

"El Mudo."



OWARDS the latter part of the year 183 , and on a fine autumnal morning, a scene of some dramatic interest was enacting in a field just outside a hamlet in northern Alava. Several companies of infantry and some cavalry were drawn up, the peculiarities of costume marking them as Carlist troops. At a score of paces in front of the line, a mounted officer whose richly embroidered cuffs showed him to be of high rank, was conversing with others of inferior grade. A short distance from the group and in charge of a guard stood a young man in the uniform of a cavalry officer, and farther in the background were assembled several women and persons in civilian dress.

"Valentin Royas," cried the General.

The guard surrounding the prisoner opened its files and the young officer, advancing to within a few paces of the chief in command there halted and respectfully saluted.

"Valentin Royas," you have been guilty of gross neglect of duty in allowing your picket to be surprised last night from want of vigilance. The court martial has condemned you to death, but not without a recommendation to mercy founded on your well proved courage and zeal. Your fault, however, must be expiated, and if I extend to you mercy it will be on one condition." And beckoning the prisoner to draw near he leaned over and spoke a few words in a low tone. A strong expression of disgust came over the countenance of the young soldier. "I should be doing myself little honor in taking my life on the terms you propose."

"There is no disgrace in serving the King in whatever way it may be," said the General sternly. "Take your choice, however, that or death."

"The latter then," replied the young man doggedly.

"Order out the firing party," said the General in a vexed, hurried tone to one of his aides-de-camp.

A piercing shriek was heard. There was a movement amongst the by-standers, and a young and beautiful girl broke away from those who sought to restrain her and rushing up to the prisoner, fell fainting into his arms. "*¡Todavía es tiempo!*" there is still time, said the General, turning to Royas. "Poor Dolores," added he casting a compassionate look on the inanimate form that the young man was sustaining.

Royas was deadly pale and the muscles of his face were working violently. He gazed intently on the lovely girl of whom the women had now taken charge and were trying every means to restore her to consciousness. At this moment she half opened her eyes and in a faint voice uttered the word "Valentin."

"I accept," gasped the prisoner.

Ten minutes after the troops were dismissed to their quarters and Royas was escorted with the General commanding the Carlist troops in Alava.

The Convent of San Domingo at Vittoria has of late years, like most edifices of its class in the north of Spain, been converted into barracks for troops. It was during the hottest part of the Carlist war that on an October evening, the massive portion was lit up by a large fire which illuminated the long corridor leading into the building. The retreat had not yet sounded and a number of the Queen's soldiers were grouped around the fire, singing, clapping and laughing,

so as to create a Babel-like din. It was during a momentary lull, that a small gap in the circle was filled up by a person who squeezed in, making himself as small as he could and extended his hands over the fire, on which he fixed his eyes with a vacant stare as though unconscious of being an intruder or of the presence of the soldiery. The new comer was a lad about twenty whose countenance of an exceedingly brown hue was rendered singularly inexpressive and stupid looking by a mouth constantly half open, and by the manner in which his hair was brought forward over his forehead, so low as to almost cover his eyes. He was dressed in the rough brown cloth which the Alavese peasantry manufacture themselves, with a broad brimmed grey hat placed at the back of his head.

"*Caramba!*" cried a happy looking Corporal, who, judging from the laughter which welcomed his most trifling sallies, was a wit of no small consideration.

"*¿Qui har aqui?*" "Whom have we here and whence come? Assuredly he must be the Mayor of some city. Behold his sapient look and dignified manner of wearing his *rembrero*."

The sneer was followed by many others from the soldiers.

"*¡Vamos! Camarada!*" said one seeing that the stranger took no notice of the jest for which he supplied the material. "You have taken a place at our fire and the least you can do in return is to give us some account of yourself." No reply was made by the peasant, and the soldiers irritated at his obstinate silence, unsheathing his bayonet introduced its point into the seam of the peasant's jacket. But scarcely had the weapon found its way through the cloak, when the lad turned sharply around and in an instant the oppressor was disarmed and prostrate at his antagonist's feet. The soldiers pressed forward to help their comrade, but the stranger threw down the bayonet and burst into a volley of those inarticulate sounds which the deaf and dumb emit in their vain attempts to express anger or other violent passions. "*Es Mudo!*" (he is dumb), exclaimed the soldiers keeping back their comrade who seemed disposed to avenge his overthrow.

They now began to hold conversation with the dumb peasant by means of signs and gestures which he however showed little aptness in comprehending, and it soon became evident that the poor wretch was nearly an idiot.

The bugle call sounded and the soldiers hurrying into barracks for the night left the *Mudo* standing over the fire, from whence he finally lounged away.

The following morning, however, he returned and for many days after continued to pay long and frequent visits to the barracks. The soldiers amused themselves with his uncouth gestures, and at length became so accustomed to his presence that he began to share their affections with the regimental dog, and was as well known to the garrison as the Governor himself.

The month of December had set in cold and wintry, and with the exception of an occasional foraging party, active military operations were likely to be for some time suspended. One night, however, orders were given for the troops to hold themselves in readiness to march early the following morning. Several officers came down from the barracks and having ascertained that all was in readiness for the march, stopped for a moment at the guard fire to light their cigars.

"We shall have a better blaze than this to warm ourselves by ere twelve hours are past," said a young Lieutenant.

"By the bye," cried another, "How far is it to this powder