CHAPTER V.

SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO.

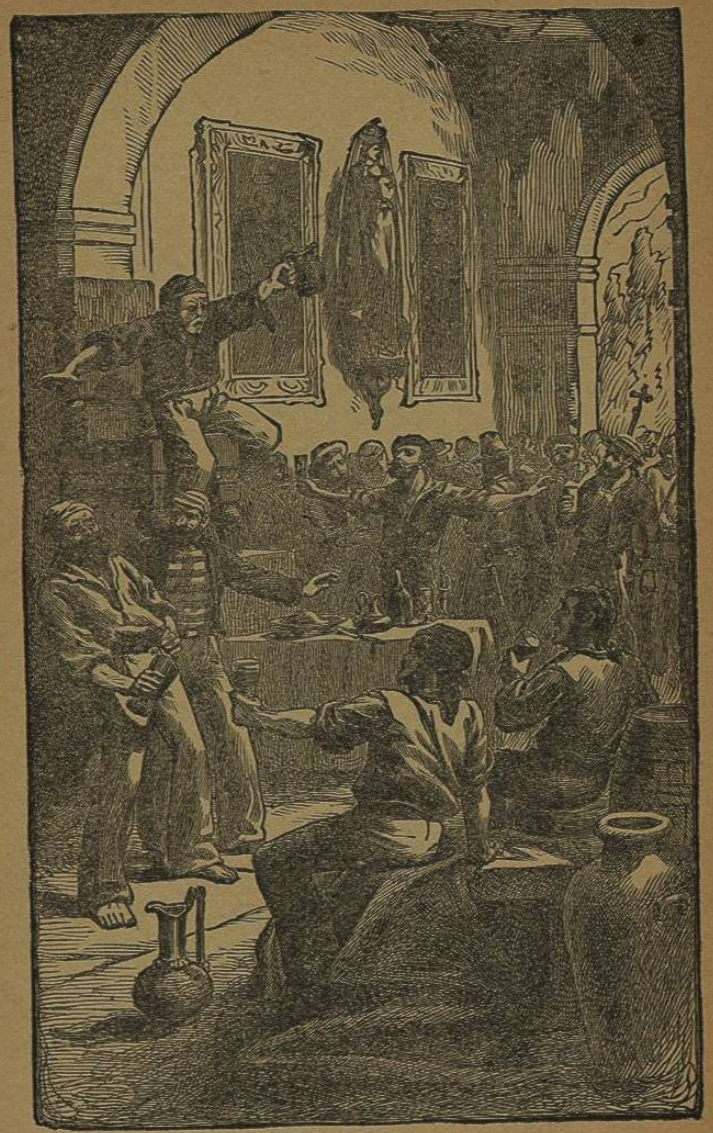
BY no possibility could any little chamber be more gloomy, unfurnished, generally dilapidated and desolate. A battered old pine table stood in the middle of the floor, and beside it a mended chair. Another, with a rawhide bottom, stood beside the door. There was no whole glass in the one window, and so the shutters were closed. An old and worn black priest's coat hung against the wall, and the cheapest variety of cotton umbrella leaned beside it. An ecclesiastical book lay on the table where it had last been used, and close beside it a pair of steel-bound spectacles. The only sign of creature comfort, the one human weakness of the place, was a little bag of cheap tobacco and a wooden pipe that lay beside the spectacles and the book.

Dust, the dust of years, decay, forgetfulness, decrepitude, was everywhere. It filled the spaces of the cracked red tiles of the floor, and lay thick on the wide old window ledge. It had flown upward and perched on the beams of the ceiling. If one had swept it away it would only have alighted again, for it belonged there, a part of the material of the place. Some of it was the excretæ of generations of insects, and some of it was composed of their powdered wings and heads and legs. Some again was vegetable; the microscopic cosmos that could tell of fungi and

lichens; of every minute growth of beam and rafter the dry, bright air could nourish.

On one side was a little fire-place; the incongruous thing of a land where, winter or summer, the great sun warms the world unfailingly, yet where it is often cold. It was doubtless in its day good for old bones and slow blood when the white sea-mist would come creeping up the narrow valley before the early mass. It was black with a hard and ancient soot, but it had been long since a fire had crackled there. There was a picture on the wall. I do not remember of what, but it was of something sacred, and it was very cheap. Perhaps, as was fitting, it was the Mother of Sorrows, looking upward, a lithographic sadness in her pleading eyes, and a hand, with a ring on the finger, laid upon her heart. But I know that the stains of time ran obliquely across her face, and that it hung crookedly upon the wall.

There was little else. You could observe the yellow glint of the sunshine through the wide cracks of the opposite unopened door; the door that had once opened upon a huge square that was edged with cloisters; that was full of dark-faced people; that was set with fountains, and crossed by walks, and studded with flowers. Its huge outline was there still, and on two sides still ran the pillared arches that had supported the roof of a porch about sixteen hundred feet long. Opposite every arch had been the low door of a monk's room; his cloister, where he had meditated upon the evanescence of all earthly things, and had told his beads, and had lain upon his uncurtained cot and slept as men do to whom the



WINE AND WASSAIL.

Church alone is infancy and motherhood and livelihood and care and love. The roof was gone, and the long rows of arches stood alone. Some of them were broken off in the middle, and the half-arch still hung there, uncracked, sustained by a singular tenacity of material. Where yet the red floor-tiles remained beneath them, beside this little back-door of the priest's room, they were worn by the going to and fro of feet that have been dust this seventy years and more, that had had errands from this cloistered square to the outer world; that were bare or clad only in sandals, and that mayhap had trod the thorny road from Vera Cruz to the City of Mexico, from Mexico to Guadalaxara, and then to San Diego, in ceaseless and toilsome crossings of an unknown desert, and thence to this sunny spot where rose the now fallen towers of the mission of the soldier-monk, San Juan Capistrano.

Beside the little chamber I have described, once, perhaps the public office or business-room of the mission, there was another, the bedroom. It was stiller and darker and sadder than the first. There was nothing there but a single bed, and loneliness and poverty. But it is not a place of ghosts, or else priests do not believe in ghosts. For I saw the place that night, as its broken arches shone in white moonlight at the end of the village street. I knew that old graves lay thick behind the church, all ivy-grown and all unmarked, and that there were memories and reminiscences in every nook and cranny. The aged priest may have been asleep there, alone and unattended in a little den surrounded by crumbling ruins,

but ghostly visitors do not disturb his slumbers. So idle, so tenantless, so out of keeping with the spirit of these times are these moonlit ruins, that even the ghosts have forsaken them.

Just in front, in a porch whereof the roof is still intact, there is an old wooden settee, smooth with age and innumerable sittings upon it. This fronts the world and the public; the world and the public of the old times; and there sitting, I tried to recall those days. It were hard to do without imagining myself also a Franciscan, which God wot I am not, and I had ill success. But down through the narrow valley—where runs a railroad now—I could see the shining sea. A faint black smoke hung trailing on the horizon where a steamer was passing. I thought it well enough that things should end when their time came. For had the towers never fallen; had the angelus bells been pealing across the yellow hills; had the fair church whose whole interior now lay open to the sky been full of dusky worshipers; had a brown-robed Franciscan sat beside me; I should have known by the smoke of the steamer and the distant scream of the train that that hour had arrived. The curious thing; the pathetic and unjoyous reflection; is, after all, of so much wasted toil and tears and hope and faith. That is what it amounts to. The eternal church and living faith, sole owner of a beautiful and isolated world; rich, strong, powerful, successful beyond hope in the beginning, could stand but eighty years. The babe who saw the beginning lived unto the very end. The people who came with her, and the Indians she converted, are gone as well. Here and there one sees a

brown face; here and there hears the old tongue; once in a day, or a week, may encounter a laborer whom he knows to be an unmixed descendant of those amiable aborigines whose benighted lives stirred the soul of old Serra. If secularization had never taken place, if the Pious Fund had been piously regarded until now, if the presidios had paid their debts, if the enormous landed holdings had been left to the course of nature and law, all would long since have given way before that advent which is the opposite of that upon which the church is founded. This aged priest lives alone amid the fallen stones his brethren laid. The roof of his chapel is propped with a post. His coat is old, his vestments tarnished and shabby. He has reminiscences for his friends, and is otherwise quite deserted. Some lone devotee may now and then come and bow in succession to the faded Stations of the Cross that hang on the mouldy walls of what was once a mission granary. Some contrite soul may at long intervals come and whisper its sins to him through the rusty perforations of the worn and worm-eaten old confessional. A few may gather to hear the mass whose bells are still rung on the ancient wheel whose rude circumference they rim, and whose iron crank was once whirled by an Indian boy at the elevation of the host. The mission is fortunate, for at most there is no priest at all. Here he serves, in faith, patience and old age, to mark for the wandering and irreverent American, and with singular emphasis, the difference between Then and Now.

There is a quiet beauty often hovering over decay and ruin, and no locality is so subject to such a spell

as an old church. So to the average American, who came to heal his lung or his fortune, who considers only climate and existing facilities for irrigation, who is thinking only of the exigent and emphatic now, perhaps a California mission bears a strong resemblance to any decrepit structure, say a dilapidated barn. Another is given to reflections upon the temporal sagacity of the Padres, of whom he makes the old averment that they never got into a poor locality. A third merely looks and passes on, unable to rightly comprehend the meaning of a memento or a monument. He says it is of the past, the "dead" past, and thereupon, if he knows any poetry at all, he quotes Longfellow on that point. Such an one sees nothing but grass and rocks and rolling hills at the field of Gettysburg, nothing but a whimsical piece of industry in the bronze and homely face of Lincoln where he stands in a Chicago park, nothing but fact anywhere —the fact which is of the present, and which concerns him alone.

By ascending a rickety stairs you may find all that is left of the library of the mission and monastery of San Juan Capistrano. Hardly is it a stairs at all, but a compromise upon a ladder, and the steps are so steep that the rise has been notched to slant inward, after the fashion of the teeth of a saw. There are books; the books of a time when the art of the printer flourished, but the binder had not acquired his modern cheap facility. Nearly all are bound in parchment; what we would call rawhide; and are of a kind that will bear much thumbing. The Spanish and the Latin prevail in this assortment. There is not a volume in the

English tongue, or of a date later than Seventeen-Hundred-and-Something. Many of them are in manuscript, written with a quill upon the old-fashioned unruled foolscap that everybody uses in Spain to this day. The monks were good penmen, and the ink was very black. You will encounter here a record of "Matrimonios," the dedicatory first page of which was written and signed by Junipero Serra himself. He was seventy years old when he wrote it, and yet it would stand for a fine quaint specimen of pen-and-ink engraving. There is another old volume of exercises, a prayer-service for every day in the year, which is handsomely printed in red-and-black, and was furnished with metal clasps. This book is thicker than it is long or wide, and is the quaintest thing in the collection. You may take it in your hand with a smile at its clumsiness, but you remember that it was a thing of personal use under all the circumstances of those times. The edges of the leaves have been thumbed and turned until they are worn into notches. Certain favorite pages are covered with an ancient gum which obscures the type, and which is all that is left of the personality of whoever it was that carried it in the fold of his habit, and whispered its prayers to himself in the shade of the live oaks, and turned to it for spiritual food when his bodily stomach was empty. Perhaps it figured in some of those graphic episodes vaguely hinted at in the sparse records it was thought worth while to make. It may have been at Monterey under the oak. Perhaps it was at San Diego when, amid the dying and the dead, that first mass was said. Perhaps it was at San Gabriel when

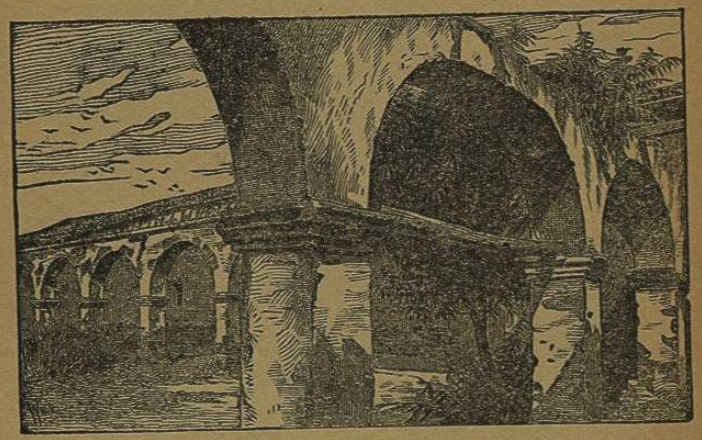
wrath was turned to adoration. One can only vaguely regret, for the thousandth time, that the secrets of the dead, and what the dead leave behind them, can never be told.

Curious things are the primers; the little books of exercises; of the Indian children. They made them as they came to them—out of rawhide. One or two of them were not lost or torn up, and lie here. Hardly less interesting are sundry long Latin essays written by some sophomoric monk who fed his mind on the silence of the wilderness, and did something for the enlightenment of future ages; for the perusal of a wanderer by rail who casually picks up his essay, divines that it is in Latin, wonders at the interminable length of it, whispers to himself, "Tu Tityre recubans," etc., blows some of the dust off the sheepskin cover from mere force of habit, and lays it down again.

But this squalid little dusty chamber was not the library at all. It is like all the rest; a mere modern makeshift. On three or four old shelves the books lie piled, and some of them are on the floor, or over on the window ledge, where they keep company with a dozen empty wine bottles. And there is one strange thing. The Padres were not making history, or lending any assistance whatever to that interesting process. In all this heap of quaint volumes there is nothing like a daily record, a diary, a bit of description, a fragmentary record of the experiences of one man. No one knows precisely, or by more than a guess, what the real life of the missions was, how many Indians there were, what variety of humanity

they represented, what anybody did, or said, or thought. Every fact has been gathered by inference or from outside sources, by whosoever has attempted the slightest sketch of those interesting times. An enormous work was accomplished, industrially if not religiously. A form of the commune was established which seems to have more than realized all modern isms and ideas of that form of political and industrial life. For fifty years of the life of the missions it is impossible to conceive of the situation as other than a patriarchal form of Indian slavery, but slavery nevertheless. Yet no man knows if it was really so, and even this prominent feature remains disputed and unsettled. Toils and perils the Padres had, innumerable from the nature of the case, and often insurmountable. There is no complaining record to tell the story. The secrets of aboriginal life, the motives and desires and cunningness of the barbarian mind, were all laid open. The Franciscans knew them; there is not a word to tell of them. So nearly obliterated are all the details that the building of nineteen missions, the raising of the stately and beautiful establishments for each one, the bringing under cultivation of thousands of fruitful acres, the magic coaxing of running water over miles of arid rock and sand to make vineyards and rose-gardens and orchards, the governing and administration of all through many years, the wealth acquired and the trade established, and finally, the sudden fall, the broken-hearted abandonment and complete decay of all;—the whole story—seems like a tale that is not told; a vision of the night. Perhaps no scheme of

conquest was ever so successful, and save a single uprising at San Diego which was forgiven and unavenged, there was no blood shed through it all. There were soldiers, but they were few, undisciplined and far between. There were civil magistrates, but they lacked all physical power to enforce. Either the Indians of California, speaking different languages and not all alike, were the most docile savages the



A DILAPIDATED CORNER.

world has ever known, or Catholic and Protestant alike may turn to the scant record of those missions as a singular example of the power of the Cross, and of the success of those who "endure all things" for the love of Him who patiently endured as an example to whosever would conquer in His name. Whether it be so or not, there is no narrative to explain. The pioneer of forty years ago knew as much as we do now, and no more. Two generations have passed.

The Indians are gone, and the oldest inhabitant can not explain whither. It is a lost civilization.

But if one will be patient, and will sit down beside the ruins of Capistrano, or San Luis Rey de Francia, or Gabriel, or any picturesque memento of them all, and will dismiss the world and the flesh, he may get himself into a mood for dimly understanding. Here, where we are sitting now, the Padres came at eventide, and looked through the canyon upon the sea, and gossipped as priests, like other men, occasionally will. It was the half of an open square. There was a rail in front to which visitors tied their horses, and the general gossip of the community went on as it must in every association formed by men. The reader will kindly remember that these holy men were also Spaniards, also that the cigarette is an ancient Spanish institution, to the benign and consolatory influences of which the priesthood has ever been amenable. The world belies them greatly or else monks, even Franciscans, are jolly. These men were pleased. Their lines had fallen in places so pleasant that everyone has been pleased ever since. It was the land of oil and wine. Their granaries and casks were full. Their dusky neophytes numbered thousands, and the ideal kingdom of Faith was established permanently. One could almost wish that such had actually, as it was apparently in those pleasant days, been the case, and that one had been there to see what now is a picture only to be recalled by such vain imaginings as these.

A semi-savage origin is traceable in all one sees. The long rows of arches are stately only after a

barbaric fashion, wonderful as they are for the time and circumstances of their construction, and picturesque because proclaiming Spain in miniature, and coming by a wonderfully long road from Palestine itself. But they are not precisely alike. The hand of the Indian is visible in their curves. Some are longer than their fellows by a finger's breadth, and some are slightly higher in the bend. Among the red tiles of the pillars some are thick and some are thin. Symmetry, either of material or of architecture, is not to be expected of the savage of any race, and for all the purposes of picturesque decay the result answers quite as well.

On the left hand, at the corner of the square, stood the church itself. No Protestant sanctuary in America, roofless for fifty years, would look as well. The walls are nearly five feet thick, not of squared blocks of solid stone, yet where standing at all almost uncracked. The chancel and its roof are still intact, showing all the proportions that for their uses were well nigh perfect. To be entirely in keeping, there is under the round flat dome, and amid the ashes of the past, an open grave. What father's bones were disturbed by this useless sacrilege no one knows, and there were but bones to reward the delver's search. Serra was buried in the chancel at San Carlos, of Monterey. Some brother, whose name has not descended, and honored only less than his superior, lay here.

There are graves enough, and all unmarked. The little square behind the church is full of them, and in a little corner are two or three whose low stucco

mounds, covered with trailing vines, have been basking places for the lizards from time immemorial. A yellow-eyed brown bird was there, interested in the gruesome corner to the extent of scolding vociferously at the most distant intrusion. To be entirely in keeping with surroundings there was also there a skull. It was so huge that it was made to form a part of the flimsy fence that ran partly across to hedge in with some lazy show of care a nameless resting place. It was not a man's, but doubtless one of the few remaining mementos of their times, showing at least the cranial conformation of the mission ox. The bases of the horns, decayed and shrunken as they were, measured nearly eleven inches round.

All the ridge upon which the mission stands is covered with the remains of the establishment, and it was by no means one of the most extensive. There is a tradition that adobe is more lasting than stone, and that rawhide will endure longer than either, and these buildings were of the sun-dried bricks, whose permanency surprises every stranger. On the right of the entrance, where, in imagination, we have been sitting while the western sun went down into the sea, was the kitchen. The old oil-mill, its stone still in place, and the rawhide thongs which held its cross-beam to the uprights still hanging shrunken to the wood, is there now. There is a disposition always to try to imagine, to dimly recall, the industrial occupations of any period to which our own appears a striking contrast. A man would be justified in searching all Spain for a barber's basin such as Don

Quixote mistakenly adopted as a helmet, and if we pry into the culinary establishment the Padres found sustenance in, we do but add a supplement to romance. But there is no guess to be made. There are only blackened walls to show the uses that are gone, and the faintest odor of garlic, even of that, has been wafted down the years. But there is the stable, somewhat useful to this day, and one gazes with interest at the wooden manger-bars between which the asses of those times pushed their mottled noses, and even at the square mounds, rising even now some three feet above the common earth, which show where once the goats and kine passed their ruminative nights.

And there was a dungeon. Whether for priests or converts, it is certain that the most virtuous community never yet existed long without one. It was a room behind the church, whose only openings are a door, still barred, and one square window, high up and closed with a solid shutter. Within the recollection of elder residents, there were stocks there; the ancient and effective machine which shut down upon the prisoner's members, and gave him a seat whose hardness was conducive to painful reflection upon the evil of his ways. It were a wonder if such simple means were all that were needed for the discipline of the barbaric majority, and, if true, one could heartily wish that the climate had the same effect upon a later generation.

The professional anatomist pieces together from scales, or wing-feathers, or claws, or thigh-bones, the monsters of the Paleosaurian age, and gives to the

world the plaster-casts of creatures beyond reason or belief by the citizens of a later time. There may have been, and doubtless were, features of mission life incredible in these times, and the process of discovering them is similar to that of the anatomists. But they are human traits, and in trying to recall them, it is necessary to remember that men are governed almost entirely by the times in which they live. Here was practical socialism without a theory. Here was the Church without a doubt. Both things are now impossible, and these ruins are mementos of a time when they were possible. The church of the Franciscans in California was a direct importation, in an age of profound belief, of the church of Spain. The church in Spain is the same as that of other Catholic countries, and yet it is not. To this day there is a difference below the surface. Perhaps the undefined thing which we can not understand about these missions is the secret of their great success, combined with that of their total failure. As one wanders about the ruins he is continually turning this question over. But the answer does not come unless it be in the form of a theory that the time permitted them, and that such time has passed. For the machinery was not different from that used everywhere by the same sect for the same purposes. Some of it is here still. The little chapel that was a granary, whose sagging roof is propped with a post, is full of it, all dating back to the old times. The pictures on the walls are dim and blurred with time. The linen which serves as a base for embroideries seems to have come, and very likely did come, among the ecclesiastical

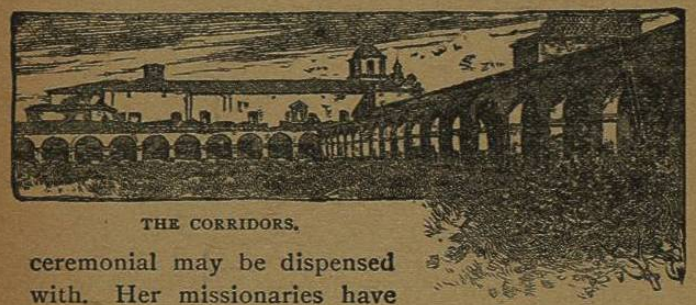
stores provided by Galvez, a hundred and twenty-five years ago. In a little mouldy room at one side are some wooden statues about half life-size. They are sometimes headless and often want fingers, but are fine specimens of an art which is now, in its perfection, among the lost ones. The wood of the faces and hands is covered with a composition that has retained its finish and color through all the years, and the eyes are of glass, and as perfectly made and preserved as those are which are now used in the arts which require them.

Another small closet contains some curious ecclesiastical machinery. There is a board with a hold at one end shaped like the handle of a saw. The sides of it are studded lengthwise with iron grips precisely like those our forefathers used for the end-handles of the hair trunks of their days. Take this machine up and twist it vigorously from side to side, and you will be startled at its capacity for that kind of noise which is known in the vernacular as a racket. Another ingenious contrivance for the same general purpose is a three-cornered box, studded with swinging irons like the other, but inside of which there could also be rattled with telling effect a loose stone. These machines figured in the Good Friday processions familiar to all who have lived in Mexico or Spain, and serve as an appeal to the sensibilities of the community at large.

An ingenious contrivance is a wheel whose rim is studded with little bells. Turn it once over by the crank, and each bell falls over once and rings the particular key it happens to possess. This stands

behind the altar and marks a particular moment in the ritual.

And without these things this sanctuary would be poor indeed. Roof, walls, rafters, pictures, bells, images, are all of the olden time. There is nothing new. The mighty Church whose property it is rises to success and wealth, or descends to poverty and isolation, with an evenness of demeanor and a steadfastness of purpose which commands the respect of the wide world. The machinery of her elaborate



THE CORRIDORS.

ceremonial may be dispensed with. Her missionaries have threaded first the intricacies of every wilderness solitude the continent knows, and where mass has once been said in a hut or tent, or beneath a spreading tree, the cathedral has afterwards arisen with unfailing certainty. Only here has the process been reversed. The cathedral has fallen, but the priest and the ritual survive. I do not know if he believes its towers will ever rise again. Perhaps he never questions, but to his mind must often occur the singularity of a situation perhaps quite without a parallel over so wide a country. All the surroundings, the whole country, is historic from the efforts of his brethren of a

common faith, and in the midst of unexampled progress in every field but the religious one, he remains as a kind of memento of all that was, and remains alone. I do not know his name; I never saw him; but in all my recollections of the sunny ruin by the sea, I find ihe humble and unknown man the most prominent figure.

The visitor to Capistrano will observe a curious architectural discrepancy. A portion, almost one-half, of the ruined church is not of stone, but of adobe. In other words, it has twice fallen and been once rebuilt. An earthquake in 1812* was a very different thing from what the same event would be in 1889, hence it has but the semblance of a tradition. It is not even known whether the rebuilding with adobe was ever entirely completed, and the observer would say that it probably was not. For on the gray stone walls, still erect and uncracked, the rampant winter vegetati n of tropical California has gained a rooting, and will throw down stone after stone. Where the adobe in its turn has melted down, there are vast ridges and mounds, covered shoulder-high with a miscellaneous growth of weeds. There is a plant with clustering yellow blossoms whose roots would wedge apart a Roman battlement, which inserts itself in every crevice, and flaunts there above statue-niche and grave, and flourishes upon air. Studying such ruins, one can but think of the immense advantage accruing from the absence of frost. It is

* The earthquake which destroyed this most beautiful of the mission churches, occurred during early mass on December 8th, 1812. Some thirty people were killed, and many others wounded more or less seriously.

certain that but for this fortunate thing there would now be no missions at all; nothing but mounds of adobe and heaps of stone. They are not solid walls. Faced on each side, almost anything was thrown between. Therefore the earthquake wrought havoc, and remedying the misfortune as best they might, the Padres committed the monstrosity of repairing masonry with the sun-dried bricks which latterly constituted one-half of the side walls, and the whole of the tower-end, of what had once been a most handsomely-proportioned and elaborately-finished religious structure.*

The quaintness, to American eyes, of what remains can not well be put into words. We never made anything like it, and never shall. For with all our former flimsiness and present solidity; with all the money we have wasted or spent on Egyptian portals or Corinthian stucco; we have never, in a single instance, come as nearly as these missionary monks did to the filling of one great desideratum; the suiting of a building to the surrounding landscape. It is an indefinable thing which can not be fixed by rules, and one does not know wherein precisely the appropriateness consists. But it is present and apparent even in ruin and decay. Take the sunshine, the gray-white sky, the yellow atmosphere and the rolling brown or green hills backed by higher ranges that are purple always, and imagine there a pile of American church architecture. The one may fit a

* The Church was built almost precisely like that of San Francisco Antiqua, in Guatemala, also an earthquake ruin, though not so large. A series of low domes composed the roof, one of which yet remains over the chancel.

town — some towns — the other fits eternally its place among the fastnesses of a wilderness that can never be really changed by any effort of civilization. Some, the majority perhaps, may wish to see relics and hunt decay. But when you are gone again, if you have seen the country aright, your mental picture will be completest when you remember Capistrano sitting upon its knoll and looking down the glen to its speck of sky-blue sea, or San Diego at the valley edge asleep upon the shoulder of a hill, or San Luis Rey in its basin of sierras, trailing a green-and-yellow ribbon at its feet, or Gabriel amid its vineyards, drowsy with the fumes of wine, and each one will seem a thing that is a part of its natural surroundings, placed there by an ineffable and superhuman taste, and made to fit, with a preciseness that time has only mellowed and blended, all its settings.

This is for the present. It is all one can carry away. The cold tones of a photograph do but spoil the soul of the reality. Colors might answer, but the artist has not yet come. All the past is but a memory, and it is but memories that we purchase with a whole life's experiences. There is still wanting something to complete the picture, and that something is beyond attainment. It is described by the word Life. For these things are, so to speak, pre-eminently dead. Baalbeck is not more lifeless, or Tyre more perfectly a thing of the past. But, with them, so is also the country dead, while with these it has put on the newness of a life beyond the wildest dreams of any monk who ever dreamed. Set up again the walls, and rebuild the towers, and ring the bells.

Cover the hills with herds and the valleys with vines. Recall the hosts of Indians and banish the American. Let the English tongue be again unheard, and put the railway so far away that even the village of Chicago, floundering in its swamp around a trading-post and a fort, knows it not. Let the storm-worn ships from around the Horn prowl along the coast for their cargoes of hides, the only and the infrequent visitors from the intangible and unimportant world. Bring again Spain, and make San Blas an important port and Guadalaxara a capital. Take away Los Angeles, and give the little white-washed adobe pueblo in the valley her full name and her proper people. Let only monks in robes and sandals, and soldiers in leathern jackets, and Indians bearing burdens, traverse the paths from mission to mission. Let us speak only of Yerba Buena if we mean the locality of the Pacific capital, and mention only San Carlos if we mean Monterey. Let a brown-walled rancho appear occasionally in the landscape, and let us make it the complete establishment of a feudalism almost unknown to the middle ages, perfect in independence, isolation and peace, the home of a life neither California nor elsewhere can ever know again.

And let us put in its last and important place the last essential thing; the confidence and self-satisfaction of provincialism, the unapprehensiveness of which ignorance is the sturdy mother. Let us desire no change and dream of none, and live in confidence and peace, protected by the Virgin and the saints, and forget that this is America at all. Then shall we have something like a memory of the California missions,

not in decay and ruin, but in the days of their fruition and prosperity. This is the real past of which they are the mementos.

Is it worth recalling? This truly American query will be the first in the minds of the majority of those who will read these words. There is a sense in which it is most assuredly not, and another in which a vague and undefined regret must surely follow any comparison of it with the California of today. Arcadia was never a reality, yet in some of its forms it has burdened the poetry of every people, and been dreamed of and imagined since the infancy of the human race. And of this idealism humanity has never grown weary. There are few things worth striving for, but one of them is peace. In the tiredness of a ceaseless struggle, there are few to whom has not come, or first or last, a fearful pleasure in the thought of that sleep which knows no human reveille, which lets the æons pass, which lies forever in the deep oblivion of dust. The peace which to some degree may come in life was never in this world nearer its idealization than at San Juan Capistrano three-fourths of a century ago. It can not be put into words, or painted, or sent by mail, but something of it broods there still. Men can not make it, or entirely destroy it. It is in the air, and to supplement it and add to it, is the feeling that the past has not yet quite gone away. The dust lies thick in the village street, and in it one almost looks to find the print of sandals. Below the brow of a little hill a stream of water purls across the road, and there is a roadside hedge composed entirely of the odorous California wild rose. In the shade of a walnut tree in

the field close by, there is a glint of rural calico, and a group of women are washing garments upon a flat stone beside the stream, as their grandmothers did in the same spot while the American revolution was in progress. A rambling and roofless adobe is upon one side of the road, its brown walls defying time in a way that is the usual puzzle to all who believe in the natural course of things. It has a little known history, wherein it differs from its neighbors that are much older, and were occupied as appurtenances of the mission establishment. It was built by a man who came near embodying in California the traits of a race of Caballeros, who was almost the last of the long-sword gentlemen and fighters, and it cost him thirty-five thousand dollars. He was of the same class and time of the man immortalized by Fremont in his story of the terrible little struggle known as the affair at San Pascual, and within these walls were nursed, by a woman, the wounded of that day. Among them was one American soldier, whose name and whose grave are now alike unknown. It is but another instance where "the northern eagle shining on his belt" did not make any difference, and where Ximena appears again from among the people whom we habitually designate as "Greasers."

At all events the ruins are there, telling the same story a broken monument does, and the hills, and the sea, and the sunshine. They rule. As to Irving and his reader the Moor and not the Spaniard still inhabits the Alhambra, so to every visitor does the robed and sandaled Franciscan still abide at San Juan. The church has been once sold at auction,

has been used as a residence, has been besieged, and has still clinging to its decay the monastic odor, the sense of belonging to God. Defying time a faint blue fresco still clings to its inner walls, and even the names scratched upon it by fame-seeking wanderers does not make it less a place whence the odor of incense has scarcely yet departed. The railway threads the valley, and one wishes it was not there, yet it does not so much affect the mission as it visibly does the old stage-yard down the street where, since early in the fifties, the reeking horses drank at the log trough under the huge pepper-tree, and whence the rocking vehicle, with infinite bustle and importance, carried its cramped passengers away again on a winding road between the endless hills.

Far up the little valley there is a still older mission; the first San Juan, standing beside the trail of the Padres when they went northward in search of Monterey. Near where a trail used by them of necessity, and many a time since, comes down out of the hills into the valley, there is a sycamore whose like will not be found in half a continent. Its shade at noon will cover 120 feet. It was as big, perhaps, a hundred years ago as it is now, and no band of weary footmen ever passed it by. It recalls the vicissitudes of those early wanderings, and the solitude and silence that then shut in the Cross. The little valley is as silent now as then, and all unchanged by the hand of man. Only the sleek California cattle come and lie in the shade, careless of all the past and all that is to come.

But even as I write I see before me the contrast and antithesis of all humility or toil or sacrifice for crown or cross. I have heard in all the watches of the night a certain Voice, calling in utter wantonness the passing of the hours, and, if for prayer, utterly failing of so pious a purpose. Its owner now lies prone in the morning sunshine, his gorgeous tail trailed out behind him, and his bronze breast in the yellow dust from which it will arise as unsullied as his notorious vanity is unruffled. It is a being whom my reminiscences will ever designate as the Sultan of San Juan, and he is one of the striking trivialities of a place so full of opposite associations. For him there are no reminiscences, unless his gorgeous egotism should congratulate itself upon a clime as winterless as that of his native land, and should imagine it to have been made for him alone. And this he doubtless does, for even now he rises and utters that strident cry which I trust may yet bring his neck to the block, and walks with mincing steps away among his hens, and does it all with the insensate grandeur that not even humanity may share with him. O, land of contrasts! San Gabriel and Los Angeles; the crumbling mission of San Juan and the obtrusive personality of a peacock.

Even so lately as a quarter of a century ago, there were at Capistrano extensive remains not now visible or known of. The present village is honeycombed with covered masonry aqueducts. Flumes were built across ravines on brick piers, after an ancient and substantial style now unknown. These became quarries for the moderns.

There were also a large number of books, most of which have disappeared. The church was rich in gold and silver vessels and ornaments, which were among the first articles to be found wanting.

The Franciscans, here and elsewhere, took, when they went, everything portable that was theirs, or that could be turned into money, without robbing

the parish of anything coming under that species of property. Their successors do not seem to have been, some of them, even so conscientious as this. The great wealth and splendor of the old times have thus been turned into a tawdriness and squalor that is striking.

There was also at Capistrano a quarter of a century ago four or five times the population of the present. It was the stronghold of old customs and old ideas; one of the last in California. What has become of these no one pretends to state in detail. The American civilization has swept as with a besom. Only the strongest survive it. This passing away is one of the interesting California studies.

The church was deprived temporarily of its character before it became a parish ruin. Bonsard, a pirate, with his crew once occupied it for three days, while priests and neophytes took refuge in the willows of Trabuco creek, and waited until his debauch upon mission beef and wine was over. The same thing happened at Santa Barbara and Monterey.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PEOPLE OF THE ADOBE.

BETWEEN NEW AND OLD:—A CORNER IN LOS ANGELES.

A DISTINCT class of odors, sensations and impressions hang about every Spanish-American town. Whether in New Mexico or California, they are so much the same, so nearly alike, that they would be recognizable to a blind man who had once learned to distinguish them. Yet it is difficult to describe them with any hope of conveying a correct idea of what they are to him who covers all points with the undoubtedly true statement that a town is a collection of human habitations, and a city a bigger one, and there rests.

One of the strongest individualities on earth is the Spanish. A man who never changes himself, he