

THE ARROW OF GOLD

to the whole Carlist army. The two youths stop under the trees at a distance, but the old fellow came quite close up and gazed at her, screwing up his eyes and looking at the sun. Then he raised his arm very slowly and took his red *boina* off his bald head. I watched him smiling at him all the time. I daresay she knew him well as she knew the old rock. Very old rock. The rocks of ages—and the aged man—landmarks of her youth. Then the mules started walking smartly forward, with the three peasants striding alongside of them, and vanished between the trees. These fellows were most likely sent out by her uncle the Cura.

"It was a peaceful scene, the morning light, the bit of open country framed in steep stony slopes, a high peak or two in the distance, the thin smoke of some invisible *caserios*, rising straight up here and there. Far away behind us the guns had ceased and the echoes in the gorges had died out. I never knew what peace meant before. . . .

"Nor since," muttered Mr. Blunt after a pause and then went on. "The little stone church of her uncle, the holy man of the family, might have been round the corner of the next spur of the nearest hill. I dismounted to bandage the shoulder of my trooper. It was only a nasty long scratch. While I was busy about it a bell began to ring in the distance. The sound fell deliciously on the ear, clear like the morning light. But it stopped all at once. You know how a distant bell stops suddenly. I never knew before what stillness meant. While I was wondering at it the fellow holding our horses was moved to uplift his voice. He was a Spaniard, not a Basque, and he trolled out in Castilian that song you know,

"Oh bells of my native village,
I am going away . . . good-bye !"