

RAMONA.

A Story.

By HELEN JACKSON.

CHAPTER II.—(CONTINUED.)

On the morning of their departure the good Padre, having exhausted all his resources for entertaining his distinguished guests, caused to be driven past the corridors, for their inspection, all the poultry belonging to the Mission. The procession took an hour to pass. For music, there was the squeaking, cackling, hissing, gobbling, crowing, quacking of the fowls, combined with the screaming, scolding, and whip-cracking of the excited Indian marshals of the lines. First came the turkeys, then the roosters, then the white hens, then the black, and then the yellow, next the ducks, and at the tail of the spectacle long files of geese, some strutting, some half flying and hissing in resentment and terror at the unwon'ded carcasses to which they were subjected. The Indians had been hard at work all night capturing, sorting, assorting, and guarding the rank and file of their novel pageant. It would be safe to say that a drollier sight never was seen, and never will be, on the Pacific coast or any other. Before it was done with, the General and his bride had nearly died with laughter; and the General could never allude to it without laughing almost as heartily again.

At Monterey they were more magnificently feted; at the Presidio, at the Mission, on board Spanish, Mexican, and Russian ships lying in harbour, balls, dances, bull-fights, dinners, all that the country knew of festivity, was lavished on the beautiful and winning young bride. The belles of the coast, from San Diego up, had all gathered at Monterey for these gaieties; but not one of them could be for a moment compared to her. This was the beginning of the Senora's life as a married woman. She was then just twenty. A close observer would have seen even then, underneath the joyous smile, the laughing eye, the merry voice, a look thoughtful, tender, earnest, at times enthusiastic. This look was the reflection of those qualities in her, then hardly aroused, which made her, as years developed her character and stormy fates thickened around her life, the unflinching comrade of her soldier husband, the passionate adherent of the Church. Through wars, insurrections, revolutions, downfalls—Spanish, Mexican, civil, ecclesiastical—her standpoint, her poise, remained the same. She simply grew more and more proudly, passionately, a Spaniard and a Moreno; more and more staunchly and fiercely a Catholic, and a lover of the Franciscans.

During the height of the despoiling and plundering of the Missions, under the Secularisation Act, she was for a few years almost beside herself. More than once she journeyed alone, when the journey was by no means without danger, to Monterey, to stir up the Prefect of the Missions to more energetic action, to implore the governmental authorities to interfere and protect the Church's property. It was largely in consequence of her eloquent entreaties that Governor Michelorena issued his bootless order restoring to the Church all the Missions south of San Luis Obispo. But this order cost Michelorena his political head, and General Moreno was severely wounded in one of the skirmishes of the insurrection which drove Michelorena out of the country.

In silence and bitter humiliation the Senora nursed her husband back to health again, and resolved to meddle no more in the affairs of her unhappy country and still more unhappy Church.

As year by year she saw the ruin of the Missions steadily going on, their vast properties melting away like dew before the sun, in the hands of dishonest administrators and politicians, the Church powerless to contend with the unprincipled greed in high places, her beloved Franciscan Fathers driven from the country or dying of starvation at their posts, she submitted herself to what, she was forced to admit, seemed to be the inscrutable will of God for the discipline and humiliation of the Church. In a sort of bewildered resignation she waited to see what further sufferings were to come, to fill up the measure of punishment which, for some mysterious purpose, the faithful must endure. But when close upon all this discomfiture and humiliation of her Church followed the discomfiture and humiliation of her country in war, and the near and evident danger of an English-speaking people possessing the land, all the smothered fire of the Senora's nature broke out afresh. With unflinching hands she buckled on her husband's sword, and with dry eyes saw him go forth to fight. She had but one regret, that she was not the mother of sons to fight also.

"Would thou wert a man, Felipe," she exclaimed again and again in tones the child never forgot. "Would thou wert a man, that thou might go also to fight these foreigners!"

Any race under the sun would have been to Senora less hateful than the American. She had scorned them in her girlhood, when they came trading to post after post. She scorned them still. The idea of being forced to wage a war with pedlars was to her too monstrous to be believed. In the outset she had no doubt the Mexicans would win in the contest.

"What!" she cried, "shall we who won independence from Spain be beaten by these traders? It is impossible!"

When her husband was brought home to her dead, killed in the last fight the Mexican forces made, she said icily, "He would have chosen to die rather than to have been forced to see his country in the hands of the enemy." And she was almost frightened at herself to see how this thought, as it dwelt in her mind, slew the grief in her heart. She had believed she could not live if her husband were to be taken away from her; but she found herself often glad that he was dead—glad that he was spared the sight and the knowledge of the things which happened; and even the yearning tenderness with which her imagination pictured him among the saints was often turned into a fierce wondering whether indignation did not fill his soul, even in heaven, at the way things were going in the land for whose sake he had died.

Out of such throes as these had been born the second nature which made Senora Moreno the silent, reserved, stern, implacable woman they knew, who knew her first when she was sixty. Of the gay, tender, sentimental girl, who danced and laughed with the officers, and prayed and confessed with the Fathers, forty years before, there was small trace left now in the low-voiced, white-haired aged woman, silent, unsmiling, placid-faced, who manoeuvred with her son and her head shepherd alike, to bring it about that a handful of Indians might once more confess their sins to a Franciscan monk in the Moreno chapel.

CHAPTER III.

Juan Canito and Senor Felipe were not the only members of the Senora's family who were impatient for the sheep-shearing. There was also Ramona. Ramona was, to the world at large, a far more important person than the Senora herself. The Senora was of the past; Ramona was of the present. For one eye that could see the significant, at times solemn, beauty of the Senora's pale and shadowed countenance, there were a hundred that flashed with eager pleasure at the barest glimpse of Ramona's face; the shop-

herds, the herdsmen, the maids, the babies, the dogs, the poultry, all loved the sight of Ramona; all loved her, except Senora. The Senora loved her not; never had loved her, never could love her; and yet she had stood in the place of mother to the girl ever since her childhood, and never once during the whole sixteen years of her life had shown her any unkindness in act. She had promised to be a mother to her; and with all the inalienable staunchness of her promise she fulfilled the letter of her promise. More than the bond lay in the bond; but that was not the Senora's fault.

The story of Ramona the Senora never told. To most of the Senora's acquaintances now, Ramona was a mystery. They did not know—and no one ever asked a prying question of the Senora Moreno—who Ramona's parents were, whether they were living or dead; or why Ramona, her name not being Moreno, lived always in the Senora's house as a daughter, tended and attended equally with the adored Felipe. A few gray-haired men and women here and there in the country could have told the strange story of Ramona; but its beginning was more than a half century back, and much had happened since then. They seldom thought of the child. They knew she was in the Senora Moreno's keeping, and that was enough. The affairs of the generation just going out were not the business of the young people coming in. They would have tragedies enough of their own presently; what was the use of passing down the old ones? Yet the story was not one to be forgotten; and now and then it was told in the twilight of a summer evening, or in the shadows of vines on a lingering afternoon, and all young men and maidens thrilled who heard it.

It was an elder sister of the Senora—a sister old enough to be wooed and won while the Senora was yet at play,—who had been promised in marriage to a young Scotchman named Angus Phail. She was a beautiful woman; and Angus Phail, from the day he first saw her standing in the Presidio gate, became so madly her lover, that he was like a man bereft of his senses. This was the only excuse ever to be made for Ramona Gonzaga's deed. It could never be denied, by her bitterest accusers, that, at the first, and indeed for many months, she told Angus she did not love him and could not marry him; and that it was only after his stormy and ceaseless entreaties that she did finally promise to become his wife. Then, almost immediately, she went away to Monterey, and Angus set sail for San Blas. He was the owner of the richest line of ships which traded along the coast at that time; the richest stuffs, carvings, woods, pearls, and jewels, which came into the country came in his ships. The arrival of one of them was always an event; and Angus himself, having been well-born in Scotland, and being wonderfully well-mannered for a seafaring man, was made welcome in all the best houses, wherever his ships went into harbour, from Monterey to San Diego.

The Senorita Ramona Gonzaga sailed for Monterey the same day and hour her lover sailed for San Blas. They stood on the decks waving signals to each other, as one sailed away to the south, the other to the north. It was remembered afterward by those who were in the ship with the Senorita, that she ceased to wave her signals, and had turned her face away, long before her lover's ship was out of sight. But the man of the *San Jose* said that Angus Phail stood immovable, gazing northward, till nightfall shut from his sight even the horizon line at which the Monterey ship had long before disappeared from view.

This was to be his last voyage. He went on this only because his honour was pledged to do so. Also, he comforted himself by thinking that he would bring back for his bride, and

for the home he meant to give her, treasures of all sorts, which none could select as well as he. Through the long weeks of the voyage he sat on deck, gazing dreamily at the waves, and letting his imagination feed on pictures of jewels, satins, velvets, laces, which would beat deck his wife's form and face. When he could no longer bear the vivid fancies' heat in his blood, he would pace the deck, swifter and swifter, till his steps were like those of one flying in fear; at such times the men heard him muttering and whispering to himself, "Ramona! Ramona!" Mad with love from the first to the last was Angus Phail, and there were many who believed that if he had ever seen the hour when he called Ramona Gonzaga his own, his reason would have fled for ever at that moment, and he would have killed either her or himself, as men thus mad have been known to do. But that hour never came. When, eight months later, the *San Jose* sailed into the Santa Barbara harbour, and Angus Phail leaped breathless on shore, the second man he met, no friend of his, looking him maliciously in the face, said: "So, ho! You're just too late for the wedding! Your sweetheart, the handsome Gonzaga girl, was married here, yesterday, to a fine young officer of the Monterey Presidio?"

Angus reeled, struck the man a blow full in the face, and fell to the ground, foaming at the mouth. He was lifted and carried into a house, and, speedily recovering, burst with the strength of a giant from the hands of those who were holding him, sprang out of the door, and ran bareheaded up the road toward the Presidio. At the gate he was stopped by the guard, who knew him.

"Is it true?" gasped Angus.

"Yes, Senor," replied the man, who said afterward that his knees shook under him with terror at the look on the Scotchman's face. He feared he would strike him dead for his reply. But, instead, Angus burst into a maudlin laugh, and turning away, went staggering down the street, singing and laughing.

The next that was known of him was in a low drinking-place, where he was seen lying on the floor dead drunk; and from that day he sank lower and lower, till one of the commonest sights to be seen in Santa Barbara was Angus Phail, reeling about tipsy, coarse, loud, profane, dangerous.

"See what the Senorita escaped!" said the thoughtless. "She was quite right not to have married such a drunken wretch."

In the rare intervals when he was partially sober he sold all he possessed,—ship after ship sold for a song, and the proceeds squandered in drinking or worse. He never had a sight of his lost bride. He did not seek it; and she, terrified, took every precaution to avoid it, and soon returned with her husband to Monterey.

Finally Angus disappeared, and after a time the news came up from Los Angeles that he was there, had gone out to the San Gabriel Mission, and was living with the Indians. Some years later came the still more surprising news that he had married a squaw—a squaw with several Indian children,—had been legally married by the priest in the San Gabriel Mission Church. And that was the last that the faithless Ramona Gonzaga ever heard of her lover, until twenty-five years after her marriage, when one day he suddenly appeared in her presence. How he had gained admittance to the house was never known; but there he stood before her, bearing in his arms a beautiful babe, asleep. Drawing himself up to the utmost of his six feet of height, and looking at her sternly with eyes blue like steel, he said: "Senora Ortega, you once did me a great wrong. You sinned, and the Lord has punished you. He has denied you children. I also have done a wrong; I have sinned,