

ly and deliberately prepare and roll his cigarillo than now, as he stood listening to the roeding beat of La Perla's hoofs. There was a half-triumphant smile on his shaven face as he turned back into the yard. "Man and horse," he muttered, "there is nothing in all Andalusia can touch them. But God and the holy Virgin help them now, for they need it."

The cigarillo was consumed to the last puff before the old man, with well-forgotten surprise and the sullen air of a Southerner aroused from his midday nap, responded to the summons of the alguacilla. An angry murmuring crowd surrounded the officers; for the blood of P. Santa Maria had long boiled against the insolent demeanor of the guards, and now that the local hero was threatened with arrest and imprisonment, popular excitement was at its height, and the sharp click of the opening navaja began to be heard amid the confused hum of voices. But as the officials and the soldiers who accompanied them passed in to examine the premises, Gomez faced the crowd, and with an expressive glance and a rapid motion of the fingers, easily intelligible to a people with whom every gesture has its meaning, made known the safety of Pinto. There was a murmur of satisfaction, and then the inevitable, "Pues, señores, comencemos un cigarillo." Out came the little books, the pouches, and the flint and steel; and when the officers returned from their useless search, the crowd, collected in peaceful groups, was engaged to a man in the solemn enjoyment of tobacco.

## CHAPTER II.

## "THE BEST MAN AND THE BEST BULL."

Despite its many associations, it is a weary journey, that between Seville and Madrid, as I myself can testify, who performed it in the banquette of the diligencia. Ah me! we were young then, but the misery of that time comes back to me vividly—the glaring heat, the stifling clouds of dust, the incessant, "Anda, anda!" of the driver, the jangling of the bells, the jolting of the unstable box in which we were confined, and, above all, the reek and steam from the long team of mules. I remember how the anatomy of my dearest friends developed angles of superhuman size and excruciating acuteness, how they noticed the same phenomena in myself, and how savage we became in consequence. I remember, too, that in calmer moments we speculated with awe, not unmixed with envy, on the physical conformation of the boy who rode the leader, and who, sleepless and untiring, kept the saddle (and such a saddle!) from first to last.

On, still on, through the heat of the day and the silence of the night, halting only as long as was absolutely necessary, did Mendez urge the gallant gray towards Madrid. On, still on! Across the wide grassy plains beside the Guadalquivir, dotted with herds of bulls, which raised their heads with a sullen bellow as the solitary horseman went by; skirting the fair walls of stately Seville, and the red Moorish towers of Alcala de Guadaira; past the palms of Moncloa and the olive-groves of Ecija; by the domes and convents of Cordova and the cornfields of Andujar. On through the gloomy gorges of the Sierra Morena, the tawny monotony of La Mancha, and the vineyards of Val-de-Penas; starting the wild-fowl in the marshes of Guadalupe, and waking the echoes of the rocky Gochan hills; speeding past the cool gardens and gushing fountains of royal Aranjuez and the wastes of Valdemoro, until the first rays of the Sunday's sun were glinted back from the spires of Madrid, and the wondrous ride was accomplished.

The streets were nearly empty at the early hour when Mendez passed through the gate. He rode to a small quiet inn, kept by a brother of Gomez. Great was the astonishment of the proprietor when he saw who had roused him from his morning slumbers, but Pinto outshone his inquisitiveness abruptly.

"Ask no questions, my friend, and above all tell no one that I am here. You will know all in time. See the mare well cared for, and ready to fight, if need be, at three o'clock. Remember the stew and the Val-de-Penas. Have breakfast and the bed in the back room ready for me when I return."

And so saying he strode off to the house of Don Miguel Flores, chief manager of the royal bullfight. This important personage was equally surprised when he learnt the name of the early visitor in whose cause the servant had ventured to disturb him.

"Valgame Dios!" he exclaimed; "Mendez Pinto in Madrid! I wonder if he comes to fight to-day. How pleased the King will be! Show him in, show him in."

Now during his ride Pinto had matured the advice of Gomez, and had settled exactly what he intended to do; and therefore, in reply to Don Miguel's inquiries, without narrating the catastrophe of P. Santa Maria, he simply expounded that intention.

"Mendez, my son," said Don Miguel solemnly, when the bullfighter had concluded, "something has affected your brain; you cannot so readily mean what you say. Ah, que me barias, mi amigo?"

"I would not venture to trifle with your excellency," said Pinto. "I mean it so far that since Thursday I have ridden from P. Santa Maria, to undertake it, by the King's leave, this very afternoon."

And so it happened that an hour afterwards Don Miguel, with a heavy heart—for he had a real regard for Mendez as a bullfighter—set out to lay before his most Christian Majesty our hero's hitherto unheard-of proposal.

Ferdinand VII., pious, fortunate, and restored, was in a heavenly temper that Sunday morning, with the prospect of a glorious bullfight before him. Wrapped in his dressing-robe, he was reclining in an easy-chair, sipping his chocolate and smoking one of his own peculiar puros, preparatory to attending mass in the royal chapel, when Don Miguel Flores was announced.

"Welcome, Don Miguel; always welcome, early or late," said his Majesty, with a gracious wave of his hand. "But what brings your excellency here at such an unearthly hour, and with such a grave countenance? Nothing wrong with the bulls, I trust?"

"Nothing whatever, your Majesty," replied Don Miguel. "But, sire, I have to offer to your royal consideration the most astounding proposal I have ever been my lot to entertain since I have had the felicity of being connected with your Majesty's bullfights."

"Ave Maria purissima!" exclaimed the pious monarch, rubbing his hands in expectation. "Take a seat, man, and a cigar, and let us hear it."

"Sire," said Don Miguel, inhaling the delicious fragrance of the royal tobacco, "there is at this moment in Madrid a pleader who is willing to match himself alone against the best bull that can be found in Spain. He will fight with the blunt garrocha, without padding and without greaves, in silk stockings and Mayo dress, like a mere chulo. It is his desire that if he be overthrown none should assist him, and the bull be allowed to do his worst. If his horse be but scratched in the encounter, his life lies at your Majesty's disposal; but if he kill the bull, or fight him until he falls exhausted, he humbly prays that your Majesty will grant the request he shall ask."

"Que disparate," said Ferdinand contemptuously. "It is absurd; the thing is impossible. There is no man in all Spain can do it. You have been imposed on, my good Don Miguel."

"I can assure your Majesty that this is a genuine challenge, and from a man who will do his best to win."

"He is either a madman or a murderer," remarked the King sagaciously. "And the name of this suicide?"

"With your Majesty's permission, I am not at liberty to reveal."

"This becomes interesting," said Ferdinand, rising and striding across the room. "Now tell me, Flores," he continued, half inquiringly, and coming to a sudden stop, "has De Veragua anything to do with it? Does he back the man?" For the duke of that name was the King's great rival in bull-breeding, and as aficionado, or members of the "fancy," there was jealousy between the two on that score.

"On my honor I believe not, your Majesty."

"And do you know what request the man will make if he should chance to win?"

"I do not, sire."

"I cannot make him a grandee of Spain," said Ferdinand, "but any lower title or wealth I can bestow on the man who shall fairly perform such an unheard-of feat, a feat that would reflect honor on my reign, on the whole nation. I accept the conditions. If he wins, I will grant whatever favor he may ask and a King of Spain may bestow. But, por Dios," said Ferdinand, slapping his thigh, "he shall work for it, for we will have out El Re."

When Don Miguel heard these last words, his knees knocked together, and he let fall the royal cigar. Let me account for the discomposure of the chief inspector of bullfights.

Among the many splendid animals destined to be butchered for the delectation of Ferdinand and his subjects was one of the royal breed, preëminent for strength, activity, and ferocity, and the possession of all those "points" in which the initiated delight. The youth of this animal had been of singular promise, from the time when, as a bull-calf undaunted by branding-iron or garrocha, he turned furiously on his attendant handlers, and when, baited as a "novillo," he spread havoc and trepidation among the butlers. Those who prognosticated his future greatness were not disappointed; never, since the days of the celebrated Harpado, had such a grand brute been seen in Spain as "the King's own Bull," which title was usually abbreviated into that of "El Re." For six years he had been reserved for some occasion worthy of his fame; and now, when Don Miguel learnt that his favorite Pinto was to be confronted by this prodigy, his humanity overcame his love of sport, and he was filled with consternation.

"El Re, sire?" he stammered; "El Re? Surely I believed your Majesty would reserve him—"

"No matter what you believed, sir," interrupted the King excitedly, as he noticed Don Miguel's evident emotion; "he shall not be reserved another day. The fight shall come off this very afternoon. See that it be properly announced for three o'clock, and let El Re be driven in at once. Ah, by the way, you begin to tremble for your audacious Don Fianco; but harken, sir, I will have no trifling in this matter. If the man enter the ring, by heaven he shall stay there until he or El Re be dragged out! And take care that the point of the garrocha be fairly sheathed. This braggart shall be taught a lesson."

"And he has your Majesty's promise if he wins?"

"If he wins," said the King shortly, "he has."

And when Don Miguel had retired, his Majesty went to chapel with an easy conscience, as became an upholder of strict justice and a hater of deceit and arrogance.

Mendez, who had employed his time in making arrangements about his dress, and in the careful selection of a garrocha, received the

King's decision with proud composure. "It is fair," he said; "the best man and the best bull. No compo nava do gangas—I buy nothing a bargain;" and after paying a last visit to La Perla, he went to bed and slept soundly.

Great was the excitement among the aficionados of Madrid when, over the old hills of the approaching fight, appeared a placard notifying that the sports would be preceded at three o'clock by a "novelty" in which El Re and a nameless pleader would be engaged.

To realize the extraordinary difficulty of the task which Pinto had undertaken, it must be remembered, first, that the pleaders are usually securely padded in case of a heavy fall, the head protected by an enormous stiff-brimmed hat, and the right leg, which is always turned to the bull, by a mona, a grove of leather and iron. Mendez was to fight in silk stockings and Mayo costume.

Secondly, that in case of a fall the attention of the bull is immediately distracted from the fallen horseman by the red cloaks of the oblates or footmen. Mendez was to be alone in the ring.

Thirdly, that the garrocha is a stout pole with a triangular point of iron but an inch in length when properly guarded, and is used only for sending off the charge, the bull being always killed by the sword of the matador after he is exhausted by the combat with the pleaders, of whom there are usually three. Mendez was to be opposed to a perfectly fresh bull, which was to be killed or subdued with the garrocha only.

## CHAPTER III.

## LIFE OR DEATH.

The hour had arrived: every nook and corner of the vast amphitheatre of Madrid, boxes, benches, and pit, the very balustrades and barriers, seethed with a dense mass of anxious excited humanity. The fierce Iberian sun beamed with unclouded splendor, darting its fever-like into the blood of high and low, of rich and poor, of man, woman, and beast: into the sanguine of the fair Castilian seated in the upper tier, whose eyes burned large and lustrous between the folds of the white mantilla; into the commoner lava that glowed in the veins of the swarthy Mayo who lounged against the inner barrier; and into the thick red tide which the bull was soon to lavish on the dust of the arena. The shadow of the partial canopy overhead lay upon the sand in a clean curving line, like that of still waters on the beach, the rustle of twenty thousand fans created a mimic breeze, and the hum of voices sounded like the muffled roar of the surge. But the flutter of the fans was hushed instantaneously, and the loud murmur subsided to a death-like silence, as the gates were thrown open, and, in place of the glittering cortege of the ordinary bullfight, of the many-hued procession of pleaders, oblates, and espades, dressed by the gilly-caparisoned team of mules, there rode slowly into the wide arena the figure of a solitary Mayo mounted on a noble gray steed. His features were concealed by a black mask, a red scarf was bound upon his arm, and he bore in his hand the garrocha of the pleader. Madrid was fairly puzzled, Madrid was at its wits' end, as the caballero, profoundly saluting the royal box where sat Ferdinand, in cretinous of his eyes, quietly crossed the Plaza, and took up his station against the barrier on the left of the trial or passage by which the bulls are admitted to the ring.

Then the key was tossed to the alguacil and deftly caught in his hat: the door of the toril was unlocked, and you could hear the sharp catching of the breath, throughout that mighty assembly as, with a leap like a stag, El Re bounded into the arena. El Re, the King's own bull, there was no mistaking him, for his brawny neck was encircled by a broad ribbon of scarlet and yellow, the royal livery of Spain, from which depended the device of a gilded crown and castle, the arms of Castile. A roar of applause greeted his entrance, and, dazed by the sudden clamor, and the transition from the darkness of his cell to the glare of open day, the magnificent brute stood like a bronze statue, his noble head raised, and his fierce eyes seeking for some object on which to vent his wrath.

On his left, like another statue, sat Mendez Pinto on the gray mare.

But apparently El Re considered this single antagonist beneath his notice, for with a disdainful toss of his mighty crest, he began to paw the sand. Then the horseman shook his garrocha, and the flutter of the red scarf on his arm caught the eye of El Re. With a deep murmuring bellow, the bull lowered his front, and rushed straight at his enemy, and the duel to death had begun.

The sharp straight horns were within a few feet of La Perla's side, when Mendez met the charge with the point of the spear planted to an inch, true and fair, above the shoulder-blade, whilst he wheeled the mare slightly to the left. The terrible rush could not be stopped, but its deadly course was altered, and when El Re, half-blinded by the cloud of dust he had raised, and half-stunned by the shock with which he encountered the barrier, recovered his sight and senses, there, again ahead of him, provokingly calm, sat Pinto on the gray mare. Fiercer even, and to the spectators more irresistible than the first, was the second rush of the monstrous smarting under the sting of the garrocha, and again was his fury forced to expend itself on sand and timber, whilst Mendez galloped ahead and took up a fresh position.

I will not undertake to describe the many phases of that marvellous encounter—how unflinching was the savage determination of the

brute, and the courage and coolness of the man. If the ferocity and activity of El Re were such as had never before been witnessed by the oldest frequenter of the Plaza, they were surpassed by the dexterity and horsemanship of Pinto; nobly seconded by La Perla, who exhausted every art of the pleader. It would be still more impossible to convey an idea of the agony of excitement which pervaded the spectators, from the King downwards.

How strong men writhed and gesticulated, and shouted until their voices fell to a hoarse shriek; and stately women and fair girls forgot their conventional decorum, and with eyes, breasts, and mouths flashing, heaving, and panting, sprang up and leant over to bestow their applause; and how, like a consuming fire, there ran through that vast crowd a longing for the end, a lust for blood, for death,—of either man or bull.

At last it came. Not less than eighteen times had El Re charged home, and eighteen times had the spear-point been planted with cruel exactness, until the gore poured down from one great wound above the shoulder, to leave a ruddy trail upon the sand. Then, as the combatants stood facing each other, Mendez felt La Perla away beneath him, and knew that the critical moment had arrived.

For the first time he took the initiative. And now began an exhibition of skill and daring never surpassed. With the garrocha held low in rest, and his eye fixed on the blood-shot orbs which followed his slightest movement, slowly, almost imperceptibly, so as to avoid provoking a charge, he backed La Perla in a half-circle, until the point of the spear lay at an acute angle behind the shoulder of the bull. Those only who were nearest, straining over the barrier to catch, like true aficionados, the niceties of the combat, could hear the words, "Ahora o nunca, por mi vida, o por mi muerte;" and lifting La Perla with spur and hand and will, with the inexpressible sympathy which exists between a true rider and his horse, he hurried her at the bull. So rapid was the dash, that before El Re could make a half-turn to meet it, the spear was in his shoulder, driven with the full weight of man and horse, with the full vigor of that tremendous arm. Beneath the terrific impulse the blunt point burst through the lacerated hide, and irresistible as the keen blade of the matador, the huge shaft followed, boring through flesh and brawn and muscle, and down into the very heart of the mighty bulk; the mass still surged and heaved and struggled against the mortal agony, the tough garrocha bent like a wand, and La Perla reeled and tottered like a drunkenman, but the arm of Mendez was as a bar of steel. You would not have said that the horse was supporting the rider, but that the rider, holding by the spear-shaft, was sustaining the horse between his knees, and so the three remained, until the last convulsive throes died out of what was once El Re, and La Perla, though shivering in every limb, had recovered from her exhaustion; then with one mighty effort Mendez drew out the garrocha, and removing his mask, again saluted the royal box.

"And you ask, my gallant Mendez," said Ferdinand, "you ask for—?"

"That which I have risked, your Majesty, my life."

"Your life, man; por Dios, how is your life in danger now?"

"I have had the misfortune to kill two of your Majesty's guards at P. Santa Maria."

"Two of my guards!" thundered Ferdinand; "two of my guards! and you come here expecting to save your own miserable life. Ah, scoundrel! you have laid a trap for me. Had I but known before I pledged my word, not if you had killed fifty bulls with your naked hands, should you have escaped. Vengo sofocado! Begone, rascal! out of my sight, and let me never see or hear of you again!"

But after Ferdinand's first passion had subsided he did see and hear of Mendez again; for with the despatch from P. Santa Maria came a petition, signed by the principal inhabitants, against the general conduct of the guards, and the King inquired carefully into Pinto's case; and finding that there had been provocation enough to justify, at all events in Spanish eyes, the cutting of at least half-a-dozen throats, and that the double homicide was more the result of an unfortunate superfluity of strength than of malice preënsa, inasmuch as probably any other man in the kingdom of Spain might have knocked together the heads of two of his Majesty's guards without producing any material effect; considering all this, he not only forgave Pinto, but rewarded him liberally. Nay more, he insisted that Gomez and his daughter should be sent far, in order that the latter might be married to her lover in Madrid, and bask in the sunshine of royal favor. Which was done accordingly. But the volatile monarch being deeply smitten with the fair Andalusian, the sunshine of royal favor waxed so warm, that old Gomez, who was sufficiently loyal not to desire his sovereign's head to be broken, one fine day persuaded Pinto to undertake the return journey to P. Santa Maria, somewhat more slowly and comfortably than he had come. So the three went back to their native town, where the family of Pinto still flourishes in the bull-fighting line, though no member of it has hitherto equalled the exploit of their grandfather with El Re.

GENEROSITY during life is a very different thing from generosity in the hour of death; one proceeds from genuine liberality and benevolence, the other from pride or fear.