered two large black eyes, lighted with their triumph. It flashed upon me, that the annual egg-breaking festival here had commenced. The rules of this frolic do not allow you to take offence, whatever may be your age or the gravity of your profession: you have only one alternative, and that is, to retaliate if you can. You have not to encounter the natural contents of the egg—these are blown out; and the shell is filled with water, scented with cologne, or lavender; or more often, with gold tinsel, and flashing paper, cut into ten thousand minute particles. The tinsel is rubbed by a dash of the hand into your hair, and requires no little combing and brushing to get it out. Ladies will work at it for hours, and find some of the spangles still remaining. When a liquid is used, the apertures are closed with wax, so that the

belligerent may carry it about his person. The antagonist is always of the opposite sex. You must return these shots, or encounter a railery, which is even worse. Having finished my chat, I bade my good old Californian friend, and his daughter, my egg-shell opponent, good morning; but turned into a shop, procured an egg or two, and re-entered the mansion of my friend by a side door, where I watched for my victim. A few moments brought her along, all-unconscious of her danger. I slipped from my covert, and, unperceived, dashed the showering egg on her head. Her locks floated in cologne. I was avenged, and now stood square with the world, so far as egg-breaking is concerned. This seems like children's play; but here you are forced into it in self-defence.

THURSDAY, JAN. 7. Two or three of the Californians who were engaged against the Americans on the Salinas, have since been in town; among these, the leader, Chaves, who was wounded on that occasion. Many attempts have been made to take him, but he has always managed to elude the search. Last night, however, he had an extremely narrow escape. The officer in command of the garrison, having been informed that he was in a particular house, silently posted his sentinels around it, and at about eight o'clock in the evening unceremoniously entered. Quick footsteps were heard here and there, and only a part of the ladies were found in the parlor; but

these were calm as moonshine, and extremely polite and amiable.

The officers apologized for their abrupt intrusion, and stated, very frankly, what their object was: the ladies assured them that they were quite right, and they should afford them every facility and aid that might lead to the discovery of the obnoxious person. They took lights and piloted them through every apartment of the house, opening every closet, and lifting every bed-curtain. There was no place in garret, cellar, kitchen or out-house on which their tapers did not shed their light; but in none could a trace of the officer whom they sought be found: so they renewed their apologies to the ladies and departed—when out slipped Chaves from between two ladies, who had jumped into a bed for the purpose of concealing him. They had lain there while the officers were in the chamber; their dark locks floating over the pillows, and their large eyes closed in seeming slumber. Between them

“ He had been hid—I don't pretend to say
How, nor can I, indeed, describe the where:
Young, slender, and pack'd easily, he lay,
No doubt, in little compass, round or square.”

FRIDAY, JAN. 8. We have as yet no further intelligence in reference to the party of Californians who carried off Mr. Bartlett, of San Francisco. He had gone into the country, it seems, to attend to some of his official duties, when he was captured, and is

now detained as a hostage. I came very near falling into a similar trap, a few weeks since. A farmer in Santa Cruze had extended his improvements over the lands of another, which lay contiguous to his own, and it became necessary to go and define the boundaries by the original titles. The day was fixed when I was to be there, and the parties interested were summoned to appear on the spot. But the night before I was to leave, intelligence reached me that an armed party of Californians were encamped close to the road which I should have taken. But for this information, brought in by a citizen of Monterey, I should now be sleeping here and there, under the open heaven, without a change of apparel, and with bandits for bed-fellows: on such slender threads hangs security here. I have been told by Californians, who are my friends, that plans have been laid by their countrymen to slip me quietly out of my house at night, or entrap me in my hunting excursions, on the outskirts of the town. I began to think, last night, that this attempt was to be realized. Quick footsteps and a loud rap came to my door, followed by an excited call for the alcalde. My boy went out, with his pistols swung at his side; but the call proved to be an honest one. A shop had been robbed, and a warrant was wanted for the arrest of the supposed felons.

SATURDAY, JAN. 9. How many inventions a Californian lady has! One who was harboring a

Mexican officer that had broken his parol, wishing to do away with all possible suspicion, got up a fandango, to which she took special pains to invite all the American officers. Such open-door hospitality—such challenging of the public eye—threw an air of freedom and frankness over her whole house. Everybody acquitted her at once of the least shadow of suspicion. But while the violins and guitars were trembling and thrilling in concert, and the floor of the old hall was springing to the bounding measures of the fandango, and bright eyes

“Were looking love to eyes that spake again,”

the Mexican officer was snugly taking a nap in the great oven, which, near the cook-house, silently loomed into the moonlight. It must have been a long nap, for the stars that kept the mid-watch were relieved before the company broke up. The officer was then at liberty to leave his oval dormitory to the baker; and creeping forth, had, no doubt, a good laugh with his ingenious hostess over the success of the fandango. There is no disguise so deep as that which seems to seek none.

SUNDAY, JAN. 10. I held service to-day on board the U. S. ship Dale. Though on deck, no inconvenience was experienced from the weather. The air was soft, and hardly a ripple disturbed the mirror of the sea. Capt. McKean, in the absence of a chaplain, reads the service himself. He appreciates the

force of moral influences in the government of his crew, and is well sustained in its exertion by his intelligent officers. It is rarely that you meet with a commander in the service who is indifferent to the religious character of his crew. If he has no religion himself, still he respects it in others, and places his greatest reliance where it exerts a controlling influence. Religion, wherever possessed, vindicates its celestial origin.

The captain of a whale-ship applied to Mr. Damon, of Honolulu, to preach on board his vessel, stating very frankly that he had no religion himself, but then he wanted his ship to appear "a little decent." Now when a captain applies for a religious service to give an air of respectability to his vessel, it shows that moral truth is in the ascendancy, at least in the dignity of its claims. There was a time when no such expedient was deemed necessary; but a higher light has struck the mariners who float the great Pacific. Their hosannas will yet be rolled to heaven in concert with the loud anthem of her many-voiced waves.

CHAPTER X.

DESTRUCTION OF DOGS.—THE WASH-TUB MAIL.—THE SURRENDER IN THE NORTH.—ROBBING THE CALIFORNIANS.—DEATH-SCENE IN A SHANTY.—THE MEN WHO TOOK UP ARMS.—ARRIVAL OF THE INDEPENDENCE.—DESTITUTION OF OUR TROOPS.—CAPTURE OF LOS ANGELES.

MONDAY, JAN. 11. I never expected, when threading the streets of Constantinople, where dogs inherit the rights of citizenship, to encounter such multitudes of them in any other part of the world. But California is more than a match for the Ottoman capital. Here you will find in every little village a thousand dogs, who never had a master: every farm-house has some sixty or eighty; and every Indian drives his cart with thirty or forty on its trail. They had become so troublesome, that an order was given a few days since to thin their ranks. The marines, with their muskets, were to be the executioners. The order, of course, very naturally runs into dog-erels.

The dogs, the dogs! my gallant lads—
Let each one seize his gun,
And lead the battle's fiery van,
Though Mars himself should run.

Remember Lodi's blazing bridge,
Marengo's shaking plain,
And Borodino's thunder-clouds,
Where Cossacks fell like rain.